



Chapter Two: Perception, Purpose, and Passion

“Work joyfully and peacefully, knowing that right thoughts and right efforts will inevitably bring about right results.”

- James Allen

Perception

Perception colors everything in our lives. We live with rainbows of possibilities or clouds of despair. How we perceive our world makes all the difference, because it determines much of our willingness to be motivated.

Ron’s Story

Ron is a successful business owner in Southern California. He owns a “getaway” cottage in Big Bear Mountain. He is a car enthusiast and owns a number of late model sports cars. Often, he and his wife drive up to Big Bear to spend the weekend in a more relaxed environment. It was on one of these occasions that he experienced the negative effects of seeing something one way when in reality it was the opposite.

Half way up the mountain, as he looked ahead up the road, he saw a car careening down the hill. His body flooded with adrenaline as he sensed the danger of the oncoming car as it swayed from one side of the road to the other. His mind raced . . . should he stay where he was or should he move to the other side of the road to avoid a collision? He decided to hold steady and slow down, while staying on his side of the road. He is fixated on every move of the oncoming car and as it gets close, it swings back onto the correct side of the road. As it skims past him, a woman sticks her head out the window and screams, “PIG!” To which he thinks, *what!* How dare she call me that! Pig? Me, a pig? And without hesitation he retaliates at the top of his voice, “SOW!” . . . and as he turns the corner he slams into the pig . . .

We need to look at our perceptions and the way we relate to the new workplace because it is a completely new workplace that requires new ways of thinking. Today you can work for an organization for thirty years and come in one day and learn that the company has been sold or that the corporate office has decided to downsize, and your services are no longer required.

That’s the way it is and in this new workplace, we need to reduce our dependency and become more entrepreneurial.

When you come to work with an entrepreneurial spirit, you come to work with a different mind set that you're actually doing a project for your company. You get more involved because the only security you have, really, is that of doing a great job. Entitlement no longer exists. Your job is only as safe as the emotions of the person who hires and fires you. In today's workplace, you're going to find as much bizarre behavior in a prestigious law firm as you will in an all-night video store, and as much altruism and compassion in a restaurant as in a medical clinic. Jobs aren't just jobs – they are places where people gather to act out stories, to form relationships, and to impact each other. The places we work are more than just desks and computers and gas pumps and mail rooms. They are compendia of human behavior, running the gamut from healthy and delightful to freakish and sad.

“Life is a great, big canvas and you should throw all the paint on it you can.” - Danny Kaye

The Dalai Lama said this about Westerners' focus on their careers: “...when I talk to people of various professional backgrounds, particularly from the West, they seem to have a tremendous amount of attachment to their profession... people seem to have an enormous personal investment in their profession, they identify with it, so much so that they feel as if their profession is so vital for the world's well-being that if it were to degenerate the whole world would suffer. This seems to me that their level of attachment is inappropriate.” (*Transforming the Mind*).

He's right, of course. We are hung up on our jobs, and what they mean about who we are. When we're little, we instinctively understand that work is part of life, and we make it part of our play. We choose the occupations that look glamorous and fun to us and decide to be firemen and ballet dancers and actors and brain surgeons. The world of work seems a lot more interesting when you're five! It's only later that other considerations come in and we get hung up on things like where we are on the corporate ladder, how much money we [don't] make, and whether it's too late to become a brain surgeon. In one way, it's vital that you work at something that excites and challenges you. In another way, what you do doesn't matter if you're hampered by a dysfunctional workplace because it's difficult to get *anything* done when you're just trying to avoid being stabbed in the back!

The fact is, whether you're starting a career as a physical therapist or working a job in a retail store, you will encounter the same sorts of behaviors from others, experience the effects of company culture on your thoughts and well-being and from time to time, feel the ennui that marks the fact that you aren't hanging out, aren't enjoying yourself, but that you are, in reality, working. The status or seeming permanence of your current position is irrelevant: Working is a complex process that involves every part of your person, every part of your life, whether you intend it to or not. Bad work can make you physically and mentally ill: It can diminish you spiritually and morally. Good work, joyful work brings out your best attributes, puts you in fine-tuned and harmonious relations with others, and lets you be fully human, fully present and engaged. The difference between good work and bad work is not so much the actual “doing” of the job, although this does play a role, but your intention and the intentions of those who lead in that particular workplace. Are people valued or discounted, trusted or maligned? Are they

perceived (and treated) as costs to the organization or as the precious assets they truly are?

When we talk about the world of work, what does it mean to you? Does it make you smile, do you cringe inside? Is work a painful necessity and the thing you do between the weekends, or is it the thing you do because it brings you joy?

For most people, work is not the happy part of life. For many, it is uncomfortably close to torture. You're not imagining things: The world of work can be a dangerous place, but it really doesn't have to be that way.

The major purpose of this book is to explain the ways that work can become a work of art, poetry in motion, meaningful and life-affirming. Work, depending on your perception, can be the purest expression of your soul.

"Joy comes from using your potential." - Will Schultz

What are your thoughts thus far?

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in helping them grow their sales.

