



SOMEDAY

IS NOT A DAY IN THE WEEK:
CREATE MORE MEANINGFUL WORK
... NOW NOT SOMEDAY

Sam Horn

My dad's dream was to visit all the National Parks—*someday*. He worked six to seven days a week for decades. The month after he retired from his position as Director of Vocational Agricultural Education for the state of California, he took off on his long-delayed dream. A week later, he had a stroke in a hotel bathroom.

Fortunately, he recovered. However, he never did fulfill his dream of seeing the Great Smoky Mountains and the rivers and lakes in Glacier. Dad was also fortunate in that he loved his work and found it meaningful.

Many people today don't. We need to wake up to the fact that we'll never have more time than we have right now to change this reality.

What is the Problem?

“Oh, so you hate your job. There’s a support group for that. It’s called everybody and they meet in the bar.” – George Carlin

Did you know that a 2013 Gallup poll found that “70% of people are unhappy and unengaged at work.”

Did you see the *Harvard Business Review* article by Christine Porath that claimed in its title “Half of Employees Don’t Feel Respected by Their Bosses?”

An 2015 article in *HR Magazine* by Dana Wilkie claimed, “1 in 3 workers wants to quit.”

Yet the majority of people stay in jobs where they feel unseen, unheard, and uninspired.

Why?

We need to wake up to the fact that we’ll never have more time than we have right now ...

Who Are the People Affected?

“Sorry I was late for work today. I was sitting in the parking lot not wanting to come in.”
– Pinterest post

Over the past couple of years, I’ve interviewed hundreds of people around the country on the topic of how to create more meaningful work. They were from different professions, a variety of ethnic and educational backgrounds, and ranged in age from 22 to 72.

I wanted to know, “Are you happy at work? If so, why? If not, why not? And if not, why are you choosing to stay?”

Here are just a few reasons people gave for staying in toxic work situations.

- I can’t afford to leave. (I need the paycheck. I’ve got bills, a mortgage, college debt.)
- I’ve got people counting on me. (Kids at home. Parents with health challenges. Employees I’ve hired. Clients/team members/donors who trust me.)
- I’ve worked too hard and too long to leave now. (I’m vested, I’ve got tenure, seniority)
- What makes me think another job will be better than this one?
- Work sucks. That’s just the way it is. (“You work hard and then you die” philosophy.)
- There aren’t other options. (I don’t have the right education, credentials, connections.)
- This is as good as it’s going to get. (I live in a small town. I’m too young, too old.)

- Change is scary. I rather stick with the status quo—the devil I know—than take a risk.
- I keep hoping things will get better and I'll get the recognition/respect I deserve.
- I'd feel like a failure if I quit. I don't want to disappoint people, let them down.
- It's selfish, irresponsible, to follow my bliss or do what I really want to do.
- I plan to do what makes me happy *someday* when I retire, have more time, money, etc.

As Paulo Coelho says, “One day you’re going to wake up and there won’t be any time left to do the things you’ve always wanted to do. One day. Day One. You decide.”

Why Is Unhappiness at Work a Problem?

“I haven’t even gone to bed yet and I’m already looking forward to coming home from work tomorrow.” – coffee mug slogan

Work is a third of our life.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics claims we work an average of 45 hours a week (which is up from ten years ago). In reality, it’s more than that. Pell reports that 92% of Americans own cell phones which means employees are now available around the clock. They often receive and send business emails and texts during lunch, breaks, evenings, weekends, even on vacations. The result? We’re no longer working 9 to 5. It’s more like 8 to 10.

Life is too precious to be unhappy for decades.

Do you know how *Webster’s Dictionary* defines the word precious? “Something of value, not to be wasted or treated carelessly.” Yet many of us are “wasting” and “treating carelessly” up to half our life.

Hating our work has become an accepted joke.

Kristin Sherry, a career coach who’s on a mission to help people love Mondays, told me, “Think about it, Sam. It’s a cultural norm to commiserate and complain about how bad our job is. It’s a source of commonality, a topic of conversation, to talk about Wednesday as ‘hump day’ and celebrate the end of the work week with ‘Thank God it’s Friday.’”

Waiting is a path to regrets.

Congresswomen Barbara Jordan said, “Waiting for recognition is criminally naïve.” Waiting for anything—for work we love or for management to give us the promotions, projects or pay raises we deserve—is an exercise in futility and frustration.

