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Steve Pavlina Top 10 Best Articles

Time Management

February 6, 2006 by Steve Pavlina

Time management systems have become exceedingly popular in recent years... and with good reason. The ultimate potential benefit of such systems is the ability to optimize how you spend your time in order to extract the best possible results in the shortest period of time. Such systems do come with a price, however, and that price is the time you must spend first learning and then maintaining the system. Generally speaking, the more complex the system, the more costly it is to use. The more time you spend managing your system, the less time you'll spend reaping the rewards of increased productivity.

Since the early 1990s, I've studied time management extensively, both by devouring existing knowledge on the subject and through first-hand trial and error. I've read a shelf full of books on time management, listened to hundreds of hours of time management audio learning, and read dozens of articles on the subject. I've used a variety of time management systems. I've used software as well as paper-based planners. If there were such a thing as a Ph.D in time management, I've gone through the curriculum many times over.

Studying time management has been an extremely worthwhile endeavor. While the claims made by people selling products in this field are often exaggerated and overhyped, I did realize some genuine productivity benefits from applying the best ideas. As I wrote in the article *Do It Now*, I was able to earn two college degrees in only three semesters, largely by applying a variety of time management techniques, some of them to the extreme. I took the same classes in 1.5 years that other students took over a 4-year period, but I was able to compress them into a much shorter period of time by taking about triple the normal courseload. However, I don't consider this to be an extraordinary achievement. I think someone else who studied time management as much as I did could achieve similar results. The sad truth is that most people are so incredibly bad at managing their time that rock-bottom personal productivity is simply accepted as normal. So anyone who can consistently invest 80% of their time each day in intelligent, productive activities is going to look like an overachiever by comparison. The average college student in particular is probably operating at only 20-30% of their capacity, and I'm referring to their social life in addition to academics. Most people are completely unaware of just how poor they are at time management until some "overachiever" enters their lives and makes them look bad by comparison.

Time Management Systems

It's tempting to say that excellent time management is a result of having a great time management system. But I have not found this to be the case. I think the general mindset of time management is far more important than any system. And the mindset of time management is simply that you value your time. It's really a self-esteem issue. If you see your life as valuable and meaningful, then you will value your time as well. If you find yourself wasting a lot of time, you probably don't have a strong enough reason to manage your time well. No system you use will make much difference until you address the underlying issue of self-respect. If your life has no meaningful purpose, then you don't have a compelling enough reason to improve your time management skills. You might get motivated every once in a while, but your motivation to improve just won't last.

Time management systems are seductive. They lure you in with the promise of greater

productivity, more free time, faster income generation, and higher self-esteem. And some of those benefits may indeed be realized. However, another possibility is that your system becomes a distraction that prevents you from achieving real gains. You find yourself investing more and more time in meta-activities like getting organized, prioritizing objectives, and learning the latest productivity software. Actually *doing* the tasks that your system is designed to manage becomes almost an afterthought... perhaps even an annoyance. Instead of helping you increase productivity, your system becomes a means to disguise low productivity. This is a common problem for people who haven't yet identified a purpose for their lives. The system provides the illusion of productivity, but when you strip it down to its bare essence, you find it's a house of straw. There's nothing there. When you sum up all the tasks, they amount to nothing but busywork and trivialities. Whether or not they actually get done is of little consequence in the grand scheme of things. In the long run, no one will care anyway. If you find yourself in this situation, you've simply lost sight of the real purpose of time management.

What Is Time Management?

Let's strip away all this complexity and get back to basics for a moment. *What is time management?* The essence of time management is the following:

- 1) Decide what to do
- 2) Do it

These appear to be very simple steps at first glance. Even a child can do them. However, when we look at them through the lens of optimization, they become much more complicated. In order to optimize these steps, we must concern ourselves with identifying the "right" or the "best" way to complete each step. We can easily see that some decision-action combinations produce better results than others. So our question becomes, "What is the best action to take right now, and what is the best way to do it?"

Answering this question should be the main purpose behind any time management system. Yes, there are side benefits like getting organized, becoming more clear-headed, and reducing stress. But ultimately these benefits all contribute to the decision-action process. What will you do, and how will you do it?

