



# **PURPOSEFUL PAYCHECKS**

How to Find Lasting Career Happiness

by **Cory Miller**

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# Introduction

In the book “Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements,” which is based on Gallup Research, author Tom Rath and Jim Harter write:

*“People usually underestimate the influence of their career on their overall wellbeing. But Career Wellbeing is arguably the most essential of the five elements. If you don’t have the opportunity to regularly do something you enjoy — even if it’s more of a passion or interest than something you get paid to do — the odds of your having high wellbeing in other areas diminish rapidly. **People with high Career Wellbeing are more than twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall.**” [emphasis mine]*

Career happiness overflows into every other area of your wellbeing and life.

Think about it ... how many chronically unhappy, miserable people do you know who just absolutely love their job?

Anybody come to mind? Probably not.

So: Be happy at work ... be happy in life.

We spend more time at work than at home. More time with coworkers and bosses than with our family and friends.

So why aren’t we more deliberate, methodical, strategic and focused on finding meaningful work?

Work that pays the bills but also frees us to be fulfilled and happy in our jobs. We should pursue work that not only meets our physical needs, but also meets our emotional and spiritual needs as well. You're going to spend a vast chunk of your life at work, it might as well be work that matters.

That's what I call a *purposeful paycheck*.

### **My purpose and goals here are simple.**

I want to share some career insights as BOTH an employee and employer ... having been on both sides of the hiring process to help you find purposeful paychecks.

I've always loved my work, with few exceptions. Most people ask me about my hobbies. I always have a hard time answering that. I have few if any hobbies that don't directly relate back to my vocation, or help me be better at my job.

I am forever chasing the purposeful paycheck. I want to spend what time I have doing work that pays the bills and makes a difference.

So my goals are to:

- **Inspire you** ... to see the bigger role of work in your lives.
- **Offer direction** ... in the form of practical tips, stories, and insights, as you seek your ultimate career happiness and those purposeful paychecks.

Here are some terms and phrases what we're going to talk about a lot:

- **Fit:** Just like good clothes should fit well, so should your work. You can have the most beautiful dress and a gorgeous model, but if the dress doesn't fit the model, it's going to look bad. It's all about the right *fit*. It's the same with your work. You need to make sure you're a good fit for your job, that your skills and strengths match your job's demands and requirements. We want to ensure you find the right FIT and MATCH.
- **Sync and alignment:** *Sync* is when you're on cue and in rhythm in your work-life. But being out of sync is like dancing the salsa at a country and western club. You and the music (and probably every-body else in the room) are out of sync and consequently you're off. *Alignment* is a straight line between what you're doing and who you are. Being out of alignment is like when your car's tires are not properly aligned with each other. Your car starts to wobble and shake, or worse it can't drive straight but pulls to the side. When what you do doesn't line up with who you are, then you'll quickly be out of alignment and out of sync with your work and life. I want you to find the right sync and alignment between your life and your amazing goals, hopes and dreams with the right vocation and career path.

### **So what exactly is a *purposeful paycheck*?**

You do need to pay your bills ... you need to be able to eat, and have a comfortable roof over your head ... but why not make the MOST of your work while doing it?

You've done the math — you know you spend more time at work than with your family, or even friends.

Why not seek alignment to make the most out of it?

Why not work with people you like and enjoy?

Why not seek to use your talents, strengths, skills for the betterment of the world?

### **Here's my invitation to you ....**

Consider the short runway of your life. We all have a finite amount of time and resources on this earth.

Reflect on your life and its gifts — what you've been given in natural talent and ability.

How do you want to spend that little time and those precious life resources you have?

You want more than just a paycheck. You want to make a difference.

Why can't we have meaning AND impact WHILE earning a living?

I'm not talking about joining the Peace Corps or a nonprofit necessarily ... or even living in a hut in a third world country. For too long, we've thought that that's what purpose is all about. That the ONLY way we achieve work with purpose is to head off to the jungle or join a charity. We've focused on that and said every other work simply doesn't have rich purpose embedded in it.

But that's simply not true.

I believe you can make a difference, a lasting impact, EVERY day ...  
in your DAY job.

You can find deep purpose in your work, wherever it is, whatever  
you do.

The fact is ... there are too many unhappy, unfulfilled, unsatisfied  
and consequently bitter and miserable people in the work world.  
There are also too many people who waste their time on earth  
yearning for the clock to strike 5.

That's simply a waste. A tragedy. A messed up way to live. But I  
want to help fix that.

So think about this for just a minute ...

Dream with me.

Imagine a world that ....

approached work not like a curse, but as a blessing;  
was filled with people excited about what they do every day;  
where that kind of multiplying impact would be felt;  
Imagine the innovation. Imagine the quality.  
Imagine the beauty of a world of people who viewed their  
work as a masterpiece;  
Imagine the passion. Imagine the purpose. Imagine the  
power.

Now that's the world I want to contribute to and be a part of.

How about you?

I want to invite you to join the tribe of career heretics who seek purposeful paychecks.

Be different. Seek something that most won't think about or do the hard work to achieve ... to find meaningful work that pays the bills while making a difference.

To view your life as a steward of it ... and to approach your work in a way that blends both purpose AND profit.

To do that ... to seek purposeful paychecks ... you'll have to get the foundation set right with some key principles and then take the right steps to ensure you're on the right path for it on a continual basis.

That's what we're going to talk about .... and I'm glad you're here for the journey!

**Now ... go get a notepad and pen. You're going to need it.**

For years I've carried around reporter steno pads to every meeting. They are always in my backpack because you never know when you have a bright idea one second, then later forget that life-changing brilliance. So as you walk through this ebook, you're going to have thoughts and ideas for action. I don't want you to miss them. I also ask you a lot of questions for reflection. You should be ready to jot down initial thoughts and answers to deeper reflection and consideration later.

# 6 Principles to Career Happiness

So let's start, first, with the foundation ... the six key principles to lasting career happiness. These principles will undergird your journey of finding work that rocks. If you get the foundation set and in place, it's going to make the journey to finding meaningful work so much easier.

The six keys are:

- 1. Living Financially Free:** Get your view of money straight.
- 2. Seeking Work-Life Alignment:** Know what you want out of life and aligning your career with it.
- 3. A Quest for Learning:** One that never ends, always wanting to learn more to do more and improve yourself and work.
- 4. Finding Purpose in our Paychecks.** Recognize the impact and meaning in all you do for something bigger than yourself.
- 5. Changing It When It Sucks:** Things will change, you must be committed to changing your situation when work and life get out of alignment.
- 6. Passing it On:** Multiplying yourself in others by sharing what you know by investing in others for their ultimate gain.

Now let's dig in to each of those with some practical tips for living them.

# 1. Live Financially Frugal and Free.

Getting your mindset and approach to money straight from the beginning is going to give you something infinitely more valuable than things that rot, rust and depreciate ...

It's called FREEDOM.

Freedom to do what you want without the financial baggage of debt that forces you to stay in a job you simply hate.

I've seen it too many times. And it's sad. We chase material wealth instead of meaningful work and the result is emptiness, lost opportunities and regret.

When you take a job JUST because of the financial lifestyle upgrade you can get with it or to support your lavish material cravings, you're choosing an almost certain path to misery.

Money jobs are those jobs you've all heard about ... where the money is so good that you get mesmerized that it covers up the fact that you would really hate the work.

Money jobs are prison cells. Ask your parents. Or those trapped in a cubicle and chained to those miserable jobs because of the "golden handcuffs."

They simply can't leave ... because they've either built up too rich of a lifestyle, with the anchoring, drowning effect of debt, to consider a job for less money but infinitely more rewarding

work.