Unhappiness creates a ripple effect.

Many people stick with a toxic job out of duty or responsibility. What we don’t realize is our loved ones don’t want us to sacrifice ourselves for them. They want us to be happy. Sacrifice causes guilt, not gratitude. We think we can “leave work at work,” but unhappiness spills over into all our relationships. Furthermore, Albert Schweitzer said, “In influencing others, example is not the main thing; it’s the only thing.” When we spend decades at a job we hate, what are we modeling, what are we teaching our kids?

Unhappiness is unhealthy.

A friend was having heart palpitations, panic attacks, and was in and out of the hospital with thyroid issues caused by battling with her board and being sued by one of her employees. “I’m normally a very healthy person. I’ve never been that stressed or sick before, but I just kept going, going, going until my doctor warned me I was endangering my health.” She’s not alone. A 2015 Atlantic article by Gillian White said, “Health problems associated with job-related anxiety account for more deaths each year than Alzheimer’s disease or diabetes.”

Unhappiness undermines job performance and productivity.

In fact, *Harvard Business Review* did a special double-issue featuring metrics proving that well-being at work is not a nicety, it’s a necessity for an engaged workforce that is motivated to do quality work and take care of customers. As *HBR* says, “A happy employee is a better worker.”

What is the Premise?

“Change can be scary. You know what’s scarier? REGRET.” – Anonymous

The premise of this manifesto is, as my millennial friend Jackie put it, **“What if work didn’t have to suck?”**

What if, instead of accepting a toxic work situation and/or waiting for it to get better, we took personal responsibility to make it better?

What if there were ways to make work more meaningful right where we are, right now?

What is the Proposal?

“Don’t tell it like it is; tell it like you want it to be.” – Esther Hicks

The good news is, there are career hacks you can use to create meaningful work so it’s more like you want it to be. And you don’t have to win the lottery to do it.

You DO need to change the belief that work sucks and that’s just the way it is.

You DO need to understand that if work comprises a third of your life and you want life to matter, you need to figure out how to create work that matters so you can make a positive difference *at work* and *through* your work.

You DO need to decide that someday is not a day in the week and you're going to start being more proactive on your own behalf... now, not later.

That's what this Manifesto proposes. I hope these recommendations are a pebble in the pond of a more fulfilling future for you. I hope you choose to change your work—for good.

As Paulo Coelho says, "One day you're going to wake up and there won't be any time left to do the things you've always wanted to do."

"One day. Day One. You decide."

Caveat: If you work for, or are, an enlightened employer, congrats. If you are receiving and/or giving respect, learning opportunities, recognition for quality work, kudos. This manifesto is for the *other* 70% of people who are not in that situation—and would like to be.

What if, instead of accepting a toxic work situation and/or waiting for it to get better, we took personal responsibility to make it better?

What is the Process?

“My parents always told me I wouldn’t amount to anything because I procrastinated so much. I told them, ‘Just you wait.’” – Judy Tenuta

I’ve developed a process anyone can use to create more meaning—on and off the job. It’s based on the belief that being unhappy at work is not an option.

Neither is it an option to wait, hate, stagnate, or procrastinate.

Please understand, these career hacks are not a “formula” guaranteed to work for all people in all situations. They’re a framework based on real-life steps people have taken to create work they look forward to.

I’ll share quick descriptions of each option and include a few favorite success stories to show these aren’t idealistic, pie-in-the-sky recommendations; they’re real and they work.

Work and recreation don’t need to be separate silos. There are innovative ways to combine your passion and profession so you get paid to do what you love most and do best.

INITIATE

“At the moment of truth, there are either reasons or results.” – aviator Chuck Yeager

Years ago, I dated a navy pilot who flew jets off aircraft carriers. He asked me, “Do you know how you stop an aircraft carrier?”

“Nope.”

He said, “You don’t. Aircraft carriers have so much mass and momentum, you have to put the engines in full reverse and even then it takes up to 4 miles to stop.”

Hmm... Has your career turned into an aircraft carrier? Have you been doing what you’ve been doing for so long, that you’re going to just keep steaming along because your career has so much mass and momentum it’s hard to stop?

Lao Tzu said, “If you don’t change direction, you’re going to end up where you’re heading.”

