



LEAVING WORK BEHIND

An introduction to quitting
your job and finding
contentment in your life

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PART 1

WHY YOU'RE READING THIS

*“An unfulfilled vocation drains the color from a man's entire existence.”
~ Honoré de Balzac*

This manifesto is a call to arms for anyone who believes that spending an enormous proportion of your life working in a job you don't enjoy is unacceptable. It is for anyone who yearns for a level of freedom that traditional career paths do not offer.

This manifesto is for people who do not believe that they are capable of conceiving the necessary change in their life. It is for people who have tried and failed (perhaps multiple times) to create something of worth that can sustain their way of living in lieu of a “normal” job. And it is for people who have yet to set out on their journey, but are ready to start.

This manifesto is for anyone who is ready to implement enormous change and create a life that they have complete control over.

This manifesto is for anyone who wants to Leave Work Behind.

PART 2

WHAT “LEAVING WORK BEHIND” MEANS

“Often people attempt to live their lives backwards; they try to have more things, or more money, in order to do more of what they want, so they will be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are, then do what you need to do, in order to have what you want.”

~ Margaret Young

When I am asked to define “Leaving Work Behind,” I am always reminded of a parable written by the author Heinrich Böll: *Anekdote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral* – the literal translation of which is *Anekdote Concerning the Lowering of Productivity*. Don’t let the rather uninspiring title fool you.

It tells the story of an encounter between a European fisherman and an enterprising tourist. Read it carefully, immerse yourself within its environment, and muse on its moral.

In a port on the western coast of Europe, a man, wearing shabby clothes, lies in his fishing boat and dozes. A smartly dressed tourist is putting a new color film into his camera to take a photograph of the idyllic scene: blue sky, green sea with peaceful, snow-white crests of waves, black boat, the fisherman's red cap. Click. And again: click, for the second time.

The dry and almost hostile sound wakes the dozing fisherman, who sleepily sits up and reaches for his cigarette-packet. Before he finds what he is looking for, the eager tourist holds out a packet right under his nose, putting the cigarette not exactly into his mouth but placing it into his hand. A third click, that of the lighter, finishes off the zealous civility.

"You will make a good catch today," the tourist says.

The fisherman shakes his head.

"But I was told the weather is favorable."

The fisherman nods.

"So you won't put to sea?"

The fisherman shakes his head, the tourist gets increasingly nervous. He is deeply concerned about the welfare of the man in shabby clothes and frets over the missed opportunity.

"Oh, you don't feel well?"

Eventually, the fisherman switches from sign language to the spoken word. "I feel splendid. I've never felt better." He stands up and has a good stretch, as if keen to show off the athletic shape of his body.

The facial expression of the tourist grows more and more unhappy; no longer can he suppress the question that threatens to burst his heart: "But why, then, do you not put to sea?"

The answer comes promptly: "Because I already put to sea this morning."

"Did you make a good catch?"

"My catch was so good that I need not put to sea for a second time. I had four lobsters in my baskets and caught nearly two dozen mackerel."

The fisherman, finally awake, is now thawing, and slaps the tourist on the shoulder. "I even have enough for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow," he says to relieve the stranger's soul. "Do you want a cigarette?"

"Yes, please."

Cigarettes are being put into mouths, a fourth click; the stranger, shaking his head, sits down on the rim of the boat, and puts down the camera, for now he needs both hands to give his speech emphasis.

"I do not want to meddle in your personal affairs, but just imagine if you put to sea today for a second, a third, or perhaps even a fourth time, and you catch three, four, five, maybe even ten dozen mackerel. Just imagine that!"

The fisherman nods.

"You put to sea, not only today but tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, indeed, on every favorable day two, three, or perhaps four times – do you know what would happen?"

The fisherman shakes his head.

"In one year at the latest you would be able to buy a motor, in two years a second boat, in three or four years you may, perhaps, have a small trawler; with two boats or the trawler you would, of course, catch a lot more – one day, you would have two trawlers, you would..." for a few moments his enthusiasm leaves him speechless, "you would build a small cold store, perhaps a smoke-house, soon afterwards a marinating factory, fly around with your own helicopter, making out the shoals of fish and giving orders to your trawlers by radio. You could buy the fishing rights for salmon, open a fish restaurant, export lobster directly to Paris without a middleman – and then..." once again his enthusiasm leaves the stranger speechless. Shaking his head, saddened in the depth of his heart, and almost bereft of his holiday delights, he looks on the waters rolling peacefully into the harbour, where the uncaught fish jump merrily.

