# CAREER SATISFACTION

## FROM WITHIN

### FIND AND FOLLOW YOUR TRUE CALLING, OR GET MORE SATISFACTION FROM WHAT YOU DO

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## Contents

# Introduction

This book is designed to help two groups of people. The first group would like to change careers or start a business, but has the nagging feeling that for one reason or another, the transition isn't possible. Perhaps these people feel they don't have the skill or ambition to make the change, that the business they're interested in is too competitive or not lucrative enough, that their families will disapprove or something else.

The second group entered the working world feeling driven and passionate, but gradually the work became uninspiring and routine. These people don't necessarily want a transition — they understand that even if they changed jobs, they might end up in the same rut in a few years. They just want to find a way to restore some of the passion and drive they had when they started.

In my coaching practice, I've worked with both types of people and I've found that — as different as their situations may sound — they face essentially the same problem. The problem is that they've learned to measure their worth as human beings according to their career success. Unless things are going smoothly in their jobs — their pay is steadily increasing, their work is well-received, they have an outlet for their creativity and so on — they feel inadequate and incomplete. What they lack is a sense that, no matter what happens or doesn't happen in their lives, they are whole and worthwhile beings.

On one hand, this feeling of incompleteness holds people back from making the career changes they want. They fear that if they don't succeed in their new job or business — if they aren't promoted quickly enough, if the business is persistently unprofitable or however else they define failure — they won't be able to accept themselves as human beings. They figure that, even if their current fields aren't very fulfilling, at least they know they can do their jobs well and they aren't likely to suffer setbacks that would damage their opinions of themselves.

On the other, the lack of a sense of wholeness also affects people who want more satisfaction in their current jobs. Because their self-esteem is riding on their career success, they're constantly worried that something will go wrong in their jobs and they'll be left feeling bad about themselves. They lose sleep over their bosses' opinions of their work, the amount of the next bonus and so on, and this renders them unable to take pleasure in what they do. Because they look to their jobs as the main source of fulfillment in their lives — or second only to their relationships — they find their lives intolerable when work becomes stressful or repetitive.

The solution for both groups is to develop a greater feeling of wholeness — a feeling that, no

matter what their circumstances, they are worthy of love and the world is basically a benevolent place. We might also think of this as a willingness to accept whatever the world brings us without collapsing into despair or fear when we don't get what we want. While most of us look to our careers to give us a sense that we're adequate people, this book's message is that we'll perform most productively and feel happiest in our work if we come to it with a preexisting feeling that we're "okay" and "enough."

This book is based on my work of helping people cultivate a feeling of completeness in themselves, and the teachings of others who have inspired me, including authors in the areas of business, psychology and spirituality. The book is organized into four guideposts designed to lead you toward a strong sense of wholeness that's independent of any success or failure you may experience in your work. Each guidepost is accompanied by exercises usually involving meditation, visualization or conscious breathing to help you achieve that goal. I'll briefly introduce you to the guideposts here.

**1. You are not your career.** As I said earlier, many of us rely heavily on our careers for satisfaction in our lives. For some people (my former self included), it's as if our jobs are part of our bodies, and if we don't see ourselves as successful in them, we feel almost physically unhealthy. Unfortunately, this means we have a hard time feeling like complete and worthwhile people when things aren't going the way we'd like. Even if things are "going well" by our own standards — maybe we're getting our superiors' approval, regular raises and so on — we still harbor the nagging worry that something will go wrong, and this makes it difficult to enjoy what we do.

Usually, we try to deal with this fear by numbing ourselves with television, alcohol and other mindless distractions, or hurling ourselves obsessively into our jobs in the hope of forestalling any possible problems. These are at best only temporary solutions. What we need to do, and what the exercises in this section help us do, is fully experience our fear, let it subside and see that we remain on the other side. This helps us physically experience the fact that, in our essence, we are greater than our fears, our jobs and anything else we face in our lives, and it gifts us with a deep sense of peace.

**2. Let go of your resistance.** In many aspects of our relationship with our work — whether we're in the office trying to get a project done, dreaming up plans for our new career paths or something else — we encounter part of ourselves that resists our efforts. When we come into conflict with this part, it's as if every cell of our bodies angrily opposes our attempts to accomplish something. If this part had a voice, it would have little more to say than "No, I won't!" This is the part of us that's in charge when we're procrastinating.

I call this part our "inner resistance." Some also call it "narcissistic rage." This part of us simply wants to *be*, and is sick and tired of constantly striving to do and achieve more. Some psychologists suggest that this aspect of our personalities develops in our early childhoods, when we learn that others won't accept many of our behaviors and feelings, and that we have to conform to their expectations to survive and be loved. On some level, we're still very upset about others' failure to accept us for who we are, and sometimes this anger has us simply go on strike and refuse to produce or create further.

What this part wants most, as I see it, is acknowledgment and appreciation. It needs to hear that we take its desire to "just be" seriously. However, most of us don't have a very loving relationship with this part. Instead, we call ourselves lazy or inadequate when it interferes with our work. Of course, this only strengthens our inner resistance. To give our resistant part the recognition and understanding it needs, I suggest we should simply allow it to be there until it subsides. The exercises in this section provide ways to greet and acknowledge your resistance when it comes up.

**3. It's okay to have wants.** Some people experiencing a lack of fulfillment in their careers have this problem because they have trouble admitting or serving their own wants. At some point in their lives, they learned it was selfish or inappropriate for them to go for what they wanted, and that they were supposed to think only of others' needs. Because they chose their careers to please their loved ones and friends rather than themselves, it's no wonder they eventually realized they weren't in the right place. Since they aren't used to putting their attention on their desires, they often have only a murky sense of what they actually want.

Sometimes I find that people with difficulty acknowledging their desires just need a safe place where they can tell someone what they want, without fear of being judged or mocked. Others just need to practice asking themselves what they want in each situation they face in life, rather than falling back into their habit of trying to figure out what everyone else wants them to do. The exercises in this section are intended to help you get comfortable with your wants.

**4. Give yourself permission to enjoy what you do.** When we aren't feeling passionate about what we do, we usually assume something in our choice of careers or our working environments is responsible. Sometimes, however, it's simply because we've cut ourselves off from our ability to experience strong feelings.

When we're confronted with intense pain, fear or some other uncomfortable sensation, we sometimes — consciously or otherwise — adopt strategies to avoid feeling those emotions. For example, perhaps we *dissociate* — our awareness leaves our bodies — or we *freeze* — we clench our muscles and hold our breath to numb ourselves to how we feel.

Unfortunately, when we shut down our capacity to feel strong unpleasant sensations, we also shut down our ability to feel intensely pleasurable ones. If we do this, we can't get particularly excited about our work, no matter how fun, lucrative or prestigious our jobs may look to the outside world. The exercises in this section are intended to help you regain access to the sensations you want to feel about what you do.

Note that I've separated the exercises into four guideposts to help you choose the practices that serve you best in your particular situation. If you have trouble determining or asking for what you want, for instance, I'd recommend you focus on the exercises described in the third section ("It's Okay To Have Wants"). You don't need to do every exercise in the book to get closer to the sense of wholeness and the results you want, although doing them all will likely have the quickest and deepest effect. Of course, if you find only certain exercises in a section useful, feel free to do only those on a regular basis.

Whatever exercises you choose, try to schedule a time each day when you can consistently run through them and ingrain them deeply into your mind and spirit.

## Why This Book Is Different

If you've read a number of career-related books and articles, you may wonder how this book is different from everything else out there and how it will add value to your working experience. I'll say a few words to answer this question.

In our culture, we tend to believe we can only improve our quality of lives by changing the

*facts* in the world — by making more money, having intimate relationships with more attractive partners, buying bigger houses and so on. Time and again, this belief proves false: Each expensive house or car we buy, resume line we accumulate and intimate partner we take up with has only temporary and minimal effects on our fulfillment in life. Although we aspire to live like celebrities and wealthy people, we constantly hear stories about how unhappy such people are, how their relationships can't seem to stay together, how they're addicted to drugs and so on.

However, since most of us don't know any other way to find joy and meaning, we just keep striving to acquire more stuff, hoping eventually some type of stuff will bring us bliss. Thus, we tend to look for jobs and business ideas that generate the most money possible, or perhaps we look for jobs that are seen as prestigious so we can get others' approval. We might call this the "outside-in" approach to career satisfaction because it assumes the best way to improve our emotional state is to change our situation in the world.

But there's another, subtler example of the "outside-in" approach that many of us will find familiar. Many of us think we'll find happiness if we can just find an appealing work environment. To some of us, this means a place where we do an activity we find meaningful, interesting or fun. For example, some lawyers enter their profession because they enjoy conflict or negotiation, while some professors enter academia because they're interested in the subjects they teach. To others, it means a place with supportive superiors and colleagues.

Unfortunately, as many of us have found, getting into the right environment or doing the right activities at work doesn't create lasting satisfaction either. Even a "dream job" becomes dull and repetitive or stressful after a while. We start worrying that we're not living up to our full potential, and envying friends who look happy doing something else. For example, lawyers might worry that they're not giving their creative gifts to the world, and artists might worry that they aren't using their organization skills and talent for business.

We tend to deal with this kind of dissatisfaction by either grimly accepting that "this is as good as it gets," or jumping to another environment in the dim hope that we'll finally find peace for the rest of our days in the next venture. This is also an "outside-in" approach to finding career satisfaction, as it assumes that the right working environment will eventually fulfill us.

Most books on finding a job or starting a business emphasize "tips and tricks" for career success. Whether they deal with the "right things to say" in interviews, the proper body language to display if you want to look trustworthy or dominant, how to convince customers to close a sale or something else, these books are about strategies for getting others to do what we want in a business setting. These books follow the "outside-in" approach because they assume improving your outer circumstances by using the techniques they teach will bring you satisfaction.

In his classic book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi gives a compelling critique of the "tips-and-tricks" approach to finding fulfillment:

> [W]hat follows is not going to be a "how-to" book. There are literally thousands of such volumes in print or on the remainder shelves of bookstores, explaining how to get rich, powerful, loved, or slim. . . . Yet even if their advice were to work, what would be the result afterward in the unlikely event that one did turn into a slim, well-loved, powerful millionaire? Usually what happens is that the person finds himself back at square one with a new list of

wishes, just as dissatisfied as before. What would really satisfy people is not getting slim or rich, but feeling good about their lives.