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maryna@synergyteampower.com

Crisis=Opportunity

We are in the middle of a crisis. Work has taken on a life of its own and seems to be making demands on our lives and families, and most people are having difficulty coping with the increased pressure. Here's the good news: Crisis is good! People don't know it yet, but within these demands lie the seeds of freedom and joy.

The reason I say that crisis is "good" is because crisis demands change, and change, although terrifying, is the quickest way to increased opportunity. The word "crisis" makes me angry because it seems that the people who are describing the latest crisis often have a motivation for wanting me to view it negatively and panic. When we hear about unemployment crises, we hear it from the media who are highly invested in brokering fear. Fear sells magazines. Crises sell fear. Selling fear is all about fostering certain perceptions in the general public. As members of the general public, you and I can decide how much to attend to, how much to believe. We can choose our perceptions.

I'm not nearly as worried about the *unemployment* crisis as I am the *employment* crisis. If everyone who's unhappy at work decided not to go tomorrow, the country would come to a grinding halt. I think it's critical that so many people are so unfulfilled at work. There are a number of simple solutions to the misery we see in today's workplace. And with a little attention, and the return to ethical ideas like

kindness, honesty, and leadership, we can change the workplace into zones of inspiration where trusting relationships and profitable work environments can be of benefit to both internal and external customers. I have seen large, profitable corporations embracing the power of relationships to achieve high performance. They are the breeding grounds for productivity and employee satisfaction.

“There is joy in work. There is no happiness except in the realization that we have accomplished something.”

- Henry Ford

At Southwest Airlines, for example, relationships, mutual respect, and communication excellence are of paramount importance in creating a sense of meaning and joy in the workplace. In my opinion, one of the keys to Southwest’s success is understanding that people want to work in an environment that is enjoyable, and customers want to deal with a company that exudes enthusiasm.

The majority of people within the organization – including the leadership (starting with Herb Kelleher, Chairman of the Board; James Parker, CEO; and Colleen Barrett, President and COO) – believe that Southwest Airlines was created by its people.

Words like fun, celebration, compassion and innovation shore up the company values which are held in high esteem. The most profitable airline in the U.S., Southwest not only maintains a spirit of “fun” but has also had the ability to “synergize” a number of different areas; thus, its well-orchestrated strategic coordination has created a competitive advantage that is difficult to match, a testimony to that old adage: When teamwork, quality, and service go up, costs come down.

Laughing and having fun with the customer is an important part of Southwest’s focus. As such, humor is encouraged at every level of the organization, from the inside out, with people thinking humorously, smiling, laughing, and making work, play. At Southwest, people are hired for their attitudes and *then* trained to develop their skills. Simply put: Southwest Airlines is comprised of the most productive workforce in the airline industry.

“Never doubt that a group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, indeed it’s the only thing that ever does.”

- Our Values, The Body Shop

“If it’s not fun, why do it” is one of the phrases you will hear at Ben & Jerry’s. According to Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, “Everything we do in our business is value-led” and it’s true that their success has been based, in large part, on their connection with human values.

From the very beginning, one of their sayings was: “How can we serve you better?” It wasn’t just a customer service training line, it was for real and they meant it. That

sincerity and steadfastness has earned a kind of customer loyalty that most corporations pay millions to achieve. Ben & Jerry's works from the age-old principle: "As you sow, so shall you reap" or in the terminology of this book, they focused on Synergy – seeking out ways to serve so that the sum was always greater than the separate parts.

In 1978, Ben & Jerry's started out with three goals:

- 1) To have fun
- 2) Make a living
- 3) Give back to the community

As the company grew, they connected with many others who felt the same and their ideals began to become reality. In Ben & Jerry's words: "Value-led business is based on the idea that business has a responsibility to the people and the society that make its existence possible. In order to do that, values must be lead and be right up there in a company's mission statement, strategy, and operating plan. This gives the employees and customers a relationship that is based on more than money.

"I couldn't ask for a better company . . . when you have been treated so well, it's hard not to appreciate it. And I'm not the only one – that's the best part of it. They do it for everyone."

- Julie Labor, Production Line Worker

It's okay to have fun, and it's okay to be joyful. Ben & Jerry's has created what they call "The Joy Gang" with this mission: "To keep work from being a grind." The Joy Gang plans fun events ranging from bi-monthly massages for workers to an Elvis-Presley-day, that includes an Elvis impersonator and look-alike competition, the whole idea being to bring joy into the workplace. To top that, the company has an outstanding benefits package! Now that's caring capitalism at its best!

Recently, Ben & Jerry's was sold to Unilever, and it will be a great day for business if their social mission slowly influences the worldwide conglomerate.

Reality and Change

I have been in the same room with people who love their work, who look forward to its challenges, its twists and turns. And most of these people are not wealthy or CEOs. I have met a number of millionaires who were downright miserable because, like the Beatles song, "Money Can't Buy Me Love." Loving relationships are the finest and sweetest part of life. Good relationships on-the-job will make work, any kind of work, meaningful, profitable, and joyful. And maybe the hardest part of turning work into a web of excellent relationships is in believing that it's possible.

