

INTRODUCTION

The Impact Factor

In today's wildly uncertain world of work, there is one thing above all that gives your career stability and coherence. That one thing makes you marketable in a completely distinctive way. That thing is your personal purpose and the impact you can have in the world — when you know these and take them seriously.

What about skills? They matter greatly. Cultivate them. Learn how to show them off with generosity.

What about your personality and your style — those intangibles that have given rise to such lucrative testing and typing industries? They matter — but maybe not as much as we tend to think. When you awaken your sense of purpose and let that become an organizing principle for your career, guess what? You'll bring forth new sides of yourself that you may never have thought possible.

What about your values? That is, what you view as good and right. Important, of course.

But look deeper into your own sense of what matters in the world — the work to be done that is bigger than anybody's personal career, the work that you would be most satisfied to be a part of. This isn't just a matter of what you hold as good and right in theory, but about what you *want* to see, for yourself and everyone you love. It's the package that holds values and desires. It's "where your great passion and the world's great hungers meet" — an axiom of career development coined a generation ago by Rev. Frederick Buechner. But "work with passion" has been trivialized, in many cases, by career guides that suggest you can have it all, that visualizing will make it so and that all passions are created equal. In conventional career-speak, you may have a passion for fashion, or for customer service, or for working in a bustling downtown office. As I'll use the term, however, passion comes in when you believe in these activities and projects as more than just a source of personal satisfaction — when you see

them as important outside yourself. If you're really passionate about fashion, you'll be engaged in helping the industry do its work more responsibly and effectively for the long-term good. You may want to learn all about nontoxic dyes that don't harm textile workers, or promote organic fibers that don't deplete groundwater with excessive irrigation needs, or make sure the models aren't anorexic. You'll do it your way, by your values, but — as the term is used in these pages — passion is *somehow* larger than one person's life.

I'm a career counselor. I also run a regional organization focused on building an economy that benefits community and environment, with the humble name and mission of Sustainable Hudson Valley. On the side, I've been teaching in a technological university, helping young people develop their leadership skills and carry out service projects in the community. From where I sit, it seems that most people want to do something distinctive in their work and leave some legacy:

There's my friend Stacie, who works in her family's restaurant and spends her own time finding ways to increase local and organic food sourcing.

There's my old friend Gene, a "typical" hospital employee who spends all his "free" time working on clean elections and enlivens both of his worlds using his third skill set as a karaoke producer.

There's my friend Shirley, a "typical" social worker who is serious about helping people break out of dependency on social services and become culturally and economically empowered — so serious that she has created an exchange relationship between her New York colleagues and their counterparts in Africa and leads annual professional exchange tours to share new strategies for empowerment.

There's my landlord, Henry, a "typical" computer programmer who spends lots of free time as volunteer webmaster for avant garde art, radio and environmental groups' websites to help under-funded creative organizations get traction.

These people have figured out a key principle of surviving and thriving. The kinds of impact that you can create — at work, and more broadly in your life — are what make you valuable in the most distinctive way. Matching this "impact factor" with the workplaces that need what you have — whether they are many or few — connects you with the work opportunities where you will genuinely fit and thrive. This strategy anchors you in the industries, sectors, communities and subcultures that hold your best opportunities.

The Impact Factor draws together the conventional concerns of career assessment and planning — skills, personality, values. It does this in a way that moves the exploration from static to dynamic, that puts the pieces together into a more coherent pattern. This book will structure that exploration to address a number of “simple” questions — in depth.

The Impact Factor guides what you choose to do and how you choose to do it. You may be engaged in a fairly simple enterprise and yet put your distinct stamp on it by the values that guide your work and the choices you make on the path. For example, Jim Buckmaster, the CEO of Craigslist — a high-value company by any measure — floored Wall Street analysts in 2006 by announcing that he had no intention of trying to raise more money than needed to cover expenses, let alone maximize profit for shareholders.

These questions of guiding values have to do with a journey that most of us are on, a journey of relationships with our communities and the planet we live on. It is a journey through moment-to-moment choices about how to meet goals and expectations, avoid errors and have a positive impact. Sometimes these are subtle, and this book aims to draw them out. Sometimes they have the potential to be dramatic, and this book is an invitation to accept authentic drama when it comes to call.