So many people fall into the trap of wealth and material possessions without thinking through purpose and meaning and impact ... and simply doing work you're going to enjoy at the end of the day.

I choose epic work over a job that's merely a prison cell for things that rust, break or cause me worry.

I'd rather find fun, enjoyable work with purpose ... over a house twice as big or glamorous as my family really needs.

I will happily trade six figures for six weeks working abroad, six seasons of Little League coaching, or six changed lives.

You can only do that ... by living financially free and frugal.

It gives us the freedom to find maximum alignment in our work-life equation because we're not working to pay for that STUFF ... but getting a paycheck doing work we love and thrive in so none of that matters.

Yes, you need to meet your financial obligations. You need to eat, pay rent, or whatever. But when we stack things on top of those basic needs and raise that bar above reality it can suffocate us.

The key is to meet your need ... not your greed.

I agree ... it is a fine line.

What is your true need? What goes over the line into outright greed. It's something you'll have to answer for yourself.

There are certain things I do not want to live without. There are certain things I want that make me and my family comfortable. But they are choices we make and realize their cost. Everything has a price tag. But most of mine have nothing to do with the top-of-the-line sports car I can't park within a mile of the grocery store front door.

So let me give you some reasons for why you should consider living financially free:

- **You can take a “teacher’s salary” and still do what you love.** This means you can take a drastic pay cut to do work you will love without worry of your lifestyle or financial baggage
- **Not anchored to crap you can’t take with you.** Have you heard the saying that you’ll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse? The financial baggage that usually weighs people down, or traps them in a job they hate are the things that depreciate rapidly, and rot or rust ...

# How to Live Financially Free

- **Fix your mindset about money and material wealth.** Manage money — don't let money manage you.
- **Stop spending more than you earn.** It's pretty simple. If you're spending more than you earn, or getting into debt over your head, you're starting to build your own prison cell.
- **Start a budget.** Know where your money goes. This is the key. Setting down and getting it on paper (or pixel). Whether you use Mint.com or something else, you need to know where your money goes.
- **Get accountability for the gaps and weak areas.** You'll have blind spots and areas where you need help. You and your significant other need to be SYNCED but also that person is often the best one to help keep you on the straight and narrow!
- **Get on the debt snowball.** Start paying off your debt, one by one, starting with the smallest one and rolling those extra payments onto the bigger ones.
- **Stay there. Enjoy the Freedom.** Once you've gotten financially free the key will be maintaining that freedom. It'll become too easy once you're free to jump right back in, so make a plan to get financially free and stay financially free.

Are you serious about your financial freedom? Then I highly suggest you get Dave Ramsey's book "[Total Money Makeover.](#)" Start reading it and implementing his baby steps to financial freedom. Then find a [Financial Peace University group](#) in your area and join it. You'll appreciate knowing you aren't alone and the accountability and cheerleading you get as part of that group!

## 2. Seek Work-Life Alignment

Work-life balance is a hot topic. It's a step in the right direction, but it falls short.

Work-life balance gives preference to one priority over the other, often at another's expense. Balance forces you to choose, to pick a priority, to make a sacrifice.

Work-life alignment supports both. It seeks mutual prosperity. Work-life alignment seeks to find a straight line between your life goals, dreams and objectives and your vocation to MINIMIZE the sacrifices and expensive choices.

It seeks to find a match between your strengths, interests and passion with where you want to go in life.

Those pursuing purposeful paychecks seek out our life goals, dreams and objectives FIRST ... then seek to pair our strengths, interests and passions with a career that aligns most with each other.

Those pursuing work-life alignment ask themselves:

- *What do I want from life? family?*
- *What work do I enjoy most?*

Then you take those answers and find a job that BEST ALIGNS with those desires and skills, giving you the best opportunity to achieve!

Proper alignment allows you to go further in your life and your work. It's the same for the tires on your car.

As we talked previously, if your tires aren't properly aligned, your car starts to shake and steer off course. Your tires will start to wear unevenly and you'll probably have to buy tires sooner than normal. Tires that are out of alignment limit how far you can drive too. You need to be watching for misalignment between your work and life.

We'll talk more about finding the right job that aligns best with your life's hopes, dreams and goals more later.

But for now ... remember, it's about alignment over balance.

### 3. Keep Learning

Most unhappy people stopped learning long ago. They think they magically arrived one day because they accomplished some marker in life (like a college degree, raise or promotion).

But for those seeking purposeful paychecks, we love learning. Life is absolute and unending curiosity for us. So we yearn to learn.

You should always be seeking to learn and grow and add new skills and experiences to your resume so that you are more valuable for yourself and for your teams, customers and clients.

Learning and growing gives us the edge by keeping us ON the cutting edge. To stop learning is to wither and die. And we seek to live fruitful and fulfilled lives that comes through endless journey of learning.

Lifelong learning is about investing in yourself. It's an investment you take with you regardless of the position or organization you're with. So it's not wasted ... it only makes you more of a star free agent in your field!

One of the keys to learning and investing in yourself is doing it on your own time and dime.

This means you ...

- **Don't rely on your employer to invest in you.** You can't count on others to care about your growth ... and you shouldn't!
- **Invest in yourself — on nights and weekends.** You shouldn't think you can do all this primarily at your day job. The key to earning more and being more valuable is a personal investment which means, yes, "off the clock." The rising stars in our organization are the ones committed to learning ... who make the sacrifice and investment on their own time.
- **Do the hard work to continue to sharpen your skills and learn more.** It is hard work to keep sharpening your sword and adding more arrows to your quiver. This is often a big stumbling block to self-directed learning ... it takes effort. Take the first step and you'll set yourself apart.
- **Open your own wallet.** Yes, it means that you might need to pay for a nighttime course at the local university, or to sit for a certification exam, or purchase an online course or training membership. But again, it's an investment in yourself that you take with you. AND ... aren't you worth the investment? As a career free agent, aren't you worth that time and money? I would hope so!

- **Be intentional, proactive and strategic about learning.**

It won't come easy, it won't come cheap, it'll cost you time but in the end you'll be more valuable and sought after as a result.

Do you want to know what's the easiest, most affordable way to learn ?

**It's called reading.**

Start a reading addiction today. Don't just start a reading habit. A habit is something you do normally, probably even subconsciously so much that you don't even realize it is a habit. Start an addiction where you're craving new information and growth that can temporarily be satisfied by buying books and devouring them on a regular basis.

Great books are the collected wisdom of experts who have taken the time and energy to articulate their ideas, experiences and expertise in a clear, easily transferable way to you.

They've gone through several editors and others who help make them even better .... and you get to buy them for a fraction of the cost.

Books are goldmines for your learning. Just because you think you can't read or have a different learning style, doesn't mean you shouldn't TRY to read and read regularly. (And of course there are usually audio versions of most books for your daily commute!)

The best way to start a reading addiction is to buy an Amazon Kindle. I'm very biased because the Kindle has well over a million books available and that's growing every day.

It's a very affordable device and it's portable ... you can download one of the Kindle Reading Apps on virtually any device, from your iPhone, Android phone, iPad, PC or Mac desktop computer and beyond. (Here is a post detailing [how I maximize the Kindle for my reading](#). You can also see [my Reading list](#) here.)

I take my library of over 230 books (and counting) with me everywhere I go! On planes, in the car, in waiting areas, right before bed ... learning doesn't have to be something formal where you sit in a desk. It can happen anywhere. With that kind of an attitude you can always be learning, always growing, always getting one step ahead.

## 4. Find Purpose in Our Paychecks

Because we have to pay the bills, we must seek a job and career that gives us a paycheck. But that doesn't mean we can't or shouldn't seek and find purpose through it.

