

Where's the Beef?

Two brief quotes from two separate friends:

Quote #1: "As a hiring manager, Chik-fil-a was always a slam dunk. Everyone I ever hired who had worked for them was awesome."

Quote #2: "It's better to have to answer "100 happy meals" than "nothing yet, but.." to the question **"What have you actually made and shipped?"**"

In my post on the Praxis blog entitled Four Reasons to Stop Despising Your So-called Menial Job, I wrote the following:

Business is not the art of playing dress up. Business is the art of solving other people's problems or satisfying other people's desires in a way that's unique enough to make them willing to pay you for the services/products you provide. If you're doing those things, you are involved in the business world. If you're not doing those things, you're not involved in the business world. Yes, you may have designed pretty business cards. Yes, you may have built a cool website. Yes, you may have dubbed yourself the CEO of Me, Me, & Me. But until you have something to sell and someone to sell it to, you're just playing a game of dress up.

A person who puts in a hard and honest day's work at McDonald's is much more involved in the world of free enterprise than someone who calls themselves an entrepreneur without actually doing anything that creates value for customers. When you look down on menial work, it makes it easier for you to fool yourself about this kind of stuff. The moment you buy into overly romantic ideas about what it means to do business, you start to see yourself as successful based on superficial things that have nothing to do with customer service and revenue generation.

There are thousands of hard working people at places like Burger King, Taco Bell, and

Wendy's who walk around with their heads hanging low because they're comparing themselves to some guy who calls himself an entrepreneur and who takes pictures of himself "working" on a laptop at the beach. I don't hate the guy who takes pictures of himself working at the beach. I hate the fact that people are hating on themselves because they think they need to be that guy in order to be valuable.

There are people who are ashamed of anything in their employment history that doesn't look "entrepreneurial" or "freelance." And when these people create resumes and go to job interviews, they try to hide the fact that they flip burgers for a living because they mistakenly believe this says something negative about them. They would rather talk about business ideas that they haven't even executed than discuss the empirical evidence of character that their 3 years at the pizza parlor might indicate.

Here's a take from my colleague Derek Magill:

There's a ton of noise out there right now. The temptation is to join in on the noise because everyone seems like they're successful and having the time of their lives and you're being left out. The vast majority are total nothings. So much can be faked today but you can't fake doing your job consistently well. You don't need a vlog or a side "hustle" or a social media following or some accolade like "20 under 20" (LOL), or "most influential youth entrepreneur" or a 1 sentence per line viral LinkedIn status." Just do your job.

Derek is advocating substance over style here. Back when I was a kid, there was a Wendy's commercial campaign call "Where's the Beef." There were these three older ladies staring at an empty looking sandwich asking "Where's the beef?" They saw the outer trappings of a burger, but there was no substance to it. This is what the world of entrepreneurship is at the risk of becoming.

[embedded content]

If you're working at a fast food job and you're guilty of trying to hide it, here's my message to you: You da real MVP!

Anyone can stay at home and try to get rich on the internet without ever having to deal with the complexity of real human interaction, but you're the ones who know what it's like to serve customers when those customers are difficult to serve. You know what it's like to smile at people and treat them with respect not because you're positive, but because

you're professional. You know what it's like to maintain composure even when people treat you like crap. Anyone can talk smack about following their passion, but you know what it's like to show up and work hard even when you don't feel inspired to do so. Everybody is tolerable when working for themselves. But you're the ones who know how to be pleasant to work with when you have to be accountable to something other than your own preferences. Anyone can talk about their side hustle or their personal brand, but you're the ones who have an empirically verifiable track record of making things happen and keeping your word when other people are relying on you.

Being a self-proclaimed entrepreneur is the new status quo. The rebels of today are those who know how to do something for a customer in an environment where they're expected to be consistent day in and day out even when the work doesn't feel entrepreneurial.

Here are some wise words from Gary V in an article entitled "Stop Asking Me About Your Personal Brand, and Start Doing Some Work":

For the first decade of my professional career, I kept my damn mouth shut. Seriously, go and Google it. You won't find a single piece of content from me that pre-dates WLTV. So what the hell was I doing? I was working. It stuns me that people keep asking about how to start a personal brand; how to be a "YouTube personality" without having a clear understanding of what comes before that, which is actually knowing something about something. It's this notion that is so prevalent right now, which is that you can just come out of nowhere and build your brand through various tactics.

So this new quick hack of using social media and modern tech to build up your brand isn't enough. It just isn't. There is no substitute for honest hard work. You have to earn the privilege of building a "personal brand", and the only way to do that is to actually execute.

Some people are great to grab a beer with, but horrible to go to battle with. If I'm grabbing a beer, I want to go with the person who has a TEDx talk about how much he travels. If I'm going to battle, I want to go with the person who hustles his or her butt off at Taco Bell for a couple of years. Give me a co-worker or employee who's held down a fast food job for 1 year over any of these "CEO of Me" types with fancy titles, pretty business cards, millions of vague ideas, and zero evidence of even knowing how to take out the garbage for longer

than a month.

“Being entrepreneurial” is just like “being creative.” It sounds impressive to people who are addicted to attending conferences, but it means absolutely nothing apart from the willingness to show up and get things done.

You want to get ahead in life? Do your job and do it with pride... even if it's fast food. Professional freedom isn't the by-product of your label, it's the consequence of your mindset and your work ethic. Wherever you are, show up and get things done.