As its title suggests, the book you're reading does something different. It presents techniques and perspectives to help improve your *experience* of your work — to have you feel more whole, peaceful and centered — rather than strategies you can use to change the *facts* of your life. It presents, as Csikszentmihalyi does in *Flow*, a "process of achieving happiness through control over one's inner life."

The inside-out approach emphasizes our experience of working because, in the end, our careers — and everything else we do — are efforts to experience the world in more positive ways. In other words, we seek careers that are lucrative, prestigious and impactful because we want to *feel* peaceful, successful and so on. If we didn't think our careers could produce such feelings for us, we wouldn't care so much about them. When we come to our careers from a place of wholeness, we have a more positive experience of working and of our lives in general.

I don't mean to completely dismiss the tips and strategies taught by the outside-in approaches. Some of that type of knowledge is useful and often necessary, but without a solid inner sense of completeness, people often end up with a nagging feeling that something is missing, no matter how impressive their achievements.

## What Feeling Whole Does For Your Career

We've talked about how lacking the conviction that you're a complete being can make it hard to enjoy what you do. But how does developing a sense of wholeness help you find career satisfaction? There are many ways, which I'll discuss throughout this book, but I'll give a few examples here:

- When we genuinely know we'll accept ourselves no matter what, we start having room to relax and actually enjoy what we do.
- When we're no longer so deathly afraid of making mistakes, we become able to take healthy risks — a factor particularly important to current and would-be entrepreneurs.
- We become more creative and productive, as we no longer get paralyzed by indecision and second-guessing our work.
- We find room to actually become passionate about what we do once working no longer seems burdensome and frightening.

When we come to our work already feeling whole rather than seeking wholeness from our careers or elsewhere, new dimensions of peace and fulfillment open to us. As spiritual teacher Tsunyota Kohe't writes in *Full Circle: Seeking The Knowledge Within*, "[t]rue happiness is a quiet happiness, a quiet confidence and a quiet peace which is unaffected by external factors. True happiness comes from within, and true happiness is maintained from within."

It's entirely possible that you may come to this work certain that you intend to change careers, but after cultivating a stronger sense that you're complete and acceptable no matter what, decide to change your plans. You may find, in other words, that the fulfillment you were looking for in seeking a career change was within you all along, and only needed to be unlocked. That's perfectly fine too. After

all, this book and your career are ultimately about giving you the feelings you want to experience, and if you can have those feelings without making a transition, so much the better.

**What About Your Work Ethic?**

The most common concern people express about the "inside-out" approach is that feeling more whole and fulfilled will rob them of their motivation. If you already feel like everything's all right with yourself and the world, they believe, you won't have any reason to pursue your goals. You need to feel like you're incomplete or inadequate to "stay hungry" enough to keep going after what you want. This way of thinking creates a strange paradox. We strive for more money, possessions, degrees and so on because we want to feel more whole — but if we never allow ourselves to feel whole, we'll never actually achieve what we want.

More importantly, when someone voices this worry, I feel compelled to ask: Have you ever actually *allowed* yourself to feel whole and fulfilled? Are you speaking from experience? Did you slip into feeling complete at some point in your life and end up slacking off at work, watching too much TV and leaving the house a mess? The answer is almost always no.

Most of us have never had the experience of feeling that we're complete beings, no matter what happens in the world. We just assume, without any evidence, that feeling whole will destroy our lives and we're really better off feeling incomplete and fearful. As Dr. Robert Holden puts it in *Happiness Now!: Timeless Wisdom For Feeling Good Fast*, we have "an implied fear that if there's too little suffering, the world won't be able to work as it is!"

In fact, the experience of feeling whole actually helps us explore possibilities and take risks we wouldn't have considered otherwise. Take, for example, the fact that the world's wealthiest people are entrepreneurs — people who have built their own businesses, often from scratch and with little help from others. For instance, 99% of the millionaires interviewed by Thomas J. Stanley and William D. Danko for their book *The Millionaire Next Door* owned their own businesses.

To feel comfortable starting a business, you must accept the risk that it will fail, as most startup businesses do. This requires some level of conviction that, no matter what happens to your venture, you'll remain an adequate person. If you suspect you'd become suicidally depressed if your business failed, you'll probably shy away from entrepreneurship.

Of course, feeling complete doesn't mean you don't want anything. However, the key point is that, when you have a deep-seated sense of fullness, you don't collapse into fear and insecurity when you don't get what you want. Instead, you accept that your plan didn't work out, and either try again or explore other possibilities.

Ordinarily, when we talk about what we "want" in life — whether it's "doing what we love," making more money, having kids or something else — we're actually talking about what we think we *need*. We believe we "need" something when we feel like we aren't good enough, adequate or complete without it.

To hear the desperation that enters our voices when we talk about getting that promotion, buying that house or getting into the right graduate program, it's as if we were talking about food, shelter or something else we absolutely require to survive. When we approach our careers willing to

accept that we might not get what we want, rather than trying to serve an unmet need, we experience a new sense of freedom in our work.

**My Own Journey**

Finally, to give you an idea of where I'm coming from with all this, I'll tell you a bit about my background. In brief, one morning in April 2006, I woke up and realized I could do what I wanted with my life. This may not seem like a novel realization to some, but it was for me. Before this epiphany, I believed life was all about doing what I *had* to do. I *had* to go to law school, become an attorney, buy an expensive car, dress a certain way and so on. I didn't see myself as having a choice.

At first glance, this may sound a little strange. It wasn't as if someone was holding my loved ones hostage and demanding I pursue a legal career. However, given my mindset at the time, this belief made perfect sense. I was convinced that, to feel like a worthwhile person and earn respect, I had to have a fairly conventional career that was high-paying and prestigious, and have all the trappings — the house, car and so on — expected of people on that path. As I saw myself as having talent as a writer and little aptitude for math, law seemed like one of the few options that met my criteria.

On the morning I described, however, I woke up with the unfamiliar sense that I didn't have to prove to anyone that I was a worthwhile person, or do anything to establish that I had a right to exist. Though I was lying in my bed doing nothing at all, I was a whole, perfect being and I didn't need to acquire anything else to complete myself. This realization filled me with a deep feeling of peace, and I went through the day smiling and dreaming of all the wonderful possibilities I'd explore now that I had a choice about how to live my life, including potentially changing my career.

Sadly, when I awoke the next day, the bliss of my epiphany was gone and my fears regarding feeling "good enough" had returned. The career choices and options in other areas of my life I'd seriously considered the day before now seemed unreasonable and unreachable. Pessimistic beliefs like "No, that will never work," "So many others already do what I want to do," "I don't have enough business savvy," and so on crept back into my mind.

While my serene feeling had departed, I knew I'd had a glimpse of what was possible in my experience of living, and that over time I could bring myself back into that state on a permanent basis. More importantly, this experience taught me that the only limits on who I am and what I can do in life are imposed by my ways of thinking and feeling. The more free and empowered I feel, the more success and happiness I can achieve.

With this in mind, I stayed in my law job over the next year, but I took up several practices designed to restore the feeling of wholeness I'd experienced that morning. I started meditating and doing yoga regularly, and hungrily devouring all the spirituality and self-help books and workshops I could. I won't go further into the specifics of what I did, as this book is all about the exercises I found most effective. I'll just say that eventually, I did find myself drawing closer to the freedom and empowerment I'd felt so vividly before.

Around a year before this writing, my feeling that I was a complete and perfect being was strong enough to generate some significant choices and changes. I decided my highest priority in life was to introduce others to the sensation I'd experienced. Within a period of a few days, I developed a

clear sense of direction: I'd pursue a career in writing and coaching with the goal of bringing others the peace I'd found. Leaving the legal profession and striking out on my own came quickly and naturally, where before it seemed terrifying or impossible.

So there's the journey that brought me to this point, which should give you some idea of the approach I take here and what I want for you and others. Now let's go about helping you along your own path.

# I

## You Are Not Your Career

When asked who we are or what we do, most of us usually respond with our job titles. We say “I'm a lawyer,” “I'm an electrician,” “I'm a professor,” and so forth. People who lose their jobs or retire often report feeling like they “don't know who they are anymore,” or that they've “lost a part of themselves.” Children learn to respond with a job description when asked what they want to “be” when they grow up. All these habits reflect our tendency to identify with our careers, or to see them as part of who we are. To many of us, it's as if our careers are part of our bodies and we'd be physically hurt or destroyed if our careers changed or ended.

Unfortunately, identifying with our careers tends to bring us suffering. When we treat our jobs like they're part of our being, we place ourselves in a constant state of fear. We fear that we won't do our jobs well enough, and that they'll disappear and leave us incomplete. We fear changing jobs or starting our own businesses because doing so would mean giving up our identities. We become unable to relax or enjoy vacations, as we feel “useless” when we spend time away from the office.

As psychologist Gary Buffone succinctly puts this point in *The Myth Of Tomorrow: Seven Essential Keys For Living The Life You Want Today*, “[w]e often confuse who we are with what we do and own. As a result, we become inordinately stressed by threats to our career, bank account or any number of external attributes, believing 'I am my career' or 'I am my physical appearance.'”

When I voice the idea that identifying with your career can prove harmful, many people are skeptical. They believe that if they weren't so firmly attached to their careers, they wouldn't achieve as much success. However, relatively few people have actually *had* the experience of feeling whole and accepting themselves no matter what — they simply assume they must be better off with their anxieties. In fact, there are several reasons why becoming less identified with your career actually increases your productivity and enjoyment of what you do.

**You become able to take worthwhile risks.** We all know people who, while they constantly complain about their jobs, make no effort to explore their other options. This is because, as much as they dislike their jobs, they are identified with their career roles and the money, status and other perks their jobs afford them. They fear that, if they took another position, they might lose their jobs or fail to perform as well, and they'd lose the benefits to which they're so attached.

