

ON *PURPOSE*

Are You Leading Two Lives?

by Richard J. Leider

I had lunch with a client recently, complete with the typical commiseration of two busy people—the travel schedules, the aches and pains, the work joys and sorrows and the conclusion that we both noticed a radical shift in the workplace.

It seems that nearly every conversation I have these days revolves around this question: “How do I find meaningful, absorbing work?” Of course it’s natural, being a trained career counselor, that I look for and attract these sorts of questions. Yet, “How do we create meaningful work?” is a question I also hear daily in conversations with leaders at top organizational levels.

Many of us are leading two lives. We are checking one of our lives at the door of our workplace or leaving it in the trunks of our cars. But we yearn to bring our whole selves to work. Often belief in the mistaken myth that work is “in there” and life is “out there” prevents us from bringing our whole selves to work. We mark time during the day and begin life in the evening or on weekends. The result is that we’re living on the margins of both lives, often without enough real energy for either one.

More and more of us are suddenly deciding to bring our whole selves to work. What do we really want anyway? Is the workplace an appropriate place to bring our whole selves? Are we looking for meaning in the right place?

What we want is meaningful, absorbing work. That means finding work we care about, work that ignites our passions and uses our true gifts and

talents. This is a time when the old work stories don’t hold and we’re hungry for a new story. The core of the new story is this: for us to be deeply involved in our work, we must find work aligned with our own talents, purpose and values.

According to the *New York Times*, this is a time of “widespread longing for transcendent meaning and deep public distrust of established authority. . . .” Rather than waiting for leaders and organizations to show us the new work way, many of us are trying to figure it out for ourselves. Many of us are quietly searching for meaningful, absorbing work.

Language is often the leading edge of change. And the popular media are increasingly discussing the “soul” of work. By soul they mean the purpose, spirit and energy that are present in our work. Soul, purpose, spirit, calling, values, meaning—these words are appearing too often to be ignored.

In bookstores that I frequent booksellers tell me that “soul books” are flying off the shelves. And new business periodicals, like *Fast Company*, make soulful work look like something more than a blip on the radar screen—maybe even the beginnings of a work revolution! “In search of meaning” is what demographers call it and, although hard data is still evolving, there are enough studies around to suggest that the road less traveled may soon begin to look like a crowded freeway.

The search for meaning is mainstream and it’s not too surprising, given the casualties of the waves of downsizing and reengineering that swept across the

workplace during the last decade. If organizations question whether they need their employees, naturally employees are going to question whether they need their employers.

Meaningful work is a deep-rooted human need. Career researchers have found, not surprisingly, that the most fulfilling jobs have personal significance to the person doing them. Meaningful work is a collaboration of the body, mind and soul between feeding our need for daily bread *and* daily meaning.

Both baby boomers and generation Xers expect more from work than earlier generations did. With a strong economy, work has become *the* place to find bread and meaning. The search for meaningful work is at the heart of middleage, just as the search for an identity—a calling—marks adolescence.

I was interviewed by Alan Webber, founding editor of *Fast Company* magazine, for an issue that dealt with meaning, calling and career decision-making. His article, entitled “Are You Deciding On Purpose?” generated a landslide of phone calls, e-mail and letters to our office from people responding with heartfelt, personal stories. What’s driving these people to share their personal, private life stories is nothing more than the subject matter itself. The new workplace is passionate about finding meaningful, absorbing work. We want daily bread (money), yes, but as much we want the chance to use our talents and to control our own time. We want most of all to work on something we feel is worthwhile. We still measure our worth, in part, by our work. The difference is that we no longer measure the worth of our work exclusively in dollars.

For example, one *Fast Company* reader responds:

“Now, at 78, retired from major industry, I was struck with the profound truth and beauty of your philosophy. In retrospect, you could have been writing about me. . . Now that I am retired and doing what I truly enjoy, looking back I wish that I had taken a few more risks and dealt with the

opportunities that I chose to ignore. Thank you for sharing your wisdom. I am sending a copy to my daughter and her husband, both professionals, with directions to read very carefully!”

