



Pursuing an Accidental, On-Purpose Life

- Gary Klaben

How motivated are you? Motivated enough to buy, at any price, a World Series ticket to watch the Chicago Cubs play Game Seven? (Keep dreaming!) Motivated to work 10 extra hours weekly to earn a larger bonus and an eventual promotion? Motivated by a secret dream burning inside you with red-hot intensity? First, a story:

In the mid-1980s as I prepared to leave the military, hanging up my “green suit,” I interviewed for several jobs. One was a quality control engineer position for an automobile-industry OEM manufacturer. During a plant tour, I noticed an assembly-line worker idle at his work station. I walked over to ask about his job. He explained his station’s function involved connecting two parts, then hoisting them on a rack for the next work station. I asked why he was pausing, since a box with the two parts sat close by.

Suddenly he affixed a gaze upon me as if I were an idiot! “Not allowed!” he shot back. The employee whose job it was to pick up the box was still on a 15-minute break. Union rules and company regulations forbade line start-up without him. Looking around, I saw that the work station ahead of this worker and three others down the line were likewise idle, waiting for the employee’s break to finish.

My first reaction to this exchange: What on earth keeps this man motivated each day? Being a neophyte to the industrial business world, this seemed a terrible waste of human ingenuity and know-how, if not an insult to basic intelligence and common-sense. Personally, I have a tough time with strict rules-based work. No wonder we lost our automotive-industry lead after the heyday of Henry Ford and Alfred P. Sloan. But that is a whole different story.

Over the past quarter century, we have witnessed one business absurdity after another: Overpriced mergers, spectacular buyouts and, in the worst case, destructive business bankruptcies. The time-honored, standard motivation of “more dollars for more work” and “more time in grade for job promotions” isn’t working nearly as well. Today’s business world appears far less motivated and more unhappy. What’s more, bad things begin to happen when money is the prime motivator.

Our recent financial crisis, brought on by loose credit and the housing bubble, towers over us as case in point: Every “expert” link in the sub-prime loan chain — from real estate agent, to mortgage broker, to secondary mortgage packager, to Wall Street repackager, to Moody’s and S&P stamping them grade A (although worthless) — belies one simple fact: No accountability. No one was held accountable. Now, I’m not blaming the individual real estate agent, mortgage broker or packager of mortgages for the secondary market. What I am saying is: Connectivity to the customer was lost. The primary purpose evolved into simply creating and selling more products for more and more money.

In Michael Lewis’ book, *The Big Short* (2010), he breaks down Wall Street abuse

and rubber-stamping by quasi-government bond-rating industries, concluding these were the primary causes for sub-prime mortgage defaults and the resulting real estate market collapse. Large Wall Street bankers and brokers got paid to package and sell products. Their motivation to sell products and make money trumped any internal motivation to be customer-accountable. Lewis describes how every major institution went along with this assembly-line, shiny new product approach. They racked in huge profits, thereby increasing their stock value, resulting in very happy shareholders. The motivation was all external.

Connectivity to the customer must be rebuilt.

The lesson to take from this financial debacle? The carrot-and-stick approach of external motivation (money) no longer works. We need to transition to something that is more intrinsically motivating.

What is intrinsic motivation? In the July-August 2010 Harvard Business Review, Clayton M. Christensen wrote an article, "How will you measure your life?" He is best known for his seminal book, *The Innovator's Dilemma* (1997), which ironically notes that relentlessly seeking new technologies can cause successful firms to fail. In this new article, Christensen writes that, on the last day of class for his Harvard Business School students, he asks them to consider the answer to three questions:

First — how can I be sure that I'll be happy in my career? Second — how can I be sure that my relationships with my spouse and my family become an enduring source of happiness? Third — how can I be sure I'll stay out of jail?

He's asking them to consider what is intrinsically motivating to them and what they value. — What we like to term as MVP: meaning, value and purpose. What is it that motivates them throughout life to make a difference, to give back, to be remembered for? His final question is not a joke. White collar crime starts off innocently enough — simply trying to meet one's quarterly numbers. However, it may become a slippery slope, resulting in an Enron-type disaster.