Your paycheck should support your life goals and dreams because we've aligned our lives with our work. But our paycheck is WAY more than simply making money, it's about making meaning in the world through our work.

Purpose is a foundational key to lasting happiness. Without it we wander and become empty. Purpose is knowing why you are doing something and how it affects and helps other people. The more obvious examples of vocational purpose are Olympic athletes or NASA projects like the Apollo program where they inspire a nation, or pioneer new technologies into unknown territories.

But vocational purpose can be seen most everywhere. Take for instance, our support moderators. They answer customer questions all day in our support forum. And by extension, they help people by solving problems that ultimately help our customers use our products, which help them DO something on the web.

If you're doing some activity that can be traced to helping someone else — either by saving them time, money and effort, or freeing others to focus on doing that – you can relate that back to purpose, even if you're a receptionist answering phones and directing guests to the appropriate person or office. The receptionist, for instance, is serving clients by answering their questions and funneling them to the right people, and simultaneously serving the team by allowing them to focus on what they are tasked with doing.

What you do on a moment to moment basis in your work should be able to be traced back to helping someone else and thereby connecting what you do to a bigger purpose in your organization. And when we connect with our purpose and see how it benefits others that fuels our drive and desire to do and be better.

Therefore, we need a cause, a reason for being and doing. Seekers of the purposeful paycheck and lasting career happiness use their passions, talents, time (and often treasure) to make a difference in the world – and other people's lives.

We seek to *make people's lives awesome* as a result, which provides us dividends far greater than just an ordinary paycheck.

For example, since we started iThemes in 2008, we continue to receive emails (and now tweets and even mailed cards) every week from our customers thanking us for helping them in some way. These comments typically have the words, “saved,” “helped,” and “solved” in them. A special few even mention how we’ve changed their lives in some way. (Like a group of customers who asked if they could buy our team a gift after a big software release!)

We love sharing with our team — from our pre-sales team who answers prospective customer questions all day to our marketing and communication team who shares with the world what our products do and how they can benefit our customers to our support team who steadfastly and patiently answers questions in the forums, to our development team who builds and ships those products — HOW we’re helping people and what they are saying. And we work hard to communicate WHY what each person in our organization does that supports the process that makes those comments possible.

We all want to be recognized and appreciated for our contributions (however small or trivial they might feel). It’s a fact of being human.

So whatever we do, wherever we go, we’re always seeking to find the greater mission and purpose in all we do. And that goes for everyone in our organization and for you as well.

We all want to be appreciated and respected for doing good work for others. And by the way, it isn’t necessarily digging a well in Africa.

It’s about finding meaning and seeing the impact of your work by helping others.

You have to be tuned in to that .... and then just recognize how and what you're doing is helping make someone else's life fuller, richer, better.

I love this quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. ....

*"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."*

If you're going to do anything, do it in a way that all others will watch and admire because of your passion, dedication and energy that is infectious and see the purpose in what you do.

And in the workplace, we observe and take notice of HOW you approach everything you do, yes, even taking out the trash or running office errands as an office assistant, all the way to your commitment to excellent for delivering excellent code as a programmer, or designer who works diligently to make sure the colors all match and sync.

No matter what you do in an organization or vocational role, you can find purpose in it if you connect it to helping someone else.

We often look at art and say that the painter has produced a work of art.

But we should approach our work in a way that regardless of whether you have a brush and canvas, or a broom and dustpan ... that others would say your work IS art.

That you view your daily work as a canvas to paint your own masterpiece ...

For Eric Liddell, he discovered part of his purpose ... his masterpiece was running.

What's yours?

Purpose shines bright when we are connecting who we are with doing something for others' benefit.

So search for and discover what you were uniquely made to do and offer the world, finding the greater meaning and purpose in ALL you do, even if that's checking and sorting the mail each day so that the checks from clients are given to the bookkeeper for deposit in a timely fashion so everybody gets paid.

And then seek to show off your art, your masterpiece on the canvas of your everyday work for someone else's benefit, whether it's as an accountant crunching numbers in a small business, or a marketing executive at a Fortune 500 company.

**Action Item:** Make a list of all the main things you do in your current work. Then beside each role, describe how they help someone else — whether it's your company, management, coworkers or customers. Additionally, there are bound to be a lot of other ways beyond your primary job functions of how you consistently help make other people's lives awesome, even if it's always making coffee for people in the office, or recognizing when someone isn't having a great day and offering an ear to listen. List those as well! You're likely to find some common themes that will also help you tune into the work that's right for you.

## 5. Change It When It Sucks

Too often we've been taught — like a elephant tied to a small stake in the ground — that we're bound to something we have much more power over. It's OK to quit your job. (Of course you want to talk with your significant other and consider the consequences of it before actually doing it!)

We're not slaves — to a lifestyle or even a job or a boss. We have the privilege of changing it when it sucks.

**Happiness in your work is YOUR responsibility.**

No one says you have to stay if you're unhappy. Those most bitter or unhappy at work are often trapped. The result? **The Bitter Bobs and Bettys of the world.**

So if we can't find happiness, satisfaction or even contentment in what we're doing or the people or the environment we're surrounded by, we must seek to change it before we get bitter and affect others (most importantly our significant others).

Change itself sucks. No one ultimately likes change. But let me tell you ... bitterness is worse.

Bitterness will suck the life out of you ... and kill you from the inside out. It will poison your relationships, your outlook on life and I sincerely believe rob you of your physical health.

I've seen it happen.

One of my first jobs out of college, I worked with a person who had been at that organization my entire life. Since before I was born in fact. And when I arrived she had long ago stopped

learning and growing. She had stagnated and was stuck. She had neglected to keep up with technology and was hanging on to what little she had left that allowed her to make a meaningful contribution to the team and organization. She made just a little above minimum wage at the time.

And she was bitter and miserable.

By extension, she made everyone else miserable who let her. No one wanted to be around her. As I worked with her for over a year, witnessing how the bitterness had eaten away at her youth and poisoned the air around here, I vowed never to get to that point.

It made a lasting impact on me and I've never forgotten it. So whenever I've been in positions where I felt a dead end coming, or could not stomach the energy to work with the people who were my bosses ... I choose to change my situation rather than go down the road to bitterness and poison.

I wanted to do more with my life and the few resources and little time I have. I promised myself to be ready to change it when I felt the prison bars of a job and environment trapping me.

Change is a funny thing. It is the thing we hate to do, and often let it go far too long before making actual steps to make a change, often when others do it for us ... but it is absolutely, unequivocally vital for our career happiness.

We have to be willing to change when the times comes.

Now be warned you will be unhappy for seasons even in the best roles and environments. It's part of life. We don't always get to do what we want.

But I'm talking about committing to making a change when there is no hope for happiness. I'm talking about chronic unhappiness. The point where you hit those dead ends. And lose hope for something or somebody else to change ...

Here are some ways to guard against chronic unhappiness.

- **Know your dashboard.** These are the warning signs to look for creep in ... they are bitterness, worry, fear, distraction and stress that deteriorates your physical or mental health. You'll likely encounter all those in even the most ideal situations ... but I'm talking about EXCESSIVE levels of those elements. Know yourself. Know the warning lights that go off when you're consistently, and excessively stressed. It often consumes and affects other areas of your life - most notably your relationships with loved ones. I know I'm holding on too tight when I get snippy with my wife in normal conversations. When my patience level dwindles and I get mad at even things our goofy dogs do that normally I would laugh at.
- **Look back and ahead to make sure what you want out of life is still aligned with what you're doing currently.** Things, situations and people will change. When you start to look back at the last 6 months, or 12 months, or 5 years, and notice things just aren't the same, but are worse ... you need to start looking at whether you're on the road to chronic unhappiness and in need of a change.
- **Find an accountability partner.** Your significant other is often a good help with this, but also a work buddy, or work friend who understands but has perspective. At almost every job I've had, I've found a lunch buddy ... someone I could go to lunch with and vent a little bit. But also who would give me

some feedback to see if it was me, or an external situation or person and perspective on it all. For me, it's been my wife. She knows what we both want out of life. When things get out of alignment, she helps to pull me back in, or encourages me to seek out the right change. It's an absolute blessing to have your significant other fully invested in your own career happiness and vice versa. We're accountability partners to each other.

