

Mary Franz

# MEANINGFUL WORK

*in  
progress*

How to Find  
Purpose, Joy  
and Fulfillment  
in Ordinary Places



# *So happy you're here...*

*Welcome and congratulations for taking ownership of finding and crafting your meaningful work so that you have more joy and fulfillment in life.*

I wrote this ebook because so many good, talented people are struggling to find satisfaction in their chosen career and/or place of work.

People often think that the only way to experience more meaningful work is to change jobs or careers and sometimes that is the best solution. More often it's the know-how and willingness to redesign work relationships, tasks and personal mindset that brings the most meaningful experiences to our work life.

I believe that regardless of where you are on your career path or particular job setting, we can all find purpose, joy and meaning in the work we do. Often, it's the ordinary, simple habits that people uphold and share that surprisingly bring that deep, down satisfaction.

I trust as you read this ebook, you will be moved to consider your meaningful work and make progress towards identifying actions you can take that lead to the purpose, joy and fulfillment you desire. Hopefully, you'll discover pleasant surprises along the way... smile and enjoy a deeper appreciation for both yourself and others.



To meaningful progress,

Mary Franz LCSW, CEC, PCC  
mary@marycoaching.com  
<https://www.marycoaching.com>

# Chapter 1: Are You Among the 65.9% or 34.1% of US Workers or the 83% or 13% of Worldwide Workers?

It's probably safe to say that most workers are engaged when they start a new job...perhaps passionate with high expectations and hopes for making a difference, at least, doing their best.

Fast forward 6 months. It's estimated by Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina PhD, in the book, *Follow This Path*<sup>1</sup>, that these same new workers have an engagement level that has dropped to 38%.

In 10 years, Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina PhD say the number of engaged employees drops to 20%. These are astonishing numbers.

Granted, not all workers care about finding purpose, joy or fulfillment at work in the same ways.

What if you are one of those workers who does care? Who deep down knows the dissatisfaction and miserableness felt at work is unacceptable and you want to do something about it. You own it.

It's your time to roll up your sleeves and make the difference. And that difference involves defining your meaningful work and making it happen.

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<sup>1</sup> Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina PhD, [Follow this Path: How the World's Greatest Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential](#) (Warner Business Books, 2002) pg. 136.

So, what do these numbers tell us about what defines “meaningful work”? And more specifically, what does meaningful work look like, feel like, taste, sound and smell like to you?

***This chapter lays the foundation with references, concepts, ideas and self-reflection for exploring what meaningful work is for you and jump-starts your progress towards all the purpose, joy and fulfillment possible.***

But first, a great story shared by Michael F. Steger PhD<sup>2</sup> that illustrates perceptions of work<sup>3</sup>. It goes something like this ...

*A traveler comes across three people hitting big rocks with hammers. The traveler asks each, "What are you doing?"*

*The 1st person says, "I'm breaking big rocks into little rocks."*

*The 2nd person says, "I'm feeding my family."*

*The 3rd person says, "I'm building a cathedral."*

They are all legitimate, cool responses. And they all say something about each person's perception of the meaningfulness of their job. Which response fits you and your current work?

**Here are the key learnings I want you to get...**

**Learning 1 – Today, miserable, disengaged workers continue to dominate the workplace worldwide.**

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<sup>2</sup> Michael F. Steger PhD, “Meaningful Work: What Makes Work Meaningful?” Psychology Today Post (6/9/2009)

<sup>3</sup> Ryan, J. J. (1977). Humanistic work: Its philosophical and cultural implications. In W. J. Heisler & J. W. Houck (Eds.) A matter of dignity: Inquiries into the humanization of work (pp. 11-22). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

According to the [March 2016 Gallup Poll](#), US employee engagement reached a new high of 34.1%. That's the highest level since Gallup started tracking daily US workplace engagement in January 2011, yet the miserable worker dominates the workplace.

## **Learning 2 - There are 3 types of workers: Engaged, Not Engaged and Actively Disengaged**

Engaged - If you have a sense of passion for your work, positive thoughts and a kind of loyalty about your employer, gives maximum effort at work with higher marks in productivity and customer satisfaction, you are among that US (34.1%) or Worldwide (13%).

Not Engaged - if you are among the vast majority of workers in the US (49%) or Worldwide (63%) you are “unhappy”, but not “drastically so”. Other descriptions are “checked out” or “sleepwalking” through the days with little energy put into your work.

Actively Disengaged - If you are among the workers who are muttering complaints at the coffee bar and using breaks to look for other work, your behaviors put you in the actively disengaged group. The numbers for actively disengaged workers in the US is (16.5%) and Worldwide, (24%). Unfortunately, the “hate” for their jobs can lead to undermining anything positive from coworkers.

## **Learning 3 - What does your engagement look like now and where would you like it to be?**

PART A: Reflect on your engagement by thinking about your current or a past job to see what your needs have been as an individual and/or as a team.

JulTones LLC developed the following 16 statements in her assessment, **TE16 ©<sup>4</sup>**, that examines engagement through 7 Engagement Factors.