You might want to take a few minutes to answer the questions in this “Has My Career Become an Aircraft Carrier?” Quiz to see where you’re headed and if it’s where you want to go.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how happy am I at work? (1 = I hate my job. 10 = love my job.)
2. Why do you feel that way? What are three things causing your happiness or unhappiness?”
3. If you’re unhappy, what have you done to address or improve the situation? Be specific. What actions did you take? What were the results or the lack of results?

4. How long have you been at this particular job and/or in this industry? What motivated you to pursue this profession or take this job?
5. Do you feel this job, type of work is a match for your skills, talents and interests? If so, why? If not, why not?
6. Do you intend to stay in your current job? If so, why? If not, why not?
7. Do you want to be in this industry or doing this type of work five years from now? Ten or twenty years from now? If so, why? If not, what do you want to do instead?

Regardless of your answers to these questions, it may be comforting to know you're not stuck on your aircraft carrier. You have options. You can improve quality of life on the carrier. You can point your carrier in other directions and enjoy different ports or parts of the ocean.

You can arrange to fly off the carrier for personally and professionally rewarding side trips. By the way, this might include taking your full paid vacation time. An August 29, 2017 *Wall Street Journal* article by Francesca Fontana reported "the average American earned 22.6 days of vacation, but only used 16.8 days." What's that about?!

You may even choose to jump ship and find a carrier more in alignment with your values, goals and priorities.

Whatever you do, don't passively accept that it's okay for work to be uninspiring and unrewarding.

And don't procrastinate or wait for things to get better.

As Michael Altshuler says, "The bad news is, time flies. The good news is, you're the pilot."

INTEGRATE

“Without passion, you don’t have energy. Without energy, you don’t have anything.”

– Warren Buffett

Work and recreation don’t need to be separate silos. There are innovative ways to combine your passion and profession so you get paid to do what you love most and do best.

What gives you energy? What are you good at? Who would pay you to do that FOR them or teach that TO them? How could you monetize what you do for fun or turn it into biz dev?

I played tennis several times a week with a realtor friend when I lived on Maui. Then, the recession hit and she said she couldn’t play tennis anymore because she had to focus on biz dev. I told her, “Kathy, there are two luxury hotels a minute away. Why not let the concierges know you’re a 4.5 player and offer to play with guests who are looking for a good match?” That’s what Kathy did. Within a week she was back on the courts, but now with visitors to the island who were potential clients. Following a satisfying match and a refreshing iced tea, they often asked what she did for a living. When they found out she sold real estate, they were curious if she had any properties for a good price, which led to showings and a steady stream of new sales.

The point? Why see your passion and profession as mutually exclusive? Perhaps you can integrate your hobby into your work so you have the best of both worlds. If you’re a photographer, maybe you can take pictures of employees of the month for the company newsletter. If you’re a musician, maybe you can host guest bands at quarterly concerts in your office building.

NEGOTIATE

“You don’t get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.” – Chester Karrass

Do you feel you’re not getting the pay raises, promotions, or projects you deserve? A Personnel Director told me, “Many employees suffer in silence until they finally get fed up and vote with their feet. They quit without ever telling their supervisor what’s wrong and without giving management a chance to address it.”

I understand there are many reasons that may happen. Employees may feel their requests would fall on uninterested ears or they’d get labeled as a “troublemaker.” The point is, if you’re thinking of quitting, you might as well at least try to fix what’s bothering you first.

A young mom told me she was receiving more and more assignments, which was a “vote of confidence” from her boss, but she felt she wasn’t “being there” for her kids. She was conflicted because she wanted to work part-time but worried her boss would conclude she wasn’t “serious” about her job. She spent weeks prepping how to ask for reduced hours. When she finally met with her manager, he didn’t even hesitate. He approved it on the spot.

What’s bothering you at work? What would it take for you to feel recognized and rewarded for your contributions? Prepare a win-win pitch to your boss so s/he sees the bottom-line wisdom in what you’re requesting so they’re motivated to say yes.

CREATE

“Life is so much simpler when you get your first serves in.” – Chris Evert

Agreed. Work satisfaction is so much simpler when you select a profession from the start that leverages what you love. However, if you're a recent grad, well-meaning people may advise you to “be sensible,” to study a major and get a degree in a “safe industry” where “you'll never have to worry about finding a job.” That cautionary advice is partially why millions of Americans are now in unfulfilling careers that are not a match for them.