Separating your identity from your career empowers you to take action if you're unhappy with your situation. As I said earlier, this is also relevant in the context of starting a business, as feeling

complete in yourself no matter what is essential in case your business fails or falls on difficult times.

**You worry less often.** Identifying with our careers brings us constant worry, and worrying renders us unproductive. Most of us are undoubtedly familiar with the experience of waking up at three a.m. in a cold sweat, wondering whether we did some project adequately or whether the boss approves of us.

We don't accomplish anything in this frazzled and half-awake state, other than losing sleep and harming our performance the next day. Even when we're at work, we can spend long periods obsessing about how we're perceived there, and whether we're doing a good enough job. Ironically, when we become lost in anxious thought about "how our careers are going," we're unable to concentrate on the work we're actually there to do.

**You become easier to relate to.** Identifying with our careers makes us unpleasant to be around. We've all met people at social events who just can't seem to stop talking about their work — whether they obsess about the technical details of what they do, the money and prestige their jobs get them, the social dynamics of their workplace or something else.

These people have become so deeply attached to their jobs that their careers occupy all their thoughts and they have lost sight of the other dimensions of their humanity. Their approval of themselves — and they believe, others' approval of them — entirely depend on the prestige of their careers, their job performance and how well-liked they are in the workplace. Intuitively, I believe, most of us recognize that people are more than what they do for a living, and this understanding has us feel uncomfortable around people who are this career-obsessed and out of touch with themselves.

**You take more pleasure in what you do.** If you think of your career as if it were part of you, that doesn't necessarily mean you love it. In fact, the opposite is often true. Because identification creates a constant fear of loss, people who are identified with their jobs see work as a source of anxiety and frustration. Their work progresses slowly and painfully, as their anxiety has them second-guessing everything they do and obsessing about others' possible reactions. As most people in our culture are so attached to their careers, it's no surprise we rarely meet someone who is genuinely passionate about what they do for a living.

We can see this most clearly when we think of the difference between how we experience activities we call "work" and those we see as "play." When we see ourselves as playing, we feel free to experiment with things we haven't tried before and we don't take it personally when something doesn't go the way we'd like. By contrast, when we begin thinking of an activity as "work," it means we're attached to the outcome of what we do — we start worrying about messing up, displeasing those we're working with, and so on. When something becomes "work," we start having to drag ourselves out of bed to go do it.

Of course, it's true that every career, as much joy as we might find in it, has its less thrilling tasks, like paying bills and organizing your workspace. But even these things, if they're done in the service of an activity you see as "play," can become enjoyable or at least tolerable. I'm reminded of this each time I see my friend, who is a sculptor, organizing and cleaning up her studio. She seems to take as much pleasure in it as she does in the act of sculpting itself, because she does it in the service of something she's passionate about. As Buddhist teacher Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki puts it, to the person who "enjoys perfect freedom of spirit" and is "always acting in accord with his Self-Nature, his work is

play."

How do we end our identification with our careers? One way, as these exercises prescribe, is to allow yourself to fully experience the work-related fears that plague you. Just let the unpleasant sensations your anxieties create in your body be there, without judging or pushing them away. If you're constantly worrying about your coworkers outdoing you, for instance, imagine them actually performing better than you, and let yourself fully feel the emotions that image evokes.

You'll notice that, when you keep breathing and focusing on your fear for a little while, it passes away, leaving you calm and unharmed. If it arises again, it feels weaker and more manageable. Once you grasp that you can face your career-related fears without being hurt or destroyed, those fears — and your identification with your work — begin to fade. Your fears aren't part of who you are — they're just temporary experiences you have.

**Exercise 1: Dissolve Your Self-Distraction**

This exercise helps you fully experience the fears that have held you back from finding career satisfaction or making the transition you want. Instead of simply allowing our fears to be, most of us find ways to numb and distract ourselves from them — working excessively, watching TV, using drugs and alcohol, and so on.

This exercise involves at least temporarily removing those distractions from your life. To understand and transcend your fears, you need to get acquainted with them, and you can't do that unless you stop diverting your attention from what you're really feeling. As Mark Linden O'Meara explains in *The Feeling Soul: A Roadmap To Healing And Living*, "[J]ust as a doctor becomes quiet and uses a stethoscope to listen to a patient's heart, so too must you quiet the things around you, focus and listen to what is going on inside. Doing this allows you to obtain the information you need to gain the awareness required to create a shift in your feelings, behaviors and thoughts."

For just one day, as you go through your routine, experience as much silence as you can. This means not only the absence of unnecessary noise, like the TV or radio, but also the absence of compulsive, unproductive activities like endlessly checking e-mail, fidgeting, and playing solitaire on the computer, and the absence of distracting, numbing chemicals like alcohol from your body. On a deeper level, see if you can actually quiet the needless mind activity you engage in on a regular basis. This includes things like talking to yourself, playing songs to yourself "in your head" and reliving events from the past.

Many people are surprised for two reasons by how difficult this exercise is. First, whenever they remove a distraction from their lives, they find themselves unconsciously bringing it back. When I started doing this myself, I'd turn off my car radio, only to find myself almost automatically reaching to turn it on again. Doing this exercise thus requires you to pay close attention to ensure you don't simply reactivate all the distractions you're trying to silence.

Second and more importantly, people are surprised by the flood of sensation they experience when they, even momentarily, give up the many strategies they've been using to avoid what they feel. Some people notice, for the first time, how tense their bodies are, and others have an intense rush of anger or sadness.

Still others report feeling bored. But what is boredom, really? I tend to think it's just another word for all the feelings and sensations we avoid experiencing through the various distractions we bring into our lives. If boredom were just a matter of having nothing to do, or not enough stimulus, why do people experience it as almost physically painful, and why are they willing to do nearly anything — even self-destructive things like abusing drugs — to get rid of it? As psychologist Bruno Bettelheim wrote, “Boredom is a sign of too many feelings, too deep and too hard to summon to the surface.”

Once you've eliminated your distractions, notice the sensations that emerge. Notice the places in your body that become tight or otherwise uncomfortable, and the emotions that arise. Observe how hungry, almost desperate, you are to bring your diversions back into your life. Consider the possibility that what you're experiencing has actually resided in the background all the time — you've just grown accustomed to diverting your attention from those feelings.

This exercise may seem irritating or stressful, but ultimately the only way to transcend your fears is to fully allow yourself to feel them. Consciously or otherwise, you designed the distractions in your life to avoid feeling your anxieties, and those distractions need to be at least temporarily discarded if you want to come to terms with what's actually going on for you.

One benefit you may get immediately is that, without your distractions, you start seeing and appreciating details of the world you may not have noticed before. If you don't have loud music on all the time, for example, you may hear and enjoy the bird songs outside. If you aren't fidgeting, you may connect more deeply with the ever-changing sensations in your body.

If the sensations you feel when you stop all your distracting activities seem like too much to bear, you can do this exercise gradually by removing one distraction from your life per day. For instance, on the first day you might leave the car radio off as you drive to work. On the next, you might refrain from watching TV. On the next, you might not drink any alcohol, and so on. This method also makes it easier for you to monitor yourself and ensure you don't find yourself automatically reverting to the distractions you're trying to stop.

Once you're fully in touch with your fears, you can begin working on dissolving and transcending them.

**Exercise 2: Simplify Your Fears**

Often, the number of potential problems facing us when we're considering changing careers or starting a business can seem overwhelming. The people in our new environment might not like us, we might find we're not as motivated as we thought, we might not generate enough income, and so on. We usually feel the same way about our work situations even if we aren't considering a transition — for example, we might be concerned that our superiors think we're strange, our colleagues are gossiping about us, our clients will switch to a competitor, and so forth.

We start experiencing our fears and worries as less threatening when we recognize that, ultimately, they all stem from the same source: the fear of annihilation or nonbeing. At the root of each anxiety is the belief that if the thing we fear came to pass, we would be hurt or destroyed. When we understand this, the number of fears facing us doesn't seem so vast. In reality, there's only one.

As Dr. Richard Moss puts it in *The Mandala of Being*, fear of annihilation is “at the root of the

perpetual sense of insufficiency and insecurity that drives our unrelenting quest for survival, long after our basic survival needs have been assured and far exceeded." If we can come to terms with that basic fear, we can live from a calm, empowered place even in a stressful work environment.

There are two methods I use to help people experience, on a physical level, the fact that the fear of nonexistence underlies all our smaller worries and concerns. First, focus your attention on one of your standard anxieties — perhaps it's the concern that your boss secretly wishes you'd stay later at the office, that you won't get a project done on time, that your colleagues dislike you, and so forth. Ask yourself what would happen if your fear came true. For example, if you're afraid your employees don't see you as an effective leader, ask yourself what would happen if they actually came up to you and told you as much. Listen for the first answer that comes to mind, regardless of how exaggerated or irrational it may sound.

Now, take the consequence you imagined — maybe, for instance, that your employees don't respect you — and ask yourself what, in turn, would happen if that event came about. In other words, using this example, what would happen if your employees actually didn't respect you? If, for instance, the answer that occurs to you is, "I'd be worthless," ask what would happen if you *were* worthless. Continue this process until you get to a point where you can't think of another consequence — when you arrive at the deepest reason why the anxiety you're having troubles you.

Most people I've done this exercise with ultimately conclude that they'd be "nothing," "nobody," "worthless," "dead" or similar words reflecting a sense that they'd disappear or cease to exist if their fear were realized. After they reach this point, they can't think of any further events that would occur if their anxiety came true. More importantly, when they repeat the same process with another of their anxieties, they tend to arrive at the same result. No matter which of their many worries they're thinking about, they find each of them stems from the fear of annihilation.

Try repeating this process with a few of your own fears and see if you get similar results. For instance, if you discovered that your concern that your coworkers see you as ineffective is rooted in the fear of nonexistence, look at another career-related worry — perhaps the fear that you won't get promoted this year. If you dig to the root of this worry, you'll likely find the fear of nonbeing lurking there as well. When you do this exercise regularly, you'll notice that the overwhelming quality your fears used to have begins to disappear. What you thought was your limitless legion of anxieties was in fact only one.

