

What is Work?

What is work? That's a deceptively hard question. It's also of crucial importance. There isn't one right answer, but there is YOUR right answer. Finding and defining your relationship to work is a huge component to fulfillment that almost everyone neglects.

I've always hated the phrase work/life balance. As if work is not life, and life is not work. It's a strange dichotomy. If work is stuff we do to stave off death and starvation, then none of us in the developed world are ever really working. If work is stuff we do to obtain possessions and choices we don't currently have, then all of us are always working.

You can't separate work from human existence. It seems like kind of an odd thing until you consider how much odder the alternative. Can you imagine human life without work? What would it even mean to be in a perpetual state of rest, with no discontentment to be removed, no dreams to be chased, no creations to be forged, no sense of hustle in the present to bring about an altered future state? No time, no change, no desires, no choice. I'm not sure what that is, but it doesn't sound like life.

So, you can't run away from work. How can you relate to it most beneficially? I think some people find the best way for them is to treat it like a game of struggle now for less struggle later and that works for them. Others treat not working as the struggle, and work as the relief (I'm closer to this camp, though not 100%). Again, there isn't a right orientation, there's just the one that maximizes your own ability to live the kind of life you want.

The only real way to lose is to refuse to consider, create, and define your relationship to work. Then it pulls you around and makes you its victim. Of course the process of relating to work is lifelong and takes a lot of experimentation and reflection.

But it's worth it. You have a relationship to work whether you like it or not. Would you rather let it happen to you unawares, or do the happening deliberately?

My two favorite posts on this topic:

You're Never Done Working Hard

Doing Work You Love and Being Happy are not Necessarily the Same Thing