Use a 5-point scale when responding to each item as follows:

5	Strongly Agree
4	Agree
3	Neutral
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

<b>Engagement Factor</b>	<b>Statement</b>
Respect	01. Company decisions are designed to treat employees fairly. 02. We focus on fixing the problem together as a team (not blaming others). 03. I am valued and respected (my opinion matters) by my team members.
Teamwork	04. My team members take pride and responsibility for their own work. 05. Our team members trust each other (i.e., we have each other's back). 06. My team collaborates excellently with each other, the department and others in the company.
Role & Responsibilities	07. I understand my job and responsibilities. 08. My work is challenging and meaningful (I enjoy my job).
Growth	09. I receive opportunities to expand my talents and contributions. 10. I receive performance feedback (at least quarterly) from my supervisor/manager. 11. I have a mentor who helps me with my professional goals.
Learn	12. I am provided with opportunities to learn and try new things. 13. I am provided with opportunities to enrich my knowledge and skills.
Rewards	14. I am recognized for my contributions in the format I prefer (i.e., public/private). 15. I receive timely, meaningful recognition (i.e., milestones, type of deliverable).
Retention	16. I am proud to work for XXXX organization/company. Overall PRIDE is the result when engagement is high (and the other benefits mentioned earlier for employees and the company).

<sup>4</sup> JulTones LLC, TE16 ©, Permission given to share in chapter. Thanks Jul!

PART B: Now, some debriefing questions for you...

1. What would need to be in place for you to give the highest score of 5 for each of the statements?

2. FOCUS on 1-3 key areas to improve and consider the following:

- What would it take to move the numbers up a bit?
- How will the behaviors be different?
- What's the first step you can take now?

### ***The takeaway is ...***

Meaningful work and engagement walk hand in hand.

For the individual worker, the key is to not only achieve engagement but to be ACTIVELY engaging in your own success. That is, to adopt the ownership mindset for your success.

Be your own best boss, cheerleader, comforter and when needed, tough and truthful critic who lovingly confronts excuses and blind spots. Ask for help. We all need help at times.

In the remaining chapters, we will identify key behaviors that you can employ to propel your progress towards meaningful work.

This will be so much fun.

## Chapter 2: Cole Porter Got It With “You’re the Top!” or Strive for Work–Life Harmony Instead of Work–Life Balance

*“Treat people like they are adults” , he said with a smile.*

My client, Tom, was describing the policies of his new employer. “Employees don’t have vacation or sick time.” When they need time off, whether it’s one day or two weeks, they talk it over with their boss and make the necessary arrangements. let colleagues know and take the time off when needed. It’s the, “Treat people like they are adults” policy. Sounds good, doesn’t it?”

We were both smiling. I knew Tom had found a work environment that seemed to value the employee’s interests, as they defined them, with policies that supported mutuality... that is, a concern that both employer and employee interests are important and a part of the conversation.

Studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and a healthy work-life balance. This chapter focuses on a newer approach to the work-life balance which is **work-life harmony**. I think you will see how this newer mindset tweaks the best from healthy work-life balance and contributes to maintaining purpose, joy and fulfillment, cornerstones of meaningful work. Ideas for creating **work-life harmony** ...even when the work setting isn’t into it so much, will be offered too.



Now back to Tom's story and why he's smiling today...

Tom is the same client who, 6 months ago, was working in a job he grew to hate. Among resentments he was experiencing was his manager's punitive approach to strict starting times, even when there wasn't anything scheduled. Tom dreaded going to work every day. His productivity was solid and in many ways he was a STAR contributor. Yet he was often late and that "lateness" to his boss became the focus.

Tom had reasons for his lateness which he explained to his manager. As a husband to an equally hard working wife that was having a very difficult pregnancy and father of an active preschooler, mornings were challenging and often unpredictable.

Plus, their commute to work took over 1 ½ hours. That's right, since they worked for the same corporation, they had decided to drive one car, choose a day care that was near their work with hopes that the long commute to and from work would provide more family time.

It was like Tom was on the balance beam attempting to balance, but falling on one side with demands from his employer, trying again and falling on the other side with the challenges at home. Balancing work and home wasn't considered for an exceptional work routine.

He was miserable and spent a lot of energy thinking of ways to avoid his boss, worrying that his future in the company would be adversely impacted due to the clash of personalities and work styles. At the same time, Tom felt angry, demoralized and set up to fail.

No doubt Tom had joined the disengaged employee group. The battle between work and personal/family interests was waged. And to Tom it

became clear that choosing his family & personal life would take priority over work.

This is not to say that the strict accountability for punctual starting times by Tom's boss was wrong or entirely unreasonable. Who knows, that could have been from the manager's best efforts to support Tom's career.

Certainly, the meaning Tom attributed to the messages by his boss was anything BUT supportive.

From my vantage point, both employer/boss and employee were losing...badly.

And you know that Tom is now working for a different company. He's happier and feels hopeful about his future.

**I think Tom's work examples illustrate the differences, although subtle, between work-life balancing and work-life harmonizing. Let's explore together.**

One of the best ways to talk about the concept, **work-life harmony** is to contrast it with the definitions of balance and harmony.

