

CHAPTER 2

The Future of Work Has Arrived

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and You

A month before I quit my job at Yale School of Management, I was at a holiday party hanging out at an exceptional cheese plate. I was deep into a manchego block when a friend of a friend walked over to me.

“Hey, I heard you’re quitting your job to start your own business. You’re doing something with life coaching, right?”

I was immediately taken aback, my manchego slice frozen in midair. This guy is a successful entrepreneur. I had big plans to be a successful entrepreneur too, but I hadn’t even given notice at my job yet. I was in transition but didn’t quite know how to talk about it. Naturally, I wanted to sound like I had my shit together. I also wanted to smack the words life coach right out of his successful mouth. Career coaches are often lumped in with life coaches. But I am most definitely *not* a life coach. I’m missing a warm and fuzzy heart to help strangers through nonwork-related issues. So, I countered his assumption:

“Actually, I’m preparing people for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

Now it was his turn to freeze. I felt the awkward silence between us and imagined a giant WTF conversation bubble appear next to his head. A polite smile spread across his face. He leaned back and looked around, a classic conversational move that signals *I’ve made a huge mistake talking to this one*.

“Okay. Cool. Well, good luck in your business endeavors.” And then he turned away, leaving me to my manchego. I learned two things in this conversation. #1: I needed to work on my professional story. #2: Talking about the Fourth Industrial Revolution at parties is awkward as fuck.

Career potential and peril

“I don’t think anyone can do long-term career planning with any confidence. We make assumptions about the indispensability of human beings but machines are already doing things we thought only humans might be able to.”—The Guardian¹³

The Fourth Industrial Revolution isn’t exactly a household term. We can thank Klaus Schwab, the executive chairman and founder of the World Economic Forum (WEF), for this clumsy phrase. We can’t fault him though; he’s an engineer and economist, not a wordsmith. He’s a serious man who’s responsible for leading the World Economic Forum, a global nonprofit that brings together leaders for private-public cooperation to, “shape global, regional and industry agendas.”¹⁴

¹³Guardian (US), “Jobs.”

¹⁴World Economic Forum, “Mission.”

The term *Fourth Industrial Revolution* emerged in 2016 from the annual World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland. The Forum convenes an annual meeting in Davos where the world's richest people and government leaders gather to talk about the world's most pressing problems and discuss how rich people will solve them.

At the start of the 2016 WEF Davos meeting, Schwab produced the report, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution." In it, Schwab named the technological and cultural shifts that define the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In particular, he wrote of the rise of technology like artificial intelligence, big data, Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, and cloud technology, as the biggest sources of disruption. These shifts mean that businesses will need to create new business models to stay relevant. He noted that the "average lifespan of a corporation listed on the S&P 500 has dropped from around 60 to approximately 18 [years]."¹⁵ Translation: businesses are struggling to stay relevant because new technology is destroying their business models.

New technology combined with increasing computer processing power will speed up the pace at which these technologies are adapted. Together, it creates the perfect technological innovation storm to destroy the professional lives of workers around the world. I'm simplifying a 172-page report here so your eyes don't glaze over. To say that things are changing due to new technology is an understatement. So, here's how Schwab puts it: "The changes are so profound that, from the perspective of human history, there has never been a time of greater promise or potential peril."¹⁶

¹⁵World Economic Forum, "Fourth Industrial Revolution."

¹⁶*Guardian* (US), "Fourth Industrial Revolution."

Peril. That's the word he uses to describe where we are in history in terms of technological change. Not only did Schwab carve out this period of change and name it, but he also wanted us to see that this period of disruption poses a threat to our professional livelihoods. The WEF put some numbers to the havoc that technological innovation might rain down on our professional lives. The 2016 report estimated that 7.1 million jobs might be lost between 2015 and 2020, the majority of which would be in white-collar office roles.