The first edition of this book was published in 1995, when a few realities were just dawning on the culture and the career pundits. We were just coming to terms with the degree of loss of manufacturing jobs — and even service jobs — through outsourcing offshore and the globalization of the economy. The direction of the economy, and the ways to make a living within it, were radically unknown. Since then, at least in my view, a number of trends have come into focus that clarify the picture:

Success habits. Many more people know the basics of networking, telling their story, finding opportunities and negotiating deals. A lot have also done some basic work on themselves to step out of limiting attitudes, take responsibility for their own growth, handle conflict and tap their own inner power. This edition starts with the assumption that readers get it and are on the path.

Open source. As information proliferates and people learn the value of sharing it, a new work ethic is coming into play that rewards open communication more than hoarding resources. This means the mutual self-help approach that’s outlined in these pages is better understood than it once was — though it still hasn’t taken hold everywhere.

Entrepreneurship. Small, independent business is making a comeback with a vengeance and a vision — as a positive force in our communities by keeping dollars recirculating and doing business with community and environment in mind. The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (livingeconomies.org) and the American Independent Business Alliance (amiba.org) have helped to bring this vision to life in scores of communities, side by side with local business groups; this movement is growing fast. Sustainable Business Alliances are actively educating consumers on the benefits of buying local and on green building and living. Many people have been self-employed, and even more appreciate the value of an entrepreneurial attitude, no less in government and nonprofits than in business.

Sustainability. Fewer and fewer people think it is possible to succeed in business without succeeding in a broader way, by creating work organizations that do not burn out or abuse employees; that treat customers honestly; engage with communities in a positive way; and preserve and restore the natural environment. In nutshell, this is the concept of sustainable economic development. The necessity and possibility for a breakthrough into sustainable forms of economic development is a guiding premise of this book. As director of an organization that is working on it for an important region, New York's Hudson River Valley, I am more hopeful every day.

In a sustainable economy, what would the work look like? Here is one vision, resulting from a focused exploration by some 50 organizations, the North American Consultation on Sustainable Livelihoods, convened to wrestle with this question back in the 1990s. These guiding principles are still on track today. They may not be fully reflected in any job, but they are relevant to each and every job and business opportunity.

“Sustainable livelihoods provide meaningful work that fulfills the social, economic, cultural and spiritual needs of all members of a community — human, non-human, present and future — and safeguards cultural and biological diversity.”¹ Therefore these approaches to work tend to:

- Promote equity between and among generations, races, genders and ethnic groups; in the access to and distribution of wealth and resources; in the sharing of productive and reproductive roles; and the transfer of knowledge and skills.
- Nurture a sense of place and connection to the local community and adapt to and restore regional ecosystems.

- Stimulate local investment in the community and help to retain capital within the local economy.
- Base production on renewable energy and on regenerating local resource endowments while reducing intensity of energy use, eliminating overconsumption of local and global resources and assuring no net loss of biodiversity.
- Utilize appropriate technology that is ecologically fitting, socially just and humane, and that enhances rather than displaces community knowledge and skills.
- Reduce as much as possible travel to the workplace and distance between producers and users.
- Generate social as well as economic returns and value nonmonetized as well as paid work.
- Provide secure access to opportunity and meaningful activity in community life.

The goal of this book is to help you seek out opportunities to achieve as many of these visions as possible, while meeting your own needs for income, satisfaction and growth. I call this approach “*Self-employment*” — that is, bringing your “big self” to work, the self that is in touch with your power and empathy. This book is for you if you want to make a difference in your world — whether your world is a classroom, a neighborhood or the planet. Most people, at some level, do want exactly this — if they give themselves permission to notice the desire. It’s common to think that we can only aspire to an impact in the wider world after we have met our basic needs and sorted out our identity. Abraham Maslow’s famous “hierarchy of needs” proposed viewing human development this way. But later psychological theory and practice has complicated the story in a very useful manner, by suggesting that, in fact, we can better take care of our basics and work out our identity by the act of connecting with the wider world. Our identity and vocation — that is, calling — is only revealed through connections, and that means through experience. Four social psychologists — Larry Daloz-Parks, Sharon Parks-Daloz, Jim and Cheryl Keen — studied the “lives of commitment” of 100 effective professionals working for a better world in successful careers.² They found, as a guiding principle of these people’s development, an opening up of caring and compassion without an ability to predict results. That act of choice was what made creativity flow and, in some

cases, actually created opportunities. What is more, the four authors carried out over 100 structured interviews over several years, as a team, and finished the project with marriages and friendships in tact. Their work in bringing these stories of commitment to light also reflects lives of commitment.