- **Refresh your compelling vision.** Sometimes we take our eyes off the prize ... it's often good to go back to your compelling vision ... we'll talk about that in the next section. But knowing WHY you're doing what you're doing can sometimes help adjust your attitude, or put your situation in perspective. Having a vision of where you're going can help smooth out the rough spots in the road. It instills and reminds you of the last key we talked about ... your purpose.
- **Financial freedom (remember step 1?) makes change a lot easier.** It's a lot less painful to make a change when you know your bank account can handle it. That kind of freedom is powerful.

But the key to all this is .... if you're out of alignment with no hope of reconciling it — change it fast before it starts to control you.

Happiness is your responsibility. Commit to making the changes when necessary to put yourself on the right track again ... or find yourself lost, trapped and drowning in a sea of bitterness and misery.

And I'll choose change over bitterness any day of the week.

**Action Items:** *Explore possible bitterness in your work and life. Ask yourself, What are the situations or people in your life causing you excess and consistent worry, fear, anxiety that could or has led to bitterness? What are some steps to improving those situations or relationships?*

## 6. Pass It On By Multiplying Ourselves

The last key is passing what you've learned on to someone else. Giving back to someone else, for their ultimate benefit and not yours is actually one of the most rewarding things you can do in your career.

Multiplying ourselves, and giving ourselves and our experiences and expertise away, for someone else's benefit, is the upper echelons of finding purpose and meaning.

It's likely you were helped at some point in our lives by others passing down their knowledge and wisdom to you.

Thus, we should pledge to do the same for others. Pass it on by paying it forward. This is about seeking a lasting legacy in and through your work by investing in others.

And the best way to do that is to be a mentor and coach or simply a friendly ear to those seeking purposeful paychecks for themselves.

In this way, we find deeper and richer purpose by multiplying our lives and our impact well into the next generation and beyond.

As I've thought about this in the past, I've often been guilty of saying to myself, especially when I was younger that "I'm not an authority, or an expert. There are people way better than me at what I do. How can I help someone else?"

But in this context, what is the definition of an "expert" or a coach or mentor?

It is simply being 2-3 steps ahead of someone else who wants to get to where you are now. It's simply showing them the way, pointing out those 2-3 steps they need to take from them to you.

I think of those indoor climbing walls with the brightly colored hand and foot holds. You are higher on the wall than the person seeking the same goals as you. They are headed up the wall just like you in the same direction.

You are simply ahead of them. As you look down the wall, you simply point to the next hold you took when you were there. And yes, it's really that simple. So anyone can be a coach and a mentor with that attitude.

I'll illustrate this with a story.

After I left college and started my first professional gig, a friend of mine who was a couple years younger than me sent me an email asking for some advice about his career. He saw me heading into my career full steam ahead and just wanted some simple advice.

What he got was a long email explaining all I had done to set myself up for success and the things I was doing to keep myself and my career headed in the right direction.

I honestly don't remember the entire email. Until a couple years ago when we saw each other for the first time in probably 10 years. He was now a successful professional in the field and I had watched his work from off afar via social media. But one of the first things he mentioned to me was that long email that he admitted he never expected a reply to. And how he had heeded the advice and the impact it made on him.

Of course it was immensely gratifying to know I had helped in some way — however naive and young I might have felt at the time. He had asked. I had answered.

That's how simple it truly is. Be willing and available to give of yourself to someone else simply heading in the same direction as you, albeit a couple of steps behind you.

So here are some tips for how to give yourself away to others and in the process multiply yourself in their lives ... here's how to be a magnet that others are drawn to seek you out in their own journey ....

- **Be an unselfish giver.** You must want their ultimate best, with no price tag attached. It means giving so they gain without thought or worry about your own. People quickly recognize the difference between selfish and unselfish giving. One of the guys who helped me personally in my career once remarked after I asked why he was always seeking to help others out so graciously with little or no return was, "I want to be known as a connector and a giver." He was and still is.
- **Be friendly.** I'm always open to meeting new friends, and specifically good people who have great potential. I've seen people who give off the rockstar vibe so they aren't

approachable. Be the opposite. Seek to know who people are and how you can help them. I want to be known as a nice and friendly person because that's who I want to work with myself.

- **Be open.** I've often said I'm an open book to most people who ask nicely. Being open is the opposite of being guarded. One of my now dearest friends in the world originally sought me out when he was starting a competing business with me. He asked some simple questions he knew I had gone through and was battling in his fledgling business and I simply opened up and shared all I knew with him. He still tells that story and even though we live hundreds of miles from each other (and yes, still compete in similar markets) he's one of the most dear and loyal friends I have in life. It started because I was open.
- **Be dang good at what you do.** It's not enough to be all of the above, you also have to be driven to be great, never satisfied with yesterday's successes. You might be three steps ahead of everybody else right now... but that doesn't mean you're coasting. Great mentors are not coasters and are never satisfied with coasting. They haven't hitten the peak altitude and now are just going along at cruising speed. They are in a competition with themselves to always be and do better.
- **Be teachable.** The best mentors are the best learners. They know they have much more to learn, even from those they might be helping. I've learned so much as I've sought to help others. Often they teach me things I didn't know about myself or the world. It also means realizing you don't know everything! I know I don't. I want to be teachable at every moment and opportunity — willing to learn and absorb.

- **Be passionate.** My college friend only asked my advice because I loved what I did. I was incredibly passionate about the field we shared together. He knew I ate, breathed and lived it and it was infectious to him.
- **Be invested.** If my college buddy was successful, I felt successful by extension. Investing in others has been one of the most rewarding payoffs of my life. I consider my time to be very valuable as should you. So when I have opportunity to share it with others — I look at them as investments and I wanted to watch and see how those investments take off. But being invested means caring. I care that those I help actually blossom and bloom and skyrocket. So I seek to check in as I can with them to see how they are making progress.
- **Be available.** Having coffee or lunch with people as I have done more and more in the past couple of years is a big sacrifice in time and energy. But I seek to be available when asked as much as possible. Maybe that's not thinking I'm some sort of a diva or rockstar and shutting my dressing room door so to speak ... for me, it means I make time and am available and open up my calendar to them.
- **Be helpful.** I seek to be as practical and help as I can. I want to offer value that gets them further. Sometimes it's as simple as pointing to the yellow hand hold on that climbing wall. Other times, it's making an introduction. But regardless, I want to help in any way I can.

Do these things, or rather BE these things ... and people will seek you out.

One last word on legacy, which is key to purposeful paychecks and investing in others by giving yourself away.

When I started iThemes and we started building our team .... I knew I wanted the work we did together to be so awesome and significant that we would tell stories about it when we were older.

As our team grew, we invested in others who did not necessarily have the exact skills we desperately needed but had the willingness to learn and desire to be coached.

It has been one of the greatest rewards of my career AND life to serve as a coach and mentor to many of these young people on our team through the years. I have watched them learn and grown and become serious forces within our business and deeply admired for their talent.

They listened. They learned. And they bloomed. They blossomed with us.