When the global elite says technology is about to change everything we know about the world of work, the world listens. After the report's publication, the internet lost its collective mind. The report spawned thousands of articles about the future of work featuring stories about robots taking all the jobs. Inc.com published an article called, "Robots May Take More Than 5 Million Jobs by 2020."¹⁷ *USA Today*, wrote an article titled, "Study: Robots to nab 5.1 million jobs by 2020."¹⁸ The *Guardian* was more creative with the ideas, writing the headline: "Terminator, Robocop and Atlas the Robot. For workers the plot is grim."¹⁹

Talking about robots taking jobs was all the rage in 2016. Articles like "10 high-paying jobs that will survive the robot invasion" by Workopolis Blog, and "Technology Will Replace Many Doctors, Lawyers, and Other Professionals," by *Harvard Business Review*, showed the range of ways new technology will change our career paths and plans. Predicting the future is relatively easy. There is no pressure to be right. All you need is some stats, a good story, and an audience.

¹⁷Inc., "Robots."

¹⁸*USA Today*, "Study."

¹⁹*Guardian* (US), "Terminator, Robocop and Atlas the Robot."

Two years after the WEF's original report, the numbers have shifted. In the 2018 report, "The Future of Jobs," the WEF estimated 75 million jobs will be displaced by artificial intelligence and automation. However, 133 million new jobs will be created.²⁰ The pace of change has increased.

While the numbers may shift over time, the takeaway is clear: technology is changing how organizations operate and the type of skills needed to succeed in the modern workplace. It's also changing how we navigate our careers.

Netflix and skill

Companies are in the midst of a digital transformation from the old economy to the new economy.

The 20th century was dominated by companies that produced physical objects: Coca-Cola, IBM, General Motors. Now, a new type of company dominates the 21st century. They're the household names that run in the background of our daily lives: Amazon, Alphabet/Google, Facebook, and Netflix.

Technology is at the heart of their business model. They specialize in digital products and services. These companies are agile and relentlessly consumer focused. They're able to launch new digital products in a short amount of time. They also attract highly skilled workers. Employees who work at these companies, and ones like them, work on challenging, complex problems. They have access to learning opportunities to build new skills that keep them relevant in the workplace.

²⁰World Economic Forum, "Jobs."

Companies are upgrading their business models while digitizing their organizations. They are turning to digital platforms and specialized software to get work done. Increasingly, leaders collect and use large amounts of data to make critical business decisions. The transformation to digital has resulted in the need for employees with a new set of skills.

Employers want employees with digital skills. Technology and digital fluency are no longer limited to IT workers. Digital is becoming embedded into the fabric of our jobs. If you're an employee who doesn't understand data analytics, struggles to learn new software, or can't collaborate with software engineers to build digital products, you're at risk of falling behind in the new economy. If you work for an employer who operates in the old economy, you are increasingly at risk of professional irrelevance in the future.

The term *future of work* is often used in discussions about our technological transformation because it captures the confusion, change, and opportunity in three easy words. However, it's completely misleading. The future of work is already here.

While writing this chapter, I stumbled on a company that perfectly captures the future of work as it's happening now. The Pudding, a six-person startup, is an example of an organization that's evolving and augmenting traditional roles due to new technology. The company examines ideas through visual essays. They use data and research to communicate complex topics. They're a mashup of data engineers and journalists. Everything about their company and jobs is experimental. On their company website they describe the roles this way:

“Much of our work is done autonomously, with individuals choosing their essays and owning the whole

*story, from research to code. Each team member can do every step: research and reporting, data analysis, design, writing, and code.*²¹

Everyone at The Pudding works as journalism engineers. They research. They code. They manipulate data. They tell fascinating stories. The result is incredible data visualizations that reframe how we understand stories. They've produced stories on everything from which rapper has the largest vocabulary in hip-hop (answer: Aesop Rock) to a visual history of Air Jordans to the Largest Ever Analysis of Film Dialogue by Gender Ever.

Their work is creative, data-driven, and interdisciplinary. They also pay well, especially compared to traditional journalism. According to PayScale, traditional editors make about \$82,000 on the high end of salaries. Traditional journalist roles make \$72,000 on the high end, \$24,000 on the low end. Yet starting journalism engineers at The Pudding make \$70,000 a year. Senior journalism engineers make \$100,000. Editors at The Pudding make \$115,000 year. I learned this because they're radically transparent about their salaries, posting them for everyone to see on their website, another move toward shaping a new world of work.