If you get creative about your career, it can honor your unique talents so you “never have to work a day of your life.” For example, Dana Wright could always be found doodling and noodling in class. Her teachers used to get upset and tell her to “get her head out of the clouds.” Yet that very same penchant for putting images to words led to a successful career as a graphic artist. Have you been to conferences or retreats where a “muralist” visually depicted what was being said in an art-piece that served as a word painting of the event? That might have been Dana. The drawing that was once considered a distraction has become her secret sauce.

Pablo Picasso said, “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose is to give it away.” Your gift is what comes naturally to you. You might devalue it because it comes so effortlessly, you assume it comes just as easily to others. Au contraire. That talent you may be taking for granted is your ticket to a career where you earn a good living doing what you're good at.

ADVOCATE

“One person can make a difference and everyone should try.” – John F. Kennedy

Chances are, what makes you unhappy at work is making other people unhappy at work. You don't have to be “in charge” to be an advocate; you just need to “take charge” by being a problem-solver vs. a problem-reporter. My daughter-in-law landed her dream job working in Mission Control at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. However, after she had her first child and wanted to return to work, there wasn't a place she could breast-pump. Instead of getting upset, she advocated to management. They appreciated her pragmatic proposal for turning an unused space into a private room for women employees and gave it a green light. Voila. Potential problem solved. Happy employee. Happy management.

John F. Kennedy also said, “Our task is not to fix the blame for the past; it's to fix the course for the future.” What is undermining morale in your workplace? What are your suggestions for improving the culture and for making it more conducive to engagement? Your goal is to find solutions (not fault) and to advocate a feasible solution that's a win for all involved.

You don't have to be “in charge” to be an advocate; you just need to “take charge” by being a problem-solver vs. a problem-reporter.

CELEBRATE

“See something or someone as if for the first or last time. Then your days on earth will be filled with glory.” – Betty Smith

I keynoted a program on National Library Day. The district coordinator was brilliant in that he had reached out to patrons the month before and asked, “How have our librarians made a difference for you?” He opened the event by holding up and reading the actual letters from grateful customers. There were tears in the room as he read story after story of people whose lives had been changed because a librarian had gone above and beyond to assist them. One said, “I am the first member of my family to go to college. I’m now a proud John Hopkins grad and a reference librarian because YOUR reference librarian took time to mentor me.”

Afterwards, a librarian told me, “I’m almost embarrassed to admit this, but I was really burned out. It seems like all I do all day every day is get asked, ‘Where’s the bathroom?’ and ‘Can you tell that guy it’s my turn to use the computer?’” Hearing those letters reminded me why I got into this profession in the first place. From now on, I’m going to appreciate being in a position where I have daily opportunities to make a difference for people.”

Marcel Proust said, “Instead of seeking new landscapes, develop fresh eyes.” Maybe the answer to a frustrating job isn’t to find a new one. Maybe it’s to see it with fresh eyes and to focus on what’s right with it instead of what’s wrong with it.

COMPENSATE

“I want to live my days so my nights are not filled with regrets.” – D. H. Lawrence

Glenna Salsbury, former President of the National Speakers Association, told me there are three things we can do when we're unhappy with a situation.

- **We can AVOID it.** However, avoiding things doesn't make them go away; it makes them worse.
- **We can ALTER it.** But, in the “real world,” we may have no alternatives. We may have tried to improve our work situation—to no avail. We may work for an “It's my way or the highway” boss who holds all the cards and who's “holding us over a barrel.” Management's attitude may be “You don't like it here? Fine. Leave. There are a hundred people who would be happy to take your place.”
- **We can ACCEPT it.** I've found, to truly accept an unhappy situation, we need to see it as a trade-off. If we want to live our days so our nights (or years) are not filled with regrets; we've got to compensate for the 40-50 hours a week we don't like with something we do.

For example, a woman from Hawaii had been accepted to USC Film School and loved every minute of it. Then, both her parents got sick and she returned to the islands to take care of them. The only job she could find was at the post office. She was miserable. She didn't fit in, was not particularly good at her job and her days were filled with mind-numbing sorting. The only way she could accept doing what she didn't like during the week was by doing what she wanted on the weekends. She volunteered at the local public TV station and ending up crewing at film festivals and for documentaries. She told me, “Saturday's and Sunday's keep me sane.”