This book will guide you through a process of vocational self-discovery and career development that is simple but not easy. It provides basic yet thorough guidance in every phase of the process, from self-assessment and goal setting through investigating the options, preparing your résumé and other marketing materials, applying and campaigning for jobs or starting and building a business. It carries forward one more step beyond securing the next opportunity — to identify an approach to ongoing career development as a “co-creator” of the workplace you want.

- You will begin simply by paying attention — real attention — to what you most care about. What issues attract or repel you in the news? Whose work fascinates you in your own social networks?
- Next, you will pause to get traction by stabilizing your life with regard to time, money, clutter and relationships — four dimensions of life that can strongly enable or inhibit your successful stepping out. This does not need to be a major campaign in itself — just a moment of marshalling resources and reducing distraction in order to move ahead with clarity.
- Next, this guidebook will help you to investigate the industries and occupations that attract you — with skills and strategies as well as essential resources.
- Then, it will structure your assessment of your own Impact Factor. It will work with the usual elements, including your core aptitudes and specialized skills, with your values, and also with unorthodox questions including your attitudes toward mobility and place, technology, money and beauty.
- Looking at these elements, together, you will focus on the essence of your work in the world and the next good ideas for translating it into job or business opportunities. You will be invited to make a commitment to those aspects of the path that are clear, and take action — whether as a volunteer or an entrepreneur — to begin creating your vision.
- Next is the search and/or business planning process, in a paradoxical pair of chapters: one about organizing, and the other about surrender.
- Finally, we will explore ways to refine your positioning and strategy within any job or business, conscious career development by co-creating your workplace and relationships.

Every guide is based on theories about the way the world works and where economy and society are headed. This guide is based on the notion that effective enterprises, in the long run, are the ones that are most self-aware and on purpose with regard to their social and environmental impact, and create value in diverse ways that build support for their core business in turn. Career sustainability comes from aligning your working life with the more sustainable, conscious, principled and accountable enterprises, whether in corporations, independent business, government or not-for-profit organizations. Because these organizations are less secretive, more effective at working in partnerships and alliances, better networked and often higher-profile, they are also better platforms for career moves and prominence in your field.

There is increasingly strong documentation of this point. Research by Inno-vest Strategic Value Advisors, ranking companies on environmental performance metrics and comparing these ranks with shareholder value, finds strong correlation year after year. Many studies echo this, and few dispute it. Now, sustainability is at the top of many CEOs' agendas, as reflected by the content of key global meetings like the World Economic Forum.³ As a result, there has been a substantial growth and diversification of socially responsible investment funds — an estimated 20% of all assets under management in 2005, according to a Social Investment Forum study.⁴

Those who understand these connections may work in corporations, independent business, non-profits or government — or they may move among these sectors. Wherever, they reflect an emerging work ethic, one that connects their work for material sustenance with the work they each do to make their communities and natural surroundings more livable. In spite of the turbulence and uncertainty everywhere, they are builders. They naturally reach for opportunities to make positive changes in the world, from protecting and restoring the environment, to reducing violence and poverty, to making society's institutions work. They realize that all the volunteering in the world will not be enough to counter the impact of working lives that have not been designed to take either environmental or human well-being into account. So they are searching for effective ways to be part of redesigning the economy — one organization, one project, one career at a time. They want to devote their working lives to some kind of tangible, positive change. What drives them isn't a sense of duty or guilt, but a spirit of engagement and curiosity.

One major national study estimates that the population with these values is 50 million strong (as of 2000) or 26% of the population and calls them the

“Cultural Creatives.”⁵ What sets Cultural Creatives apart is a combination of environmental, social and spiritual values, all arising from the view of themselves as interconnected and interdependent with the world around them. For them, taking care of the environment and solving entrenched social problems are no longer fringe concerns but essentials. Work is not the only arena for this exploration, but it’s a major one. This is a career guide for people who understand that our lives are substantially constructed by our surroundings and our choices and that we can’t wait to inherit a future — we need to create one worthy of the effort.

This requires looking at the current state of the world — and the crying need for human initiative and effort — without diving under the bed. This, in turn, requires taking a look at the peculiar apathy that many of us experience when the conversation turns toward difficult ecological and social issues, from domestic violence to global terrorism. Research on the phenomenon of psychic numbing makes it clear that people do not shut down on big-picture issues out of a lack of caring. They shut down because they care too much, and it hurts too much sometimes to look at the mess we are in. It hurts, especially, when we feel powerless to act. Numbing and apathy are directly proportional to the perception of powerlessness. And they deepen that sense of powerlessness by cutting us off from our lighter feelings as well as those of despair. Holding our concerns for the world around us at bay and trying to behave “normally,” we begin to feel fraudulent if not crazy. We lose our sense of inner authority.