The future of work has already arrived

Asking if robots will take your job is really just like shouting into a Magic 8 Ball. There isn't a clear answer. The reality is far more

²¹The Pudding, "About."

nanced than a bunch of robots showing up one day and saying, “Hey, give me your job.”

If we ask our modern-day Magic 8 Ball, Google, if robots will take our jobs, the results range anywhere from *it is certain* to *my sources say no*. According to a 2017 Pew Research Survey, “...only three in 10 workers think it’s at least somewhat likely that their own jobs will be mostly done by robots or computers during their lifetimes.”²² Yet we sure are nervous about the possibility. The same survey found that 72 percent of all Americans are worried about robots or computers taking over human work.

So, how do we make sense of a world filled with robot hype? To start, we have to acknowledge we’re in a period of transition. While the Fourth Industrial Revolution isn’t exactly on the tip of everyone’s tongue, the rapid pace and scale of new technology will reshape the workplace in the next five years. Just because you don’t see it happening doesn’t mean it won’t happen to you. In fact, if you happen to be a college educated American in a white-collar job, you’re the most likely to think it won’t happen to you. According to a 2017 Gallup survey of Americans’ attitudes toward AI, 85 percent of Americans with a bachelor’s degree or higher are not worried about their jobs becoming eliminated, compared to 72 percent of Americans without a bachelor’s degree.²³ The problem with people in the 85 percent is that they’re the most likely to drown in the technological tsunami headed our way because they weren’t listening to the warnings.

²²Pew, “Automation.”

²³Gallup, “Artificial Intelligence.”

Robots in the workplace

Asking whether or not robots will take your job isn't helpful for career planning. The better question is: How will new technology augment your job in the near future? You must examine the ways in which new technology will change your job and ultimately your career path.

Whether or not a career path or job is at risk of being eliminated depends on the industry. The manufacturing and retail industry are at most risk of having robots displace workers. Amazon is leading the way in this. Amazon added an estimated 75,000 robots to its warehouses in 2017. It's estimated that robots will make up 20 percent of their employee base soon. Amazon, of course, is also famous for opening Amazon Go, a cashier-less store in Seattle. Showing proof of concept that a store may not need cashiers after all resulted in yet another flurry of articles about robots taking jobs. And what Amazon does, others follow, trying to keep up in a fiercely competitive business world.

Most of the focus right now on the future of work is on robots, in part because we can see them. Bright yellow robots moving palettes around a warehouse creates a nice visual for anyone reporting on the future of work. But that same visual causes those who don't work in warehouses, often those working in offices, to ignore the technology that's changing their workplace behind the scenes.

Artificial intelligence technology doesn't always present itself as bright yellow robots. Artificial intelligence is powered by advances in machine learning. AI usually takes the form of a seemingly benign software program that crunches a ton of data. Unless you are a machine learning engineer or data scientist, it's harder to see the technology's effect on the workplace.

Machine learning and artificial intelligence are used in the workplace to automate tasks to increase efficiency and productivity within an organization. Understanding these technologies is key to understanding how the workplace will change even if you can't physically see the technology shaping the change. This is the technology that will reshape the white-collar workforce and wreck the careers of the 85 percent of people who think it won't happen to them. The transformation will happen slowly yet cut deeply.

In June 2018, Bloomberg reported in an article titled "Amazon's Clever Machines Are Moving From the Warehouse to Headquarters," that Amazon's push to automate its workforce isn't just limited to the warehouse. Amazon had replaced the department that made decisions about inventory with a powerful automated platform that "predicts what shoppers want and how much to charge for it."²⁴ Amazon is a powerhouse in data collection. Data powers machine-learning technology, which gives a company the power to make predictive models that replace people. These are people who made six figures and likely had MBAs, given that Amazon hires the most MBAs of any company. Executives weren't spared either, as Bloomberg reported. They were moved around or chose to move out, many noting that they were unsurprised by the development.

