

A Story of Change

Sometimes, the best thing you can do with a career is to change it -- even if You've invested a lot of time, money and education in getting to where you are now. This is a lesson I've learned from personal experience. And it's a story I want to share with people who come to the Oxford Program looking for career help.

The year was 1990. I had just graduated from college and had landed a primo job in the IT department of an international investment bank. The pay and benefits were off the chart compared to what my peers were being offered and everyone seemed so impressed with me. In my delusion, all was well. Then something terrible happened. I came face-to-face with reality.

While wearing my new suit, carrying my new briefcase and commuting with the masses into Manhattan on my first day of work, it became apparent to me that life as I knew and enjoyed it was over. I felt like I had lost my freedom -- not only the freedom to wear what I want, learn what I want, take time off when I want. But most importantly the freedom to feel .alive.. Before this I had walked on the beach barefoot and felt the sand beneath my feet. Now it was as if I was walking on the sand with shoes and socks on-- buffered from the .meaningful. world. I hadn't even started my first day of work and I already envied the life of a truck driver. I thought my .Age of Passion. was over.

It was entirely my fault. I'd picked my college major because of its potential salary and public appeal ("Computer Science?? You must be smart!"), instead of researching and choosing what I was naturally good at and could "light my fire" for several decades. So I spent five years in what I found to be an essentially shallow work life that consisted of mere existing instead of "eyes-wide-open" living. I had no good reason to feel this way. Well, at least no acceptable reason. It was a great company that offered fantastic compensation and training. My managers had been intelligent and continually showed their appreciation of my work. But I knew something critical was missing and I spent virtually every day trying to understand what change I could make which would free my mind and spirit.

Finally, the time came to say "enough is enough". I had at last understood the meaning of the phrase: "*life is not a dress rehearsal*". I knew the time had come to follow the Gellert edict: "*Live as you will have wished to have lived when you are dying.*"

I had decided that I would quit my corporate job and look for something that would truly bring me satisfaction in life. Within days I had decided that coaching crew was what I wanted to do, and a couple of days later I had

turned in my resignation. It was an extremely difficult decision. I was abandoning financial security and earning the wrath of my incredulous family. But with one life to live, I decided I was going to live it. Soon I left for the UK to become part of the coaching team at the pinnacle of collegiate rowing, Oxford University.

After returning from Oxford, I realized that my decision had been the most important of my life to date. I had received every benefit that I expected of it and discovered the most salient fact: the grass **can** be greener on the other side. Not all careers are full of frustration, conformity, anxiety, and boredom. I had found a career in which I dreaded a day off like most folks dread Monday! Why was this profession so energizing, mood elevating, life-fulfilling? I later realized that it was a case of harmony between the work and who I am. It matched my skills, my personality, my work environment preferences, my purpose and values.

And as my life's circumstances evolved, so did my work. My preparation to be a career consultant actually began about 15 years ago on that day in Manhattan, but I didn't know it. You see, it was the obsession with returning to the "Age of Passion" that resulted in years of career research and lengthy, systematic self-introspection and which helped me acquire at least some of the experience, knowledge, and enthusiasm needed to guide others along the path to their "natural vocation."

Is my passion to live a less ordinary life special or unusual? No. I believe that each and every one of us has an instinctive drive to feel connected to the world and to humanity. To leave their mark on this Earth. To walk along the beach feeling the sand under their feet. Not under their shoes.

Do I have any secrets on how to find life-fulfilling work that also supports you? Yes and no. What I did and what I teach isn't easy to do, but it's simple to describe: all you need to do is (a) know your innate, natural talents and (b) commit yourself to the task.

In future e-mails and articles, I will elaborate upon what it means to "know Yourself" and how to get there. I'll talk about the importance of understanding what you are really good at, what work environment you thrive in, what activities bring out your enthusiasm and the fact that if you don't match your vocation with these traits, you will have a near impossible time finding what you may be looking for.

My career decisions and the resulting experiences have helped me to develop a great, inner satisfaction and confidence about my life and where I am heading. And I'm going to do my best to help you get to the same place.

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