And at the end of my career, I will look back fondly not on the money we made, or the products we built ... but relish in the memories and stories of seeing their lives and careers take off as they sought to make their own masterpieces for which I could watch and admire.

The reward we get ... is the legacy we leave in others.

And there's no money on earth that compares with that ...

**Action Items:** *Write a list of your areas of expertise and experiences. All the things you know, whether it's skills that set you apart in your job or the interpersonal or "people" skills that have helped you make friends. Then in a column next to that list, make another one of the people around you who you think might be a candidate to pass them onto. By the way, mentoring doesn't have to be a formal relationship. It could simply be showing someone new the ropes. Who is the obvious first person to start passing on what you know this Monday?*

# 5 Steps to Finding Lasting Career Happiness

Once you have the six enduring principles of career down, you need to make progress toward finding the work that matches what you want in life and ultimately gives you that purposeful paycheck.

Here are five steps to finding that lasting career happiness:

## 1. Discover what you truly want out of life.

The first step to lasting career happiness is to identify what you want your life to look like.

You must know and establish your goals and dreams in life then define objectives for obtaining them.

This is a foundational step, an investigation into your heart and soul, but often too many people go blindly into careers without deeply considering what they want out of life.

By the way — **if you have a significant other in your life, it's extremely important to do all this with that person.** He or she is your partner in life and as such will make a significant impact on your career.

This is a deep, sometimes taxing process ... but absolutely necessary.

I'm going to be asking you some deep question and asking you to think about different stages in your life and what you see accomplishing or having or being at those times. Like your 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, retirement and beyond.

At this point, you are defining what success and happiness are to you.

But my definition is different than yours. It can't be forced on you ... or inherited. You have to discover and write that definition for yourself.

Unhappiness in your career often comes from living someone else's definition of success.

If you don't have your own and are merely mimicking someone else's, you're just playing an actor or actress in someone else's life movie. I'm not sure about you — but I don't want to be someone else's puppet.

I want to direct, produce and act in my own original play.

So let me help with the discovery process and finding that definition of success for you.

Here are some key questions and exercises I've done to help me get at my own definition of success. I'd recommend you take these questions and exercises ... and with a pen and notepad .. sit down, explore them and answer when you have some uninterrupted time to think and reflect deeply on them.

Let me set the tone as well ... at this point we're not thinking about actual jobs, job titles, or organizations. We're looking beyond that and focusing on how you want to spend what precious time you have on earth. What makes you happy and fulfilled.

So here goes:

- What does success look like at the end of the day? At the end of your life?
- Answer the old question ... What do you want written on your tombstone? For me, it was "He Loved."
- Who do you love and cherish most in life? Who are the people you want to spend your time on earth with?
- What do your family goals look like? Do you want to have kids? Be married?
- What are your financial goals?
- What are your lifestyle and living goals? What does living a good life look like for you?
- Where do you want to be in 6 months, 1 year, 5 years ... or when you're 30, 40, 50, 60?
- What are those future facts for what your life will look like then? What does success for you look like and feel?

One exercise I did a few years back was creating my Bucket List. This was extremely helpful exercise and allowed me to fill in some gaps in my definition of success.

At the time I was going through some personal turmoil. And as I reflected on my life I realized I had achieved the biggest goals I had set out to achieve ... and I was left empty and wandering.

I was wondering what else was left for me in life.

It was the quintessential deflating time I'm sure climbers get after they've come down from the pinnacle, the mountaintop journey, reached the summit and thought to yourself, "What's left? Is this all?"

So I turned to the Bucket List. And I researched some of the things others put on theirs for inspiration and [found a great blog post on the subject](#) I used as reference.

I realized going through the Bucket List exercise that I had reached the point in my life where all of those things, like traveling to India, or unique experiences like cliff diving, I could easily get or obtain.

And I put down some of those but was still left empty and wanting.

Except for one. I realized there was just ONE thing I wanted in life that I didn't have ... that I couldn't reasonably get or obtain to that point in my life.

Through the Bucket List process, I realized the gap, why I was left empty and wanting more.

I had never had the opportunity to have children.

It became glaringly apparent as I recalled that my dad had often said to me his greatest joy was being a father (and now a grandfather) that having children of my own (at least trying to) was my deepest desire in life.

Up to that point, I had built a business that was thriving and on

the verge of breakout success I had dreamed of. I was doing what I wanted to do vocationally in life. In fact, I had created my dream job that changed and challenged me almost every day. My physical needs and wants were and still are very basic and anything I might have wanted, I could have easily bought.

So I put at the top of my list that I wanted to try to have children at some point soon in my life. Having put that down, everything else was minimal and almost superficial to me.

And it truly helped reprioritize and reorient my life for the better.

Having all-consuming goals and dreams is huge for me ....

So ask yourself ... what's something you don't have that you can't reasonably get in a short amount of time? That's a dream to pursue with passion.

Try the Bucket List exercise to see what things really rise to the top for you.

The next question you should ask is ... what did you want to do when you were a child?

It helps me think back about my dreams as a child. They were uninhibited. They are very telling. They can and should feel crazy and odd and maybe outlandish to you, but list them out.

For instance, at one point, I wanted to be a long-distance truck driver.

As you think back and list those out, ask yourself WHY you had those dreams.

I realized the reason I wanted to be a truck driver was to explore the world — or at least United States and see the beauty outside of my little hometown of Lone Grove, Oklahoma.

Next ... ask yourself: What do you enjoy doing now? Why?

What do you spend your leisure time doing? What are the activities that give you the most fulfillment and excitement?

Then, once you've really explored some of these foundational questions and exercises and gotten a rich volume of answers to explore further, let's switch to vocational interests.

What jobs fascinate, excite, inspire and interest you? What specific positions, roles, fields, and industries interest you?

How do you work best? What is the environment, situation that you cherish and thrive in? Maybe it's as a solo practitioner, or maybe you need a team. Do you like being in a small well-lit quiet office like me, or prefer being outdoors as much as possible, like my brother?

When do I utilize my natural ability and gifts most effectively? When do I experience "flow"? Flow as described by [Mihály Csíkszentmihályi](#), in his book by the same name, is when a person is fully engaged in an activity, external interruptions don't phase you ... your are singularly focused on doing whatever you are and succeeding at it .... athletes describe it as "being in the zone," or "on fire."

What am I naturally good at that others recognize and mention frequently? I enjoy hearing undirected input from others around me about what I do best. It gives me perspective on what others value but also helps me understand assets I might take for granted.

I also seek input and advice from trusted truth tellers — people who won't just tell me what I want to hear but offer sharp, practical feedback — in order to get perspective on my natural abilities, talents and potential.

You should also observe and take note at what things people value about you. Sometimes these things are so obvious you miss them.

What are your passions and causes that light your fire? What things get you up in the morning and keep you up at night. Those things that truly stir you up and energize you.

Let me give you a couple more ways to learn about yourself that I've used to add even more perspective ...

- **Myers-Briggs Personality Test.** Take the test which you can find at [Kiersey.com](http://Kiersey.com). This excellent personality test identifies 16 personality types. I took this in college over 15 years ago and have referenced it or things I learned from it almost every week of my life. It's useful for understanding yourself AND others. It's helped me identify potential career fields I might be especially attuned for (in fact, several of the careers listed in my type I've done!) ... and how I like to work and how I function best. By the way, I am an INFJ.
- **StrengthsFinder 2.0.** It is based on Gallup research and helps you identify your top 5 strengths — those things that you're naturally good at and have developed and honed over time. The idea is to focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses. I took this several years ago and now we ask every team member we have, and even prospective employees (as well as friends and significant others) to use this discovery tool. This terminology is so

embedded in our team's culture that we use it regularly to describe different team members and situations. We don't want everyone to be just like us ... but we seek to leverage others unique and natural abilities for greater success as a whole. Personally, understanding my strengths helps me focus on them and use them in everything I do. I realize and readily acknowledge I'm not good or strong in every area, so when I encounter those areas which are not my strengths and would probably drain my energy, I seek out a partner with those particular strengths. You'll need to buy the StrengthsFinder 2.0 book and use the special coupon code in the back of the book to take the discover tool online at StrengthsFinder.com. For \$15, it's a bargain. By the way, don't read the book before you take the discovery tool. Use the book as a reference tool after for specific action items you can take to leverage your own strengths, and discover how to leverage other people's strengths in the process. My strengths are: Learner, Individualization, Maximizer, Futuristic, and Intellection.