The second approach involves noticing the sensations that arise in your body when you hold your fears in your awareness. To do this exercise, simply bring one of your anxieties to mind as you would using the first method, and observe how your body feels. Perhaps you'll feel a tightening in your muscles, a shallowness in your breathing, a warmth in your forehead or something else.

Once you have a clear idea of the sensations that arise when you focus on this anxiety, bring another anxiety to mind and notice the sensations it creates. In my experience, most people who do this exercise report experiencing similar sensations, no matter what their specific anxiety. This illustrates on a more visceral level the common source of the mass of seemingly unrelated worries that afflict most of us.

We can also see the fear of nonbeing in the dramatic ways people usually talk about the possible consequences of a career change or a setback in their jobs. For instance, when layoffs occur at a

company, people often call the remaining workers “survivors.” Similarly, people often say, “I need my job to survive.”

Of course, while it's true that you need some source of income to pay for food and shelter, there are many different ways to “make a living”; the particular job you have right now isn't the only one. People tend to exaggerate the consequences of a job or career change, as if it really could mean their extinction — and at bottom, their extinction is what they really fear.

Once we recognize the fear of annihilation at the root of our anxieties, what comes next? As we know from the amount of spiritual and philosophical thought out there, there are many approaches to handling the fear of nothingness. Some, including me, believe that “annihilation” as we usually think of it is impossible. Because I, at the deepest level, consist of the same energy that comprises the rest of the universe, I cannot be destroyed. When my physical body dissolves, I will remain part of that changeless energy field. Even if you aren’t yet sure how to address your fear of nothingness, just knowing that this fear underlies all your anxieties brings a simplicity and clarity to your thinking.

**Exercise 3: You Are Not Your Fear**

As spiritual teachers have said for ages, one way to find greater knowledge of what you *are* — a perfect, whole and acceptable being — is to get a clear understanding of what you are *not*. I think the most critical realization of this kind is the knowledge that your fear isn't part of who you are.

Ordinarily, we treat our fears as fixed parts of our identities — as if we're always going to suffer from the fears we have right now and nothing we do or think can change that. We can see this in the language we typically use to describe our fears. We say things like, “I'm afraid of conflict with my boss,” “I get nervous around bonus time” or “I get so worked up when I have computer problems” — as if the fear we're talking about were part of “I,” or our essential selves. This is also the mentality that has us look for ways to distract ourselves from our fears; since we assume we can't move beyond them, we try to force them out of our conscious awareness.

Some people even take pride in their anxieties. For instance, many people think of themselves as virtuous or hardworking because they worry so much. When asked why they get so anxious, they say, “Of course I worry — I take my job seriously,” or “Of course I'm afraid — my career is on the line.” You may even occasionally find yourself saying similar things.

However, our fears aren't actually part of who we are — they're just experiences we have from time to time. For instance, when I see a movie, I may laugh or get scared during the movie, but when the movie is over — or shortly afterward — those feelings disappear. I won't think of the movie or the emotions I felt during it as part of who I am, or as experiences I'll have to repeat for the rest of my life. Once you recognize that your fear is just a transient, short-lived experience, the prospect of taking risks, asking for what you want and otherwise facing that fear no longer seems so threatening.

This exercise helps you become aware, on a physical level, that your fears aren't part of who you are. Start by finding a comfortable place where you can sit alone and remain undistracted. Keep your eyes open, and breathe steadily and deeply.

Now, turn your attention to the fears that have stopped you from achieving satisfaction in your career or making the changes you want. Allow any thoughts and feelings to simply occur without

judging them, pushing them away or turning to some activity to take your mind off them. Notice the sensations arising in your body when you bring your fears to mind.

When I do this exercise with people, some say, “I don't feel anything 'in my body' — I'm just afraid.” But there must be some sensations that tell you that you're experiencing anxiety — otherwise, you wouldn't know the anxiety was there. For example, is there tension or pain in some part of your body? Where is it? Does your breathing become constricted? Do you feel warmer or colder anywhere? Does your mouth become dry? Do you start to sweat? As you make these observations, maintain your breathing and focus.

Once you’ve fully experienced the physical sensation of your fear, allow the fear to gently pass away. Let it subside into the space, the emptiness, from which it came. Just as each breath of air into your lungs is followed by an exhale, so, too, do fear and other emotions enter and flow out of you. Observe that even though the sensations of the anxiety are gone, you are still there. Allowing yourself to experience the anxiety didn’t destroy or change what you are. You are still a whole and complete being.

This exercise helps you experience firsthand that sense of separation from your fears I talked about earlier. When we allow our fear to run its course inside us and notice we remain unharmed after it’s gone, we feel empowered to act even if it resurfaces. As Dr. Barbara Miller Fishman writes in *Emotional Healing Through Mindfulness Meditation*, “[t]he meditative tool for probing experience allows us to watch how thoughts arise and then fade, how powerful emotions such as anger and fear emerge and then subside. In this way we learn about the impermanence of experience.”

We can also understand this exercise in terms of the theory in somatic psychology that, when we're suffering some kind of trauma, we usually tighten our muscles and hold our breath to ward off the intense feelings associated with the experience. Unfortunately, this causes the emotions to become “locked into” our bodies, and makes us continually reexperience them.

The way to release these trapped emotions, some say, is to experience them while breathing deeply and allowing our bodies to move in whatever way they need — whether through crying, jumping up and down, or something else. As psychologist Susan Aposhyan describes this approach in *Body-Mind Psychotherapy*, “through very slowly allowing these traumatic physical responses to unwind and sequence out through the body through our breath and our movement, we are transforming them into the healthy effective responses that could not occur originally.” Similarly, the exercise I described has us breathe through our fear until it dissipates and is no longer trapped in our bodies.

**Exercise 4: Appreciate Your Other Dimensions**

Most people reading this, I suspect, work in sedentary jobs that focus on generating words and numbers — computer programmers, executives, accountants and so forth. I don't think there's anything wrong with this. After all, at this very moment I'm sitting at my computer typing words. However, we spend so much time seated and engaged in mental activity that we sometimes forget there are dimensions of who we are beyond our minds.

As Ram Dass writes in *Be Here Now*, “You have at this moment many constellations of thought, each composing an identity . . . . Usually you are lost into that identity when it dominates your

thoughts. At the moment of being a mother, a father, a student, or a lover, the rest are lost." So, too, do we lose sight of how varied and multifaceted we are when we become identified with what we do for work.

One way to reconnect with the neglected dimensions of yourself is to turn your attention to parts of your body that normally operate outside your awareness. Doing more physical activity is one way to get back in touch with the bodily areas you've overlooked. If you don't exercise much, just getting more active is a helpful way to remind yourself of how much more there is to you than your mind.

However, a more targeted approach involves simply sitting by yourself in silence and holding your attention on areas of your body you normally take for granted. Simply notice the sensations that arise in those areas — whether you feel warmth, tingling, itching or something else. Examples of these taken-for-granted areas include the soles of the feet, the pelvis and the back.

Some spiritual teachers prescribe a similar exercise they call "feeling the inner body" or "feeling your body from the inside" that has you scan your awareness over each part of your body and notice how it feels from within. As Eckhart Tolle writes in *The Power Of Now*, one way to overcome the perpetually worried state most of us find ourselves in "is simply to take the focus of your attention away from thinking and direct it into the body, where Being can be felt in the first instance as the invisible energy field that gives life to what you perceive as the physical body."

I've found in doing these exercises with myself and others that merely feeling the sensations in more of your body can strengthen your feeling of wholeness. When we lose touch with the feelings in an area of our bodies, it's no surprise that we develop the nagging sense that we're incomplete. If I can't feel my back or my legs most of the time, for instance, I'm likely to get the sense that some part of me is missing. Often, we mistakenly believe the only way we can feel complete is to get or accomplish something in the world. In fact, what we may really want is to experience more physical sensation. Thus, reconnecting with our bodies can make a big difference in how complete and adequate we feel.

If the idea that you might want to experience more sensation in your body sounds strange to you, try seeing it from this perspective: Everything we do in life is, at root, an effort to feel or avoid feeling certain sensations. For example, we don't make money for money's sake — we seek money because of the feelings we think it will bring us, whether it's safety, pleasure, dominance or something else. Because focusing our attention on our bodies makes us more receptive to sensation, body awareness — more than anything we achieve in the world — can help us have the kind of experiences we're seeking.

**Exercise 5: Transcend Your Boundaries**

I believe many of our fears, career-related and otherwise, stem from a misperception of ourselves as small and weak. We see ourselves as too fragile to deal with setbacks in our businesses, confrontations with people, upcoming deadlines and so on, and this has us hold ourselves back or worry compulsively. One way to overcome this feeling of frailty is to feel, on a physical level, the fact that you are much greater and stronger than you may think.

What I'll recommend here will sound the most metaphysical of any exercise I've talked about so

far, but if you bear with me I think you'll be surprised at the results. We tend to assume we are our bodies. If asked to point to themselves, many people point to their chests or heads and say, “This is me.” When we reflect on this, we recognize that we don't think of ourselves *as* our bodies — we experience ourselves as the *controllers* of our bodies, as if our bodies were cars and we were the drivers. For instance, notice that when you talk about your arm, you say “*my* arm” — implying that “you” are something that directs your arm's motion, not the arm itself.

What are you, then, if you are not your body but something that controls it? What do “you” look like in your true form? Consider for a moment the possibility that, as many spiritual teachers have suggested, what you really are doesn't “look like” anything, as you have no boundaries or limitations. What you really are is as large and enduring as the universe. When we move beyond the illusion that we are our bodies, we see that nothing remains to define the borders of what we are, nor do we feel any need for something to do so.

The *Vigyan Bhairav*, an ancient yogic text, describes an exercise for connecting with your boundless nature at a deep level. The passage I'm talking about says, “Imagine spirit simultaneously within and around you until the entire universe spiritualizes.”

I understand the exercise to work like this. Sit in a quiet, undistracted place. As you sit, start focusing your attention on the sensations you feel on the surface of your skin. After a while, you may begin to notice that your skin's surface, though it may look solid, is actually *permeable* — meaning that energy can move through it into and out of your body. Focus your attention on the movements of energy through your skin until you feel the boundaries between the inside and outside of your body begin to blur.