American psychologist Frederick Herzberg, one of the most influential persons in 20th century business management, asserts that money is not our most influential motivator. Every individual has a much greater motivation to learn, to grow in responsibility, to contribute to society, and to be recognized for one's achievements.

There's a message here for all of us, especially young people. During these tough economic times, we are seeing more and more college graduates and unemployed workers re-examining core premises about livelihood and life — many seeking jobs that are internally motivating. If dealt a lemon, make lemonade — pursue alternative work that is more creative and less routine. Learn to be self-directed. Do what you love doing!

I believe we will look back a quarter century from now and see the United States and the world making a very important transition from a society letting go of the last vestiges of external money motivation.

In Daniel Pink's recent book, *Drive* (2010), he cites consulting firm McKinsey & Company's estimate that only 30% of all new U.S. job growth derives from routine algorithmic work. Some 70% now springs from internal heuristic work. Routine work continues to be outsourced overseas to China, India and other developing countries — whereas artistic, creative and empathic work is retained in the United States and continues to increase.

With unemployment hovering around 10% and applicants for each new job oppor-

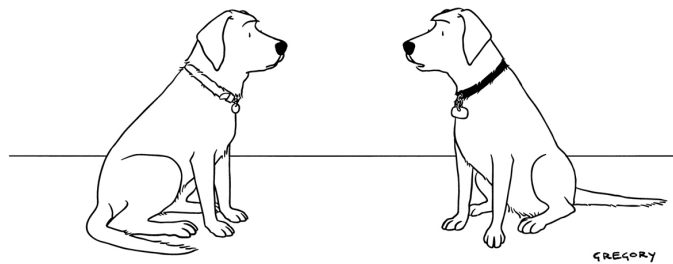


tunity numbering in the hundreds, many people have opened home offices. It's a little known fact that a greater percentage of entrepreneurs launch new businesses during recessions than during economic growth periods. An estimated 18 million Americans now work from home. They are self-directed, have started businesses they love, and are intrinsically energized to fulfill their MVP.

Sometime, when you have a few minutes and access to a computer, key in the search words "accidental career" and "accidental entrepreneur." Soon you will find yourself reading compelling personal stories about working wives facing layoffs who launch home-design firms, and out-of-work actresses who partner with health care formulators to develop and market all-natural pet care products. Then there's the full-time professional who "accidentally" launches his new battery sales company after he finds a way to extend his iPhone's battery life.

The novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald famously said, "There are no second acts in American lives." Well, with all due respect, the American Dream is synonymous with second acts and many encores. As recent glitches and potholes have taken their toll, many Americans have elected to tap their true passion, re-invent and re-tool themselves, and enjoy the freedoms they have to explore more fulfilling options.

Failure — its lessons when carefully understood — can lead to remarkable Act Twos. Henry Ford's early businesses failed and left him broke five times before he founded Ford Motor Company. R. H. Macy started seven failed businesses before finally hitting it big with his New York City store. Albert Einstein didn't speak until age four and didn't read until age seven, causing his teachers and parents to think he was mentally handicapped; eventually he was expelled from school and refused admittance to the Zurich Polytechnic School.



"I had my own blog for a while, but I decided to go back to just pointless, incessant barking."

Many people have read the best-selling book *Three Cups of Tea* (2006), co-authored by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin. In 1993, Greg Mortenson attempted to climb K2, the world's second highest mountain, in the Karakoram Range of northern Pakistan, as

a way to honor the memory of his deceased sister Christa. He failed to summit. After getting lost during his descent, now terribly weak and exhausted, he chanced upon the small village of Korphe. The chief elder, Haji Ali, greeted him and took him in. To repay the remote community's hospitality, Mortenson promised to build a village school. After incredible difficulties raising capital, and later having supplies stolen, he finally managed to do so.