Amazon makes the headlines, but stories like this pop up constantly if you know where to look. In Japan, Fukoku Mutual Life Insurance company replaced 34 of its workers with an automated system to calculate insurance payouts. The company estimated it'll save \$1.2 million since they won't have to pay the salaries of the laid-off employees. They also anticipate it'll increase

²⁴Bloomberg, "Clever Machines."

productivity by 30 percent. On Wall Street, Goldman Sachs has slowly replaced its traders with automated trading platforms, going from 600 in 2000, to just two in 2017.

In the first month of 2019, Accenture, a large, multinational consulting firm, publicized a new automation software, SynOps, that they used to automate 40,000 jobs to, “streamline and automate processes in areas such as finance and accounting, marketing, and procurement.”²⁵ Accenture says nobody lost their jobs; they simply retrained those workers. Accenture is now selling this software to its clients to help them automate their systems and save money.

There are thousands of products built on AI technology that aim to do the work humans normally do in the workplace. From virtual AI assistants that schedule meetings to AI-powered chatbots that interview candidates to predictive algorithms that identify prospective sales candidates to algorithms that manage people, this technology is transforming our work and reshaping the workplace.

It’s tempting to think you’ll be spared because you’re very good at your job. But this transformation isn’t about talent; it’s about cost. Companies are eager to use technology to replace work done by a human because it’s cheaper for the company’s bottom line. I write “a human” but it’s actually hundreds of humans. After all, machines don’t need breaks, vacation, health benefits, retirement contributions, raises, or stand-up desks. They also don’t create productivity problems with coworkers when their lunch gets eaten from the communal fridge.

The effect of new technology in the workplace is more than having robot coworkers. For many, your job won’t be eliminated

²⁵Bloomberg, “Accenture.”

outright by robots. Instead, the nature of work will shift and the skills required to stay relevant in your career will change. The result is that in five years, your current job may not look like the one you have now. And when you try to make a career change and apply for new jobs, you may find that you no longer have the required skills for the jobs you want.

The future is hybrid jobs

Thinking about the ways an employer will replace us with technology is a bit grim. But within this technological chaos is opportunity. The workplace transformation is creating hybrid jobs. Hybrid jobs are evolving from traditional roles and offer greater job and financial security in our new world of work.

Hybrid jobs are the roles of the new economy. In the report, “The 21st-Century Career,” the multinational consulting firm Deloitte defined hybrid jobs as “jobs that create whole new job categories by mashing up disciplines.”²⁶

They continue: “These ‘renaissance jobs’ are those that combine technical expertise (in one or more domains) with expertise in design, project management, or client and customer interaction. They might be titled ‘experience architect’ or ‘IoT engineer’ or ‘user experience designer’ or ‘security consultant,’ and they typically involve knowledge of a technical domain, problem-solving capability, project management, and often industry expertise.”

As employers change their business models, employees should change too. Changing careers offers you a chance to

²⁶Deloitte Insights, “Changing Nature of Careers.”

improve your professional life. How you define improvement is up to you. For many, improvement means more money and more job security. Hybrid jobs offer you both. The best-paying jobs that offer career security, outside of government jobs, are hybrid jobs. These job openings will be in roles that combine technical abilities, people skills, and domain expertise.

We already see the evolution to hybrid jobs happening. Digital designers are a hybrid job that's hiding in plain sight in most organizations. Over the last 15 years, graphic design roles have evolved into digital design roles. On top of understanding graphic design principles of color, layout, and typography, digital designers have a set of digital skills that cross an organization. Digital designers must understand user experience, wireframes, user flows, information architecture, and email marketing. They have HTML and CSS coding skills. JavaScript is a bonus. They also have power skills like creativity, collaboration, and communication that allow them to work across teams. For example, a digital designer at an ecommerce company must collaborate with different departments, requiring an understanding of sales funnels, marketing campaigns, and user data to inform design choices.

With a hybrid skill set, it is no wonder digital designers are paid well. According to PayScale, a digital designer's top salary is \$78,000. On top of that, digital designers have the foundational digital skills that allow them to move into more specialized roles like interaction designer, which commands a top salary of \$117,000.

The flip side of the digital designer's growth is that graphic designers without digital skills will find fewer opportunities in the marketplace over the next decade. They'll also make less than digital designers. The top salary of a graphic designer is \$61,000.