As you experience this sensation, notice how you begin perceiving objects in the “outside world” more acutely — almost as if you could *feel* them in the same way that you feel the beating of your heart and your breathing. Expand the range of your “feeling” to include everything around you, reaching out to include the ground and sky. Consider the possibility that you aren't simply perceiving things outside yourself — that in fact, there is nothing “outside” you at all because you are everything.

When you're back in your daily routine, keep part of your awareness focused on “feeling” the world around you, as if you could physically touch the mountains far off in the distance, the ceilings of the rooms you enter and so on. In this state, you may find that the things in your life that used to scare you seem to have lost some of their seriousness.

This exercise is intended to help dispel the notion that we are our bodies because that belief, as spiritual teachers often say, is the source of many of our fears. The human body is in some ways frail and vulnerable — it's susceptible to disease, accidents, stress and other kinds of injury. If we think we're nothing more than our bodies, we're bound to worry a lot. As the Indian sage Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj said, “[a]s long as you identify yourself with the body-mind, you are vulnerable to sorrow and suffering.”

What this exercise lets you feel is just a taste of what you really are — a being without dimensions or limitations. As you experience your real nature, you'll likely feel the fears you used to experience fading away. Those fears, after all, were based on the wrong idea that you are your body, and that your body is too frail to deal with the problems that confront you in your working life. In fact, you are not weak at all. You are larger than any setback or challenge you may face. In *Trances People*

*Live: Healing Approaches In Quantum Psychology*, psychologist Stephen Wolinsky aptly describes the importance of realizing we are greater than the obstacles that confront us in our lives:

> We need to have the new and different experience of discovering that we are more than or larger than the source of distress with which we are so typically identified. If I learn to move outside this misidentification so that I can view it, observe it, describe it, . . . in short, if I am the knower of the problem, then I am bigger than it. Simply put, it is not me. . . . The problem no longer takes up all my inner space; it is surrounded by a context of perception and awareness . . . .

Recognizing this gives you the peace and composure you need to handle the problems that arise in your career and other areas of your life.

# II

## Let Go Of Your Resistance

To illustrate the idea of “inner resistance,” I'll tell you a story about my life to which you’ll probably relate. For most of my life, I felt like part of me was pushing against my efforts to accomplish my goals. Whether I was at school studying, in my office working on some document in my old job or preparing articles for publication, there was a persistent feeling that I had to drag myself kicking and screaming through my tasks. After a little while doing any structured activity, my attention would start drifting, tension would start building in my head and I'd find it increasingly difficult to get my work done. Part of me, it seemed, just didn't want to do anything at all.

It took a lot of introspection just to realize that this sensation came up no matter what I was trying to do. For much of my working life, I just assumed part of me was resisting my efforts because the particular work I was doing was difficult or boring. Eventually, I recognized that my inner resistance had followed me all my life. My own mind was the source of the boredom and frustration I felt — not the specifics of my work.

My inner resistance is the reason why, while I look like a successful and “high-powered” guy on paper, my accomplishments in the past usually came with tremendous *effort*. Generally, I had to really fight to maintain my focus and push myself through my projects. By contrast, some people I've known — and I'll bet you know people like this, too — seem to attract what they want in life with minimal effort and suffering.

One day during a meditation, I had another sudden realization. The resistant part of me was angry because it didn't feel it was ever accepted for who it was. It felt that the world only valued it for what it could accumulate and accomplish. Because the world had refused to unconditionally love this part of me, it didn't want to contribute to, or do work for, the world.

Just having this knowledge did much to change my attitude toward work, and gift me with the peace and focus I'd wanted. When I acknowledged what the resistant part was upset about, I felt it begin to relax. It was as if I'd given that part the attention and appreciation it wanted, and it felt free to call a truce in its war against the world. My work took on a sense of ease and flow I hadn't experienced previously. Sometimes I felt the old tension return as I was working, but when I put my attention on the resistant part and the reasons it was upset, I again felt the tension dissolve.

Psychologists call the part of you that creates this resistance “narcissistic rage.” Our narcissistic rage begins arising the first time we learn — usually when we're very young — that others aren't going

to unconditionally accept us no matter what we feel and do. Instead, they demand we behave according to their rules and desires, and punish or ignore us if we don't. Psychologist Karen E. Peterson aptly describes the origin of this rage and its effect on our working lives in *The Tomorrow Trap: Unlocking The Secrets Of The Procrastination-Protection Syndrome*:

> The original source of procrastination is unconscious shame emanating from . . . issues that originate at birth or during childhood. They include perceived or real physical imperfections, flawed or disrupted parenting, neglect, or even abuse. Whether one refers to these unresolved issues as destiny, "a cross to bear" or "karma," the fact remains that these issues must be worked through in order to lead a productive, meaningful life.

Our rageful part is angry that it's not allowed to simply "be itself" — as Drs. John Firman and Ann Gila put it in *The Primal Wound*, it is "a direct result of an assault to the self" — and it stays angry well into our adulthood. It doesn't like doing structured activities like drafting documents and writing computer programs. It wants to simply sit there in silence and *be*.

We often shame this resistant part, calling ourselves lazy or stupid when we get distracted. However, the more we try to shut it up or force it down, the angrier and more resistant this part becomes. The only way to make peace with it is to give it the acknowledgment and affection it craves.

The key takeaway from this is that your work doesn't always have to feel like "work" — that is, no matter what you do for a living, it doesn't have to feel frustrating, boring or stifling. Your inner resistance to giving your gifts to the world creates these sensations — not the people in your workplace, the repetitiveness of your tasks, your office's drab décor or some other aspect of the outside world. Dissolve your resistance, and the peace and productivity you've hoped for will return.

The other side of the coin, of course, is that changing your outer circumstances — how much money you make, the people you work with, the tasks you do and so on — won't do much for your long-term career satisfaction if part of you is locked in a struggle against the world. To achieve lasting fulfillment in your work, you need to come to terms with the part of you that fights back against your creativity and productivity. The following exercises are intended to help you work toward this goal.

**Exercise 1: Your Resistance Touches Everything**

Take a few moments to reflect on your working life, and all the career and educational settings you've experienced. Put your focus on what you did the majority of the time in each setting rather than the temporary highs and lows created by rare events — promotions, pay raises, crises and so on. Most of the time, regardless of the environment you were in, you were probably doing one or two specific tasks. See if you can recall how you felt in each environment as you went through your normal routine.

For instance, when I was a lawyer, I spent the bulk of my time drafting documents in my office. When something positive or negative happened in a case, I'd feel a fleeting sense of excitement or despair. Moments later, the feeling subsided and I'd be back in my office doing my usual routine. If I were doing this exercise, I'd focus on how I felt the vast majority of the time — while drafting documents — rather than my experience when a big win or loss occurred.

As you bring your attention to how you felt most of the time in each environment, see if you notice a subtle — or perhaps not so subtle — sense that you weren't happy there, or that you wanted to

do something else. Perhaps you notice a sense that you were struggling to stay focused even while fully awake, or an anger at others for "making" you do repetitive, uninteresting work. Maybe it was a sudden fatigue that hit you out of nowhere when you sat down to do what you did for a living.

If you recall feeling these sensations during your usual routine, you'll probably observe that the sensations have followed you wherever you've gone. No matter what career path you've taken and no matter how lucrative, glamorous or fascinating that path may look to the world, your inner resistance has made your work feel like a chore. You've wanted to feel a sense of peace and ease as you work, but everything you've done in a career context has come with some degree of frustration or pain.

At the outset, this may sound depressing. The realization that, no matter what you've done, your inner resistance has held you back, may momentarily give you a sense of hopelessness and despair. But it also gives you a sense of perspective. You now know what the problem was. It wasn't about the activities you've done or what your work environment was like. The obstacle you've faced is within you.

You don't have to go somewhere else, or make an effort to achieve or accumulate more, to remove the obstacle. You simply need to let go of it. As spiritual teacher Michael Brown aptly puts it in *The Presence Process*, "It is pointless meddling with the physical circumstances of our outer life to effect real change to the quality of our experiences. The uncomfortable physical circumstances of our life right now are the physical manifestation of the emotional ghosts of the past." The following exercises help you through this process of letting go.

**Exercise 2: Fully Experience Your Resistance**

Our usual response when we find part of us resisting what we're trying to do is to either procrastinate by turning our attention to some frivolous activity like checking e-mail or pacing around, or criticize ourselves as lazy or unfocused. Unfortunately, this only magnifies our resistance and makes working even more difficult. The next time you experience your resistance, try doing neither.

Instead, breathe steadily and focus your attention on your resistance, and notice every aspect of how your resistance feels. Become aware of how you experience it in your body — perhaps as a feeling of getting physically pulled away from what you're doing, or the muscles in some area of your body tightening. Also notice the thoughts that come as you resist what you're doing. For example, do you start feeling critical of your work, wishing you were doing something different, thinking about other unhappy aspects of your life, or something else?

Once you understand what's going on in your moments of resistance, hold the resistance in your loving awareness. Treat it as you would an infant in distress — send it the silent message that you're with it, and you're going to stay there without judging or punishing it until the episode passes. You're going to embrace it and give it whatever it needs to get through what it's experiencing.

Realize that, in a sense, this part of you *is* a distressed infant — it's a very young part that resents being forced to do what others want all the time, and wants some time and space to simply *be*. Allow it some time to be itself, without meeting anyone's demands or requirements. The sensations you're feeling may briefly intensify, and you may even start recalling moments from your early life when you felt dominated or neglected. No matter what you experience, keep breathing and holding

your attention on the resistance. Give it a safe environment for it to release its anger and return to a peaceful state.

The intensity you may experience is a form of suffering, but it is *conscious* suffering — that is, suffering that dissipates your resistance to giving your gifts through loving awareness. As Richard Moss describes the process of conscious suffering, "[t]he path to awakening consciousness is a path of conscious relationship to everything we think and feel. It is ceaseless inquiry and necessary, conscious suffering, which must continue until more and more easefully we can rest in the fullness of being."

