

UNLOCK DEEP ESSENTIAL WORK

FIND REAL MEANING BY CHANGING
YOUR WORK MINDSET
AND HABITS

REMMY HENNINGER

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INTRODUCTION

I'm writing this book because of the Great Resignation from 2021 to 2023. There was a massive shift in US work culture. We went from a primarily office-based or location-based work culture to a mixed one. Now we have more options in terms of where to work.

Many companies have implemented work-from-home systems. Work that did not need to be done on premises has been decentralized.

Immediately following that was a surge in hiring because of American workers' more excellent choice of employers, work arrangements, and other details. There was an unprecedented number of people quitting their jobs. This also led to people jumping from job to job and getting paid higher and higher wages each time they hop.

The Great Resignation took the world by storm. Granted, it was primarily a US phenomenon; other countries experienced this differently. Western Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore may have experienced this but at a much lower level than the USA. The rest of the world did not have this luxury.

What happened next is interesting. Many others are left behind because of the serial job hopping done by highly skilled people who are highly in demand. Their skills could have been more portable. They had to work on-site because they felt stuck and could not work from home.

This then triggered the next phenomenon of "quiet quitting." When people feel they're not getting paid what they're worth, they don't quit, at least not obviously. But they leave in terms of output and, just as importantly, attitude.

As you know, a workplace is about more than just output, productivity, and the amount of services and products delivered to customers. It's also an environment where different personalities complement and supplement each other.

This broke down in the age of quiet quitting. Before, people could be counted on to do some extra or even work free overtime. At the very least, their positive attitude was a welcome added element to the workspace. Not anymore!

With quiet quitting, the message was loud and clear.

Make no mistake; the idea of doing barely enough not to get fired is familiar. That has always been the majority attitude in many workplaces worldwide.

This has always been the attitude, but this was front and center in the phenomenon of quiet quitting. At that time, workplaces became cold. Boundaries were drawn. Work became transactional.

Fast forward a few quarters and wave after wave of company layoffs and the rise of artificial intelligence like ChatGPT, the

atmosphere has dramatically changed. From people complaining on Reddit that they have quietly quit their work even though they still physically show up for their jobs, the tone has taken a different direction. Now people are complaining that they can't find a job at all.

Artificial intelligence and inflation in many different parts of the world have pushed people back to the workplace, but there's a problem. Different from the most recent past, those jobs are not available because the economy could be doing better than people have been told or as people assumed.

Instead of complaining about their work, how little they get paid, and the work conditions, Reddit has changed its direction to people complaining about not getting a job. These similarly different strands of workplace development add to the reality of modern work.

Most People (Still) Hate Their Jobs.

I put "still" in parenthesis because people have always hated their jobs. The distribution is straightforward if you survey 100 people in any workplace in any corner of the United States throughout its history.

There will be people who love their jobs. They can't wait to get in through the doors the following day. They talk about their jobs almost all the time. They define their identity based on what they do for a living.

The other third are pretty stoic about their jobs. They know how important it is. They understand their role in their careers and the benefits their work brings to them, but they don't define

themselves by their work. They focus more on a balance between their family lives, personal lives, and their work lives.

And then there's the other remaining group of people who flat-out hate their jobs. Now, they're not all equally vocal about their displeasure, but if they were given a chance, they would either get another job or quit entirely. Many are tempted by the prospect of striking out independently and setting up their shop. Regardless, these people hate their careers, and they do the bare minimum not to get fired.

The reality of modern work is partly timeless and partly new. The timeless part is relatively easy to understand. Most people hate their jobs. What is new is that we live in a culture where we're supposed to draw deep meaning from our work. It's supposed to help us in our quest for the need for transcendence or something higher. It is our gateway to serving others and becoming part of a larger group with a mission.

This brings up a lot of internal conflicts among people. Where do you draw the line between your world — things that make you tick, things that make you want to wake up in the morning, things that explain what you look forward to and excite you about tomorrow and the day after — and what you do for a living?

Many people have made a happy compromise where they draw much of their inspiration and sense of purpose from what pays the bills. But many people need help to bridge that divide. They think and assume there are hermetically sealed lines between what they do to earn their daily bread and who they are.

Those who hate their jobs see these two worlds in opposition. They don't complement each other. They don't make each other possible. Instead, they oppose each other like matter hitting antimatter to produce a horrifying explosion.

This is the reality of modern work. It would be best to navigate these different mindsets as you try to understand what you do for a living. This book is entitled "The Joy of Work" because it is possible. People must find deep meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in their actions.

You may be thinking, "I only work 8 hours a day. I have the rest of 16 hours to live my life and be who I want to be." Fair enough! But half of those remaining 16 hours are spent sleeping. Well, at least you should.

This leaves 8 hours. Some of those 8 hours are affected by the carry-over or the emotional hangover of the work you did for 8 hours.

It's how important work is, and that's why it's crucial. If you want to become a more effective person who lives up to their fullest potential, start creating a healthier attitude and healthier balance with work. The older models need to be put up to the job.

CHAPTER 1

ALL WORK IS PERSONAL

Your conception of work comes to you just from your experiences and upbringing. It is from the personal narrative of who you are, what you can be, where you can go, and who you can surround yourself with. These set limits as to what kind of work you do, how deep you will work, and the impact you see your output having on the people around you.