Perceptions about work start in childhood. Remember when Dad came home and sank into a chair, took off his shiny shoes, flexed his sweaty feet, and grouched at you not to bother him? He read the paper, watched a ball game, and maybe even demanded absolute silence. He had a "hard day" at work and coming home was his

chance to “relax.” Are these the behaviors of someone who had an invigorating, exciting, enjoyable day at work? Maybe you saw this when you were little and thought, “Oh boy, work surely must be some awful place. Hope I never have to go there!”

Now, contrast this with Mr. Rogers, the children’s public television star. He would come through the door, hang his suit jacket neatly in the closet, pull out a powder-blue cardigan, remove his shiny shoes, and put on his play shoes. Then he would take us into wonderland. Mr. Rogers was coming to work, a gentle, loving, imaginative place where people were friends, where disagreements were solved, where he was happy.

What if everyone’s work felt like Mr. Rogers’ neighborhood instead of a battle zone? It can! Why should you believe that assertion? You don’t have to yet: Just keep an open mind. Remember when your work was to copy the alphabet on that big, lined paper with a fat pencil? Or to draw a picture with as many colors as you wanted? Or to dance to the music from the record player? Remember how much fun it was to try hard, and to succeed? The work has changed, but your possibilities haven’t. Allowing the possibility that work can be a happy place is the first step in recreating work as a joyful place.

That Old American Dream

Our other perceptions, or frames of reference, might not be so much impressions we received in childhood as expectations our parents foisted upon us. A lot of parents tell their kids, “Go to school, get a good education, get into a good college, get a real job with a good corporation that has health care and a good retirement package. Then you can retire and do all the things you ‘really’ enjoy for the rest of your life.” As if work is this awful place that must be endured until you reach the joyful part of your life.

That is a powerful story, and it’s amazing that in the face of decades of the most pernicious downsizing, it persists. This perception, which is a part of the American Dream, says that if you do your best (notice that doing your best doesn’t include *enjoying* your long-term job), you will be rewarded by the father-figure corporation, which will meet all your needs, all your life. It may seem wrong to dismantle a part of the “dream” but letting go of this perception will open the possibility to a true pursuit of happiness. If you happen to be a person who has found a haven that expresses this story, that’s great, but if you are expecting this story to be the norm in your work life, you will most likely be disappointed.

All over our nation parents are dismayed and saddened when their skeptical teenagers point out that there is no such thing as job security, and question that a college degree is worth the time and effort. We need to refocus our efforts on educating ourselves and our children that true joy is possible by moving away from the father-figure expectations to finding a personal sense of purpose. Public education started in this country as a way of providing the necessary workers to the newly industrialized workforce. Factories needed people who could tell time so they would show up promptly to work, and they needed people who could both read and write a little. The idea that children should attend school arose from the need for slightly more educated workers. Unfortunately, the American Dream (to get a good job) usurped in our consciousness the other reason for getting an education, which was to lead a more learned and

informed life and ultimately to be of greater service to others. So now, when a kid says, “Why should I get an education when it no longer guarantees me a decent job?”, parents stand there with their mouths open, trying to think of something to say. Maybe they say, “Because I said so, that’s why!”, which may get some initial results but can hardly be called a logically compelling argument.

“Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of men, but from doing something worthwhile.”

- Pierre Coneille

This is why at Synergy Executive Education, we will teach your organization that customer experience is of the utmost importance.

We’re caught between the old story of what work should be and by what it has actually become. And the incongruence between what we want to believe and what we experience is so great that it leads us to grab up new expectations, to armor ourselves against the unknown. Suddenly told to expect nothing, we reach for anything. Frankly, people get some weird ideas about what they are entitled to in the workplace. They feel cheated when the espresso runs out and become incensed over parking space issues. Some people actually believe that they are entitled to special favors from others in their workplaces – they see this as a power perk! The issue of entitlement is a reflection of the insecurity inherent in today’s workplace – a human reaction to chaotic conditions. It’s not really because people are insane, it’s more of the soul’s expression of confusion about what we are really getting out of going to work.

Bizarre Perceptions: Misplaced Entitlement

I knew a university department where the union for the staff members was quite strong. One secretary was famed throughout the college for not working under any circumstances. She brought a small television to work and watched soap operas while sitting at her desk. When people tried to get her to work, she made such a mess that they never asked again – I never saw her do a thing, so I can’t say for sure. Her expression, which was mostly hostile, was enough to protect her from the evils of the copier, the computer, and the filing cabinet. And because no one was going to take on the union, she sat there, year after year, occupying a workspace, denying a productive, enthusiastic person the opportunity of self-fulfillment.

“The world is full of willing people. Some willing to work, the rest willing to let them.”