Gradually, you'll notice your unpleasant feelings beginning to die down, and eventually they'll dissipate completely. Once the sensations have subsided, return to your work. You may find that your resistance is gone, and that your creativity and focus have fully returned. Even if your resistance does return, you'll likely notice that its intensity has weakened. As you repeat this process each time the resistance recurs, it will trouble you less and less often.

You can also do this exercise if you're having difficulty taking steps to make the career transition you want. Perhaps you find your body resisting when you're researching career possibilities, contemplating making calls to possible business partners or simply thinking about leaving your job. When this happens, breathe and focus on the sensations you're feeling, training your loving attention on your resistance until it passes. You'll likely start experiencing a greater sense of ease and flow as you plan your transition.

**Exercise 3: You Are Not Your Resistance**

As painful as it is when part of us seems intent on keeping us from achieving our goals, we often get into the habit of thinking our resistance is part of who we are, and even taking pride in it. Some people feel the beliefs that prevent them from getting what they want, and the suffering they create by buying into them, make them realistic, hardworking or virtuous people. For example, you've probably met people who proudly tell you, "Nothing has ever come easy to me. I've busted my hump to get everything I have."

Others talk about things they supposedly can't do, and you can tell instantly that they derive an identity from their lack of talent in some area. Their belief that they can't do something gives them a sense of who they are. They say things like, "I'd love to be a writer but I'm not creative," or "I'd love to get into politics but I can't stand arguing with people." Or maybe they'll tell you something more general like "I have no motivation." This mindset comforts them, because it at least allows them to say to themselves, "I know who I am; I'm a guy who can't write."

If you want to dissolve your inner resistance, it's important to understand that your resistance isn't part of who you are. If you remain identified with your resistance, you will cling to it and refuse to give it up because you will feel like letting go of it might hurt you or leave you empty. A key step in recognizing that your resistance isn't who you are, and then releasing it, is becoming aware of the ways you treat it as if it were part of your identity.

As you go through your day, notice when you start telling others you can't get something you want. Notice the moments where you get a feeling of pleasure or security from saying you can't accomplish something.

For instance, some people like to make self-deprecating jokes about their lack of creativity or productivity. Others like to complain about how they don't have time to complete all the projects they're assigned, or how they are forced to do tasks for which they don't have the experience or skill. Similarly, some like to discourage others from pursuing what they want, telling them things like, “So many other businesses are doing what you want to do” and “You'd be throwing your life away if you tried that.”

Often, just paying attention to how you identify with your supposed weaknesses and failings does much to help you overcome those blocks. If this doesn't work and you find yourself still making negative statements about yourself in your mind and to others, try another approach.

First, get a clear idea of the inadequacies you see as part of who you are. For instance, perhaps you think you're uncreative, unproductive, unsociable or something else. Then, find a quiet place to sit alone for a few minutes and ponder this question: Who were you *before* you drew those conclusions about yourself? For that matter, who were you before you had *any* beliefs about yourself at all?

I find that, when I ask myself questions like this, my mind draws a blank and all thinking stops for a few moments. At first, the feeling of emptiness I experienced in this state was unnerving because it had me wondering if I knew anything about who and what I truly was. However, when I allowed this state to persist, I began to feel a sense of peace and composure.

This emptiness, I recognized, was my natural state before I made any decisions about who I was, and what I could and couldn't do. The spaciousness I felt represented my infinite potential to define who and what I wanted to be, and I'd filled that space with the ideas I'd adopted about myself. And if I'd created my own beliefs about myself, they weren’t part of my identity. In my deepest essence, I am the creator and believer of my beliefs, not the beliefs themselves.

There is a Zen *koan*, or saying, that goes, “Show me your original face before you were born.” When I first heard the *koan,* my initial reaction was that it made no sense — I didn't exist before I was born, so how could I have had a “face”? But as I contemplated it further, I saw a deeper meaning in it. In the phrase “before you were born,” I recognized, “you” means your identity or the set of beliefs you've adopted about yourself.

You “gave birth” to yourself when you drew your conclusions about who you were. Every time you make a decision about yourself like, “I'm good with computers,” “I'm bad with people,” “I can't manage money” and so forth, you give birth to another part of your identity. But you have an “original face” — the emptiness you were before you identified with anything — and you can always return to that peaceful void if the beliefs you've adopted about yourself aren't serving you.

Spiritual teacher Osho offers a helpful description of the idea of your “original face” in *Courage: The Joy of Living Dangerously:*

> Just be what you are and don't care a bit about the world. Then you will feel a tremendous relaxation and a deep peace within your heart. This is what Zen people call your 'original face' — relaxed, without tensions, without pretensions, without hypocrisies, without the so-called disciplines of how you should behave.

The exercise I've described here is designed to help you see your “original face” and realize that the ways you resist giving your gifts to the world aren't part of who you are.

## III

## It's Okay To Have Wants

Many people believe finding career satisfaction is about simply having a clear idea of what you want, and the skills and drive to go for it. I think these are important qualities, but they aren't enough by themselves. To find a career you'll feel joyful about and fulfilled by, you have to believe that what you want actually *matters* — that you genuinely deserve to pursue your goals and dreams, rather than someone else's agenda for what you're supposed to do. The story I'll tell you nicely illustrates this point.

A man came to see me recently because he was unsatisfied with his job and wanted to explore other possibilities. However, he hadn't quite nailed down what he was looking for, he said. To get an idea of what career path would best serve him, I asked him some questions about what he enjoyed and what frustrated him about his current job. We also discussed what he was passionate about in life.

As we talked, he began fidgeting and playing with his pen, and I sensed he was getting uncomfortable. Eventually, I asked if he was nervous or upset about something. My instinct turned out right — he was getting angry and he let me know why. “Why do you keep talking about how I feel?” he said. “I'm here about my career, not my feelings.”

“Does it matter whether you feel good about your career?” I asked.

“Of course not,” he insisted incredulously. “My job is about supporting me and my family — not making me 'feel good.'”

Ah, I thought. Now we're getting somewhere. “When did you decide it didn't matter how you felt?”

His body tensed up, and it seemed for a moment he was going to blow up at me again, but suddenly he slumped in his chair and fell silent. “A while ago,” he finally answered.

He went on to reveal that he'd believed what he felt and wanted didn't matter since his early childhood. His father, a military officer, demanded the same obedience from his children that he required from his subordinates. My client remembered a few times when, as little kids often do, he told his dad he didn't want to do some task. His father would angrily respond, “It doesn't matter what you 'want.' Now do what I told you.” My client would ashamedly slink off and obey.

Since experiences like these, he’d had trouble telling people about his emotions and desires, as

he couldn't shake the conviction that people didn't really care about them. When someone asked him, as I did, what he wanted, his first instinct was that he was being mocked or deceived. No wonder he got angry, I recognized — since he thought there was no way I could actually care what he wanted, he figured I was patronizing or taking advantage of him.

This belief also explained why he wasn't satisfied in his career. Because he was convinced that his goals and dreams "didn't matter," he — like many people — chose his career based on other people's expectations. He took a job that was relatively lucrative and prestigious because he believed it would satisfy his father, his wife and kids, his friends and others in his life. Since he gave no thought to his own happiness, it's no surprise he settled into a career that left him unhappy.

It took a little coaxing, but ultimately I was able to convince him I actually cared what he wanted and I wouldn't scorn or ridicule him if he told me. When he began to trust that he had a safe place to reveal his desires, his seeming confusion about what he wanted evaporated and we quickly arrived at a list of career possibilities he resolved to explore. He knew what he desired, and he had the talent to make it happen. He just needed reassurance that it was okay for him to have desires in the first place.

I'm consistently struck by the number of people I meet who get uncomfortable talking or thinking about what they desire in life. For various reasons, they've learned it's unsafe or shameful for them to consider what they want. They've gotten used to being called "selfish," "stupid," "crazy" and other epithets by people around them if they come clean about their wishes and needs.

These people come to me thinking they need direction or to improve their skills if they want a fulfilling career. However, they often discover that, when they can seriously put attention on what they want, deciding their next step becomes easy. In short, their problem isn't a lack of motivation or experience — it's a lack of self-respect.

If you share this common feeling that you don't have "permission" to have wants or that your desires "don't matter," the upcoming exercises may increase your comfort with having desires and ultimately expressing them through the career choices you make.

**Exercise 1: Find A Compassionate Listener**

This exercise is simple. Find someone you trust to listen to what you truly desire without judging or criticizing you, and tell them what you want out of your career. If it helps you feel safe, you can ask them to agree to keep what you tell them confidential. If you're concerned about your ability to open-mindedly receive what they say, you can ask that they not comment on what you tell them and simply listen. You may also benefit from writing what you want beforehand. This way, you won't leave out any of your desires, and you can find assurance that discussing everything you want is safe and acceptable.

As you describe your career goals, notice the sensations you experience, and your voice tone and posture as you communicate. For instance, do you feel parts of your body constricting? Does your voice get quiet or agitated? Do you fold your arms to protect yourself? Do you start explaining or backpedaling after you've stated your desires? If you notice these signs of fear or shame coming up as you say what you want, practice relaxing your muscles, breathing deeply and declaring your wants to

your listener without apology.

The purpose of this exercise is to give you firsthand evidence that telling someone what you want isn't going to get you hurt or destroyed. Although it seems obvious, on a rational level, that stating your desires won't usually put you in physical danger, many of us still behave as though it will. Many people, for instance, are in the habit of saying, “I just don't know what I want” or “Oh, I'll just do whatever anyone else suggests,” even when someone asks them pointblank what they prefer. In fact, they do know what they want — they just feel like they’re opening themselves to exclusion, criticism or attack if they say what it is. As people who normally have trouble stating their wants do this exercise, they become more comfortable acknowledging and pursuing their goals.

You may find that, before you actually talk to the person you choose, you feel like you don't really know what you want. Even if you feel this way, have the conversation. You may surprise yourself at how much you actually do know, and how much you've been craving a safe space to reveal your hopes and dreams. You've just become so accustomed to concealing or downplaying what you want that you've actually convinced yourself you don't know. It's okay to let that confusion or reluctance go now. Neither you nor anyone else will get hurt if you simply reveal your wishes.

