

CAREER SATISFACTION FROM WITHIN

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



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For more information about Chris Edgar's writing and coaching practice, visit www.purposepowercoaching.com.

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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

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