Hybrid jobs come in all shapes and sizes. They defy traditional categories. With the introduction of artificial intelligence into the workplace, AI-adjacent roles are emerging as a type of hybrid job. AI-adjacent roles are the ultimate mashup job. They require technical knowledge, data fluency, communication skills, and industry domain knowledge.

The *New York Times* reported on how algorithms are changing traditional roles in the retail industry. In retail, fashion buyers who are normally tasked with making purchasing decisions, are increasingly using algorithms to do the task. These algorithms make fashion decisions by predicting the next big trend, a task normally associated with creative geniuses. With so much consumer data, predicting trends and stock levels is left to the machines, no intuition needed. The reporter shared how drastic the shift is:

*“Retailers adept at using algorithms and big data tend to employ fewer buyers and assign each a wider range of categories, partly because they rely less on intuition...At Le Tote, an online rental and retail service for women’s clothing that does hundreds of millions of dollars in business each year, a six-person team handles buying for all branded apparel—dresses, tops, pants, jackets.”*²⁷

The retail industry is using fewer buyers in the decision-making process. Instead, retailers are increasingly hiring people who can, “stand between machines and customers.” These AI-adjacent roles

²⁷*New York Times*, “White-Collar Work.”

are filled by employees who understand the machines and the business needs.

Hybrid roles that require AI skills are on the rise. The research firm Burning Glass Technologies, found that almost 70,000 job postings in 2017 requested AI skills, a 252 percent growth over job postings in 2010. These jobs weren't all in the tech industry. Instead, they found "a wide range of industries including retail, health care, finance and insurance, manufacturing, information and professional services, technical services, and science/research."²⁸

Hybrid jobs and AI adjacent roles might seem a bit out of reach from where you sit in your career. I assure you they are not. You can learn the skills and domain knowledge to get these jobs. Better yet, they're the jobs that will pay you better and position you as an in-demand worker among employers of the future.

It's not you, it's them

At this point you might be saying, "But I'm so good at my job." And you might very well be very good at your job. But consider this: companies value efficiency and productivity. Humans, even at their best, are not as productive and efficient as machines. Technology has advanced enough to give companies the ability to automate some of the work that humans do. Companies are doing the math and finding it cheaper to automate than to employ people.

Leaders of these companies have stated outright that they plan to eliminate jobs. The leader of Citibank declared in a 2018 interview that it will get rid of half of its 20,000 staff in technology

²⁸Burning Glass Technologies, "Artificial Intelligence."

and operations over the next five years. Tim Thornsby, the CEO of Barclays, the massive global investment bank, put it this way in an interview in June 2018: “If your job involves a lot of keyboard hitting then you’re less likely to have a happy future.”²⁹

That’s some brutal advice from someone who just got \$24 million to start his new job at Barclays. CEOs never talk about how they might be automated. Tim sounds like a jerk for saying that, but he’s not wrong. He’s simply translating the Fourth Industrial Revolution into terms we can understand.

Older workers are already experiencing the brutality of a rapidly changing workforce.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently wrote about the almost eight million older workers who are out of work despite a booming job market. They are formerly skilled workers who can’t find a job. The article profiles an environmental engineer with a bachelor’s degree who has sent out over 400 résumés without getting hired. He has faced years of unemployment. Age discrimination is part of the issue. But there’s another factor at play: his skills are less relevant in today’s market. He lacks the digital fluency to land middle- to high-paying jobs. He and many like him are stuck with part-time, temporary jobs that don’t pay the bills or offer health benefits.

If you don’t understand how new technology is used or possess digital literacy skills, you’re at risk of becoming less valuable in the workforce. Think of older employees you’ve met who struggle with email, phone conferencing, or PDFs. That might be you in your later thirties or forties, struggling with basic machine-learning technology but far from retirement age. The technological revolution we’re experiencing right now is bigger

²⁹MarketWatch, “Big Banks.”

than the digital revolution, which took us from analog to digital. It requires digital and data fluency, adaptability, and rethinking of the skills we need to be successful in our careers.

You weren't raised to think about how your skills would diminish in value by the time you're 30 or 40. But we're in a new world of work now and all of us must think like mini-futurists to navigate our careers. To succeed, you must adapt, not react, to changes in the workplace.