- Robert Frost

Can you imagine the perceptions she must have had about her work? Can you imagine working at the same level in an organization with someone whose main personal goal is to be vastly unproductive? Can you imagine supervising such a person? The sheer exhaustion of it boggles the mind. She felt entitled to do nothing – maybe because she’d been at that desk for fifteen years. Or maybe because she had

internalized the idea that you're "entitled" to anything you can get away with. And while her story might be, "I'm taking what I'm entitled to," the effect was that she had no opportunity to participate in the fun of work. One other secretary, who was a junior version of herself, ate lunch and talked on the phone with her. The other secretaries avoided her, as did the faculty members and students. In effect, she was the departmental pariah. Imagine going home at the end of every day knowing you hadn't done a single thing and that apparently no one cared or needed, or even missed you.

Khalil Gibran said that if you can't love your work, you may as well take up a begging bowl. He wasn't being sarcastic. In Buddhism, there is an idea that the beggar has a natural place in the social order. The beggar gives the rest of us the opportunity to be generous, which enlarges our spiritual well-being. The beggar is doing us a favor, braving the elements, hunger, and the stingy in order to reach those who are ready to give. The beggar, in this light, according to this perception, is the generous one.

Perceptions can be devastating to your reality. Let's say you go to a party, and right before you get there, someone tells you that the hostess said something particularly nasty about you last week. But you have to go to the party because you're supposed to network with someone you have few other chances of seeing. So you go, but you're miserable the whole time. Your hostess greets you at the door with a warm hug and you think, "You hypocrite, get your hands off me," but you don't say anything. You're angry – what did you ever do to her? Boy, would you like to tell her off! Or, feeling hurt, you really wish you could ask her what you did to make her hate you so much. The whole party is colored by your unhappiness. But once you get home, you check your messages and find out that it was a complete misunderstanding. Your informant feels terrible – he had simply heard wrong.

Suddenly, you see the party in a different light. Your perceptions have changed.

If you aren't already happy at work, take time to think about your perceptions and expectations. Some are realistic, but some may be open to interpretation. Which ones can you afford to throw away? Which ones can be replaced with more optimistic ideas? Notice what your co-workers' perceptions are, too. Look around you – who's happier? Who's chronically grouchy? Who's celebrating? Who's always sick?

"Seven days without laughter makes one weak."

- Mort Walker

I don't have a lot of naive ideas about the workplace. I have seen too many organizations where sickness, psychological warfare, and plain old mean-spiritedness are intrinsic to the culture to make up stories about how cut-throat, corporate America is a "natural" outgrowth of capitalism. They may not actually murder you with spears, but they might smear you with honey and tie you to an ants' nest. It's all a matter of degree. So I'm certainly not advocating a blind, trusting smile without any discrimination between friend and foe in your workplace. I'm just saying that, if the place you work isn't inherently dangerous to your well-being, there is a chance that you can dump some old baggage and be happy there. If you're in a place that you recognize as chronically unhealthy and unlikely to change, the best thing you can do for yourself is look for something better.

Purpose

“Man is a stubborn seeker of meaning.”

- John Gardner

Why do you go to work? If you're like most people, your answer is, “I work for the money.” To some extent, everyone works for money. But some people work for scads of money in order to buy expensive cars, houses, or clothes. Some people work for nearly nothing, supporting another passion that has yet to pay off financially. The artist in the garret is one example. Some people work so their children can have a better life. Too many people struggle, working to pay for mortgages so they'll have a place to live that's near work. There is a commercial that makes me sad every time I see it. It's a short story about a young man who lives in a tiny apartment and works at a meaningless job. His one source of satisfaction is the drive to work in his new car. “We were made for better things – when did it become acceptable to sell your very self for a mid-priced automobile?”

While we're throwing out old baggage and challenging old perceptions, fear rears its ugly head again. The main reason many people go to work at all is because they're afraid of being fired. For some people, it's a legitimate fear – they have children to care for, a house to support and, in a turbulent economy, they may not have a lot of choices about where and how to work. But some people have gotten into the habit of this fear so that when new opportunities arise, they don't even see them.

“None are so blind as those who will not see.”

- Unknown

It's scary to make a change, even a change for the better. When a logging area is all logged out or there's a moratorium on fishing (and although the government may institute training programs for employees), many loggers and fishermen (or corporate trainers or HR people) do not take up the challenge to learn other ways of working. Logging and fishing are physically hard, highly dangerous jobs, but the fear of losing one particular way of life blinds us to other possibilities, even when the original job is no longer a practical option.

“There is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Fear motivation will keep some people in jobs that don't fit them properly, but they are constantly exhausted from the effort of doing something that doesn't feel right. Out of fear, kids entering college may decide to become accountants rather than artists, managers rather than musicians. What they don't see until later is that you can be as pragmatic about career choices as any career counselor, but in the end, the needs of your soul will vanquish all those practical intentions. One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is the outspoken permission to do what they enjoy, all the way through school and right into a career. It may seem like a good solution to push kids into

“practical” careers, but in the long run, it causes pain and confusion. Better to start out headed in the right direction than to start over after years of dissatisfaction.

Defining your real purpose in working may be the inspiration of a moment or an ongoing saga. Some people will know what they want from the start and will pursue it always. These are the lucky few. More people tend to have several careers over the course of a lifetime. Some folks just flounder, trying one thing, then another.