Another reader writes:

“Thank you for your interview in *Fast Company*. I read it on a business trip to New York which prompted a sort of plane ride self-evaluation. I outlined what I wanted, where I was, what was important to me. I’m 27 and I want to do this now, not at 65. I wrote out some guidelines or reasons to stay or leave my job which had become satisfactory rather than my passion over the past few months. With my outline in hand, a divisional reorganization one week later made my decision to resign much more clear. I resigned on Monday with no plans except to view my industry (the Web) through my own eyes and explore different roads. Pretty vague. . . and I feel fantastic! I’ve had an absolutely insane number of opportunities float my way this week and my only concern is I don’t know which to choose. I’ve had multiple people comment that my smile is glowing!”

And yet another inspired reader states:

“I’m making preparations to switch jobs right now, and I’ve had the luxury for the past two years to have a position in a company with real purpose. I know it’s rare, based on the envy I’ve felt from many less-satisfied individuals. Unfortunately, my current situation lacks many of the other qualities important to my satisfaction, such as respect and creative expression. Your advice for people making moves such as mine is very sage. I hope you have a lot of success in getting your word out to those who need it!”

Job security today is an oxymoron. Under the old work contract, you gave loyalty and you got security. But now job security is an illusion and we are more closely examining our work/life options and choosing new ones. We want better alignment between who we are and what we do. We believe

we will be happier and more naturally productive if we work and live as whole persons.

Another reader offers a reaction:

“I am a 25 year-old woman who has been adrift for three years after college, just paying the bills. . . . Lately, I stopped to look at my pattern of work. I have left every job in the past three years because I knew that I wasn’t following my talents. I have a degree in biology and chemistry and I have always wanted to make a difference in what happens on this planet. I will take a big risk today and put my mind to work on reaching for the fulfillment of my purpose. I will post my resume at an environmental engineering company and jump off the cliff of uncertainty. For the first time in years, I feel alive!”

Another individual looks back over his life:

“I have been struggling for the past couple of years trying to find out what it is that I am meant to do in this life. I feel like I’m lost a lot of times. Other times I think that I’m just malcontent and that I expect too much out of life. Reading your article made me realize that there are others out there who believe that your career needs to be compatible with what’s inside you. Trying to fit into a job doesn’t work. The salary, the title, the prestige mean absolutely nothing if what you’re doing is meaningless to you. I know this all too well—I’ve practiced law for the past seven years and I’m not exaggerating when I say that I have never had one day of satisfaction in my career. Realizing that life is precious is the easy part. The hard part for me is trying to figure out what brings me joy. How do you know? What I’m afraid of is that no career will ever bring me satisfaction. Maybe some people are just destined not to find pleasure in work. What if I’m one of them and I waste my life? Thanks for knowing that there is a purpose!”

Oliver Wendell Holmes summed up a common fear for many of us: “Most of us go to our graves with our music still inside us.” From childhood on we’re asked, “What is your music. . . what do you want to

be when you grow up?” What is the probability that the career choice we made when we were in adolescence will be identical to our calling in middlecence? How could we, at a young age, make such an informed choice from among the tens of thousands of possible jobs listed in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*?

Discovering “the music inside us” is a cradle-to-grave quest. If research on career choice has any validity, the chance is very low that we’ll get it right the first time. In fact, the confident first career choice of a young person is most likely going to be wrong. We must experiment with different music and different rhythms.

As one reader says:

“I just got through reading your *Fast Company* article and for the first time in my life I understand what I have been feeling. You actually put it into words—‘the music inside of us.’ What I didn’t realize is that most all of us feel that way. I am a baby boomer and at a crossroads in my life. I am looking for a job, not just a job really, but something I can give my talents to, to give my life to, to give my 60% to. I am searching the Net for that new life. Is it reasonable to assume that I might find what I want? Do some people actually find that music? Can I? Thank you for your inspiration!”

Yes, I think it is reasonable to assume that we can find what we want—our music. I am an optimist. Anybody in the career coaching business is an optimist. It is a field grounded in optimism about human potential. When that optimism wavers, I look to my clients for a sense of hope. And they rarely fail me, just as these unsolicited responses to the article do not fail me. They remind me of three eternal truths I have observed over and over in my coaching work.

First, we must express our gifts and natural talents no matter what. If we can’t earn a living doing that, we must still find a way to contribute our talents in another realm. Second, each of us is in a position to make some purposeful contribution to the world

around us. For our happiness and fulfillment, we must do this. Third, we must spend our most precious currency, our time, living one life—our own.