According to Oxford Dictionary, balance means an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady: *she lost her **balance** and fell*; a situation in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions.

Harmony is defined as: the quality of forming a pleasing and consistent whole: *delightful cities where old and new blend in harmony*; the state of being in agreement or concord: *man and machine in perfect harmony*.

You might be like Tom, very clear that work was not equal to family in value, so balancing them evenly was not a realistic goal. Yet, being able to do the work he loves to do outside of the home was deeply satisfying and of course financially critical to his lifestyle.

The work-life harmony approach captures the importance of both work/career and personal/family interests with the emphasis on interdependence, pleasing, and agreement between parts.

Moreover, all the aspects of life including work/career, personal/family, social, financial, spiritual and purpose/values are somehow interconnected and dependent on each other to achieve harmony vs. being separate from the other and often in competition with the balancing approach.

Here's where Cole Porter's, "You're the Top!" comes in and the fascinating series on what makes great music great, a conversation between PBS Newshour reporter Jeffrey Brown and composer and musicologist Rob Kapilow. The program is called, "Why Cole Porter's Melodies and Lyrics Produce Musical Magic."

It's a beautiful example of what I imagine the interdependence of the harmony approach to life, including work interests achieves.

[Watch it here](#) or read the excerpt below that speaks to the meaningful and yes, somewhat magical results when important parts combine in a great song, kind of like when there's a harmonious approach to work and personal life interests.

*"In a great song", says Kapilow, "once words and music combine, they become a new, completely interdependent element. Words cease to have a purely literary meaning and music ceases to have a purely musical meaning. Though it's true,*

*these are enormously sophisticated lyrics, without the music, they would never work...”*

**Work-life harmony**....and here’s some down to earth ways to make your own harmony...

**1) Strive to craft your purpose and passion.**

If you own your own company or work for someone else, seek out that part, no matter how small, that connects for you, that excites you or makes your day brighter and brings out your best.

Be intentional about your contributions. Look at the mission statement and values posted on the break room walls. Make them come alive for you. Use your strengths.

**2) Be a stickler for making good on sacrifices others make for you.**

We do our best to keep family commitments, but there are times work schedules have to take priority. So, “making good” is about giving back in a way that is recognizing the sacrifice and maybe a little more.

For example, if you have to miss your child’s orchestra concert, you make it up by taking an afternoon or whole day off to listen to her play. Perhaps attending an orchestra practice or having someone record the concert and sit with her and listen while enjoying an ice cream float.

Co-workers who cover for you so you can accept your partner’s invitation to take a long weekend away need recognition too. Certainly a thank-you or a lunch they love would be a good start.

### **3) Be brave and share your needs with your boss/manager.**

If there are some personal needs and ideas that facilitate adjustments at work, talk them over with your boss/manager. Often hesitancy to ask is about not wanting to appear “weak” or “needy” but would definitely bring more harmony between work and personal lives.

For example, maybe leaving the office 10 minutes earlier in the evening would allow you to get a seat on the bus that often fills up before you can get there. You can then be home in time to take your son to his French Horn lesson or enjoy your own voice lesson without rushing.

Certainly, negotiating may be possible and who knows, maybe the boss was looking for someone who could come in earlier or cover over the lunch hour.

Ask for what you want, notice what you get and be grateful for the no. If you don't ask, no one will know.

### **4) Keep your promises to yourself.**

Write your activities in your calendar in ink or highlight them in RED. Your interests are important too. Too often our workout, quiet time reading or another dinner gets bumped off, erased and/or deleted because something or someone asks us to be available.

Remember, harmony is about a “pleasing and consistent whole” which you are definitely a part. Be your own best advocate and protect your part.

### **5) Work with friends. Be friendly.**

What could be better than to get some of those social needs met by enjoying a laugh or sharing thoughts and ideas to advance a new program with a friend at work? Whether you make friends with the people already at

work or you and your friends are able to find work together, what a neat way to combine important parts of a harmonious life.

Here's an idea if you work at home. Go to the local coffee shop on a semi-regular basis and meet friendly people who are probably doing the same... changing scenery and being around other adults. Maybe the library (I think if you talk quietly, you won't hear... shh! from the librarian :)

***The take away is best said by Rob Kapilow when talking about Cole Porter's genius...***

*"What makes a great song is not the great words and it's not the great music. It's the combination of the two. Words mean nothing by themselves. Music means nothing by themselves. The two reinforce themselves and become a new unit that cannot be understood separately..."*

**Work-life harmony.** Music to my ears. How are you creating harmony between your work and personal life?

## Chapter 3: How to Create a Career That's More Deep-Down Satisfying

*“What makes my career deep-down satisfying are those times when connecting happens as the dialogue flows between the client and myself. There’s a trust in the process and a kind of knowing that is freeing and creative, compassionate and strong... I feel it. This is what I’m suppose to be doing.”*

*- Mary Franz*

Debbie repeated a story I had heard her share previously. Admittedly, it was painful to hear...