*“One of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is
the belief that one’s work is terribly important.”*

- Bertrand Russell

Your purpose is the way you claim your destiny. If you know what you love to do, and do it, your life will be richer than if you settle for less. Choosing your life’s work is arguably as important as choosing your mate – after all, most people can expect to work for decades. What’s more frightening: making a big change that reflects your innermost desires, or the possibility of wishing all your life for something you could have had but were afraid to try?

Integrity of purpose is vital to being willing to provide important basics like excellent customer service. If you’re excited about what you’re doing, proud of your work, your products, happy about where your company is headed, you’ll want to share those feelings with everyone you meet. On the other hand, if your workplace has nothing to do with what you care about, you’re going to start to resent it. Resentment is a strange emotion, much more complicated than fear, anger, or even shame, maybe because it embodies elements of all three. Rather than resenting myself for choosing a career path that is unfulfilling to me, I will invariably start to resent my boss, the company, or my co-workers. Focusing my resentment on externals gives me the illusion that someone else is responsible for my discontent. If I start wondering, “Why have I chosen this path?” it puts the responsibility for doing something back on me. And that’s a lot of pressure, isn’t it? On the other hand, recognizing that the ball’s in my court also gives me options that I don’t have if someone else is in charge of my life. So, if you aren’t yet sure of your purpose but you know you don’t like where you are, put aside the terrorist boss, the unfair company, and the lousy pay structure and ask yourself, “What do I really feel passionate about? What turns me on?” Think hard about what makes you happy, and then get to work!

External Blocks to Purpose

The main internal blocks to acknowledging and expressing your work’s purpose are fear and procrastination. External blocks may include the lack of support of family and friends, a political, competitive, hierarchical workplace that wears you down, or a boss with the personal characteristics of a terrorist. Being driven crazy at work is a surefire way to make your purpose seem hopelessly irrelevant. You’re just hoping to get through the next meeting without stapling someone’s mouth shut. If your workplace cannot support the growth and expression of your purpose, it’s time to start looking for someplace that can.

If you're pretty clear on your purpose, take a look at your current workplace and appraise it in terms of how much you can realize your purpose there. If in general you're in the right place, it may just take a little tweaking to align your job with your purpose. If you're working in a fast food place and your purpose is to be a clothing designer, it's time to get to the drawing board and redesign your life. Are you taking classes in sewing and fashion history and design? What's the first step? Take it, and then take another.

If expressing your purpose requires a change of corporate venue, make your job interviews work for you. You don't want to promise everything and get nothing – that would be a huge waste of your time. Most interviews end with the prospective employer asking the employee if s/he has any questions. This is your primary chance to find out if this is the right place for expressing your purpose. Ask what the company culture is like: If the interviewer doesn't like the question, you're probably in a place where hierarchy matters. If you don't already have a clear picture, ask how the company is run. How long do people tend to stay at the company? What are current projects and plans for the future? What's the training situation like? If the interviewer can't answer one of your questions, you might think twice about the amount of information distributed at various levels of the organization.

You can pick up the general vibe of a place from the receptionist. Is s/he friendly? Open or uptight? Formal or casual?

Ask a few questions: What's the boss like? Are you involved in a regular training program? Have there been any layoffs lately? The answers you receive will reveal a lot about the culture of that company.

Making Authentic Choices

“If the mind is happy, not only the body but the whole world will be happy. So, one must find out how to become happy oneself. Wanting to reform the world without discovering one's true self is like trying to cover the whole world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to wear shoes.”

– Ramana Maharshi

Discovering and living out your purpose goes hand in hand with making authentic choices. The day you sigh and say, “Well, it looks like I'm really an actor/ chef/ mechanic/ runic scholar,” is the day you've made the most important, authentic choice of your life: the announcement of your purpose. After that, it's a matter of making more of the right choices, the ones that fit your purpose most closely, over and over again. Making authentic choices isn't only about choosing the right place to work – it's about how you express yourself in general. The cliché about painters living in garrets makes sense because painters have to live somewhere cheap until they're established artists. Basements are usually the cheapest places, but painters can't paint in basements because they need light in order to realize their passion. So they take attics and the tops of old warehouses. They swelter in the summer and freeze in the winter, but they gain the advantage of that great, high-up light. It's part of being a painter.

When you know what you want, making authentic choices comes easier than when you're not committed to a course of action. Once you know your purpose, there will be all sorts of decisions to make, some of which will distract you from your purpose. Do you take the job that offers a basic salary but cuts into time you'd otherwise spend at the library researching your novel? Do you go into business with your brother because he needs a partner, even though you've never really been interested in window coverings? It's like a driver's education film where you've got a bicycle to the right and slightly in front of you, a tailgating bus just behind, and a pedestrian crossing the street just any damn where he feels like. Then a guy in a Pinto runs a red light and makes a left turn in front of you. It's hard to decide which mistake to make first! What can you do when things are distracting you from your true purpose?