"And then," says he, but again his excitement leaves him speechless. The fisherman slaps him on the back. "What then?" he asks in a low voice.

"Then," says the stranger with quiet enthusiasm, "then you may relax here in the harbour with your mind set at ease, doze in the sunshine – and look out on the magnificent sea."

"But that is what I am doing just now," says the fisherman. "I relax here in the harbour with my mind set at ease and doze. Only the clicking noise of your camera disturbed me."

The tourist, thus put right, became pensive. There remained in him not a trace of pity for the fisherman in shabby clothes – only envy.

Leaving Work Behind is about creating a freedom that enables you to do what you want, when you please.

It's not about travelling the world or becoming a "digital nomad" (although that is certainly a path you can go down if you want to). You can Leave Work Behind from the comfort of your own home or you can do it by means of a round-the-world plane ticket – it's up to you.

It's not about making vast amounts of money either (but again, you can certainly do that if you want to). You can Leave Work Behind with piles of cash or a relatively modest income.

Leaving Work Behind is about creating clear separation between the modern marriage of "success" and financial wealth. True success is happiness, which is largely driven by factors other than financial wealth.

To Leave Work Behind is to be the fisherman. Are you ready to be the fisherman?

I was recently contacted by a popular blogger who has nearly 100,000 subscribers. He was emailing me in response to [a blog post I had written](#) in which I explained my relative dislike for audio and video as mediums for learning when compared to the written word. He was genuinely concerned that I was failing to engage with a huge number of potential subscribers due to me not having a podcast or active YouTube channel.

My response to him was simple: I don't like recording video and audio. I'm not passionate about it. I find it a fiddly and troublesome medium with which to create content. On the other hand, I love writing. So that's what I do.

I do what I want because I have the freedom to do what I want. I avoid things that I do not want to do – even if they could make me more money – because money is not my main priority.

I am the fisherman and my concerned blogging peer is the enterprising tourist. He may make more money than me and be deemed more “successful” by many, but he has to sell a bit of his soul and do work that he doesn't find rewarding to retain that title. Meanwhile, I'll keep on snoozing in my boat.

PART 3

MY JOURNEY TO LEAVING WORK BEHIND

*“Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.”
~ Abraham Lincoln*

You may be wondering what qualifies me to help you quit your job and build a life of true freedom. Well, my story starts as far back as I can remember.

When growing up, adult life looked like total freedom to me. I was son to a stay-at-home mother and a self-made millionaire father. He had made more money at the age of 23 than many of us could dream of.

Because of that influence, the entrepreneurial way of life seemed normal to me. At no point in my childhood did I expect to do anything other than follow in my father’s footsteps and create my own successful business.

Unfortunately, I made the mistake of assuming that such a situation would simply emerge out of thin air.

I was not academically gifted and received average (or below average) grades throughout school. Report cards would often say something along the lines of, “Shows promise but is simply not interested in learning.” They were correct to an extent, but what I discovered many years later is that I wasn’t uninterested in *learning* per se; I was simply uninterested in learning much of what school had to teach me.

I left school with woeful grades and only *just* managed to get into college, studying a topic that I had little interest in (History and Politics). I attended college because that’s what you’re supposed to do when you leave school, not because I had any clear plan. I spent the following three years doing very little work and at the end had a poor-quality degree to show for it. That I managed to leave college with a degree at all is a minor miracle.

It would be fair to say that my academic career was not a spectacular success. And yet, I still fully expected to succeed in life. I just hadn’t figured out how.

When I graduated I had no plans. I moved back in with my father and he offered me a part time role in his property company for modest pay as a short-term solution to my unemployment.

Fast-forward five years and I was still there. I had managed to prove to my father that I was worthy of a permanent role and had grown into a position that afforded a great deal of autonomy and responsibility. By many people’s standards I was doing very well for myself.

However, I was about to be hit by a bombshell – an epiphany that would change my life forever.

It took me half a decade of employment to come to the sudden realization that I was not living the life I had once expected of myself. I was no entrepreneur; my successful business was nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, I was not in charge of my life. As is the case for the majority of people, how I spent my waking hours was often dictated by the responsibilities of my job.

I realized, seemingly overnight, that I could not go on living the same life. I had to enact huge change. I needed to fulfill an expectation that had lived with me for as long as I could remember.

That epiphany occurred in May 2011. In December 2011 I quit my job. By August 2012 I was earning more from my online business than ever I had from my job while working just a fraction of the hours. My income has climbed steadily ever since, as has the freedom I have to live and work as I please.