*I don't think anyone at work values what I do... I'm not important to the organization. There's nothing for me to aspire to in this company. It's a dead end. I'm paid well, but what I do doesn't make a difference. It's depressing.*

Fast forward to the present. It's been 9 months since Debbie accepted the option for an early retirement from her previous employer. She's been working at her new job for almost 2 months.

Debbie's story is much different. She now shares...

*I'm told by the owner's son that he sees a difference in the stress level of his dad, since I started working for him. I know it's true. My boss, his dad, tells me how much he appreciates me. And, the other day, I shared some information that*

*I think really helped another employee who was struggling. I feel really good about myself and my job.*

No doubt, Debbie's job today is more *deep-down satisfying*.

***In this chapter, the characteristics of deep-down satisfying work are defined. Next, key factors for creating a deep-down satisfying career are offered.***

Let's get started...

For many people, a *deep-down satisfying career* includes the following attributes...

- Lifestyle needs are maintained with the assurance that increases will come so that meeting those needs are accomplished in a timely way with ease.
- Personal strengths are utilized and ongoing development of these strengths occur regularly.
- Values and work are congruent. There's an alignment of work purpose with life purpose. "All people deserve to be treated with dignity" is a value I hold dearly in both my work and life interactions. It's a part of my life purpose.
- There's what career researchers call a "transcendent summons."<sup>5</sup> This can be a God/Higher Power calling that some people experience. For others, the "summons" comes as a family legacy to keep or a strong sense of purpose to serve a greater social need.

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<sup>5</sup> Dik PhD, "What is a Calling and What Difference Does it Make?", Oct. 29, 2015, lecture.



This concept comes from the “work as a calling” discussions. For more fascinating information on this topic, read *Make My Job A Calling*\_by Bryan Dik PhD., etal <sup>6</sup>

- Work makes a meaningful difference to others. There’s a prosocial orientation; an awareness of contributing to the larger community, benefitting others both directly and Indirectly and finally,
- There’s genuine happiness and excitement about each day ahead. Sometimes a reminder is needed by taking a break from your involvement..

A career that is *deep-down satisfying* sounds pretty good, doesn’t it?

Regardless of where you are on the career path, these attributes can help you determine your next steps and perhaps validate the steps you have already taken.

***Here are some key factors that can accelerate the creation of your deep-down career satisfaction...***

**Key #1 – Be wary of the comfort zone inertia, that’s the kiss of death for deep-down goodness possible in your career.**

We can sign up for some self-defeating kinds of thinking that become “comfortable” because for some reason or another they aren’t challenged and quite frankly, it’s just the way you’ve always thought.

It’s like signing an *unlivable*\_contract. You can know it’s *unlivable* because it zaps energy and promotes defeat before you try. Go ahead, tear that contract up!

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<sup>6</sup> Dik & Duffy, *Make My Job a Calling*, Templeton Press, 2012

Here's a sample of some of the common defeating, unproductive thoughts that need to be challenged...

- I'm too old to make any meaningful changes. My time is over.
- I can't stand it if I'm turned down or rejected.
- I'm too young to be taken seriously.
- I should be happy with what I have.
- No one will be interested in my ideas.
- I never finish anything, so why start anything now?
- I'm not smart enough.
- I need to wait until it's the right time.
- I've already invested money in learning xyz, I can't change my mind.
- If I don't like it, I can always quit.
- I'm an introvert, so I really can't do any selling.
- I'm too this or too that...blah, blah, blah.
- It's not okay to be uncomfortable.

Be your own super lawyer (low cost) and cross examine those thoughts demanding evidence. Zap them. Not useful. Get your supporters to help!

### **Key #2—Make a commitment to your chosen career.**

Read the following. Highlight, copy, paste, print or save to your desktop. Read it daily. Reflect. Commit.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe says it best...

*Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves*

*too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.*

### **Key #3—Build in the discipline to stick it out when the going gets tough.**

So, you've zapped the unproductive thoughts (and you're keeping the zapper nearby in case they return...sneaky little so-and-so's) and you've made the commitment to pursue the *drop-dead-deep-down satisfying* career. You've made a plan and are going along and you get stuck, denied access or are simply feeling defeat.

Here comes the disciplined you who says, "Ok! Let's take a look at what happened and make a list of what is working and what isn't. What are some new ideas?"

Maybe a chunk of your career includes public speaking. You present and it was received well, lots of interest, but few sales as a result. You hire a marketing/sales guru, share a tape of your presentation and get some feedback.

New ideas... you can't wait to try them out.

A disciplined approach when things get tough that ward off any serious thoughts of giving up is the key. Giving up. Just-Not-Happening.

### **Key #4—Call on your community of support.**

Do you have a team of caring friends who are willing to provide honest, objective feedback? Are you keeping them informed of your dream work vision?

Good job.

Here's an idea from Kenn, a star guru extraordinaire that's worth investigating if you're feeling like you don't have a support group to pull from. He calls it Step 0...