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Shifting to a Flow State World

by Tom Thiss

Why, with so much focus on organizational change, is there so little successful change? The fundamental reason is that most organizations and their leaders fail to understand the rise of an interactive world.

Today we are undergoing a cultural shift of seismic proportions and we need people who think and act interactively. This is a shift of consciousness—from matter to energy, from independent parts to an interdependent whole. Regrettably, many people are locked into thinking that is no longer adequate for the complex, systemic issues of our time. At the very least we need a new bumper sticker, “Shift Happens!”

In the 1980s when research revealed that effective leaders all had a clear image of where they wanted to go, the word *vision* became acceptable in business. This signaled a change of context that demanded an equally bold change in execution, which has not happened. In an emerging interactive world we are still obsessed with separateness. Like the blindfolded people and the elephant, our fixation on parts precludes our seeing the whole.

Visualizing requires new ways of bringing the wholeness of visions into being. Wholeness, with its interdependence and complexity, demands that we network, partner, dialogue and connect. The Q4

Model in the sidebar illustrates the interactive world. For the most part we have lived in the bottom half. Now vision challenges us to move to the top half.

The quality and reengineering movements have tried to address change with some success. For the most part, however, these efforts faltered because people didn't change their ways. Vision, too, has succumbed. It has become business jargon, lifeless and uninspiring, as we stuff it into our rational models.

Visions are images, pictures of our imagination that are not subject to the constraints of rational logic and thinking. In the Q4 model proactive thinking, the ultimate in rationality, is left-brained and linear. Its scope is too narrow and its methods too controlling to cope with an interactive world. We must take the bold leap into the interactive realm to walk our visionary talk.

A vision is a living thing—vital, juicy and pulsating with possibilities. Interactive visionaries are whole brained—fluid, organic and *boundaryless* in their thinking. By nature interactives cross boundaries like African wildebeest in their annual migration. I recall reading of roads being closed for political purposes between Kenya and Tanzania but the wildebeest didn't get the message.

Visionaries are like that. Undifferentiated in the wholeness, they know few limits and see all boundaries are permeable. They arise in the marginal realm and roam at will with no space/time limitations, neither being limited by authority nor submitting to old constraints.

The question remains: How to bring vision into being? Certainly not with old ways. With a living vision (Q1) in mind we need interactive (Q4) ways to make it happen. Instead, we traditionally break the vision down into parts, make a plan, and execute reactively. “Just do it!” we say, Nike style. Some of us, not wanting to be labeled reactive, pride ourselves on being proactive and execute the parts with precision but fail to engage the whole. Recently I saw an ad in which a noted business guru

promised “proactive participants in your company’s shared strategies and vision.” This is a siren song of the past.

As the tectonic plates of cultural change shift beneath us, we stubbornly remain problem centered and focused on control, behaviors largely dysfunctional in an interactive world. When we compress a lofty vision into the Procrustean bed of mechanistic methods, it loses its soul. What’s needed is not to be problem centered but rather *personally centered*.

Centering opens us to the energy of the universe so we can focus our intent and direct our energy accordingly. Intuition enables us to function in an interactive state of flow by giving us insights not available in rational ways. These momentary glimpses of truth, of what lies beyond, help us to stay true to the spirit of our vision.

Paul Ray, a lifestyle researcher, has documented the rise of Integral Culture. This new group of “Cultural Creatives,” 44 million strong, constitutes a surprising 24% of the population with women outnumbering men. The rapid rise of this group indicates a society in transition with values focused on spiritual transformation, altruism, ecological sustainability, globalism, alternative health care, feminism, and a healthy social conscience.

I was heartened when I discovered this research because I had always heard this was a small minority, yet I encountered people with these values everywhere. My experience tells me, however, that they remain mostly on the margins of the business community. The leap of faith that takes us into the interactive world calls for a letting go of much that we have learned. The focus is not on control, but release — energy release which is the essence of productivity. Insecurity underlies all control whereas release allows natural productivity of people. Interactives live in the flow state world of Q4. They harness the energy of the whole self.

