

Live Each Day as if It Is Your Last Day Alive

Make your own way in life to find happiness.

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Matthew Crawford woke up one morning and thought about how he was living his life. Matthew finished his doctorate in political philosophy at the University of Chicago and was hired by a prestigious think tank in Washington, D.C. After five months, he could not see the rationale for being paid a huge salary for what he did. The goal of his job seemed to be simply pleasing his superior. He was always tired and said he lost all self respect working in a job that had no discernible product or measureable result. Basically, he said he was managing information and his self-esteem depended on the opinions of others. Despite his income and title, he felt he was no more than a “clerk.”

Matthew quit his job and started doing motorcycle repair in a decaying factory in Richmond, Va. His journey from philosopher-intellectual to philosopher-mechanic is the arc of his book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*. Crawford believes that the office, at best, is a “place of moral education” with managers acting as therapists, concentrating on making workers into “team” players. The individual begins to believe he is alone, he is without any effect. He becomes passive and helpless and has difficulty imagining how he might earn a living otherwise.

It was the massification of higher education that has created this bleak scenario where everyone must go to college or else be viewed as suspect, stupid, and/or unemployable. After you get a degree you must take a job where you are doing smart, clean, and well-paid work. You must never accept a job that does not require a college degree. Except for “clean” the other adjectives no longer apply. Well-paid white color jobs are becoming scarce in today’s economy.

Matthew decided on doing something that was “meaningful” for him and became a motorcycle mechanic and ignored the expectations people had for him and his Ph.D. All his happiness took was his willingness to get his hands greasy. What is reflected in Matthew’s story is the beauty of human potential that lies in each of us who have the courage to make our own way in life.

LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN EVERY DAY AS IF YOU ARE GOING TO LIVE FOREVER

Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computer, is another wonderful example of someone who had the courage to drop out and make his own way. His biological mother was a young, unwed college graduate student, and she decided to put him up for adoption. She felt very strongly that he should be adopted by college graduates, so everything was all set for him to be adopted at birth by a lawyer and his wife. Except that when Steve was born they decided at the last minute that they really wanted a girl. So his parents, who were on a waiting list, got a call in the middle of the night asking: “We have an unexpected baby boy; do you want him?” They said: “Of course.” His biological mother later found out that adoptive mother had never graduated from college and that his adoptive father had never graduated from high school. She refused to sign the final adoption papers. She only relented a few months later when his parents promised that he would someday go to college.

And 17 years later Steve did go to college. But he naively chose a college that was almost as expensive as Stanford, and all of his working-class parents’ savings were being spent on his college tuition. After six months, he couldn’t see the value in it. He had no idea what he wanted to do with his life and no idea how college was going to help him figure it out. So he decided to move on with his life and drop out. He said it was pretty scary at the time, but looking back it was one of the best decisions he ever made. The minute he dropped out he stopped taking the required classes that didn’t interest him, and begin dropping in on the ones that did.

He slept on the floor in friends’ rooms, He returned coke bottles for the deposits to buy food with, and he would walk 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple. And much of what he stumbled into by following his curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on.

Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Because he had dropped out and didn't have to take the normal classes, Steve decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. Steve learned about serif and san serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great.

None of this had even a hope of any practical application in his life. But ten years later, when he designed the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to him and he designed it all into the Mac. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them. If he had never dropped out, he would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Think of how you are living your life. Imagine your life, as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and infinitely times more with nothing new in it. Every pain, joy, every thought and sign must be relived in the same sequence and succession, even this very moment of reading this paragraph. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over and over. Would not this thought change you as you are or perhaps crush you? The question in each and everything, "Do you want this more and innumerable times more?" would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress. Or would reliving every moment over and over be the ultimate confirmation of your life.