The Agile Worker

Agile: able to move quickly and easily.

The *New York Times* recently profiled Ms. Sow, a woman whose work exemplifies our new world of work. In her interview with the *New York Times*, Ms. Sow struggles to define a single job title that captures what she does. She's a producer, writer, podcaster, connector, strategist, and influencer. Her work history defies traditional career paths:

"I don't think there's a title for what I do," is how Aminatou Sow, 33, describes her career, which takes many forms. Certainly, she is best known for hosting Call Your Girlfriend, a podcast devoted to sprawling conversations with her friend and collaborator Ann Friedman. Its popularity, with 6.1 million downloads in 2017, led to a live tour that sold out shows in New York, Washington, San Francisco, and Boston this fall, and the pair are writing a book, Big Friendship, for release in 2020. But Ms. Sow, who lives in Brooklyn

and speaks five languages, also works as a digital consultant and strategist for brands such as Smartwater and State Farm. Previously, she was at Google, running marketing for the company's civic initiatives. She also moderates panels and does live interviews with public figures, including Hillary Clinton and the gymnast Aly Raisman, and she co-founded Tech LadyMafia, a network that links women working in the digital economy. When Ms. Sow is pressed to come up with one single job title that encompasses all she does, she looks back at the last year, figures out what category of work made her the most money, and says she is that. Last year, that made her a digital strategist.³⁰

Ms. Sow is the future of work. She has multiple talents and areas of knowledge. Her skill set is fluid, allowing her to apply her diverse skills when new opportunities arise. Agile workers like her are creative and collaborative. They stay one step ahead of the game, looking to the future for inspiration and possibility.

You don't have to be as high profile as Ms. Sow to embrace an agile career. However, you must shift from the old-school model, where careers are defined by job titles and degrees to one where careers are shaped by what you're able to do.

The curious opportunist

As you start the career change process, shift from the traditional career ladder mindset to the agile worker mindset. An agile

³⁰*New York Times*, "Aminatou Sow."

worker customizes their career path. They focus on skills, not job titles. Agile workers seek out people who excite and inspire them, learning from new perspectives. They build deep domain experience. Once they have a hold of it, they seek the next opportunity, whether it exists or not.

The agile worker is comfortable with ambiguity. They don't have to have it all figured out to make a step forward. They can experiment with a new job and, if it doesn't work, they know how to find a new opportunity.

The fabulous thing about the agile worker mindset is that if you wanted to become a data scientist or develop your communication skills to make an impact on climate change policy, you could start the process tomorrow. The agile worker framework gives you permission to change. Agile workers aren't limited by their major in college or intimidated by learning new skills.

The agile worker mindset gives you space to embrace and explore your curiosity. If, through the process of discovery, you decided that data science or communications wasn't your thing, the agile framework gives you space to start over and learn more.

Curiosity is your career BFF

My first “real job” after graduating from college was in a mind-numbingly boring role at a Fortune 500 company. I was a faceless worker in a sea of cubicles tasked with doing data entry for eight to 10 hours a day. As we approached the end of the quarter, we were required to work mandatory overtime, which meant 14 hours a day of data entry. It was the kind of place where we had meetings about upcoming meetings, and middle management fought each other to prove who could micromanage us the hardest.

As I plodded through days at the bottom of the Corporate America food chain, I sunk into a deep funk. I am part of a generation that was raised to think a college degree was the path to my dream job. I expected to graduate and sail into a job that merged my passions with big paychecks. The job I landed after graduation was the opposite of my passion. My passion was foreign languages and cultures, not checking the accuracy of hundreds of zip codes on fulfillment orders all day.

But I wasn't the only one in a funk. Few people in my 50+ person department were following their passion. I know because I asked. I wanted to understand why people chose to work in such a soulless place. I learned people liked getting paid and the free lunch we got daily. But the work? Nobody mentioned passion. Instead they talked about paychecks with overtime.