Another example is a woman who told me, “I got tired of hitting my head against the wall. I’d been lobbying for a leadership role for years but my boss is very controlling. I think he saw me as a threat and kept turning down my requests. I finally read the writing on the wall and got involved in my local Chamber of Commerce. I’m President Elect now and get to plan events and run meetings. It’s wonderful having people welcome my leadership instead of try to squash it.”

I call this the Godfather Plan. If you’re locked in and have no options, make your mind a deal it can’t refuse. You can accept less-than-ideal circumstances if you understand why it’s necessary and IF you give yourself something that makes you happy in exchange.

Sometimes the grass is green enough right where we are. Sometimes it’s greener elsewhere.

RELOCATE

“I am quite ready for my next adventure.” – Bilbo Baggins

Sometimes the grass is green enough right where we are. Sometimes it’s greener elsewhere. A switch to a different department or new location can give you a geographical fresh start.

And you don’t have to be unhappy to change things up. Case in point? Me.

A couple years ago I was on the phone with my son. Andrew must have sensed something in my voice because he asked, “Whazzup, Mom?”

I told him, “Andrew, I’m so exhausted, I don’t even want to get on the plane tonight. I’m taking the red-eye back to DC and then I fly out again on Friday to speak at a convention.”

He paused and then said, “Mom, there’s something about you I don’t understand. You’ve created a life where you can do anything you want, and you’re not taking advantage of it.”

Wow. Out of the mouth of a twenty-something.

He was right. It was time for my next adventure. Long story short. I gave away 95% of what I owned and took my business on the road for a year by the water.

Ironically, that year ended up NOT being about the water. Yes, I swam with dolphins, sailed the Chesapeake Bay and walked beaches on both coasts. However, what I remember most from my travels was how many people told me, “I’m going to do something like that... someday.”

To which I said, “Someday is not a day in the week.”

You may be thinking, “Well, you’re single, your kids are adults and you’re an entrepreneur, so you have the freedom to take off. I can’t. I’ve got family obligations, bills to pay.”

It’s true. I’m fortunate to be at an age and stage in my career where I had the autonomy to do this. And I understand that relocating is not an option for (or of interest to) many people. It is an option for some people.

Just last week a couple told me, almost in a state of wonder, “We’ve just become snowbirds. We’ve rented our home via AirBnB and will be spending the winter in California. We have friends there and can run our businesses virtually. Why didn’t this occur to us before?”

Maybe you don’t have to locate to another city or state; maybe you can relocate to your home. Many organizations are agreeing to telecommuting requests because it’s a way to reduce costs and attract/retain quality employees.

In fact, a 2014 *New York Times* article by Alina Tugend claims remote work is the workplace of the future and is “fast on the rise, increasing 79% from 2005-2012,” because it actually boosts productivity, morale and efficiency.

So, what’s your story? Are you doing meaningful work? Are you happy with your career and current job?

What is the Next Step?

“I don’t think my story is over yet.” – Serena Williams

So, what’s your story? Are you doing meaningful work? Are you happy with your career and current job? If so, good for you. If not, your story’s not over yet.

You DO have options. Maybe you can:

- INITIATE on your own behalf instead of waiting for things to get better
- INTEGRATE your passion into your profession so you have the best of both worlds.
- NEGOTIATE to remove or improve what’s bothering you instead of retiring on the job.
- CREATE work you love from the start by getting paid to gift your gifts to others.
- ADVOCATE for improved work conditions that are a win for all involved.
- CELEBRATE what’s right with your work and the difference you get to make.
- COMPENSATE by seeing this as a trade-off of what you don’t like for what you do.
- RELOCATE and telecommute, work virtually or find a new home for a fresh start.

Whatever you do, remember Yogi Berra’s tongue-in-cheek advice, “It gets late early out there.”

Choose to create a more meaningful career starting today, not someday.

Choose to change your work for good.

Choose to change before you have to.

Choose to change because you want to.

Choose to change while you still can. 📌



Info



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About the author

Sam Horn, Founder and CEO of The Intrigue Agency and TEDx speaker, is on a mission to help people create meaningful work and quality projects that add value for all involved. Her books previous books are *POP!*, *Tongue Fu!*, *IDEApreneur*, *ConZentrate*, *What's Holding You Back?* and *Washington Post* bestseller *Got Your Attention?* Her new book, *Someday is Not a Day of the Week*, will be available in 2018.

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