First, slow down. Take some time to meditate on the changes you want to effect and changes that you might be tempted to make purely for the sake of changing. Sometimes, when you panic that things aren't working out as quickly or easily as you'd hoped, it's tempting to take any new job or apartment or lover, just to feel like you're in some control. If you find yourself making changes in a blind panic, take a break and remind yourself of what matters most to you.

Think Synergy. Synergy describes what's happening when the total is greater than the sum of its parts. When it comes to work, it means that if one person takes four, jaw-clenching hours to complete a task, two people may complete the task with laughing and jokes in an hour and a half. Four people can get the job done in about thirty-five minutes, and it'll be a party. A work group that has Synergy can accomplish more than larger groups or even more skilled groups where Synergy isn't part of the process. Synergy is when everything flows, creativity is rampant, people cooperate to create the best solutions, and everyone's having a great time.

For the individual pursuing her/his passion, Synergy at work is a natural part of the process. It's when you discover that three hours have passed in a flash while you worked on something that totally involves you. Like many wonderful phenomena, Synergy can't be forced – it just happens. Still, we can encourage the growth of Synergy in our work by being attentive to the needs of the self, and by not being overly influenced by other people's expectations. For example, if you are my publisher and expect these pages before noon each day, you may be disappointed to discover that before noon, I'm not much of a writer. I need to get into my day, clear my messages, solve some problems, and work my way gradually to the manuscript.

Encouraging Synergy in your work life requires a certain amount of self-understanding and enough flexibility in your workplace to meet your needs. If you need a quiet, serene atmosphere in which to design a new car seat, but you work in a cubicle in the middle of a raucous sales office, it's a waste of your time and energy to try to ignore your creative needs. Ideally, you have a boss and a schedule that lets you set the pace. Less than ideal is a micromanaging boss who doesn't believe that people will work without being closely attended. Micro-managers who mean well can usually be reasoned with. Horrific is the terrorist boss who probably knows you could do the work better in another situation but who takes pleasure in making work extra difficult for you. Terrorist bosses, who will not be reasoned with, deserve to be left alone with their weird

enjoyments while you find someone better with whom to work. If your capacity for Synergy is being interfered with, it's up to you to find a way to change the situation.

Firing Your Boss

I am a consultant, so in a way I'm the master of my own destiny. In another way, anyone who pays my fee is, for a time, my employer. But I have walked away from projects when my employer didn't measure up. A large part of my job is to educate business leaders about ways to run their organizations with integrity, and most of the time that's a satisfying job. But once in awhile, I run into someone whose agenda wasn't ever to actually improve his organization.

Sometimes people have hired me because other people wanted them to, or wanted to appease employees or convince themselves that they had done all they could (without actually doing much of anything). Once I stood in a room with a bunch of employees and listened to the CEO give a speech about all the wonderful things he was putting into place for his workers. They were happy! They applauded him. He was the Big Man on Campus. But within days, the Big Man laid off a large percentage of his work force. Seems the temptation for a little momentary stockholder gain was too much to resist. I felt used. I was disgusted at his duplicity, the way he'd let his company down, his lack of thought regarding the remaining employees and the effect of his actions on many areas of the business. Following his layoffs, a rash of resignations followed and not long afterwards, he was fired. I wonder what he will screw up next? One of my core values is that I have to be able to trust and respect the people with whom I work. So I took him to lunch at a famous restaurant in Orange County and fired him.

Sometimes you can do everything right, but if the people you work with are playing by a different set of rules, everyone is losing. Ideally, it should be possible to tell at an interview if you're headed into a bad place, but interviews are like first dates: It's difficult to really know what you're getting before you're already committed. If the people you work with aren't interested in playing by the rules you find important (especially in matters of integrity and honesty), the wise thing is to get out as soon as you realize that your values aren't shared by your co-workers.

"There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward."

- Kahlil Gibran

Passion

Bring your passion to work, and come to work on purpose. You have to love your work and feel it's worthwhile, or find something you can become passionate about and make it worthwhile. Obviously, no one's going to be delighted with every aspect of their work all the time, but it's vital to have a central core of enjoyment or pleasure so that when things get tough, you still have the emotional security to get you through. If you ever watch the Food Network, you'll see people who are in love with their jobs. The chefs talk about the food, compare flavors and colors, taste and smell things, and have a great time doing it. But the next time you go to a restaurant, look at the chaos, the

heat and flames in the kitchen, the demanding physical aspects of the work. To be a chef, to work all day and half the night on your feet in a hot kitchen with people yelling, dishes clattering, and hungry, cranky customers, well – you’d better love food!

When you love your work, it’s easy to commit to being great at it, to seek out improvements in yourself, and to challenge yourself by taking on new tasks or learning new skills. When you are committed in this way, you are modeling passion and commitment to your employees. Your commitment to greatness also has impact when you direct your passion towards the most important people in the business – the customers. Exceptional customer service means more than making the customer happy today: It means making that customer a customer for life! Being willing to go the extra mile with your customers will keep bringing them back. Being consistent in product quality, in continuous improvement, in demonstrating outstanding, outrageous customer service, in educating and inspiring employees, will make your business soar.

