

Is meaningful work all it's cracked up to be?

by Elizabeth Jewell Stephens



I googled ‘dream job’ today and it brought up 1,430,000,000 pages, while a ‘meaningful job’ search produced 304,000,000.

Yes, a job like the one depicted above looks as though it would be really cool, but why is meaning so front of mind these days?

Why are we on the search for meaning in our work day?

Is it because many of us work a day that is far beyond an 8-hour day, and the job takes such a huge slice of our lives that we have a legitimate desire to ensure it has meaning?

Perhaps it is because we have a ‘bad’ boss who doesn’t recognise our abilities and our personal strengths, let alone use them. Gallup research shows that “less than half of employees strongly agree they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day.”

Maybe we spend a lot of time comparing ourselves to our peers, via social media. Heaps has been written about that, but basically, most people portray themselves as 'having it all' – rarely 'warts and all'.

Are people honest when they fill in surveys?

Because, in most circles, it's socially unacceptable to be 'in it for the money', is it possible that all those surveys that say that people want meaning in their jobs and careers – and rarely money – give skewed results?

If so, we've all been conned into thinking that no-one wants to work for the money – so we'd better not either.

Money is meaningful too



For some people, doing a job simply must be to bring in money to put food on the table and a roof over the family's heads. That's a very valid reason to work – arguably *THE* most valid.

At the other end of the scale, think about how you could pursue your passions, including a passion to serve others, by earning buckets of money in your day job and being able to gift your cash and/or time lending a helping hand to others.

Other ways for a job to be meaningful

For quite a lot of people, just having a job is meaningful, and a source of great pride.

You may be a single working parent and your requirement is focussed around being able to work in school hours and taking time off for sick kids, school plays and school holidays. That's a dream job for you.

Consider satisfaction as well as meaning

There's a heap of US data [at this link](#), where Payscale have surveyed 454 different occupations to find out their wages, how much meaning they attributed to their job, and how much satisfaction they got out of it.

Many people have a job where they feel it's **not** 'making the world a better place' (this seems to be Payscale's definition of meaning), and yet the job gives them satisfaction. In this category we find quite a few accounting and computing careers, cooks and graphic artists, as well as others. The most stand-out of these is that carpark attendants rate 'meaning' as only 5% (the very lowest on the scale) and yet the role got 41% in satisfaction (not high, but *much* higher than 5%). There's more about patterns I observed from this data at the very bottom of this article, if you like such things.

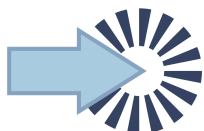
I know from many jobs and elements in roles I've undertaken over umpteen years, that boring can be satisfying. I'm a creative person and really at my very happiest when creating and coming up with new ways of doing things, but there's also a great sense of achievement from having finalised all sorts of routine tasks. Plus, if you are in a stressful role, with lots of responsibility for making the right decision from a very open-ended jumble of data, it can be time-out for your brain to be used in a very run-of-the-mill task.

What about finding meaning in your life in general?

Have you considered that your meaning can come from being a gorgeous person, a kind neighbour and a loving and wise parent? Or from pursuing a deeply loved leisure activity?



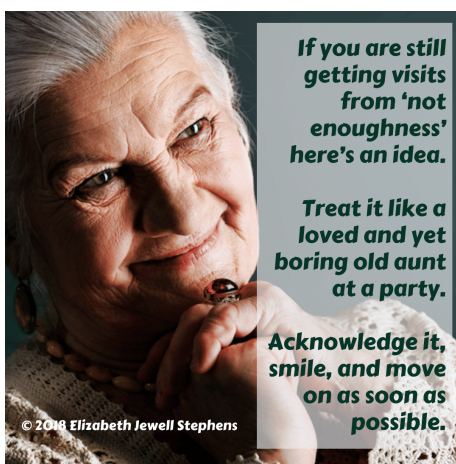
When I was a teenager at school we read a poem called something like ‘The Boxmaker’. It left its mark on me because it told of a guy who went to work each day and made boxes in a dull and routine way. After work he got his violin and played the most beautiful music, and his soul was nurtured. [If you know the poem and the poet, I’d appreciate a link please. I’ve not been able to find it.]



If you are looking for meaning in your career, is it because you’re missing meaning in your life?

If you ascertain your ‘big why’ – the reason you get up in the morning – you’ll likely be able to work out if your career contributes to that purpose. It’s possible that your career ticks another box that you have tucked away in your subconscious, one of your childhood stories about needing to be good enough for someone, or needing to prove your teacher wrong, and so on.

We all have such stories, and they are part and parcel of what we bring to life. It’s totally okay for you to be proving a point with the career you want, and you’ll be a more rounded and settled person if you can see and then acknowledge your stories – and move on.



Elizabeth Jewell Stephens was the founding editor of LivingNow magazine (1989 to 2017) and is now the creator and presenter of online programs for self worth at <https://www.selfworth.co>, for manifesting the life you want, starting with your job (<https://www.selfworth.co/CareerHelp>). Her business “just about went under” in the early part of this century and, when all seemed lost, someone introduced her to seven angels and a process for engaging their help. They saved the day, and they now feature in most of Elizabeth’s strategies for success.

My observations from payscale.com

I exported their table to a spreadsheet, and rearranged the figures, and found these interesting things from the data of 454 jobs surveyed:

\$100K+

There were 19 careers earning more than \$100K p.a., 12 were in health, one was a chief executive, three were in engineering or science, and three computer info (but all of those computer jobs came in under 50% in the 'meaning' stakes)

\$50K+

172 careers

67%*+ score for meaning

155 careers

67%*+ score for satisfaction

310 careers (oddly double the number of jobs with meaning)

(* 67% was my arbitrarily assigned benchmark)