**Exercise 2: Put Attention On What You Want**

Some people aren't accustomed to thinking in terms of what they want, and their attention is instead on what would please everyone else or get them into the least trouble. It's as if their lives are movies, and they're the supporting cast members. Their job is to make sure the “star players” — perhaps their parents, bosses or someone else — are happy, or at least to avoid bothering them.

For example, you've probably met someone who's explicitly told you they think of themselves as “Number Two to someone else's Number One,” “behind the scenes” or “the right-hand man [or woman.]” These people see themselves as only here to make others' lives run smoothly, not to achieve their own goals. People who take this mindset into their careers often feel dissatisfied. Not surprisingly, because they didn't consider their own desires in choosing and conducting themselves in their jobs, they're feeling unfulfilled.

Some people experience the world like this because they learned, perhaps at a young age, that others would shame or ridicule them if they expressed what they wanted. Others became responsible early on for taking care of someone else, and got accustomed to being depended on and putting their own needs second. Whatever the reason, these people have become so used to focusing on what others want that they've lost consciousness of their own goals and aspirations.

I've found that becoming able to acknowledge and follow your desires is like building a muscle. Saying and thinking about what you want gets more comfortable the more you do it. One way you can strengthen that muscle is to consistently ask yourself throughout the day what you want in each situation you encounter. When you wake up in the morning, for instance, ask yourself, “What do I want to do today?” When you go to the grocery store, ask yourself, “What do I want to buy?” In your intimate relationships, ask, “What do I want out of this relationship?” and so on.

Notice the emotions that arise as you ask these questions. Does simply asking yourself what you desire, without even taking action or telling anyone, feel shameful? Do you get the sense that what you

want doesn't matter, and that there's no point in even asking? These feelings reveal your relationship to your wants, and tell you much about how you've made career decisions and the reasons for the dissatisfaction you might experience. If you see your wants as wrong, that's probably the reason you haven't been getting what you want.

Keep repeating this process, and you'll likely begin feeling more comfortable with pondering and expressing what you want. As psychologist Vicki Berkus writes in *Ten Commitments To Mental Fitness: Accept The Challenge To Change*, "Just the exercise of checking in with yourself lets your subconscious mind know that you count, your feelings count, and your thoughts count." You may find that, as you develop this "desire muscle," the doubts and confusion that used to plague you about your career begin to fade away, and peace and clarity take their place.

You may encounter some mental resistance to doing this — that is, you may find yourself putting off having the conversation I'm describing, or repeatedly "forgetting" about it. If this happens, repeat the exercise I described earlier about fully experiencing and releasing your inner resistance. Sit in a quiet place, breathe deeply with your eyes open, and focus your attention on telling someone your career goals and how that might make you feel. If unpleasant sensations arise in your body, keep breathing and holding them in your awareness until they pass away. Over time, this practice gradually dissolves your resistance to stating your wants.

**Exercise 3: You Are Not Your Self-Denial**

Some people I've talked to have learned not only to ignore their desires, but also to take pride in focusing entirely on others' needs. They see themselves as selfless, giving and noble for disregarding their wants. These are the people who seem to enjoy working for work's sake, regularly stay in the office until two in the morning and refuse to delegate work to others. When these people get the notion that another career path might feel more fulfilling, they are torn between loyalty to their current employers and what they see as their true callings. Often in the end, guilt and inertia cause them to stay where they are.

If you're in this kind of situation and you want to make a career decision based on what truly satisfies you rather than on fear and guilt, let me ask you a few questions. The first, which is the same one I talked about in the context of detaching from your resistance, is this: Who were you before you decided your desires weren't important?

When you ponder this question, you may actually remember a moment where you consciously made the decision to disregard your wants. If so, remember who you were before you made that choice and understand that — at any time — you can return to where you were before you created your self-denying identity. More likely, however, you'll simply draw a blank. Let this emptiness persist and notice the peace that sets in when you've allowed the blankness to be there for a while. This is the peace of knowing you existed before you invented an identity for yourself, and that you can change those beliefs at any time.

Your immediate instinct, if you identify with a self-denying attitude, may be to protest that you don't want to be selfish and you're only trying to help others. This leads me to the second thing I want you to think about if you have a self-denying mindset: Are you really embracing this attitude to benefit humankind, or are you doing it out of your own fear?

One way to get a clear answer to this question is to notice what immediately comes to mind when you think about doing something to further your own goals, such as transitioning to your ideal career. Is it concern about being selfish or doing a moral injustice? Does the possibility that others will condemn or hurt you come up?

Drs. Rachael and Richard Heller observe in *Healthy Selfishness: Getting The Life You Deserve* that an attitude of self-denial "often stems from unreconciled fear, guilt, feelings of unworthiness, or the belief that you lack willpower," and "is a hallmark of a childhood in which you may have been devalued, fearful, and powerless." One of my clients is a perfect illustration of this point.

She was plagued by the feeling that she'd be "self-centered" if she pursued what she really wanted in her career. Even though she had no children, she had the nagging sense that she'd "sell out her future kids" if she left her high-paying law job for the museum curator position she wanted. My efforts to change her mind failed until I started wondering, and asked, if anyone else had told her she'd "sell out her kids" if she made the transition she desired.

She recalled that when she was a kid, her mom said those words to her dad when he decided to leave his own job as a lawyer to become a writer. As we talked, she came to see that her real fear wasn't being overly self-interested. Rather, it was drawing her mother's criticism. Gaining this awareness helped her take steps toward entering the career she wanted. She recognized she wasn't as concerned about her mother's opinion as she used to be, and that today she had the strength to follow her passion even in the face of others' possible disapproval.

The final question I'd like you to honestly answer is: Are you refusing to follow your aspirations because your current situation feels more comfortable? Many of us feel more secure in work environments where someone else is determining the business's course and making broad strategic decisions, and all we have to do is show up and follow directions. Although we might not feel overly excited about what we do, at least the paychecks and benefits are steady. I don't have anything against people with this mindset — not everyone can be the boss or the owner, after all.

However, if this were the working life you were willing to settle for — if comfort were all you were seeking — I doubt you'd read this book. You're reading this because you have the intuition that, whether you make a change or stay in your current job, it's possible for you to find more fulfillment in what you do. To find that fulfillment, as I've said, it's critical to make decisions based on your calling and desires rather than fear.

# IV

## Give Yourself Permission To Enjoy What You Do

As anyone who's been to San Francisco knows, if you walk around the city for a while, you're sure to meet some colorful characters. One time, I met such a person in the park. I guess I was smiling because she approached me and yelled, “Stop! You're under arrest for smiling without a license.” Then she laughed and ran away.

On one level, what she said was silly. I don't need a license to smile, or to feel or express any emotion. I can legally smile for any reason or no reason at all. On the other hand, what she said contained profound insights into the way we experience and manage our emotions.

When we tell someone we're feeling excited or joyful, their typical response — if they care how we're doing — is to ask, “About what?” In other words, people want to know the reason we're having the emotion. If you say you don't know, or that you don't have a rational explanation for feeling the way you do, they'll probably express concern. They'll worry that you're drunk or high on some drug, or perhaps even that you're mentally ill. Maybe they'll express surprise because they can see so many reasons in your life why you “shouldn't” be happy.

The conventional wisdom seems to be that if you have an emotion you can't explain, you must repress it or conceal it from others. If you don't, you're crazy, childish or otherwise socially unacceptable, and you need therapy or some sort of mood-stabilizing drug. As Richard J. Foster writes in *Celebration Of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, “Modern men and women have become so mechanized that we have snuffed out nearly all experiences of spontaneous joy.”

How did this become our way of thinking? In our early childhoods, we didn't feel the need to justify our emotions. We would feel spontaneously joyful, sad, angry and so on, and we wouldn't suppress those feelings simply because we couldn't explain them. Probably, our need to rationalize our emotions stems from how our parents disciplined us as children. When they didn't like the way we expressed our emotions, they'd demand an explanation for the reason we acted that way. “Why are you so loud?” they'd ask. “Why are you bouncing off the walls like that?” “Why are you going so crazy?” and so on.

When our parents made this sort of request, they didn't want us to explain why we had the emotions we did. They were upset about how we were *expressing* our emotions, not our lack of justification for feeling them. Demanding explanations was their way of voicing their annoyance. But our young minds didn't grasp this, and we concluded our parents didn't want us to have emotions we

couldn't logically explain.

To make sure our parents kept loving and protecting us, we started shaming ourselves whenever we had a feeling we couldn't "justify." That habit stuck with us into adulthood. As psychologist David Fontana puts it in *Managing Stress*, "Much repression comes from early conditioning during which children are led to associate their emotions with something unpleasant or even downright sinful. Punished for expressing emotions, they grow into adults who just can't allow themselves to speak their minds or to boil over or to have a good time."

Sometimes we repress our spontaneous happiness for different reasons. Some clients I've seen have told me they worry that if they let themselves feel inexplicably joyful, they'd lose control and their lives would fall into chaos. These people believe they have to stay on their guard to ward off threats and dangers from the world. For some, this sort of attitude was necessary to survive as children. Maybe they had parents who flew into a rage with little provocation, or who abused alcohol and behaved unpredictably or violently. Although it doesn't help them anymore, this sense that they "can't let themselves get too happy" remains with them.

Still others, consciously or otherwise, have learned to see feeling joyful as selfish. They have what many personal development authors call a "scarcity mentality." It's as if the Earth has some sort of finite "happiness supply" and every time you let yourself feel happy, you are depleting that supply and taking away someone else's opportunity to feel good. As I mention in a later exercise, not only is there a potentially infinite "happiness supply" in the universe — when you go through life feeling peaceful and centered, your mere presence helps others experience those emotions.

Unfortunately, when we shame ourselves for having an emotion and repress it, it doesn't go away. It stays in our bodies and creates distraction, fatigue, tension in our muscles and other uncomfortable sensations. Our habit of denying ourselves permission to experience emotions unless we can logically explain them — if you will, arresting ourselves for smiling without a license — is harmful to us. As Dr. Sandy Jost writes in *Your Body, Your Mind And Their Link To Your Health*, "[t]here is no such thing as a 'negative emotion' when it comes to the healthy expression of the bodymind. It is the suppression, denying, pushing away, or avoidance of these emotions that causes a physical response that can lead to health problems."