What began as a single promise became Mortenson's life-calling. His "accidental" village visit soon became his passionate, all-consuming "on-purpose" career. Introduced to Jean Hoerni — a wealthy Silicon Valley pioneer (then dying of leukemia) who shared his dream of improved access to education, especially for girls in remote, war-torn Central Asia — Mortenson co-founded Central Asia Institute. To date, 155 schools have been built in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan. *Stones into Schools* (2009), Mortenson's sequel, updates his story of promoting peace and fighting terrorism through building local relationships, empowering communities and educating young girls.

Pursuing an accidental, on-purpose life can afford immense meaning, value and

purpose. But daunting challenges may confront one's self-motivated pursuits. In Greg Mortenson's case, he was briefly kidnapped by Taliban sympathizers, faced death threats, and endured long periods of separation from his wife and young children. Yet, as Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" points out, a more arduous, less predictable journey has its rewards:

"Somewhere ages and ages hence:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."*

There are no second acts in American lives? The American Story IS Act Two: Starving immigrants arriving in New York Harbor. Pioneers in prairie schooners seeking new livelihoods in the West. Bicycle shop owners Orville and Wilbur Wright experimenting with flying-machine prototypes until they finally get airborne.

There is nothing that trumps money? The days of purely external motivation — the secure life-long job, gold watch, company pension — are long gone.

Today, there is a strong pull between the profit maximizers and the purpose maximizers. It is not that working on Wall Street or Main Street for large companies is all about profit maximization, or that starting a small business is all about purpose maximization. It is about the tide turning towards purpose, while maintaining profit.

Author Daniel Pink identifies and discusses three types of motivation. Motivation 1.0 is the basic need to survive. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors spent nearly all their time fulfilling this need. Motivation 2.0 involves seeking rewards and avoiding punishment. From the time of antiquity through the 20th century, this was the primary motivator after achieving survival. Finally, motivation 3.0 seeks internal, intrinsic satisfaction — the fruit of personal freedom, challenge and purpose.

Ours is a motivation 3.0 world. The unexpected and unpredictable will increasingly occur. Change is the only constant. Continual surprises! Microsoft's digital Encarta encyclopedia — a profit maximizer — lost out to tens of thousands of online hobbyists writing and editing topics in Wikipedia's open-source, interactive encyclopedia without pay — a purpose maximizer.

Surprise! Wikipedia — now the world's most popular encyclopedia, with 13 million articles in 260 languages — maxes out on personal motivation, massive value and combined purpose. How many other industries today are likely candidates for Internet "re-purposing"?

We are at a very important crossroads in history. Both the developed and developing worlds have a unique opportunity to transition to what makes all of us tick. — What is inside of us, who we are, what we dream to be. — What is most important to us, how we want to be remembered.

Before you consider a career upon completing school, before you pursue a new job, before you give up on the unemployment line, consider the current environment. Literally every citizen in this, the world's freest country, can start any business with an iPhone or a BlackBerry and a laptop. Barriers to entry have never been so favorable to the small business owner.

Are you intrinsically energized to achieve your MVP? Then you stand on the threshold of a most interesting, exciting future.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being



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able to remake the world...as in being able to remake ourselves.”

Carthage general Hannibal: “We will either find a way, or make one!”

Yoda (“Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back”): “Do or do not. There is no try.”

At the end of the film, “Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life,” we see Michael Palin being handed an envelope. He opens it and provides viewers with “the meaning of life”: “Well, it’s nothing very special. Uh, try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in, and try to live together in peace and harmony with people of all creeds and nations.”

These are goals deceptively challenging to pursue — particularly the latter! Throw yourself into work you passionately believe in, set goals, work/eat/sleep actions, and you will find happiness and internal purpose that you might not have ever thought possible.

But success doesn’t come easy and, at the end of any given day, you may not be able to control each outcome. On this subject, I find myself often thinking about the old joke: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

Only one, but the light bulb must want to change.

Certain folks, for various reasons, will always resist change: Therefore, we need as much light and enlightenment as possible to guide all of us intelligently and creatively into a bright future.

I’m frequently reminded of Yogi Berra’s admonition: “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up some place else.”



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