

Career Fulfillment: Why It Matters



Chrissy Scivicque

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Career Advice Professional Development

Career fulfillment is very important. I consider myself very fortunate: My career gives me a deep sense of purpose.

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Luck is definitely part of it, but it also took a lot of work to get to this point. Like everyone, I've had jobs that left me feeling empty at the end of the day. But this—coaching and training others about career development—isn't one of those jobs. In fact, I see it as more than just a job or even a career: It's a mission.

Everything changes when you love your career. It might sound dramatic but I know from experience. Of course, the degree to which career fulfillment (or “nourishment” as I like to call it) is important is different for each person. Some crave it more than others. Some need a successful career to feel whole while others can really take it or leave it.

But by and large, most people who work for a living want to experience career fulfillment and the reasons are universal.

Career Success Is A Significant Component Of Personal Success

Many of us are taught, in order to be viewed as “successful” individuals, we must attain a certain level of professional achievement. Our self-worth has become tied to our professional worth. So, when we're experiencing professional dissatisfaction, we believe it's a deeper reflection of who we are and what we're capable of, rather than recognizing that it's a matter of circumstance that's infinitely changeable.

We Spend A Large Percentage Of Our Lives At Work

From the age of 18 to 65, most of us work an average of eight hours a day five days a week. By my calculations, this totals nearly 100,000 hours spent working in an average lifetime. That's a significant percentage of the time most of us will spend on Earth.

So, if you aren't fulfilled by what you're doing, life can feel pretty empty.

Work Provides A Means For Survival For You And Your Family

Ultimately, your career is what puts food on the table. It's a requirement for basic survival and, thus, it's a necessity. It's not something that most of us can just walk

away from. Because of this, an unsatisfying career can start to feel like a death sentence. It escalates your stress response and you're constantly in "fight or flight" mode.

Finding some kind of career fulfillment will inevitably create a more comfortable existence on the most basic level. Your perspective will broaden, shifting away from that of mere survival.

Career Is Closely Tied To Identity

When you meet someone new, what's the first topic of conversation? In most circles, nine times out of ten, people discuss their careers. "What do you do?" is the most common way to break the ice and get to know someone. If you're not happy with your career, it can make parties an absolute nightmare. By the end of the night, you feel like a loser.

Why? Your career has been tied to you as a person. It's not really "fair" but it's a social norm. When you're proud of the work you do, it shows. Others hear it in your voice and see it on your face. You feel good about yourself. You enjoy the conversation a heck of a lot more and so does the other person.

In our society, right or wrong, we tend to put people in boxes. Career is a common way of doing this. You're a lawyer? I have a mental image already. You're a CPA? Yawn. There's a widespread practice of stereotyping people based on what they do for a living. This can be upsetting for many. For example, when I worked in finance, I hated the idea that my identity was linked to my work. My social circle was full of artists and, though much of it was in my head, I always felt them looking down on me.

What I learned is this: Regardless of what you do, if you enjoy it, you have the power to break the mold. People might make snap judgments, but they're just as quick to let themselves be pleasantly surprised. If I had LOVED my career in finance, I would have surely felt more confident when socializing. I wouldn't have felt that (real or imagined) sense of judgment.

Career fulfillment can change your reality. If you want it, create it. But don't try to deny it matters.