

Warren Beatty is on to something. Beginning Steps to Help you Define Your Idea of Heaven, In the World of Work

I'm not usually given to quoting Warren Beatty, the movie star. If you don't know him, he's one of my generation's greatest Lotharios. , before and (I'm assuming) not after, he met his leading lady and wife, Annette Bening. But I think Warren got it right when he said that the definition of heaven is when you can't tell the difference between work and play. Positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this state flow- and wrote a book about it by the same name. It's a state when you're fully immersed in whatever you're doing and feel an energized focus: seconds, minutes and hours fly by. Some call it being in the zone.

Are you one of those people who have the Monday morning blues, because it means that you have to go back to a job that you hate, where you're



everything *but* in the zone? Or are you the opposite, like my Father, who was truly, madly, deeply passionate about his work and eager to see Monday arrive, because it meant he got to be paid for doing what he loved? The good news is that if you fit into the former category, the current and growing tsunami of retiring baby boomers and the low unemployment rate translates into wonderful opportunities for you and for us all, whether you're a retiree who wants to go back to work, a younger boomer, or a member of generation X and Y. This really is good news because in my personal life and in my practice as a life and business coach I see far too

many men and women who are just putting in the hours at work they don't like, are ill suited for, or fell into at an early age. If this describes you, and you don't believe that your career prospects can improve, I'm here to tell you that demographics prove that it just isn't true.

I believe it is your right, and argue even your responsibility, to contribute your unique talents to the world, because our planet needs them now as never before. People who love their work make a significant contribution to others while “growing,” their authentic selves. Tired of working at a job that doesn’t feed your soul? Because of limitations on the length of this article, I can’t outline all the things you could do to find a better fit and work that is authentically you. However, I’ll get you started by giving you some things to start thinking about, as well as a few resources that will help you hone in on the gifts that you, as the very special and very unique individual that you are, have to contribute to the world.

To begin, fast forward to the end of your life. Pretend that a group of people have gathered to honor you on your 80th birthday. What would you like them to say? If most of your comments concern family over career, then maybe your career isn’t an important focus for you. But if career is an important part of your life, then what would you like people to say? That you were wealthy, that you helped the less fortunate, that in your business the customer was always right? Whatever your answer, it reflects what coaches call values, the things that you must have in your life to make it happy and meaningful to *you*. And isn’t that the most important person to make happy? In the three examples above, the values that are expressed are financial success, compassion/kindness and social justice and lastly community and relationships. If these values were your values, as your coach I’d want to know if they were reflected in the job that you have now. If they were, then your level of job satisfaction would be higher than for someone with the same values where they were not.

Two other places to explore increasing your chances of right livelihood are two tests given by Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology and Tom Rath. .Seligman’s VIA Signature Strength Survey is a 240 question survey that has been taken by hundreds of thousands of people. It measures 24 character strengths that many people, my clients included, have used to help them find their true vocation instead of continuing to put in time at a less than satisfying job. To take the test, visit www.viasurvey.org/Register.aspx Personal strengths identified by Seligman include: leadership, social intelligence, perspective, love of learning and creativity.

Rath’s book, *Strength’s Finder 2.0* asks the compelling question: do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? If you do, you will

probably be like Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who recently shed some tears at a news conference announcing his retirement from Microsoft. Rath's premise is that we spend way too much time strengthening our weaknesses instead of honing our strengths. Based on 40 years of research, Rath's book contains hundreds of strategies for discovering your strengths. To take the test, (you must purchase the book first) visit: <http://sf2.strengthsfinder.com/content/25186/about-the-book.aspx> The Gallup organization, which developed this assessment's predecessor, found that employees who *do* have the opportunity to focus on their strengths every day are six times as likely to be engaged in their jobs *and* more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life *in general*.

If you're in what you consider the wrong or a dead end job, no matter how glamorous it looks to others, you owe it to yourself to follow your bliss, as the author and mythologist Joseph Campbell often urged. Doing the three exercises outlined above is a great way to get started. And you just never know where following your bliss might lead. Take former vice-president Al Gore, who illustrates Campbell's theory so well. Gore, criticized by many as being a wooden politico who just could never master a sound bite, lost the 2000 presidential election but went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for his life long work and passion for the environment which was highlighted in his movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Gore's success begs these questions: what is your bliss, what activities make time speed by and what do you consider play and others work? Answering these questions will move you closer to your right livelihood and toward your authentic self.

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