- Two other personality-type tests I'll mention that I've taken are Standout by Marcus Buckingham, who was part of the Gallup Strengths research team, again, you buy the book and get a special coupon to take the online test. And the Kolbe A Index. I'm not super well-versed in either but they gave me another perspective of who I am. For the Standout tool, I am a Pioneer and Influencer. For the Kolbe, I am a high Quick Start, with Fact Finder.

Those are just a couple of tools I've used to help me explore who I am and offer more perspective. I'm by no means an expert in them, but have simply found them valuable in my search for work-life alignment.

Now ... once you've gotten a wealth of information about who you are, what you like, don't like, or most interested in ... what you want out of life — those hopes, dreams and goals — it's time to start crafting a rough draft of your compelling vision of your life and future.

Knowing what you want out of life gives you a direction to head toward.

The key to the compelling vision is also finding your Why, which I hope you've started to hone in on.

Mark Twain said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born, and the day you find out why."

When you discover your own Why ... you have a clearer picture of your compelling vision. A purpose. A drive. A focused gravitational pull.

That's your compelling vision.

It should begin emerging from the clouds as you crystallize these things.

As I mentioned, you need to define success for yourself. It can't be someone else's compelling vision, it's got to be yours. Hopefully through these questions and exercises you're getting to the core of your one-of-a-kind version of success and the compelling vision you see for your life.

So now ... what do you want your life to look like? What do you see for yourself? How do you want to use the finite time and resources you have to make the most of it?

## 2. Search for potential career matches.

With your life goals and dreams established and a compelling vision of your life, now you want to look for a career (or business) that gives you the best possible chance to achieve them, while doing work you really enjoy.

If you know what success is, you can find meaningful work more easily that aligns with your compelling vision.

This is the really fun part for me. It is sort of like dating and finding your mate in life. You want a job that ultimately you'll enjoy, potentially for years down the line.

If you are in a career that ultimately doesn't suit you, or has some traits that cause your happiness in other areas to deteriorate, you are going to end up unhappy at some point (yes, no matter how good the money or benefits are!).

But you have a fixed heading ... you know what you want out of life ... now it's time to start doing an exhaustive search and to list all the potential careers that might be a good fit for you.

It's likely you've already got some jobs and career fields in mind. List those out now.

However, we want to get a long list of potential matches so you can be picky. So here are a couple of places to look for help:

- **The Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH):** Produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics this in-depth handbook of careers has been one of my favorite reference manuals for seeing what careers are out there, as well as what the fastest growing, highest paying careers, fields and industries are.

It has 25 Occupational Groups ... kind of career categories from “Entertainment and Sports” to “Math.” In each group you’ll find occupations to explore, with a summary of jobs, what they do, the work environment, how to become one, pay, job outlook and similar occupations. All of this makes the OOH the BEST place to start exploring careers and occupations.

- **Your Personality Type and Strengths as a guide:** The Myers-Briggs Personality profiles, which I recommended in Step 1, list possible career paths for each of the 16 types, or areas and fields to explore. I have often looked back at these suggestions to see how each field would be aligned with my goals and just interesting to me. It’s remarkable how these paths have mirrored my own experience .... most INFJ profiles suggest occupations like writer, editor, clergy, counseling and education — all of which I’ve had careers in or significant overlap. It’s a great starting place to explore careers more in-depth, using various sources like the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

The StrengthsFinder profiles often mention possible careers that might leverage your unique strengths more. It’s not as detailed as the Myers-Briggs personality profiles, but still another resource to compare and consider.

- **Broader fields and industries that interest you:** Beyond just specific jobs and titles, you should begin looking at fields and industries that pique your curiosity. Maybe it’s an emerging field and you see yourself helping pioneer it. Or an established one, you’ve long admired. For instance, at an early age I discovered I enjoyed writing. So I started looking around at fields that employed writers ... from newspapers,

to magazines, communications in organizations ... and of course, now blogging. You might be able to match a specific interest like writing with a career field you're drawn to.

- **LinkedIn:** The professional social network is a powerhouse. I believe it's got tremendous staying power over other social networks because it deals with careers and what we're talking about today. It's not just a way to connect and showcase your skills as a career free agent, it's also a great source of career research. Find and follow companies you are interested in. See what positions they are looking to fill. Look at people's titles you admire and learn what they do and what skills they possess. It's also a great way to see the path people follow to get where they are now. By the way — if you haven't created a public profile on LinkedIn, that's some homework for you tonight. And start connecting with people you know on it. The best jobs I've had in the past have come through personal connections — people knowing I'm looking and recommending me for certain jobs. The faster you start building your connections, especially on LinkedIn, the easier your job hunt is going to be.
- **Classified ads:** That's a little old school, but today that is Craigslist, Monster, and other online job sites. I look for what jobs people are posting often. Although I believe the best candidates for jobs come from personal recommendations of people I trust, I think you can use these online sites for ideas and to recognize trends. Who's hiring. What are they hiring for.
- **Google:** Start typing in your interests and skills with "job" or "career" and just see what turns up. Search for people and companies in career fields you're interested in. See if you can find job descriptions for the careers on your list. And then,

if you find people doing this career who seem open (or have a blog on the subject) try reaching out to see what advice they can give you. What you're doing now is just trying to be exhaustive and fill in some gaps and gauge what's out there.

- **Happy people:** Happy people are magnets. They love what they do and it shows. It draws us to them. So ask them ... what they do, and why they love it. How did they get there? See what trends they might be seeing and potential job matches for you. These are just some ways to start getting a good list of potential job matches for you. I always have a list of potential job matches and fields I'm interested in. And as I discover more I add them to my list. In the past, I've put writer and journalist, copy editor, art director, editor, publisher, travel writer and photographer on my list. Eventually I put communications director, public relations officer and of course ... entrepreneur on my list. And as I saw or heard of opportunities to apply and interview for those type of positions, I was ready to jump at the chance.

### 3. Master the experience and expertise required.

Once you find the job descriptions, experiences and expertise you need in order to be marketable and land one of these jobs, see how your current education, skill set, experiences AND personality type match up with what prospective employers want.

This is where you'll likely find gaps. Don't fret the fact you might not be qualified NOW for those jobs. But identifying those skill or experience gaps is key to knowing what you need to start working on.

You may realize you need to learn a new software program, or be fluent in another language. Once you've identified those gaps, now you need to see how much time and money it will cost you to acquire those skills. This is vital though.

For most employers, mastery equals money. Skills pay the bills.

As an employer, I can tell you ... after ensuring for fit with our company and culture ... we value and hire for skills.

The goal for you is to identify the career matches that align with your compelling vision ... to acquire and boost the skills and experiences you need to land it ... in order to be viewed as the in-demand free agent in your field. You do that by mastering the skills needed for the job and demonstrating proficiency through a portfolio of projects.