“The secret of joy in work is contained in one word - excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it.”

- Pearl S. Buck

Patience, Patience

Once, when I was attending a conference, I stayed at a hotel for several days in a row. Whenever I left or returned to the hotel, I noticed a janitor, happily working. He was always, very methodically, sweeping the floor and because I am a student of human behavior, I couldn’t resist asking him: “Don’t you ever get tired of working all the time?” He flashed a huge smile at me and said, “I am an honorable man, and an honorable man keeps self-respect intact by always doing a good job.” It reminded me of the old saying: “When the student is ready, the teacher arrives.” He was really saying that you don’t work for the boss – you work for the honor of maintaining and growing your own self-respect.

Some people work on their passion part-time for years because they have to work for money during the day. They go to school at night, or paint pictures all weekend, or get an internship that doesn’t pay but teaches them what they need to know to succeed in what makes them happy. If, while pursuing what you love on the side, you maintain the attitude that any work is honorable if you do a good job, work can take on a purpose grander than just showing up and hoping to make it through the day.

If you can’t leap with both feet into your passion, you can still find some satisfaction in doing the best job you can. Obviously, it’s far more preferable to do something that you are passionate about, that’s stimulating and challenging, than to spend your life doing a job you don’t like extremely well. Let’s get that out in the open – I don’t intend to perpetuate the old lie that work is its own reward, because it isn’t. *Passion for your work is its own reward.* It rewards you with more than a paycheck. People who are happier at work are physically healthier and tend to be emotionally stronger. When you do what you love, it opens the door to having a sense of calmness – including a feeling of rightness with the universe, an optimism and energy that goes beyond just having fun.

It's a spiritual experience. You were put on this earth to do something important – to express the finest and most talented parts of yourself.

I know a woman who bought a rose bush for her tiny but much-loved garden. She was excited about this bush, as it was supposed to bloom with large, fragrant, peach rose-pink blooms. She planted it in a pot and kept it watered and fertilized, but it didn't do very well. It was always fighting an orangey mildew, its leaves looked sickly and dropped off a lot. She hung onto it for a year before it bloomed, and then it was a disappointment to her. The blossoms were almost scent free, tiny and red with few petals. They each lasted about one day. She wondered aloud how she had managed to buy such a crummy bush when the label had promised so much.

Then one day, she spotted something on the other side of the plant. When she turned the pot around, across from the homely, sad blooms, she discovered a large, multi-petaled, apricot colored rose. It was the rosiest-smelling kind of tea rose, exactly what she thought she was getting in the first place. Her best guess was that the peach rose had been grafted onto another root – a common horticultural practice that weds hardy roots to more spectacular flowers. But the rose hadn't been pruned properly at the nursery, so the root stock grew canes too, and bloomed with the original flower. When she looked more closely at the plant, she noticed that the small red roses were growing on sickly-looking, small, yellow-leafed canes, but the leaves surrounding the apricot bloom were shiny, green, and fat. In effect, she'd bought two completely different roses on the same plant.

If you've ever known someone who was clearly meant to be a surgeon but was working instead as a third-grade teacher, you've seen an example of this error in purpose. When their true purpose isn't being expressed, people get mentally twisted and malnourished. They might look like they're surviving, but they aren't in proper bloom. The rose didn't have much choice – until someone pruned off the unhealthy canes to encourage the intended growth, it would keep putting out ugly flowers throughout its life span. People have choices, though. What would you like to cut back, and what would you like to encourage to grow? Perhaps that's as much as I can get out of that analogy, but maybe that's all that's needed.

"The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers, but for the wide world's joy."

- Henry Ward Beecher

Be Your Own CEO

A great way of building your confidence in your ability to create the kind of work life you need is to take personal responsibility for what happens in your lifelong career, not just this job or the next one. One of the reasons most people don't want to face the lie of the "get a good job, stay twenty years" story, is because it means the things we once could take for granted are things we can no longer believe in. Specifically, those things include company-provided health care, pensions, 401Ks, and insurance. You might have all those things today, but they may evaporate tomorrow.

The existentialists said it best: Freedom demands responsibility, and in this case, if you want to stay free of the perception that you may acquire security by hooking up body and soul with the “right” company, you need to be mentally ready to take care of your health, insurance, and retirement needs on your own. This may look like finding a community-based, sliding-fee health insurance if you’re working for low pay (Kaiser Permanente has something called the Steps Plan that can start individuals out at under \$50 per month for the first year). It may mean starting your own Roth IRA and contributing to it month-by-month like a savings account. It definitely means acquiring some sense of what happens to your money. It means giving up the perception that some company will take care of you. The sooner you give up the myth of the “nurturing” company, the less you will be affected by companies that disappoint their employees.

We are all entrepreneurs: the more joyful among us already see themselves that way. It is an existential crisis and as such, it brings up the terror of being totally alone with yourself in the work world. But once you confront the fear, map out a retirement plan, take care of your insurance issues, plan for your kids’ education, you will feel at peace, confident that you are moving in the right direction. Robert Kiyosaki, author of *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, said that one of the things “rich dads” teach their kids is that, no matter who you work for, you also always “mind your own business.” His point is that it’s vital to consider yourself a businessperson in your own right so that whatever else you do, you attend to your own finances with the mindfulness of any CEO. When you accept the responsibility of becoming your own CEO, you gain confidence. After all, who better to watch out for your interests?

