
CHAPTER 1

WHY DO YOU WORK SO HARD?

A QUESTION OF CONTROL

There is a very good chance you are not living your dreams. In brutal fact, you might not even have tangible dreams to reach. You might be what I call a **scratcher**: someone who fervidly scrapes the system like a chicken, yearning to find that one additional piece of cornmeal to help make the next car payment or nearly delinquent credit card bill. Oh yes, you have dreams; however, your focus on short-term gain and maintaining an ever-escalating standard of living preclude any hope of long-term satisfaction. More specifically, you lack the focus and discipline that will enable you to realize your dreams—dreams that are attainable, but only if you treat them as goals and develop realistic plans to reach them.

Consider one simple question:

Why do you work so hard?

Why do you dedicate so many of your waking and sometimes sleeping hours to your job, often to the cognizant exclusion of friends, family, and other loved ones? For that matter, why did you go to school and work so hard there? Why did you invest (and may still be paying off) anywhere between 20,000 to 200,000 smackers to go to college? Why did you forsake \$100,000 or more in lost salary and tuition getting a master's or doctorate, if you chose to go that route?

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One primary driver keeps rising to the surface: control. Call it curiosity, competitive spirit, whatever—you want to be able to control how much money you make, your career directions, whom you sleep with at night, where you live, where your kids go to school, and so on and so on. It's amazing to observe the lengths you go to gain merely one or two more slugs of this intuitively uncontrollable concept. At face value, this need for control might not be a bad thing, though digging a little, control can often be a guise for dealing with something you don't understand or you potentially fear—anything from dealing with a smart-mouthed kid to foreign policy. Regardless, this quest for control, if not managed and for the right reasons, can be excruciatingly painful.

UPENDING THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE

A central example of this yearning for control is how you vainly try to balance your time, energy, and focus between the realms of work and life. How **do** you balance your 11.5 hours spent on average per day getting ready, commuting, working, (and commuting again) with your scant bookends of life and time on either side? How **do** you meaningfully interact with your (awake) kids, (not-tired) significant other, and/or (tended to) pets more than a couple hours each day? Can you somehow TiVo your daily cycles, removing all mundane catch-up conversation and chores, to optimally maximize your time? Another way to broach this conundrum is by asking yourself, "Can I leave work and really leave it?" You can't just enter the Dark and Gloomy Cave of Work and then return to the Bright and Blissful Garden of Life as it suits you.

In this context, the implied metaphor of a balancing scale casts work in an inappropriate light. If work wins, life loses? Or if life wins, work loses? **HUH?** Is work such a **BAD** thing? Perhaps if you perceive your means of income as merely a job, then yes,

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BRING IN THE SCALES, and make sure your life-side weights are nice and heavy to really piss you off as you watch the space of time collapse around every ticking second as your daily grind comes to a close. Yes, the term **work** has certain connotations: a degree of difficulty, of challenge, and even sacrifice. It also implies achievement, advancement, and fundamentally something noble. How could our society and standard of living ever improve without work—impassioned work at that? Have you ever heard people describe what they do as “my life’s job”? No. Portraying your commitment as “my life’s work” carries a decidedly different nuance. The sooner you can approach what your life’s work might be, the sooner you can leave that absurd and undefeatable balance behind.

The fact is that balance is not possible. Maybe it is if you believe in multiple dimensions or other breaks in our quantum time fabric, but from my humble perspective, balancing just doesn’t work. Work is an integral part of life, not a weighty counterbalance to it. You should love your work with the same passion as you love life! Imagine your boss casually sitting you down in the lunchroom one day to discuss your recent spate of late and tortured office nights and then screaming at you, “You idiot—It’s all life!” The secret to upending the balance is upending your perspective on how you deal with its working parts. Being able to apply the same impassioned perspective to both work and life will moot your scale metaphor in a heartbeat.

Let’s banish the term “balance” from your daily vernacular and replace it with **priority**—work/life priority. Balancing is how circus performers entertain. The success of your acts—work, pastimes, kids, and so on—is driven by prioritizing how you want to spend the time of your life, your **LifeTime** as I will call it for the remainder of this book. Yes, time is money, but infinitely more important, time is life. Although this distinction between balance and priority is subtle in nature, after you adopt it, its implications

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on how you look at, structure, and execute your life can be extraordinarily profound.

Ask yourself this baseline question:

Am I having The Time of My Life, in the Time of My Life?

Don't worry if your answer lacks enthusiasm. This is a tough nut to crack. The concept of being able to autonomously live your life has unfortunately been under sustained attack for quite some time because so much of your tactical day and night have been signed away to others. Following are piddly examples, but combined, they make a point. Have you ever read, word for word, the back of your credit card statement? Your home, car, or life insurance policy? How about your benefits package at work? Rental or mortgage contracts? Investment prospectuses? Any piece of legislation—local, state, or federal? Can you even begin to understand those insurance Description of Benefits statements? No? Well, why not? This is potentially important stuff, no?

How about something more general? Ever thought about understanding the terms and conditions of “Keeping up with the Joneses”? You must have wondered at some point why you need to own that newest model import car, need to possess the latest whiz-bang piece of technology, need to eat at the trendiest restaurants whose names you cannot hope to pronounce, and need to send your kids to preschools costing upward of 50 times what the average global citizen earned last year? Call it curiosity, competitive spirit, whatever. Are you happy with these terms? Fundamentally, do you think you can win a game whose rules are seemingly beyond your control?

Living in our society implicitly requires the need to negotiate with other people's terms, terms that can readily engulf you,

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rendering you a passive participant in the sport of life. You have been explicitly (or worse, implicitly) contractualized to the point where you don't even care to know the provisions of whatever transaction you need to make. "The last four digits of my social security number are 3491. Just give me the pen. Where do I need to initial and sign?"

You need to live life on your terms.

WHERE ARE YOU?

You might like your work but not love it. You could be one of the 75 percent who responded to a *Forbes* poll as being "unfulfilled" and "unhappy" with their jobs. You could be one of the roughly 30 percent who responded in outright negative terms—"I hate my job . . . If it weren't for the paycheck, I'd leave tomorrow." You might be living the worst possible atrocity: relegating your own needs beyond the back burner to work an unhappy job to survive in a jungle of terms you dislike and can't control. Worst of all, there isn't an off ramp or even a signpost on the horizon, and your spiritual gas tank's warning light is starting to flicker. Don't you ever just want to murmur, declare, or scream at the world, "Stop, I'm getting off!"?

So... what is holding you back?

Why are you hesitant to change, try something new and possibly different, figure out what really lights your happy lamp, and then work like a campaigning politician to make it burn? Isn't success simply loving your work and life with the same degree of passion?

I'd like to share a story that highlights why you should start thinking about these questions and how they might start to impact your journey . . . **NOW!**