You can read through every single monthly income report from the day that I decided to Leave Work Behind [here](#).

I have worked from a cruise ship in the Caribbean, a beachfront lodge in Turkey, my sister's house in Houston, a villa in Orlando, a hotel in Belgrade, and many other places. I have created a business, out of nothing, that requires a relatively limited number of hours to maintain.

I didn't follow a get-rich-quick scheme to achieve this, nor did I discover a so-called "shortcut" to success. Instead, I hustled hard and relied largely on my own intuition; often ignoring both conventional wisdom and the lessons taught by most "make money online" bloggers. I persisted through failure, fought doggedly against self-doubt and remained stubbornly convinced that I would achieve my goals.

You can learn a lot more about how I got to where I am now [here](#).

Thankfully, I did achieve my goals. Not only that, but I created a blog that transformed from an accountability journal for my own journey in Leaving Work Behind into a community of people all working towards the same goal.

Having Left Work Behind myself and built a blog that people go to for answers in doing the same, I feel that I have a responsibility to deliver a solution.

This manifesto is the first step of the solution.

PART 4

WHY YOU MUST ABANDON CONVENTIONAL THINKING

“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.”

~ George Bernard Shaw

A lot of what you know is wrong.

It's not your fault – you have been raised and conditioned to think in a certain way, just as I was. It took me years (and actually achieving the freedom I so strongly desired) to fully understand how damaging the conventional way of thinking is when it comes to living a fulfilling life.

Consider the abject resignation that is rife amongst so many of us – the attitude that working in a job you don't like is somehow “normal” – something to be tolerated rather than changed.

Consider the blind acquiescence to so many compromises in life that one should simply not put up with: the handful of vacation days, not being able to attend important events due to work, not being able to see your kids grow up as much as you would like, spending more waking hours in an office than in your own home...the list goes on.

Consider the acceptance that so many of us have for “our lot in life” – as if our circumstances were forced upon us (as opposed to being a direct result of our actions).

Consider society's demands on our every working day. One must work for approximately eight hours – occasionally a little less, often more. Whether you are able to get your work done in one hour or ten makes no difference – you still clock in and clock out at the behest of the powers that be.

The above restrictions probably feel normal to you. And while they certainly represent the norm for most of us, the circumstances under which we operate do not constitute a “normal” way of living in terms of enabling you to live a truly rewarding life.

When it comes to Leaving Work Behind, you must discard most of the conventional thinking that drives your behavior. You must consciously empower yourself to view the world through a different lens. You must believe that there is another way.

PART 5

MOVING FORWARDS

*“Everything you want should be yours.”
~ Richard Koch*

Your life should be defined largely by fulfillment, not by desire.

You should love the work that you do. You should be in a happy relationship with someone you love. You should be able to enjoy the desired social influences in your life unreservedly. You should have enough money to afford a style of living that fulfills you. Any aspirations that you may have for achievement or service to others should be met.

You should *expect* all of the above, not dream of it. To dream of it is to make it imaginary. In order to make it real, you must understand that each of your desires are achievable and appreciate that making them a reality is far easier than you may currently think.

Just because resignation has become the status quo in your life does not mean that it should be your long-term outlook. If you apply yourself to your efforts in building a better life, using no greater assets than what you currently have available to you, you too can Leave Work Behind.

PART 6 WHAT NEXT?

*“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.”
~ Theodore Roosevelt*

This manifesto represents the core message of Leaving Work Behind and serves as the foundation of everything that I teach.

But it is just the first step in a long journey that never truly ends. Leaving Work Behind isn't a destination – it's a way of life. It is something you experience every day you wake up in the knowledge that *you* are in control of what you do.

Some of you will have got hold of this manifesto by signing up to the Leaving Work Behind newsletter, but if you didn't then please take a moment to [sign up now](#). I've got a path plotted out for you but I can't guide you along it unless you allow me to by subscribing!

If you have any questions at all then please do not hesitate to [get in touch](#). I am always available on the other end of an email and would love to hear from you.

Finally, if you have found this manifesto valuable then I would be extremely grateful if you would share it amongst your family, friends, peers and colleagues. Put [a link to the manifesto](#) on your blog if you have one. Email it to someone. Print it out and post it through someone's mailbox. Put it in a bottle and cast it out to sea. I am on a journey to help as many people as I can and your support is greatly appreciated.

On behalf of the entire community, I would like to welcome you to [Leaving Work Behind](#). Things may never be the same for you again.

~Tom Ewer