One of my favorite coworkers, a salty British woman who took no shit, explained to me why passion was overrated. For 20 years she'd owned a bar in England. It was her dream to open up a bar. For several years she loved it. Then she began to hate it. The constant cleaning. The drunks. The zombie working hours. When she moved to the States, she was thrilled to get a job that wasn't in a bar. At our job she got good benefits, worked during the day, and didn't have to deal with drunks. Overseeing fulfillment accounts wasn't her passion at all. She loved that the job gave her plenty of time to hang out with her grandkids.

It was the first time someone had reframed for me the idea that a job didn't have to be your passion. I grew up with parents who worked jobs that didn't align with their passions. They worked in casinos as craps dealers, as bartenders, and as administrative assistants. My mom made me learn how to type so I could fall back on receptionist jobs in case times were hard (and I did).

But I was still raised with the idea that all I had to do was merge my passion and work, and career magic would just happen.

Over the course of my career I've met tons of people who weren't following their passion yet were content in their work. When I was an administrative assistant, I wondered how other admins found passion in their work. Again, I asked. Their answers surprised me. Most weren't using the word passion to describe their work. Some admins felt good about helping management keep their shit together. They knew the executives couldn't function without them. They felt good using their organization skills to keep management on track and therefore keep the company functioning.

One of my favorite coworkers at this job, a mischievous woman who could sweet talk anyone into doing a task, told me she loved her job because she didn't have to take her work home with her. She felt sorry for management because she saw their stress, the late nights, and the "always-on mentality." She loved that she could do her job well and leave by 4 p.m. without the need to think about work until 7 a.m. the next day. She laughed when I asked if her job was her passion. "Of course not," she said. She had hobbies. That's where her passion lived.

The crushing pressure of passion

The push to find passion in our work stems in part from the American obsession with happiness. In the book *America the Anxious: How Our Pursuit of Happiness is Creating a Nation of Nervous Wrecks*, author Ruth Whippman notes that the selling of happiness-related products and services is estimated around \$10 billion. Americans are in constant pursuit of happiness, and

our workplaces are not exempt. If we must work so hard, we should be happy doing it, the thinking goes.

On top of that, we also equate hard work with morality. We get down on ourselves for not being productive on weekends and compete with each other to be the busiest. We also take less vacation compared to other countries. (How we can find happiness without taking loads of vacation is something I will never understand.)

In a country that values productivity and the pursuit of happiness it makes sense that we'd create a narrative that encourages us to seek the ultimate happiness in our work. And what can make you happier than fulfilling your passion on a daily basis and getting paid for it? It's a little easier to swallow the intense pressure to always be seeking happiness in your job by wrapping the idea in the nicely packaged career advice to "follow your passion."

Telling someone to follow their passion creates a lot of unnecessary pressure on career choices. We can't be expected to follow our passion at all times. Some people are in career transition, working mediocre jobs just to pay the bills or take care of family. The priority isn't passion. It's money to survive. There's no need to be down on yourself during those times for not following your passion.

We also change our minds. We talk about finding our passion as if there's only one true passion in life. Yet we are not the same person at 25, 35, and 45 and that's mighty okay. Our lives and priorities evolve. At 25 all I wanted was a job in a foreign country where I could dance until 5 a.m. and not fall behind on my student loans. By 35 I wanted a job with a competent boss, 100 percent company-paid benefits, and independence (I had two out of the three—bosses are always a crapshoot). Priorities change and so does our passion. Some of us have multiple

passions. Choosing a single passion fills many with career FOMO (fear of missing out).

On top of that, work doesn't need to be a pleasure. Our obsession with passion glosses over the day-to-day grind that is work life. Even if you've found your true passion in work, there are lulls in the journey: inboxes that overflow, coworkers who make your life difficult, or organizations that lose funding. Contrary to the popular saying, *If you follow your passion, you'll never work a day in your life*, you can burn out on your passion. Sometimes our passions just don't make for viable work and we have to make hard tradeoffs.

Our work life is full of contradictions that make following your passion difficult. You can look forward to seeing your favorite coworkers while hating your boss. You can love your job while still being frustrated at the lack of opportunity for growth. You can make a ton of money and loathe the people you work with.