From a career perspective, our habit of suppressing our spontaneous joy can rob us of much satisfaction we could otherwise experience in our jobs. If we're at work and feeling frustrated, depressed or bored, we tend to assume our job environments are responsible — our bosses are too demanding, our colleagues are irritating, the computer is too slow and so on. Sometimes, however, the reason is that we've simply denied ourselves permission to enjoy what we do, as we think it would be "wrong" or unsafe. If this resonates with you, the exercises below are geared toward helping you grant yourself that long-overdue permission.

**Exercise 1: Let Your Natural Happiness Be**

This exercise is simple: The next time you feel joyful, energetic or "blissed out" for no apparent reason, just allow that state to persist. Don't shame yourself for having "no reason to be happy" or search your mind for reasons you ought to feel depressed or frustrated instead. Just let your joy please and empower you. If the feeling starts to seem overwhelming, sit still and breathe deeply for a little

while, keeping your eyes focused on a point in the room. Continue breathing fully until you feel more grounded and the intensity of the feeling has subsided.

If you find yourself obsessing over whether you have a reason to feel happy, or what others are going to think of your emotional state, try removing the label from the sensation you're experiencing. Instead of giving the feeling a name like “joy,” “sadness” and so on, try seeing the feeling as nothing more than energy moving through your body. This energy is neither good nor bad, neither appropriate nor inappropriate. It's just a natural part of the operation of your body, like eating and sleeping — there's nothing wrong or unacceptable about it. All you are doing when you give your joy permission to be is letting your natural emotional energy move unhindered.

Some people get scared during these moments of spontaneous joy because they worry that they're going to become unproductive — they'll be so happy that they won't care about getting things done. Others worry that their misery or indifference has held their lives together, and that if they let themselves feel happy, “everything will fall apart.”

If you feel this way, remember that your foot, if you will, is on the accelerator — you ultimately decide how intense you'll allow your emotions to become. You can repress or manage your spontaneously happy states in the way you've learned to do all your life if you sense things are getting out of hand. However, if you remember that moments of sudden happiness, like moments of fear or anger, are fleeting and quickly pass away, you'll likely have the courage and perspective to fully experience your joy.

Letting your spontaneous happiness exist can have quite an impact on your working life. I know that when I started fully permitting my joy to be, I began having moments where I'd randomly have a great time doing something I used to consider dull. I experienced moments of ecstasy filling meetings into my calendar, organizing my office and doing other things I used to dread. It definitely hit home that the attitude I bring to my daily activities is just as important as, or even more important than, the nature of what I do in determining how fulfilled I am.

When you connect with and no longer push away this energy, even what you thought were the dreariest activities at work become infused with a peaceful and perhaps even exciting quality.

**Exercise 2: Let The World Affect You**

Many of us have developed ways of protecting ourselves from the feelings events in the world can trigger in us. When something happens in our lives that has us feel hurt, we sometimes — consciously or otherwise — create ingenious strategies to avoid experiencing that sensation again. Some people, for example, have learned to tighten muscles in various parts of their bodies to numb themselves to feeling in those areas. Others have learned to dissociate — to lose themselves in thought and focus their attention away from what's going on in their bodies.

When we use these strategies for avoiding feeling, we protect ourselves to some extent from experiencing hurt or sadness but we also block our ability to feel vibrant and joyful. The dullness this creates in our lives makes it difficult for us to appreciate what we do for a living — regardless of how enjoyable, lucrative or prestigious it looks to the world.

When we're separated from the joy of living, the problem isn't that we're in a career we aren't

passionate about — it's that we're incapable of experiencing passion at all. As psychologist Christine Caldwell puts it in *Getting Our Bodies Back*, "Whenever we control our experience, we sacrifice a measure of vitality. . . . Because we exert so much energy on controlling and rejecting our 'wrong' experiences, we have fewer resources available that enable us to tolerate *any* experience."

How do we restore our ability to love what we do? It would be nice if we could bring back our *joie de vivre* without having to feel the anger, despair and other difficult emotions we usually avoid feeling. Unfortunately, that doesn't work — we need to meet the sensations we've run from head on. When we fully allow the experiences we've been avoiding to be, we'll regain access to the passion and other sensations we're wanting in our lives.

Sometimes, as I talked about in Section One, this happens naturally when we simply take time to sit in undistracted silence. If we turn off the TV and radio, stop fidgeting and tapping, and still our minds for a few minutes, and we have the composure to breathe through the sensations that come up, we can start reconnecting with what we've avoided. If we can firmly hold our attention on the difficult feelings, no matter how irritating or even agonizing they are, we'll not only restore our ability to experience them, but they'll also begin to pass away.

If removing distractions alone doesn't help you experience the sensations you've avoided, try focusing your attention on details of your surroundings you may have missed before. Notice the intricacy and beauty of each object, even the most everyday ones. For instance, you might try closely examining the labyrinth of veins on a leaf or the moonscape of the stucco on the walls of a building. If this isn't a usual practice for you, you may feel surprised at how much anxiety it can bring up. You may get a sense that, if you allowed yourself to fully perceive what's going on around you, you'd be overwhelmed and perhaps even injured.

When the resistance arises, gently and firmly hold your awareness on your surroundings, and the discomfort will eventually fade. When the resistance has subsided, notice that, even though you fully opened your senses to the world, you're still alive and unharmed. The realization that it's safe for you to *let life in* — to allow your surroundings to fully impact you — will likely fill you with a sense of peace. Recognize also that the same is true of the intense sensations that may arise in your body from time to time. You can fully open yourself to your joy, sadness and even anger without harming yourself or someone else.

The more you develop your ability to stay focused on what's going on inside and outside you, the more access you'll gain to the passion and drive you're missing. Beyond getting you more connected to your raw energy and ambition, this exercise can help you gain a more concrete idea of what you want from your career. For instance, perhaps you've found yourself running down a list of career possibilities and feeling blasé about all of them. With deeper access to your inspiration, you may find yourself getting distinctly more excited about some of your choices and narrowing down your list.

**Exercise 3: Notice People's Response To Your Joy**

Now that you've experimented a little with just allowing your spontaneous joy to be, try going out into the world while you're in such a state. Notice how differently people respond to you when you allow your natural love of life to surface without suppressing or judging it. I suspect you'll notice your state has, to some extent, rubbed off on them — that even strangers begin smiling, saying hello or

coming closer to you more often.

The purpose of this exercise is to show you the profound effect your emotional state can have on that of others. This is particularly important to keep in mind if you're considering changing your career to something you're more passionate about, and are concerned about the impact of the transition on your loved ones.

Many people worry about the criticism they may get from their significant others, relatives or friends when they change direction in life. They wonder if making a change will appear selfish and inconsiderate of others — particularly if they have children and can expect a lower income from doing what they want in the short term.

What people don't usually consider is how the joy they find in doing what they love will likely uplift those around them, as well, and how they may bring others down with the misery they feel in their current positions. People are far more empathic than we usually think. The social convention may be to tell people we're "doing fine" when we actually aren't, or to hold back our joy for fear of looking "crazy," but doing these things doesn't fool anyone.

Even if you aren't considering a career transition and just want to find more satisfaction in what you do, it's important to understand the impact how you're feeling has on those around you. Getting this point motivates you to continue working on developing a sense of wholeness, as it helps you see that you're benefiting others — not just yourself — by gaining the recognition that you're a complete human being.

Shakti Gawain nicely describes our ability to positively impact each other with our emotional states in *Living In The Light: A Guide To Personal and Planetary Transformation*:

> Whether you are washing the dishes, taking a walk, or building a house, if you're doing it with a sense of being right where you want to be and doing what you want to be doing, that fullness and joy in the experience will be felt by everyone around you. . . . It's the same when you're just being. If you walk into a room, feeling whole, and expressing yourself in whatever way feels right to you, then everyone in the room will be affected and catalyzed in their own growth process.

Many books and articles try to teach you how to succeed in your career by recommending things to say, ways to move your body, the right people to befriend and so forth. This kind of advice includes, for example, stock answers to interview questions or body language you can use to appear trustworthy or commanding. The basic purpose of all these techniques is to convey the "impression" that you are a confident, assertive and conscientious person.

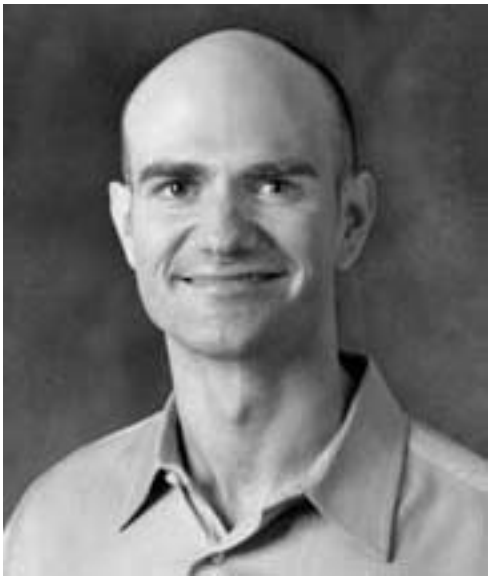
One problem with these techniques, however, is that they don't take into account how sensitive we are to each other's emotions. No matter how much you practice your confident body language, for example, others will sense if you aren't coming from a genuinely confident place. Improving your emotional state does more to inspire those around you than any learned technique.

## Conclusion

I've packed a lot of material into this book, and the number of exercises in it may seem daunting

to people wanting quick solutions to their career dilemmas. If this is true for you, it will probably help to look for the sections with the most relevance to your situation and at least start by doing just those exercises.

Beyond any of the individual exercises, the main idea of this book is that you can achieve the most success and fulfillment in your career when you come to it from a place of wholeness, rather than looking to your career to make you a complete or adequate person. With the peace and composure that come from feeling whole, you can take risks, overcome obstacles and step into the leadership role necessary to create the career situation you want. Whatever practices you adopt to find more career satisfaction, keep the goal of realizing your completeness and perfection in mind.



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