



## **Real Work**

### **The 5 Secrets of Finding Career & Life Fulfillment**

By Clay Parsons

*The purpose of life is to uncover the gifts that you were born with. The meaning of life is to share those gifts with others.*

Have you ever met anyone who really loved their work, not just superficially, but deep down to the core of their being? Have you ever known someone who smiled all the time, had lots of energy, and never seemed to complain about anything? If you can't remember anyone like that there is a very good reason. There are very few people who are happy with their work and it shows.

Most of us began our careers almost by accident and we are not doing something that we enjoy. We may have become good at it but it takes so much energy to perform that by the weekend we have nothing left for spouse and family. We may have made a lot of money but the truth is we would rather do something else - anything else. We are on a fast track towards burnout, desperately waiting and planning for our retirement while in the process of losing our health. By the time we reach the golden age of 65 we are a basket case. Does this script sound familiar? Does it have to be this way?

We can do it a different way, a more effective way, but first we need to learn how to take real control of our lives.

A healthy and vital career begins with accepting the fact that we actually do have a choice and then deciding what we want to accomplish. We need to start looking closely at our decision-making process, including how to go about choosing and what to base our choices on. We need to be practical because we live in the real world but we do not need to follow someone else's or society's standards and live up to their expectations. We need to stop evaluating ourselves based on what other people think, or have achieved. We need to look within and ask ourselves what kind of life we really want. When our work becomes a reflection of that life, we will be on the right path.

The following are a few suggestions which will help keep you on the right path, the path toward achieving what I call *Real Work*.

## **WORK FROM YOUR STRENGTHS**

This is an easy one but it's surprising how many people overlook it. The universal man or woman who can do everything equally well is a myth, a creation of popular western culture's fixation with heroes. We are actually all very different people. Each one of us has different talents, strengths and abilities. These are what I call our core comfort zones.

When we work from our core comfort zones we create energy. When we work outside of these areas we give it away. For example, an extravert who loves being at the center of the action can do a job which requires constant socializing whereas an introvert would quickly burn out. The introvert was giving away personal energy while the extravert was creating it. Having the necessary knowledge to do a task is of practical importance but irrelevant in terms of achieving a fit. It's who you are as an individual that really matters.

Find a job where you are operating from your personal strengths and you will be happy. Find a job where you combine your core strengths with actual knowledge in a particular field and you will be well on your way to achieving career success.

## **WORK FROM YOUR BELIEFS**

Our work-related core beliefs are a reflection of who we are as individuals. They are the foundation upon which we build our lives. They are not something we adhere to only when in church or helping out at the local Rotary Club food drive. Adhering to our work-related values in practice can bring great satisfaction and have a positive influence on all other areas of our lives. On the other hand, when our work conflicts with our core values it can lead to a whole array of serious negative consequences.

For example, consider personal independence. Let's assume that our employee values his independence on the job. He is allowed to make important decisions and take action without close supervision. He is evaluated by the results he achieves, not by the process he uses to get there. He believes that his employer respects his ability and therefore gives him free reign. Let's change that scenario and assume that the same person must report all of his daily actions to a supervisor who allows him little freedom and no room to make decisions. Under these circumstances what happens? Most likely he would become an ex-employee very quickly.

Another type of core belief might involve the value of conservation or preservation of nature. Could someone who strongly believed in the rightness of strictly regulating the use of nature to avoid abuses work for a major company with a long record of environmental damage caused by company operations? Regardless of your position on conservation the answer is obvious.

There are always exceptions to this rule but the values principal still applies. Find a job where the people you work with and the organization you work for believe in and practice the same values that you do. You will be well on your way towards achieving Real Work.

## **BE CREATIVE, INTUITIVE**

We use our creative ability to identify patterns, link them together and arrive at meaning. It is a process which enables us to solve complex problems and experience the excitement of discovery. You don't have to be a famous artist or scientist to be creative. It is an ability that all of us possess. It is also the same process whether it is used by an astrophysicist in deciphering the secrets of the universe or by a former lawyer exploring her options for a career change at age 50.

Our creativity also helps us avoid stagnation in our lives. It is a powerful guide, which helps us adapt to new situations. For example, a world-famous architect whom I knew personally had a distinguished career. He led a major university department and was the owner of a widely recognized consulting firm. When he retired he sat around expecting to continue as a leading figure in the profession. When the profession moved on and new leaders emerged, he became withdrawn and bitter. He had refused to adapt. He had not used his creative talent to learn and grow. He was stuck in the past.

Find a job where creativity is respected and where you can learn and grow and change. Also pay attention to your feelings. That gut feeling about a new opportunity or new co-worker may tell you more than any in-depth, rational analysis ever could.

## **FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE**

Most of my clients at some point in our initial discussions talk about the lack of meaning and purpose in their work lives. It is not that they are sitting around doing nothing. They may be very busy. Rather, the work itself means nothing to them. They are pushing paper, or selling something which they believe is irrelevant. There is no real benefit they can see from their work. This trend is particularly rampant because of the shallowness of our materialist culture.

Seeing the results of our labors, knowing that what we do matters to other people and being recognized for our contribution is the fuel that keeps us going. Of course, meaning and purpose are different for everyone. Your own purpose may focus on a particular accomplishment or perhaps a process. For example, a well-known writer and lecturer told me that when he stopped writing he felt empty and adrift. When he started writing again he felt connected. His life had meaning. He had "purpose." Sometimes we also use the word mission as a synonym for purpose.

One of my former clients is now a member of the Kurdistan government in exile. When he came to see me he was bored, adrift in a job that was meaningless to him. After making a decision to return to his country of origin, join the opposition and work for change, his life has taken on a powerful sense of mission. He acknowledges the danger but says that it is well worth it.

You don't have to do something dramatic to find meaning in your work. Find a job where you believe in the mission of your work, where you know that what you are doing is making a difference. When the word "work" with all its negative cultural connotations has disappeared from your vocabulary and has been replaced by tasks that are important to you, you will be on the path of achieving *Real Work*.

## **BE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS**

All of the world's major religions believe that in selflessly giving ourselves to the service of others, we find true fulfillment. In the Buddhist world, work that supports the common good is called *rightlivlihood* and is highly respected. I am not proposing that we all should go out and sign up for Mother Teresa's Mission in Calcutta, India. However, most of us in our hearts are idealists and would truly like to help others. All we need to do is find a way and then incorporate it into our daily lives.

First, list all the major activities you do, in both your work life and your personal life. Then look for opportunities where you can be of service to others. If you can't find anything, research some possibilities and add them to your list. For example, volunteer to help at a children's shelter in your spare time. Start a holiday season fund at work and deliver the goods once you have collected them from your co-workers.

Most importantly, start thinking about how you can incorporate more public service in what your company or organization does. If they balk, do it on your own or look for another job with a company that cares. You may be surprised to learn what your options are. One of my clients works for a non-profit organization that helps homeless people, especially the elderly, find permanent housing. He worked for a large real estate management company but left because of their lack of humanitarian values. Another client is a financial services consultant and active member of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Believe me, opportunities to serve will appear wherever you look.

If you are looking for work, find a job where the work you do, the products you create or the services you provide help others either directly or indirectly. Make sure that your involvement is not peripheral and that you get to work with the recipients. The satisfaction you receive will be worth the extra effort. You will be making a difference. You will also be on a direct path to achieving *Real Work*.