*STEP 0 – Take stock of who you already know that you're not hooking up with. Make a list of 20 people who are or have been supportive in the last year, then choose the top few and email or call them up to get coffee, see how they are doing and grow it from there.*

You can see why Kenn is a star!

### **Key #5—Love yourself into success.**

Early in my career, a wise mentor told me at a time of feeling overwhelmed, “Mary, it takes years to develop as a professional.” At that time, I didn't fully appreciate the meaning of those words. I do now.

Ouch! This “development” stuff has been painful over the years and can still be painful at times when starting a new project or transitioning to a different business model. The joy, however, is that much sweeter when there is success and satisfaction. Knowing that I've got skin in the game; growing and learning are the sweetest of all.

The learning curve is still there no matter how long you've been in a career...even one that's *deep-down satisfying*. (BTW, a secret for staying *deep down satisfied* is the ongoing learning, which, surprise surprise, isn't always

comfortable!) I'm hearing Pia Melody's words, "Pain filled joy, joy filled pain" and smiling.

David Brooks, a New York columnist and author in a conversation with [Charlie Rose](#), used this phrase when talking about commitment, *You've got to love yourself into it* (a vocation). He suggests it's a process too big to imagine in one sitting. He's absolutely right. *Deep-down career* satisfaction is an ongoing process requiring commitment.

As suggested earlier, the love you're giving yourself through this process will embrace the discipline necessary to succeed. Go ahead...love yourself through the challenging times. Ask for a hug. Give hugs. Ok, group hug!

### ***The takeaway is...***

Be brave and go after what makes meaningful work for you that is ***deep-down satisfying***.

## ***Chapter 4: How to Deal With the Human Side of Meaningful Work—Both Yours & Others***

*Vicki and I had just parked at the restaurant. She was driving. We had been working nonstop developing a new workshop. Feeling tired, tense and creatively maxed-out, I told her I just felt like screaming.*

*Immediately, her blood curdling scream filled the car. Good grief!*

*Let's just say, I'm careful what I say around Vicki now...definitely raw human...and I just love her for it.*

**“I guess that means you're human.”**

Recently, someone I report to said that to me. It's usually a gracious way of acknowledging a mistake of some kind.

The mistake I made was truly based on incorrect information. Nonetheless, I wasn't able to get to the meeting I was subcontracted to lead at the preferred time. Although relieved to have her understanding, I felt mildly anxious and it took me awhile to stop berating myself for the imperfection.

That's the problem with being human...it tends to get in the way of perfection. And the last time I checked, anyway you slice it, we are all human. We're not going to be perfect...and neither are others.

And what about other, less admitted publicly, but known to most of us, human experiences of anxiety, fear of rejection/failure, and the disconnected feelings resulting from lack of recognition and appreciation.

***In this chapter, normal human emotional experiences on the not so great side of meaningful work in progress are highlighted with ideas that smooth the rough edges and possibly inspire more joy and fulfillment.***

Now to embracing our human emotional experiences that can show up...

**1. Anxiety. At times, it's just what we need. At other times, we need to shut it off.**

- **Anxiety is normal.** I'm sure by now you've heard somewhere that it's normal to feel some anxiety when trying something new, or performing (like getting up in a group and speaking or interviewing for a desired job, talking to the boss about your concerns or playing a cello solo).

A little bit of anxiety helps us be "on our toes", sharper, attentive and quicker with adrenaline easily accessed. So, notice the anxiety and let it be. You can breathe into it and accept it for the sparkle it can be.

- **Choose something.** I remember my mother telling me to chew gum to help me calm my nerves before my scheduled graded cello solo performance. (Aren't moms great?) It worked...I think I still give gum a special "soothing power" when nervous.

Kind of magical thinking, but hey, whatever works, right? (And yes, I did spit it out before I got on stage!) Wearing lipstick also has special powers too (at least it does in Texas, all good women and probably some good men wear lipstick...if that isn't your thing, try chapstick).

The point is to choose something, some symbol, visual, structure that says, "Relax. You can do it." What would help calm you?

- **Being prepared helps a lot.** Sometimes it's just comes down to the practical, everyday ordinary ideas that you've heard over and over. Don't let that procrastinator or perfectionist (you know they are related) be in charge.

Get busy with the task at hand and do what you need to do to prepare. "Winging it" is usually risky and while some people seem to be pros at it, my best guess is that those are the people who probably have years of practice and have a favorite "winging it" speech.

- **Expect critical reviews.** When doing something for the first 3 times, expect some not so great reviews, yours or others. That is, you're polishing it, revising, adding or deleting according to feedback. Expect that and adopt a welcoming attitude for learning what works and what doesn't. Ask for feedback regularly. You're only going to improve. Maybe you'll hit a homerun immediately. It happens.
- **Then there are times anxiety needs more attention.** Sometimes people present with a stuck position or belief about themselves that they just can't shake with all the wise, rational thinking available. A part of them knows that their thinking is off, but another part won't let go.



I had a mild panic episode while speaking to a large audience years ago. I remember feeling a wave of disconnect while speaking and feeling like I was watching myself perform. It felt horribly out of control. I had momentarily lost my grounding. To this day, I'm not sure what, if any, sense I made. I could hear my voice shaking and I couldn't finish fast enough.