Interactives know the power of centering and balance in a flow state world. Subtle energy is an intrinsic part of their flow state living. They

acknowledge the energetic body, the life force that vitalizes the physical body. Forty-nine countries recognize this subtle energy and have a name for it. The United States is not among them. In China it is known as chi and in India, prana. This indigenous wisdom is thousands of years old and forms the basis of healing practices and spirituality. Interactives are into yoga, meditation, martial arts, hypnosis, breath work, shamanism, dance, herbs, nutrition, massage, music, dream work, healing, soul development, drumming, spirituality, visualization, angels, prayer, channeling, myth, and rituals to name a few.

In order for a vision to transform an organization, we must first transform ourselves. Stripped of the illusion that power lies outside of ourselves, we discover the commonality we share with all others. This subtle connectedness forms a link from self to other and from individual to organization, a link that the 1960s generation lost in an orgy of self indulgence. Interactives, aware of their connectedness, learn to live in the flow.

To be in the flow is to see the magic in every moment and to sense the wonder in the ordinary tasks of everyday life. An astrologer told me recently to “practice eroticism with the whole world.” Strange as this may sound, the idea is to have an affair with life. Jim Finlay, a Trappist monk, calls this “reverencing the intimacy of our own lived experience.” Preoccupation with the past and fear of the future takes us out of the center and disconnects us from life.

Our purpose is to stay centered *in here* so we can stay in the flow *out there*. We know we are in the flow when we lose a sense of time. In sports we call this “the zone,” focused concentration that translates into superior performance.

Focusing on the present state does not exclude goal setting and preparing for the future. Interactives take time from the present to attend to these in a natural manner. If the goals seem forced or labored and if intuition indicates otherwise, however, they abort them. Addiction to goals at any cost is a pathology of proactive thinking.

Interactives are at home in all four quadrants— inclusive and free to celebrate all things and all people. Whereas proactives favor homogeneity; interactives celebrate diversity. Most significantly, they see the interconnectedness of all life and embrace deep ecology because they recognize that ravaging nature wounds their souls. Finding a balance with their masculine and feminine sides, they honor the opposite in themselves and others. This is the promise that interactivity holds for us, a promise that will lift us out of our proactive ruts and soar to new visions in newly inspired organizations. It won't come easily, but then nothing of value ever did.

* The author acknowledges Harrison Owen's *Spirit: Transformation and Development in Organizations* as the inspiration for this concept.

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Your Life is Your Work of Art

by Bernie Saunders

My transitions from Peace Corps to marriage to graduate school to children to forming my own business, though essential and rewarding, pale in comparison to the transition I am experiencing now. Carl Jung believed that the first half of our lives is a time of being all that we are not, and that entering mid-life is a time of discovering who we really are by answering the question, "Who am I?" There's always been a little voice deep inside me, which I would hear from time to time, that whispered: "I love taking photographs."

Two years ago, during my Inventure Expeditions trip to Africa, the little voice called louder. The unexpected emotional responses from people to my photography supported me to find the courage to listen closely to the voice and to take it seriously. People's responses continue stronger than ever to my passion for photographing the "inner world of flowers."

Today, as Jung predicted, I am experiencing a new and exciting vocational direction, which has been patiently calling me for decades. The new energy I am experiencing through my art work is pulling me out of the closet. My core identity is being exposed for the first time, and I feel wonderfully alive and scared being so vulnerable. Photographs of the inner world of flowers reflect my own inner world. My life and my art have, finally, come together. My life is becoming my work of art.

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What if You Discovered the Power of Purpose?

by Richard J. Leider

The most distinctive feature of the emerging era is not technological change, but a change in human consciousness. There is a growing interest in discovering personal meaning and purpose in life and work.

Purpose is that deepest dimension within us—our life theme or essence—where we have a profound

sense of who we are, where we came from and where we are going. Purpose is the quality we choose to shape our lives around. Purpose is a source of deep energy and natural productivity.

Create your own purpose statement any way you wish. Write your statement on the back of a business card and put it in a place where you can see it often. Look at it daily and ask, "Is that me?"

Finding meaningful, absorbing work, work which ignites our passions and uses our true gifts and talents, is an ongoing quest. Use the following exercise to help define your purpose in the light of what you feel passionate about and what your gifts are.

With my passion for. . .

and my gifts of. . .

I am here to . . .

for the benefit of . . .

One word or life theme which captures the essence of my purpose is . . .

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