The antidote to all this is a cluster of very distinctive learning experiences that pulls us out of isolation, lets us feel and speak our own truths about the state of the world and the work that needs doing, allows our voices to be heard to restore our faith in our own perceptions and then turns attention toward the creativity that is released after repressed emotions are let out. This happens, for example, through:

- Learning to pay attention to the world with multiple intelligences: emotional, kinesthetic, visual, imaginative and so on, as well as analytical.
- Developing fresher, more subtle perceptions of the world and the work to be done in it, and using them to challenge perceived limits about our choices.
- Cultivating a sense of personal power by doing what we can do and building a support system.
- Creating and celebrating beauty, in every possible form, to keep us animated.

Only by opening up, in these ways, to the full spectrum of experience can we rise to the immense challenge of organizing our working lives with our communities and the Earth firmly in mind. Only then can we do the right things, not as a “should,” but out of recognition of the enlightened self-interest of preserving our social and ecological life-support system. As Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess puts it, “When the social self is well developed, and I understand that I am part of something larger, I no longer want to eat a big cake all by myself. I want to share it with others.”⁶ So, too, with finding ways to earn livelihoods that maximize benefit to the world around us, as well as being personally satisfying. In keeping with good ecological thinking, *Making a Living While Making a Difference* stresses everybody’s right and need to adapt these principles to their own circumstances. Above all, it’s about freeing up more of our true Selves and bringing them to bear in the work we do. As examples will show, the rewards can put the risks in an entirely different perspective.

Career decision-making today is more complicated than the road maps will ever be. We are not only deciding among more options than ever; we are deciding how to decide. What’s real? What’s essential? What work will make a difference? What institutions are capable of doing it? Where do we place our trust? With respected businesses that show solid increases in stock value? With nonprofits whose mission statements are really compelling? With public agencies that have gotten serious about reinventing government and are embarked on fascinating experiments in new ways to serve the public? With charismatic leaders? With organizations that show results we care about, or the ones whose cultures and day-to-day operating principles seem most wholesome?

With the guiding structure of a ten step program, *Making a Living While Making a Difference* approaches life/work planning in several distinctive ways:

- It focuses on having enough and creating a satisfying life, not on having it all.
- It goes beyond the notion of utilitarian networking to encourage the creation of real community around us, not only when it is useful for a transition, but to feed us and give back.
- It views career development within a web of stakeholders who are touched by our choices — from up-close ones like family and co-workers, out to the communities and natural environments our choices affect.
- It takes an entrepreneurial view for everyone, whether an employee or business owner, and whether you are in the private sector, government or nonprofits.

- It works with a paradoxical pair of strategies for advancing your career: commitment and surrender.

“Self-employment,” then, is not just about finding or creating work that helps rebuild communities and the planet, although that is sorely needed. It isn’t simply the ability to get paid to do something fascinating. It’s work that links external contribution with personal development and satisfaction in the way that is right for you.

When we’re contemplating a choice, many of us focus on the risks. How different the same choice can look from the other side, when we can also see the possible gains, and the inner resources we free up by acting on our true values. One of the courageous clients and workshop participants who remind me of this is Peter. He was hooked by an idea that had taken over his imagination, but he couldn’t figure out how to activate it. He wanted to create an ecological retreat center with demonstration organic gardens, green building practices, meeting spaces and many other features. One inner voice told him it was a crazy notion. Another voice told him it was his future. Throughout a workshop, his questions were all about the costs of taking the plunge: reduced earnings, compromised credibility, his wife’s uncertainties. Finally, I asked him, “How do you know this idea would be so impractical? How do you know you would earn less than you do now? Have you done a business plan? Have you done market research?”

“No. I’ve been too scared. I really have no idea,” he replied. Just a few months later, Peter sent me a beautiful brochure for the new center, with the next season’s program and a note of thanks.

You cannot control the economy or the course of planetary civilization. But you can very much control your responses to it and your stance within it. Taking personal responsibility for those choices is a key to getting your career aligned with your own values and pictures of reality and with emerging opportunities. This is the most genuine form of job security in the world today. Whatever risks and opportunities you are dancing with, I hope this book will provide a tangible support for breaking out of perceived limits and stepping into a future worthy of your commitment.