Until I acknowledged this happened, and talked about all the stresses I experienced prior to that incident (which I believe were expressed at that time through the panic symptoms), I was vulnerable and fearful about public speaking again.

And even though I have a background in behavioral science, (we can be the most resistant about getting professional help), I continued to try and manage on my own. I forced myself to accept public speaking events because I knew that staying away would foster a bigger fear. The right strategy and it was tough.

I eventually worked through most of the fears by doing the uncomfortable again and again. Hiring an EMDR<sup>7</sup> trained therapist or coach would probably still be of help today around performing. It's kind of like putting a delicious icing on top of the cake. The extra help would fortify my confidence. I'm putting that on my "to do" list.

## **2. Fear. Fear of rejection and fear of failure walk hand in hand and can be redirected to be your best support.**

- **Go for Productive Failure.** A favorite term from Courtney Seiter is "Productive Failure"<sup>8</sup> and her conclusion that "doing things you suck at can still be enjoyable."

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<sup>7</sup> Francine Shapiro, [Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing, 2nd Edition](#), Aug. 6, 2001

<sup>8</sup> Courtney Seiter, "Productive Failure: How to Keep Going When You Feel Your Work Sucks," Buffer, 2/15/2016

Actually, as someone put it, “you’re not doing it right if you don’t get a complaint or rejection.” Think about it. The appeal isn’t present for everyone for a variety of reasons. It could be the other’s particular issue, and yes, it could be your style. Remember, just like you have preferences and reject ideas or offers, so do others.

The beauty of failing or being rejected is the opportunity or let’s say dare, to rise to the occasion and conquer which leads to the next idea...

- **Be like Obi-Wan Kenobi.** *Strike me down and I will become more powerful than you can possibly imagine...* Ok, I admit it. Just saying Obi-Wan Kenobi makes me feel powerful. Yet, his message is all about resilience. Let the rejection motivate and empower you to boost the action, step it up and get going now!
- **Surrender to rejection and failure.** Why not expect that a natural part of meaningful work development is rejection and failure? Surrender and stop debating that it has happened or is happening. When you can surrender to the reality, then your energy to problem solve and notice options becomes the focus.
- **Say thank-you and drop the defensiveness.** Sounds counterintuitive, doesn’t it? But it’s the feedback, both positive and negative that can be our greatest support. I think it’s true that our biggest allies are the people who speak honestly...with care, but truthfully, even if the message is opposite of what we think or prefer.

Ask for clarification of the rejecting or failing kind of feedback. Put your

defenses aside and learn from the other person's point of view. Be open and receptive. Sit with the feedback for awhile. Suspend judgement for now.

I'm guessing there are several people like me who reads or hears negative thumbs-down kind of responses and immediately feels protective and then curious. Afterall, time and energy has been invested and to have it questioned or torn apart (see, that's human...not necessarily accurate, but it sure feels like it) deserves a little time to be processed and welcomed as another helpful perspective.

My suggestion is to walk away for a little while. Review who the "critic" is and their legitimacy. If they are not your enemy, then consider that they have given you their gift of time with good intention. You may not agree, however, let their message be understood.

Better still, before you read or hear critical feedback, tune into yourself and get into a welcoming place. Take a few deep-cleansing breaths and get into your "adult" self so that you can process rationally. You know, it's our adult self we all have access to that is open, honest, and willing to consider another viewpoint. Take some time and let the adult in you surface. It will if you let it.

### **3. Disconnection. Be the goodwill messenger with recognition and appreciation of others and foster connection.**

- **Realize the benign neglect syndrome.** We can just be so self-involved with our schedules that the simple recognition of others or from others lacks. It's not because we don't care. Our radars are not programmed, (although thanks to FB reminders, birthdays are hard to

miss, right)? Benign neglect is a human condition that only conscious commitment remedies. This is how you do it...

- **Give it first.** Ok, you expected this right? While researching articles I came across a story of a woman who didn't feel she was getting the kind of recognition and appreciation she deserved.

So, she decided to give her own kind of recognition and appreciation to

the people she knew, including people she worked around. She made it her own by making capes to celebrate the "hero" like quality of the person she was recognizing. I'm not sure, but I think from her feelings of deficit, came a great idea and who knows, she may have opened a business specializing in appreciation/recognition capes!

- **Start a gratitude journal again.** This is not a new idea for many of us, yet it's an idea worth repeating and an activity that can shift a mood towards greater appreciation and connection. Here's what you do...
  - a. Each night before you sleep, make a list of at least five things you feel grateful for. For example: being able to read for leisure every day, the beauty of a sunrise every morning while drinking the first cup of coffee, enjoying the glee of your grandchildren at the zoo.
  - b. Make an effort to keep up with the journal daily; hopefully, it's an activity you are enjoying and eagerly anticipate.

### ***The takeaway is...***

We're all human. No doubt, creation of meaningful work is often challenged by normal human emotional experiences of anxiety, fears and disconnection from others.