Deep Work

Deep work involves more than quality. It also implicates your state of mind when you enter this level of work.

Deep work is more than qualitative. This kind of work would significantly move the needle regarding the Pareto Principle.

But, it also implicates states of mind. Achieving a deep work state means occupying an emotional and psychological state where things start falling into place without conscious effort.

It seems magical that the right ideas come up at the right time with the right solutions to produce the outcome that you're

looking for. This is never an accident. It is the product of practice, experience, and, most importantly, being open-minded to welcome solutions often disguised as challenges and problems.

Deep work is not a destination but more of a process that morphs over time that you eventually become comfortable with.

Deep Work Leads to Deep Personal Fulfillment

This is not a one-way relationship where being able to perform deep work leads to a deep level of personal fulfillment. It also works the other way.

When you feel fulfilled, you are more likely to go deeper. You're more likely to explore connections between what you do to produce better outcomes.

This is primarily driven by purpose. This purpose is similar to the overarching purpose you begin work with. That kind of purpose is too fuzzy, too far away, and often susceptible to changes happening in different areas of your life.

Instead, this purpose that flows from deep work works with us and produces deep personal fulfillment stems from your ability to work correctly. It has a specific setting and context and flows into a sense of momentum.

You know you are doing the right thing. You know that since you can do things correctly, your actions are ultimately correct, proper, and worthy. These feed into each other to push you forward as well as deeper.

The Source of Work Depression

Many people quickly blame overwork for their depression, anxiety, and restlessness. They lose all will to do their work because it seems disconnected from a larger purpose.

Maybe they can't see the connection at all. They may have started with a clear purpose, but as they dove deep into work, it became disconnected, disjointed, and alienating.

Depression flows from having too much time on your hands. You have free time when you have set up your work so that it takes less and less of your time to do the actual work.

You don't fill in the rest of the time you save with deep work, exploration, and system building. Instead, you busy yourself with empty rituals like checking email and going from one meeting to the next, knowing full well that the work has already been done.

Of course, underlying all of this is the fear of having more work assigned to you without a matching increase in pay.

I get it. But when you free up so much of your time for rumination, going around in circles, or feeling like you're trying to chase your tail, this lack of engagement allows you to keep ruminating.

Some studies on depression point to an excess amount of time spent ruminating. This leads to a negative feedback loop. The more holes and problems you see, the more you get depressed and demotivated. And the more demotivated you get, the less you get rewarded.

The more time you spend ruminating and the more holes you see, the worse it gets. On top of this, you're not engaging. It would be best if you were pumped up to find problems to solve.

That's somebody else's job. You turn your job into rumination, and you feel stuck.

The next step is to feel detached. This is the opposite of deep work and a state of flow. This path does not lead to personal fulfillment.

Work Done Properly Provides Meaning

There have been a lot of famous quotes regarding the connection between meaning, purpose, and work. I will not bore you with a long list of quips from history. Just know this.

When you do your work the right way, it in itself is a reward. Turning this into a habit and making it part of your identity is vital for a sense of personal meaning. You are useful. You bring value to the table.

Your sense of value bearing concerning productivity and work effectiveness has to be taken into account. This can also be explained through the relations of the Pareto Principle. Research shows that 20% of the working team will deliver 80% of the output in any organization.

When you do your work and scale it up, you build systems that continuously pack value into what you're doing so you can do more at a higher level of quality. You blow everybody away. You become that cornerstone that, when knocked out, brings the whole building down.

You must understand that when people encounter truly productive and valuable team members, they are rarely encouraged to level up. If anything, it works in the opposite direction. Crab mentality kicks in. They see an eagle and think of ways to bring it down to their level because they're pigeons or turkeys.

Work Done Right Provides Meaning, Value, and Purpose

It reorients your picture of who you are, what you're capable of, where you can go, and what you could be. It is your personal but practical way of pushing against your limitations. I'm not just talking about the limitations you have put on, but the limitations others put on you.

Work done right enables you to focus on something bigger than yourself.

The TV show of particular discussion, 'The Office,' revolves around a paper company. Dismissing their work product as simply involving easily replaceable merchandise is accessible. Worried and obsessed over by easily replaceable people in an easily replaceable and all-too-forgettable corner of the United States.

But this misses the point entirely. People depend on the company that you work for or the work that you do. Otherwise, they would only do business with you, and you would have a job.

When you understand this dependence and the matching expectations and assumptions that go with it, you can see that

you are part of something bigger than yourself. You miss the big picture if you focus on how much you earn and focus on taking from the company while barely putting anything back in return.

You could have been part of something worthwhile. Instead, it is a prison sentence. Work is something you do for 8 hours every given day so you can get on with the rest of your life. It is just a means to an end.

When you do that, you reduce the power of your impact on this planet. You refuse to be part of a more enormous enterprise with a nobler purpose than yourself.

Learn to draw the connection between what you do for a living, no matter how small or insignificant you think it is, and a larger ecosystem of causation. You're part of a more extensive network of cause and effect.

Your work is cumulative. Either it sets the chain reaction going, or it combines with many other efforts of other hidden people and organizations from all over the world working together in a way that you can't quite understand or articulate but are sure about.

Your focus on your sense of value and meaning should keep this in mind because you are part of something bigger than yourself. It doesn't matter whether you work for yourself or your virtual assistant, you are a remote crew, or you're a direct employee.