None of this is to say that you shouldn't seek joy or purpose in your job. Finding fulfillment in your work is important. Work that has a positive impact, connects you to interesting people, or challenges you intellectually are all elements of fulfillment. Work can be enjoyable without passion. But fulfillment and passion are not the same thing. It's possible to find meaning and joy in jobs you're not 100 percent passionate about.

As you start your career jump, give yourself permission to not find your passion. Or, if you've found your passion before but lost it, give yourself permission to change your mind. You are allowed to change your mind. Even Ivy League MBAs who spend \$100,000 on a path to a new career change their minds. When I worked at Yale School of Management, I'd get calls from recent graduates in prestigious consulting or banking roles. Some had pursued an MBA specifically to follow their passion

for investment banking or consulting, and it turned out they hated it. They wanted out but didn't know where to go without passion as a driver. They were stuck because they couldn't find their passion.

After tens of thousands of lines of data entry in cubicle world, I started getting curious about other opportunities. I didn't know what I wanted. But I knew I didn't want to stay in Corporate America. So, I started where any person starts: Google. I started reading about topics that interested me. I most definitely did this research on corporate time. My curiosity about life outside off the corporate America career path led me down a week-long Google rabbit hole. Eventually I landed on a website about graduate schools abroad. I didn't know graduate school abroad was an option for Americans. I never met anyone who had done it. I was super curious about living in a foreign country. Fast forward two years, and I was in Denmark on a fully paid scholarship in graduate school. I wasn't following my passion when I Googled. I was following my curiosity.

Curiosity trumps passion

In 2009, NASA held a nationwide contest for students to name their new Mars rover. The winning entry came from Clara Ma, a 12-year-old, who submitted the name Curiosity. In her essay she shared why she chose the name:

“Curiosity is an everlasting flame that burns in everyone’s mind. It makes me get out of bed in the morning and wonder what surprises life will throw at me that day. Curiosity is such a powerful force. Without it, we

*wouldn't be who we are today. Curiosity is the passion that drives us through our everyday lives. We have become explorers and scientists with our need to ask questions and to wonder.*³¹

Clara Ma articulated the beauty of curiosity better than any 12-year-old I've ever met. At 12 years old, I rode my bike off the back of a pickup truck and broke my collarbone. I was an idiot who couldn't articulate much beyond my love for the show *Beverly Hills, 90210*. Let this be a reminder that we all take different paths in life.

The advice to follow your passion serves one important purpose: to push us toward meaning in our career. But this advice also has another effect: it keeps us stuck. Plenty of people toil away in jobs wondering what their passion is, unable to move until they find it.

There is a better option. Instead of following your passion, follow your curiosity. Curiosity is an act of seeking. Curiosity asks you to investigate the professional world around you. Our careers shouldn't be stationary. They evolve. They change shapes. Much like the Mars rover, which seeks out new terrain and then communicates its findings, you must do the same in your career.

Better yet, curiosity doesn't put pressure on you. We're all naturally curious. You have questions about how things work. I'd be willing to bet you're pretty curious about the future, because you picked up this book. Curiosity motivates you to seek out the ideas and work that interest you.

³¹NASA, "Curiosity."

The best part: you don't have to wait to find your curiosity. In the context of your career, curiosity asks us to question what's possible. Embracing curiosity drives you forward in your career even if you don't know what motivates you. Use it as a tool for exploration and understanding. It comes in mighty handy when you don't know which direction to go with your career. Instead of asking, "What is my passion?" shift the question. Inject more curiosity.

- What kinds of jobs exist that use my skills and experience?
- What type of work interests me and how do I get those jobs?
- What are the backgrounds of people who work in (insert interesting work here)?
- What types of companies hire people with my interests?

Broaden your idea of what makes a career, because there is so much more to your career than passion. Explore the type of work you enjoy, coworkers who motivate you, and workplaces that interest you. Look at possibilities beyond passion as the world of work changes. Prioritizing curiosity over passion ensures you don't miss out on opportunities and paths that open up new passions.

Discover the Possible Jobs

In 2012, I shifted careers from a student advising job at a university into a luxury travel writing job. I hustled my way into a role as a full-time travel writer for a private jet tour company. In my role as a private jet writer I was definitely out of my element. I was