Here are some questions you need to find answers to for acquiring the skills you need:

- **What are the actual skills you need for the job you want?** This is where the Occupational Outlook Handbook comes in handy. You can see a starting list of what you might need. You'll also want to ask professionals in the field what skills they suggest you acquire.
- **What are the best books you need to read?** Books are the most affordable, easiest way to glean knowledge and acquire certain skills. See what the recommended books are to get started.
- **What is the fastest, most affordable way to acquire the skills you need?** And to bolster the ones you already have? It

could be a college degree. It could be experience in the field. It could be a combination. But the keys are .... the quickest AND most affordable way to get the RIGHT skills you need to actually do the job. You always want to blend practical skills with foundational knowledge and theory.

- **What projects can I do or be involved in to accelerate my learning ... while having results to share?** I believe the best way to do is to do. Projects are an AMAZING way to learn and grow, while bolstering your resume. They give you stories and measurable results to share in interviews. And they build on theoretical knowledge. See what projects you can volunteer for that will force you to learn along the way and build connections and contacts who will talk well of your work with them on their projects.

Here are some reasons you need to start building your portfolio of projects:

- **They demonstrate skills.** Shows what you can do practically in a live fire type environment, even if that's organizing the blood drive for your sorority, or helping run a political campaign like a school board race.
- **They offer measurable (& repeatable) results.** They show how well you can do it and gives something to compare to.
- **They provide experiences & stories to share.** You'll glean takeaways you can apply elsewhere including those interviews and in your work.
- **They give employers hints to transferable business benefits.** Again, your project might not be an exact match to your career field but if as an employer I know you lead a

team (in a completely different field and environment) then I assume some, or hopefully all, of those skills can transfer to our environment.

- **They set the foundation for more, bigger projects.** Doing a good job on small projects, leads to opportunities to help on bigger and bigger projects. Your work builds on itself. If you can be consistently trusted on smaller projects and take them as serious as a bigger project, you will be given more responsibility. We want to know you can do the work, be consistent and deliver.

Here's a quick side tip that I like to emphasize because of its importance in our increasingly technological workplaces:

**Find the key software used in your ideal career positions ... and MASTER them.** Hone in on what is used most frequently and become THE guru on those software programs.

My father works in the oil field industry. Even though he's in a truck traveling hundreds of miles a day to check on wells, his work is increasingly becoming more computerized. I'm confident most every career field will be touched by software in some form if it hasn't already. There are few exceptions to this tip.

So identify what software, programs and equipment is used. Then learn it backward and forward. Learn all the shortcuts. Make sure you're aware of upcoming versions and new features. You'll be ahead of the game.

Early on for me, I discovered in the newspaper industry at the time it was desktop publishing software QuarkXPress. I knew if I could master it, become extremely efficient with it, know all the shortcuts ... it would set me apart against other candidates who

were often slow to learn software. If I could offer a prospective employer an easier orientation and training period, and could be plug and play so to speak ... I had the edge. And guess what I usually emphasized in those interviews? How well I knew Quark. One last thought and tip when we're talking about gleaning the experience and expertise necessarily to land your ideal career match:

**Sometimes this means you might need to work for free, or for cheap.**

I highly suggest seeking out an internship and apprenticeships as early and as fast as you can. Midway through college, I realized even though I was acquiring the skills to be a newspaper journalists, I didn't have much experience. So I sought ways to break into the field through internships and part-time jobs so I could build that experience, but also the list of connections who would help me land a job.

I was often frustrated seeing my friends work dead-end part-time jobs that had nothing to do with their prospective career field, when with a little effort they could have landed internships or part-time gigs building their own experience and connections.

We've had several examples on our team of people who started in a part-time or limited role ... or even just a very very entry-level position, only to earn their way into a larger role and position on our team.

One person we have on our team currently started as an office assistant. We knew she had higher career aspirations and wanted to work in web development, but we told her we only had this position open but that if she worked hard, learned and absorbed when her other work was done, and of course —

invested in herself on her own time and dime ... that there was a potential for her to secure a position on our development team at some point.

She jumped at the opportunity and specifically said to us, "Whatever I need to do to get my foot in the door, I'll do." It made a huge impression on us.

After several months of hard work doing that position, proving herself, we had an opportunity open to her and offered it to her because she had earned our trust and respect ... and now she's taken the next step toward her ideal job and career.

All because she was willing to do the first step in order to earn the next one.

Another option is to be a temp for a while. This way you can test out different jobs and workplaces to see what you really like. It gives you a collection of experiences to help formulate more what you're looking for, while doing good work and making connections at those places as you work hard and as a result are memorable.

Do a good enough job and you might find yourself with a full-time job offer.

But as you narrow in on a career or job to focus on, you'll need to start mapping out your path to education and experience to close the gaps to get where you want to be.

And then do the work to fill in those gaps so you can ultimately land that ideal career ... and be the hot commodity free agent in your career field.

#### 4. Hunt relentlessly for the right fit.

Now that you've begun to close the experience and expertise gaps, you need to start looking for the right fit — whether that be in a business working for someone else, or starting your own business.

I want to emphasize finding the “right fit.”

Companies like mine are searching for the right fit. And so should you!

Not every opportunity will be the right fit. So it is truly a hunt. A relentless one you should not give up on easily or jump too fast into something.

You can save yourself a lot of misery by making sure you are a good match for any potential job opportunity. But you should be looking for leads to jobs, making contacts with potential employers and getting interviews with them as soon as you feel confident in obtaining a job in your career field of choice.

Unfortunately, this all takes time and patience.

I hate to have to say that to you because it's not what you want to hear, but it's true. It will not happen overnight. Sometimes it could take days ... but often it's months and maybe even a year or two ... or more.

But let me just say ... employers and prospective employees can all agree on one thing ... the interview and hiring process sucks.

It's time consuming, disheartening, and as I've said before ... the whole process can feel like speed dating on the way to a Vegas-

style shotgun wedding.

So just like looking for a mate in life .... you should approach your job hunt and search with the same consideration.

For me, the key characteristic for career fit is this: ARE YOU A BELIEVER?

That question might sound weird, but do you fully BUY IN to what the company does, how they do it, and who they are fundamentally?

Do you believe? Do you drink the Kool-Aid they are serving you?

I've found the answer to that question often determines whether someone will seek to add value instinctively and with vigor, or consciously not, seek to destroy unity, purpose and trust in a company (especially small teams and businesses).

Believing in the company and its values, process, philosophies and directions means you are ready and eager to accept and follow the existing direction.

In a way, it's like joining the crew of a ship. You agree to do the work you're asked to do ... so that the ship and its crew reaches its desired destination. But someone else is in charge. The course has already likely been set. There are vital structures and systems as part of the ship. Everyone must work together, or there can be disaster at sea.

Believing is what sets apart those who are fully invested and aligned with the company's direction ... a true and valuable member of the ship's crew .... from those who are looking to fill a hole in their resume or seeking selfish gain at the expense of

others ... the stowaways and mutineers.

I've seen it happen. If you're not willing to accept, add value and contribute to the group so that it achieves its mission ... and go into it looking to create division and strife and conflict, and not contribute your share of the workload ... you're just going to cause problems for everybody else ... and you're likely to walk the plank.

So when you're looking for the right fit and have an opportunity to join a new company ... ask yourself, "Do I fully embrace the vision, the mission, the direction of that company?"

Is this the ship I want to sail on?

This doesn't mean you have to get the tattoo right away ... but it does mean you willingly and yes, even excitedly, want to be a part of where the ship is heading. It means you see where it's going and want to add your own unique contribution to it getting to its destination.

