

## **Learn and Love Your Work**

Donald W. Mitchell

Do you work mainly to earn a living? Or do you love what you do so much you would do it for no pay?

If you just work to earn a living, how would your life be different if you loved your work instead?

I used to meet with a group of entrepreneurs who advised one another on how to be more successful. Once a year, our coordinator would ask us to spend two days away from the office to consider fundamental questions like why we worked.

I remember well a retreat that was held on rainy Cape Cod one fall. Equipped with drawing paper and crayons, I was asked to draw a picture of what I would be doing if I was having a great time at work.

To my surprise, I drew an image of a laptop computer screen set against the backdrop of a beautiful sunrise coming up over gorgeous, tall mountains in a desert setting. After a few minutes, I recognized the scene as typing while sitting on a patio in front of a cottage at a resort near Palm Springs, California. Having slept on the meaning of that image for a few days, I realized that I was dreaming about writing books on a laptop computer during the early-morning hours in the high desert there: After finishing my writing for the day, there would be plenty of time to enjoy the many local activities that interest me with family and friends.

The portrayal of that reverie provided quite a number of insights for me: I had no idea that my passion to write books ran that deep. Now, I do. Since then, I've coauthored or written six books and have many more books planned. I also plan my writing so that I can enjoy lovely outdoor views while at work in the mornings. I do as much of my writing as possible when my family is asleep so that my writing time doesn't take away from my time with them. My wife and I often collaborate on books which gives us another common interest. Since I made those changes in my work, life has been much lovelier. I also get a lot more writing done, and my writing is better appreciated by reviewers and readers.

What are the lessons for your life?

1. Try new things on a regular basis so that you will find more things that you love to do.
2. Rehearse new ways of working to find out what your reactions are.
3. Be open to new opportunities to shift your priorities to spend less time on what you don't like to do.
4. Consider how your loves, your work, and your income might overlap more often.
5. Improve your skill in those areas you love so your opportunities to do those activities will increase.
6. Involve your family in your interests and loves.

I was recently reminded of these experiences and principles while corresponding with Dr. Jon M. Robinson, a graduate of Rushmore University who has used his graduate studies to reorganize his life to spend more time doing what he loves, rather than what earns him more money.

In Dr. Robinson's case, the impetus to shift his focus was also an outside influence: He hurt his back and couldn't do the kind of work he used to as a tractor-trailer driver.

In a very real sense, this injury was less of a loss to him than it might seem. He didn't like that kind of work. Dr. Robinson knew that work could be more personally rewarding. As a teenager, he had managed a map store, a role that gave him much personal satisfaction. When technology changed to make free and low-cost online maps easily available, he knew that his career in map retailing was going to end.

Between then and becoming a tractor-trailer driver, Dr. Robinson worked first as a custom upholsterer and later as head sawyer in a saw mill. Although the money was good in each case, the psychological satisfactions weren't very good.

Dr. Robinson developed new interests through his reading and hobbies that included anthropology and museum management. As he thought about possible career choices, he dreamed of finding a career that would allow him to direct a museum and conduct anthropological research that would also make good use of his map-making skills.

Two issues presented temporary barriers: He didn't have any of the academic credentials to do that kind of work, and traditional schools in these fields require long hours of sitting in uncomfortable lecture-hall seats. Dr. Robinson's back couldn't hold up to the stress from that kind of seating.

But with a can-do attitude, Dr. Robinson found that he could learn what he needed to know by studying online and enrolled at Rushmore University. Much like I prefer to write in an ideal setting, Dr. Robinson prefers to do his studying under optimal conditions.

During his graduate studies, Dr. Robinson earned a Master of Science degree in Museum Science and Anthropology, and a Ph.D. in Environmental Anthropology. Reading about his research made me wish that I had investigated the possibilities of anthropology while I was an undergraduate.

His dissertation was based on extensive research into a parcel of Native American reservation land that was later sold to a rancher, only to be eventually repurchased by descendants of the Native Americans and turned into a tribal park. His research addressed questions like how the land use changed with these different owners and purposes, while also capturing the history of the people who lived on the land at various times.

As you can imagine, it can be daunting to go from working with your hands to being someone who uses his mind to make a difference. Dr. Robinson found that studying what he loved with an eye to turning that love into a vocation also added confidence and self-respect. He is now active in a historical society and assists a museum curator with historical research. On a day-to-day basis, many people seek out his advice and counsel about historical and anthropological questions.

In addition, he realized that others might benefit from understanding more about other cultures. To share what he learned, Dr. Robinson designed master's and doctor's programs in Intercultural Synergistics for Rushmore University students. He also plans to write a text that students in the

programs can use. He is excited about the chance to help others gain the kinds of insights he has about the importance and value of adapting to other cultures and circumstances.

What does he value most in life now? It's contributing to his children and sharing with them what he has learned. His son, Zeb, already shows an analytical bent of mind that fits with practicing anthropology. The family has enjoyed wonderful trips and vacations to visit important Native American locales such as Chaco Canyon and other pre-Colombian pueblo sites.

Naturally, his joie de vivre is inspiring to his family.

Does your work provide you and your family with the same kinds of opportunities to do what you love and to share more of your love with them?

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