

Connecting Your Work Tasks to Meaning

I'm really good at getting a lot of things done, taking action, piling up a buttload of completed tasks.

Action isn't my problem — it's making the tasks themselves feel more meaningful.

Do any of you have that problem, that your work just feels like busywork, not super meaningful?

By the way, if your problem is not taking action ... here's my action rules:

1. Pick important things to work on
2. Do only one of them at a time
3. Set aside everything else and do only that one task
4. Make it smaller so it's easier to start
5. Feel the joy of getting stuff done

And yes, getting stuff done is so much fun. But at the end of the day, you just churned through a whole bunch of things, and it doesn't feel that meaningful. Sure, at least you didn't just procrastinate all day, didn't fritter the day away in distractions ... but there's more to life than just churning and being super busy.

Let's talk instead about meaning.

The Joy of Meaningful Work

Not everyone has the luxury of doing meaningful work — maybe you have to work at a fast food restaurant just to buy groceries, for example. I get that. I'm incredibly lucky to have work that I find meaningful.

But it is one of the most incredible things I've been able to create in my life. Purposeful work. Work that feels like I'm doing something good in the world.

People in all kinds of fields have found meaningful work — it's usually when you've done some good in the lives of others. Teachers who see a kid's eyes light up when they do a science experiment or read a good story. Nurses who help someone who is in pain. Volunteers who help with a project that makes a community better. Writers who inform or delight or provoke. Mothers who help babies grow into wonderful people. A bus driver who keeps his students safe so they can learn. Scientists who are advancing human knowledge. Yoga teachers who bring a measure of inner peace to people's mornings. A flower gardener whose product will make people's homes happier. A counselor who helps someone deal

with their grief or anxiety. A software engineer whose app empowers creators. An artist whose work gives people a new way of seeing the world. A personal trainer who helps her clients get healthier. A coach who helps his clients make breakthroughs in their lives.

And it's my belief that anyone can find meaning in their work. Work in an office? Maybe it can feel meaningful to serve your team so that their work gets done easier, or so that the project they're doing actually gets done. Maybe you help brighten people's day with your positivity or sense of humor. Maybe you delight your customers with your service. Work as a janitor? Imagine not cleaning for a week and think about how miserable people would be — your work makes their lives better, even if they don't realize it. A feeling of meaning can come even if the people benefitting don't realize what you've done. Just knowing you've made lives better is a wonderful thing.

Meaning is anything that makes lives better — your own life included. If you are putting smiles on people's faces, helping them find mindfulness, helping them make a living, making their jobs easier or their headaches smaller ... you're doing something meaningful.

Meaningful work is all around us, and it is deeply satisfying. Even joyful, if we can connect to that meaning instead of going through the motions.

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It's one thing to realize how meaningful your work is ... and another to actually feel that meaning throughout the day.

The key tools to help you connect any task to meaning are these:

1. **The Pause.** Before you start a task, pause. Then check in with yourself about why this is meaningful (see next two tools). If you're in the middle of the task and you've gotten into Get It Done mode, pause. Check-in. If you're moving through your day mindlessly, pause. Check-in again. Do this all day long — pause and check in. Then do the next things on this list.
2. **The Why.** When you pause, check in and ask yourself why you're doing this. Why is it meaningful? Whose life will be made better in some small way? For example, as I write this, I imagine one of you might feel that their work is a little more meaningful. Maybe two of you. That warms my heart (see next step). As I went to yoga class with my daughter this morning, it felt really meaningful to be bringing mindfulness and activity into her life. As I did a coaching call with someone today, it felt meaningful to support their incredible work in the world. As I did chinups with my son this afternoon, it felt meaningful to be bonding with him doing something active. Why does this matter to you? Why is this important enough to be in your life? Connect your task to this Why.
3. **The Heart.** It's one thing to *intellectually* know why you're doing something, and to know in your head why it's meaningful ... but quite another to *feel* the meaning in your

heart. When you think about someone's life being made better, try to feel the pleasure of doing something good for them. How often do we let ourselves feel pleasure? Feel the love you have for them, in your heart. Feel the joy of putting a smile on their face or easing their burden. You don't need them to know — but it's a wonderful thing to do this for them.

It's that simple. Pause. Check in with your Why. And feel the pleasure, the joy, the love, in your heart.

Keep coming back to that, and tell me your life isn't better.