By embracing these challenges, career satisfaction can be enhanced with rewards including ongoing meaningful development, possibly with a unique twist not considered before, potential income innovation and other creative opportunities that just feel (and sound) screamingly energizing. Thanks Vicki.

## ***Chapter 5: How Meaningful Work Can Become Too Much of a Good Thing and What to Do About It***

*“It occurs to me that my wellbeing is at risk... you know, that contented place of being happy, healthy and prosperous. I absolutely love my work and derive a lot of meaning through the variety and challenges each day offers. So, my life energies and time is approximately 85% work-related activities...I’m either providing services to clients, planning ways to do so or managing the administrative functions of my business. It was okay for awhile because of additional training commitments. They’re finished. Now, it’s hard to stop. It’s like I’m hooked. The other parts of my life have faded in the background. I love my work, yet at times, there’s a sluggish feeling that’s creeping in and feels uncomfortable.”*

Does it sound like someone you know? Could it be you?

Are you a worker/owner/executive who finds joy and fulfillment at work and feels separation pains if you step away?

Do you often feel like the joy and passion you feel around your work takes over your life?

Are you thinking about your work when out with your partner or sharing time with friends and/or family?

Is your significant other or family complaining that you’ve become distant and moody when asked to spend time in another activity besides your work?

Finding purpose, joy and fulfillment through meaningful work is a good thing, yet, *too much of a good thing can become a detriment*. Or maybe it really hasn't been that good for awhile.

Pursuing meaningful work with all the energy passion brings can become an unhealthy obsession that eventually robs the very purpose, joy and fulfillment desired not only for work but life generally.

***This chapter's focus is on recognizing how meaningful work with all the passion supporting it can morph into decreased job satisfaction and ultimately decreased wellbeing. The signs and symptoms of passion gone awry will be discussed as well as steps towards reclaiming wellbeing and harmonious living.***

**Let's get started by defining passion and how passion impacts meaningful work...**

### **1. Passion is good. It's how we use it that makes a difference.**

According to researcher, Dr. Robert Vallerand<sup>9</sup>, 85% of people are passionate about at least one activity in their life. The passion could be anything like watching soccer, chess competitions, playing Dungeon and Dragons, car

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<sup>9</sup>Robert J. Vallerand, [The Psychology of Passion: A Dualistic Model](#) (Series in Positive Psychology) 1st Edition, Oxford Univ. Press 2015

shows, reading history, traveling, music, coaching executives, teaching, volunteering, researching cancer, engineering, writing novels, etc.

Professor Vallerand’s research concludes that there are 2 sides of passion: Harmonious and Obsessive.<sup>10</sup> Notice the differences...

Harmonious Passion	Obsessive Passion
Strong desire to engage in the activity that remains under the person’s control	Strong desire to engage in the activity that eventually comes to control the person
The person can choose when to and when not to engage in the activity	Person can’t help him or herself...passion must run its course.
In harmony with the person’s other activities and life contexts	Creates conflict with the person’s other activities
Leads to positive emotional experiences	Leads to negative emotional consequences and to rigid persistence

**2. For many people, meaningful work and passion are happily united.**

When the passion is harmonious, meaningful work is just a part, although important part of a meaningful life.

It’s easy to envision wellbeing happening as the freedom to enjoy a variety of activities and interests in a variety of contexts are available while also engaged in meaningful work.

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<sup>10</sup>Robert J. Vallerand. “Making a Difference in People’s Lives”, Dec. 12, 2012, youtube lecture



Healthy limits are respected so that time is made to meet your partner for dinner or accompany your kid to her first day at college. You enjoy time for exercising and stop for a chat with the neighbor to ask about their latest vacation.

As a result, psychological health is maintained with overall happiness and abilities to cope with challenges are strengthened. That's wellbeing.

And from what I'm told, activities enjoyed outside of work, like playing Dungeons and Dragons actually increases the motivation to perform on the job.<sup>11</sup> Always a winning combination.

**3. When the passion is obsessive, meaningful work will eventually suffer. Vulnerabilities to job idolization, workaholism, career tunnel vision, exploitation and plain ole burnout are real and can court disaster for wellbeing.**

**Let's take a look at the vulnerabilities both Bryan Dik PhD etal<sup>12</sup> and Professor Vallerand discuss in their respective research...**

**Job Idolization** - When work becomes like a "god" status with a greater importance than any other life role, that's obsessive passion.

**Workaholism** - This is a state where work becomes less about feeling good and more about avoiding bad feelings you get from not doing it.

There's a restlessness and sometimes feelings of guilt along with unpleasant, sometimes snappy interactions with others. Dr. Dik etal<sup>13</sup> provide a checklist for the risk of workaholism:

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<sup>11</sup> Kenn Schroder, CoachingSitesThatWork.com, Coaching Website Mastery FB July, 2016

<sup>12</sup> Bryan Dik PhD, etal, Make My Job A Calling, Chapter 9, Perils and Pitfalls, pg. 173.

<sup>13</sup> Bryan Dik PhD, etal, Make My Job a Calling, pg 181.

