



January 2010

Three Questions Process

Reflect on the following questions. Then write down your answers.

1. Meaning

What gives you meaning and a sense of purpose? Looking back over the last few years, what professional and personal events have given you a great deal of satisfaction?

2. Pleasure

What gives you pleasure? What do you really enjoy doing? What activities so energise you that you can lose all sense of time passing?

3. Strengths

What are your strengths? What are you good at? If other people were to sum up your strengths, what do you think they would say? What things do you do better than many other people?

Now identify where your answers overlap.

Those areas indicate the kind of work that might make you happiest.

Recall times in your life when you experienced these three attributes coming together. Are there any patterns or trends?

How would you rate your current role in relation to these attributes? How might you adjust or reframe your current job to include more meaning and pleasure?

PERSONAL STRATEGY: ARE YOU THE RIGHT PERSON IN THE RIGHT ROLE?

New year, new plans

Graeme was drowning. What's more he knew it. It's not that he was struggling far from a literal shore but, in his role with a large infrastructure company, he was drowning nonetheless. Returning to work after Christmas brought it home to him. He felt as if he was caught in a rip, being swept along with no choice and no control. He had lost his sense of who he was and what mattered to him.

Graeme's situation was quite confronting. He knew he had no alternative except to step back and think things through. You may relate to that. Or it may be that you've returned to your desk with just a few niggling doubts, 'Is this all there is? Is this what I really want to be doing?'

Or you might be in that fortunate third group of people. You feel reasonably comfortable with the career choice you've made, but you just want to check that you're still aligned to your original sense of purpose.

Rethink, review, or refreshment: which group do you belong to?

The beginning of a new year can be a great opportunity for reflection and this year also marks the start of a whole new decade: the perfect time to take ten minutes out of your routine to think about whether you're the 'right person in the right role'.

Why does this matter?

Just as every organisation needs a well-crafted strategic plan, so each of us benefits from having a personal strategy that shapes our goals and energises what we do each day.

Study after study demonstrates the importance of doing work that connects with our individual values, passions and talents. It's that place where the things we love to do and the things we're good at come together. Others look at us and say, 'You're in your element!' We're happy, we feel fulfilled and we contribute in ways that make a positive difference when meaning, passion and strengths align.

But there's a fourth element in this equation: organisational need. Your strengths and your passions need to fit with a need the organisation has, if they're going to value what you have to contribute.

When all four factors (purpose, passion, strengths and organisational need) align, then you'll find you're the right person in the right role, at the right time. You know you're adding value. You're not looking for another job. You feel engaged and motivated. You're learning and growing. You're doing things you genuinely love to do. You feel happy and you're having fun!

The impact of misalignment

If your organisation needs the capabilities you have but, for you, there's little passion or sense of purpose in the job, then you can feel bored or stuck. Let's say, however, that your values are aligned but the organisation needs a skill set which is just not you. The fit is wrong. You can't shine in such a role and your confidence can suffer.

Another possibility is when you're clear about your purpose, passion and strengths, but your current organisation would need to change in some significant way for your contribution to be valued. This can feel like swimming against the tide. Sometimes it's better to move to a different organisation where you can make more of a difference. That's what Graeme realised.

In order to be successful as well as happy, you need to find an organisation that wants what you have to offer. In the box at the side, you'll find a question process in three parts to help you begin to think about your personal strategy: in other words, how to be 'in your element'. Finding this is a two way journey: an inward journey of reflection, then an outward journey of exploration.

The power of alignment

The same research findings can be helpful for managers. Do you know the strengths of everyone in your team? Can you ensure they have the opportunity to draw on these for at least some part of each week? Have you shown each team member how their particular role contributes to a larger purpose? People who enjoy their work are more likely to be motivated to do it well.

Crafting the job you want from the job you have

Of course, life is often about managing the constraints we aren't able to change. Perhaps you need time to find the right role, or there are other considerations which mean you need to stay put. What can you do to make your work more enjoyable right now?

Once you've identified the type of activities that are meaningful and pleasurable to you, challenge yourself to find ways of incorporating even a few of these into the way you do your current job. In addition, what meaning or pleasure may exist already, if you were to highlight certain elements and downplay others?

The last word goes to psychologist Abraham Maslow, "The most wonderful good fortune that can happen to any human being, is to be paid for doing what they passionately love to do."