Here are some more ways to discover if a job is the right fit for you:

- **The work:** Are you going to actually enjoy the work? Learn and grow? And use your unique skills and strengths for the greater good in it?
- **Coworkers:** Do you like the crew you're going to be sailing with? Surveys show that people who have friends at work are likely to be happier. I want to like and enjoy the people I work with. I often ask myself whether I'd want to hangout after hours with a person or team.

- **Bosses:** You may not always like the person who is your boss ... but do you respect them, their knowledge, their vision, their leadership? And more importantly do you trust them? Trust is definitely earned over time with consistency. Maybe you don't know them immediately. But CAN you trust them? Do you see red flags that concern you?
- **Company:** Do you agree with where the ship is heading? Do you believe in the mission and direction of the company? Does it sail in rough seas (i.e. market) and is it capable of handling the storms it will likely encounter?
- **Culture:** Do you believe in or even like the way the company and team operates? Do you buy in to how things are done and the attitude and environment? Can you be a positive addition to the growth of the culture? Does it sync with your own personality and attitude?
- **And finally ...** do all these things give you the best chance for success and alignment to your goals? Do they help you achieve your compelling vision, while doing great work that adds value to the organization, the team and its customers?

Finding the RIGHT fit is key ... for both you as a crew member ... and for the company, the ship.

Make sure you do your homework, and your side of the equation, so that you find the right match that best helps BOTH sides be successful.

As the ship goes, so do you ... and vice versa. Make sure you're getting on the right one.

## 5. Evaluate and refine as you go.

At some point, you will land that job and find that work-life alignment.

But the process doesn't stop here. Just because this is the fifth step doesn't mean it's the final one.

These steps are a repeating cycle, not a finish line.

With the rapidly changing business climate and workplace, you need to be vigilantly watching for how things are going in your work. Unlike previous generations, today people rarely stay in a single job or even career for their entire lives. Things change. You need to be ready for it

Finding lasting happiness in your work is a continuous cycle.

Things change. Life will happen. Such as:

- **Your family situation will grow.** You'll have kids, or you'll get married; sickness and death are also facts of life.
- **Your dreams will drift.** Sometimes your dreams change, or you get new ones like I did
- **Your interests will wain.** You'll get bored and want a new challenge. I love learning. The hardest thing for me was to say, "I want to work in newspapers for the rest of my life." I wanted to work in them at THAT time, but my interests changed. And I knew they would.
- **Jobs change and go away.** It's a fact now ... you will most likely not have the same job, working for the same company, for your entire life. You could lose your job, the workplace and leadership may switch, or sway.

- **Entire markets disappear or are totally reinvented.** The rapid pace of business today demands that companies be nimble to change, and fast to innovate and adapt. So should you.

So be prepared and ready for it all. Your best-laid plans can and will change. But you can always be seeking work-life alignment.

And that starts back at Step 1. Sometimes it means starting all over again. It could mean creating your own job — by starting your own business and being your own boss. It may mean you have to make adjustments that cause some temporary discomfort (like relocation).

Rinse and repeat these steps often. Do it annually (or more frequently). Learn and grow. Iterate and refine your career plan. You'll need to make course corrections along the way. The worst thing is neglecting this process and finding yourself WAY off course and perhaps lost.

So in closing here are some ways to be prepared for the change that will invariably happen.

- **Anticipate it.** Get ahead of change and be ready for it.
- **Stay on the edge.** Instead of getting pushed off it ... get out front, hone your skills and connections ... look around and stay ahead of the competition in any way you can.
- **Keep up to speed.** Ask questions. Never be satisfied with what was true yesterday. Keep a pulse on what's going on. Know what the market is paying and where it is going for what you love doing.

- **Keep watching on the horizon.** Looking out in your market, in the company, in the world for what's coming next ... what are the dangers, obstacles as well as strengths and wide open seas
- **Keep networking and building relationships.** It's all about people. Trusted referrals and recommendations from other people are the best way to hire in my opinion. The more people who know, like and want to work with you the better. You'll have a pool of people to help you find work-life alignment when the time comes.
- **Keep pushing.** Coasting is not recommended or even allowed. It's pretty dangerous to set your career on cruise control. If you're lacking in energy or motivation, check your Dashboard to see why and correct it as quickly as you can. You can't afford to get passed by, or break down on the side of the career interstate.
- **Watch vigilantly.** Make sure your work-life is aligned and not getting dangerously out of balance. It's your life. Your time. Your talent. Make the best of it by guarding and protecting it.

You do all that by repeating the 5 steps to career happiness ....

# Conclusion: What Will You Do Now?

Well, I've poured my heart out sharing the principles and process for how I continue to find lasting career happiness personally.

But without action this is just an academic exercise. And that's not why I've written this.

So my question to you is simple: What will you do now?

By now, if you've had your trusty notepad and pen handy as you've read, you should have ton of notes and ideas to explore for how to find your unique brand of lasting career happiness.

Take a moment to review your notes and reflect on what you've read now.

Then ask yourself: What is the next step that will make the BIGGEST impact on finding work-life happiness for myself?

We can often get buried in all the little details and annoyances. But as you take a step back and reflect, think about what needs to change and what you need to do.

If you're like me, there's likely one really big thing that will stick out.

Once you've identified that one key thing, start mapping out all the most important things you need to do to make progress toward that step.

And do one of them today.

Then another tomorrow.

And the next day, and on and on.

Dreams without action are empty, worthless vapor. The prize goes to those willing to take the risk to ACT on those dreams.

And I'm often reminded of this long but powerful quote from former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt about how to live your life:

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

I want to dare to do and be something great with my life, don't you?

Settling for the “ordinary,” “normal” and “average” are not only options for me.

I want to live my life without regrets, in the center of the action, taking chances, embracing uncertainty, hearing the roar and jeers of the crowd ... all for something so big and daring and bold and purposeful and beautiful ... so much bigger than your thoughts or dreams ... that winning or losing becomes inconsequential all because you simply had the GUTS to do something that few ever attempt ... you simply stepped into the arena.

So take that first bold step today toward the center stage of your own life. And dare to share the time, talent and treasure you’ve been given doing some unique, wonderful and special helping others.

Yours to chasing the purposeful paycheck,

—Cory

P.S. If this book has helped you, or you have a story to share about your journey for finding Purposeful Paychecks, I’d love to hear them! [Click here to tell your story.](#)

# About the Author

[Cory J. Miller](#) has had a lifelong passion for writing and entrepreneurship. Before becoming a full-time entrepreneur, he spent more than a decade in the newspaper, magazine and communications industries, working as a newspaper reporter and editor, freelance writer as well as a director of communications for several organizations.

Having maintained his own website since 1998, in 2006 he began writing a professional blog on nights and weekends in his career niche at the time. Through the process he started to learn more web design and began a part-time freelance business.

In January 2008, he took that momentum, experience and exposure in blogging and web design and started [iThemes](#) to offer professional website templates for WordPress, a free online software to manage your own website or blog. Starting in his home office, as the business grew, he started recruiting and hiring a team of designers and developers to build easy-to-use templates, selling to customers all over the world.

Through his up and down journey of entrepreneurship, he now leads a team of over 20 professionals around the globe, with headquarters in Oklahoma City, more than a hundred products and thousands of customers. In March 2011, he co-authored WordPress All-in-One for Dummies (Wiley) and has written and released several other [books](#).

On the side, he helps other aspiring entrepreneurs on their own journey of [entrepreneurship](#), primarily through [Entrepreneurship Lab](#), where he offers online training and support. He also blogs regularly on [career happiness](#) and work-life alignment.

In addition to being a passionate entrepreneur, he is “hubs” to [Lindsey Anne Miller](#) and “daddy” to [Caloway](#). When not hanging around in Oklahoma City, they are probably in the mountains of New Mexico enjoying life together.

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