- Do you have low self-esteem?
- Do you have a high need for achievement?
- Did you grow up in a family that was unstable or had a history of addiction to work?
- Do you work in an environment where workaholism is rewarded?  
(Here's something to note...Employers tend to love workaholics and the unusually long hours can be paid well and, at the same time, workers are open to being exploited because of their dedication to the work and often not compensated.)
- Do you work in a highly competitive work environment?
- Are you more confident in work than other areas of your life?

What have you noticed about job idolization or workaholism for yourself or others? Are you feeling some discomfort? Good! Explore more because it's a window into your approach to work. Finally...

**Career Tunnel Vision** - This is a situation where feedback from respected others is ignored due to the person's fixed thinking and inflexible goals about a particular career desired. There's a rigid persistence happening.

For example, someone who is determined to become a professional musician and is not willing to accept the discouragement by trusted mentors could possibly be in that tunnel. Yes, occasionally, the person goes on to become famous, e.g. Bob Dylan or basketball star, Michael Jordan.

The point is that becoming famous despite negative feedback regarding talent by trusted critics isn't common, no matter the individual's passion. That's the hard truth.

#### **4. What does a positive, proactive approach to these vulnerabilities influenced by obsessive passion look like? Here are some ideas...**

- Celebrate your awareness and willingness to explore options which promote a healthier you. Grab your sparkling water. Let's toast!
- Enjoy your passion. I wholeheartedly concur with Dr. Vallerand's admonition to bring more attention to other areas of life rather than abandon what has traits of obsessive passion altogether.

Remember, it's a process of creating a harmonious relationship among activities and interests. Respect your preference or the others' preference about changes needed and the timing for change.

Critical to keep in mind is that it's NOT the activity of passion that is the issue. It's HOW the passion is allowed to show up in life.

- Be diligent about accepting feedback from others. It's not a matter of agreeing with everything you hear, however, listening is required. Maintain perspective. Remember, we are always learning and evolving.
- Go for a deeper understanding of the utility of allowing obsessive passion to rule in your life. That is, be courageous and examine how it helps you avoid important areas of your life. Perhaps you're ready to face those issues now. If needed, talk with a trusted friend or professional.
- Grow the aspects of harmonious passion. Use them as guidelines for creating healthy boundaries. Discuss them with significant others.

## ***The takeaway is...***

Meaningful work with all its inherent passions can also become costly to our wellbeing.

Our willingness to recognize the signs and symptoms leading to decreased job satisfaction, burnout and risks to interpersonal relationships only enhance the joy and fulfillment possible in our life.

**Meaningful Work in Progress...Finding Purpose, Joy and Fulfillment in Ordinary Ways...**...an ongoing process of continual self-examination of how passion is being used and making brave moves to achieve wellbeing.

Meaningful Work..Happy, Healthy, Prosperous Life. Harmoniously together.

Be brave. Put a little wellbeing into your approach to meaningful work today. You deserve your own kindness.

# What's next?

I'd love to have a phone conversation with you to help you find or create meaningful work that brings you endless joy.

During this call we will...

- Dialogue and clarify your vision for the job you would positively love so we know what is important to you.
- Discover some hidden barriers (maybe not so hidden) that derail your focus.
- Discover strengths to positively accelerate your success.
- Dare you to use your strengths and take the first step towards realizing your vision and crafting your meaningful work.

I offer this 45-minute **Love My Work Strategy** call at no cost to you. However, I am limited to only offering one of these per week if my schedule is full.

If you are interested in having this conversation around accelerating **YOUR** meaningful work success, please go to <http://www.marycoaching.com> and fill out the request.

My staff will contact you within 3 business days to schedule.

I look forward to hearing from you because, as you can guess, the work *I love to do*, is helping you find work *you love to do*.

Mary Franz LCSW, CEC, PCC  
mary@marycoaching.com  
<https://www.marycoaching.com>

# ***About Mary Franz LCSW, CEC, PCC***

*I help you make brave career moves so you can do meaningful, deep-down satisfying work that you love- even if the going is sometimes rejecting.*

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Certified Executive Coach (CEC) and Professional Certified Coach (PCC). I coach people who are looking for personal and professional growth so that barriers are addressed, relationships are considered and desired change is possible.

I have a background as an assistant professor in an undergraduate college and an assistant clinical professor at Baylor College of Medicine~Baylor Psychiatry Clinic. I have experience as a couple's therapist and critical incident responder.

**I love what I do.** I love meeting executives in corporate settings to strategize around employee support during a critical incident response.

**I'm challenged** by the client who is meeting with me in my private office exploring next steps toward resolving a conflict he is having with a supervisor or being on the phone with a client who has decided to take a risk and pursue a career change which will support his desire to spend more time with his family.

**My behavioral health background** is comforting for clients. With a feeling of safety, clients feel more open to discuss their career uncertainties and confident that I'll be understanding, nonjudgmental and private.



Mary Franz LCSW, CEC, PCC  
mary@marycoaching.com  
<https://www.marycoaching.com>