As more and more of us start to see ourselves as entrepreneurs, the workplace will naturally change to accommodate our new perceptions. In some ways, that’s already happening as more and more people work as consultants, or on contract. Mutual funds are being created for individuals, so changing jobs doesn’t affect them; and some workplaces are providing benefits that are reminiscent of years gone by such as on-site day-care and health clubs to meet employees’ needs for family interaction, and energy-boosting (medical-cost reducing) workouts. Companies that take the time to think about employees’ needs want to attract employees rather than imprison them, and worker freedom and mobility is an important factor in keeping employers humble.

Our Synergy Sales Power workshops empower the entire team from the leadership down. To schedule an appointment with us to see how we can help your organization grow, please contact maryna@synergyteampower.com

Your Inner Ecology

The most important factor in achieving joy in your workplace is your own inner ecology. Your inner ecology is the landscape of your mind and heart. If it’s clear, well-kept, and clean, it’s easy to see what matters most to you and to make decisions that reflect your personal values. The closer your decisions align with your values, the

happier you will be. On the other hand, most of us have an inner ecology that's suffered the depredations of bad bosses, greedy companies, stupid policies, and inadequate pay. Our souls are junked up with old baggage; our hearts are wounded. I think we suffer as much trying to find the right work with the right colleagues as we do trying to find our life partners. We don't expect to be hurt by the workplace as we do in love, maybe because no one writes songs about it. But the workplace is too often a place of loss, fear, and pain. People abuse each other at work in ways we would never tolerate in our personal lives. And it takes a toll. We lose trust in the workplace as a viable opportunity for joyful interactions.

Your inner ecology is like any other environment: It can be cleaned up, purified, replanted with positive ideas and solutions. But don't rely on other people to do this work for you – you are the only protector of your soul. Think hard about experiences you've had and from which you've learned. Observe your workplace and decide if it's worthy of you, and if you are contributing all you can to it. Throw out perceptions that hinder you, and try new ones. Think of yourself as an artist creating something powerful and meaningful.

Recognize Your Limitations

Some parents tell their kids, "You can do anything you want to do," and although it's a nice affirmation, it's not actually true until you back up what is really a wish with some tangible skills. Telling a child, "You can read," has little to do with the truth of teaching a child to read, and having the desire to read without actually acquiring the skills to do so is often known as "illiteracy." It takes alphabets and phonics and practice and working your way up from reading small words to learning bigger words.

Like reading, just wanting to have great work that you love isn't enough: You have to find enough motivation to take the classes, practice your art, study for the license, do whatever you have to, to make your dreams real. Sometimes recognizing your limitations can be painful. If I have heart trouble, I may have to admit that I'll never be able to learn to fly, even though I'd love to do so. Sometimes, you can be stopped by truth, but these times are rare. In general, where there's a will, there's a way. I might decide to take a personal risk and learn to hang-glide. Recognizing your limitations doesn't mean being stopped by them, not at all. It's where you start from to get to where you want to go!

*"You deserve the fun, the joy, the freedom, and the pure goodness that flows through
the*

experience of love that indwells you... The choice is yours."

- David McArthur and Bruce McArthur, The Intelligent Heart

Screw Your Courage to the Sticking-Post

I think Lady Macbeth said this while planning a murder, but I like the sound of it anyway. Whether conspiring to mayhem or dreaming of a new career, to go through with your best-laid plans, you've got to have some way to control your fear. Fear is like a big dog, maybe a slightly slow-witted Saint Bernard, that hasn't been trained. Fear is protective, so that if you fear stepping in front of that moving bus, you are much less likely to end up as a blot on the asphalt. But fear, being unwieldy, can be unmanageable. If you don't manage it, it will take you for a ride.

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear."

- Ambrose Redmoon

I know just telling someone, "Don't be afraid," isn't exactly therapeutic genius. Go ahead, be afraid. But *go ahead*. Fear and courage aren't opposites – heroes are people who behave bravely while experiencing terror. So recognize that you're about to make some changes, which are scary in themselves, and plan for the fear. Decide how much of your fear is realistic and how much is just superstition or a lack of confidence, and minimize your rational fears with careful planning. Find people who encourage you, and avoid the ones who prefer you to remain unchanged. Talk positively to yourself, and to others. Tear into the things that scare you most so you can see them for what they actually are – challenges you will one day master.

"We wise grown ups here at the company go gliding in and out all day long, scaring each other at our desks and cubicles and water coolers and trying to evade the people who frighten us."

– Joseph Heller, Something Happened, 1974

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Synergy Sales Power. We have included it as a handout for your enjoyment. We would gladly love to gift this entire book to you during our first face-to-face meeting.

To schedule an appointment with us, please contact us at:

maryna@synergyteampower.com