When I first studied time management, I found that most of the existing literature was focused on step 2. There was a lot of emphasis on how to get things done. This is a fine model for employees whose tasks are given to them, but that's an industrial age model, and it doesn't suit knowledge workers today who have a lot more freedom in choosing their tasks and even their careers. If step 1 is done incorrectly, then it doesn't matter how well you do step 2. If you decide to do the wrong thing, it makes no difference how well you do it.

Deciding What to Do

Step 1 is a lot more difficult than step 2, which is probably why I've found so little adequate coverage of it. One of the most popular systems that attempts to tackle step 1 intelligently is the Franklin-Covey system, which concerns itself with the high level subjects of mission, roles, and goals more than the lower level of projects and actions. However, I don't think Franklin-Covey goes nearly high-level enough. Many of the mission statements I've seen produced by this system are nothing but vapid drivel, especially those produced by corporations.

The next level up from roles, goals, and mission is the level of context. Think of this as your current understanding of reality as well as your role within it. If you change your context, then everything else changes as well. For example, if you change your spiritual beliefs, then you

may experience changes in your relationships and career as well.

Accuracy Is Paramount

The most important aspect of context is accuracy. Either your context accurately models reality, or it doesn't. This includes your most sacred spiritual beliefs, and it also includes the possibility that your beliefs may even alter your external reality. If inaccurate beliefs guide your actions, then your actions may very well be pointless. A person whose high-level beliefs are inaccurate simply cannot be productive in any meaningful sense. S/he might as well be digging a hole and then filling it.

I began learning of time management at the level of projects and actions, but I've since been approaching it from a top-down perspective. Now I'm far more concerned with doing the right thing than with doing things right. I spend a considerable amount of time reviewing my beliefs, looking for incongruencies between my beliefs and my experience of reality, and exploring other potential beliefs that may be more accurate. While working on the projects and actions level can yield minor productivity boosts, working on the high level of context and purpose can produce major breakthroughs. This is the process that led me to retire from computer game development and to start working in the field of personal development. When my context changed, everything else changed as well, including my mission, goals, projects, and actions.

I believe the most important thing I can do to manage my time is to strive to understand reality as accurately as possible. Above all, this means I cannot ignore data. Everything I've experienced — everything I think I know — must somehow be integrated into my approach to time management. There can be no incongruencies. My beliefs, thoughts, and actions must all be in alignment with reality itself.

Resolving Incongruencies

A big time management mistake people make is that they allow incongruencies to exist in their lives without ever consciously resolving them. This is very easy to see when it comes to religion. People claim to hold certain beliefs as sacred, but they fail to act in accordance with those beliefs. They hold back or label themselves as weak. Why? Because part of them feels those beliefs are correct, but another part of them feels they're not. But instead of resolving this conflict, they try to avoid thinking about it. To resolve the incongruency would likely cause serious upheaval in their lives, and they fear what might happen. So instead they go through unhealthy cycles of hiding the truth from themselves and feeling frustrated with their inability to meet a standard which they don't fully agree with but which they feel they must continue to follow.

The upheaval caused by resolving internal incongruencies is real, but that doesn't mean you must fear it. I've gone through some major life changes as a result of pursuing this path, and it's hard every time. But I cannot accept the logic of clinging to a belief system that I know to be inaccurate. Once new data presents itself (or a new understanding of old data), I have to find a way to integrate it. At the very least, I must drop the incongruent beliefs while I search for better ones.

Despite the challenges, I've been extremely pleased with this approach. Problems that I struggled with for years simply evaporated once I adapted my beliefs to fit my own experience instead of blindly accepting what others told me. The world is full of so many false beliefs (especially from mass media), so it becomes a serious challenge to trust ourselves and our own thinking when everyone around us is telling us we're wrong.

For example, one of the first beliefs I found to be inaccurate was that I needed a job. Part of me felt I should get a job — it seemed like the right thing to do after college — but another part of me didn't like the idea of having to go to work each day and have a boss tell me what to do. I'd look at a job application and just stare blankly at it. I could barely stomach the idea of working on my resume. The whole idea just felt intuitively wrong to me. And I'm certainly not alone in this feeling, but most people do their best to tune it out. They go to work each day, but they don't really like it. They'd rather not go to work if they could afford to do so. Instead of accepting this incongruity like everyone else seemed to, I chose to resolve it. And this led me to find a way to make a good living without a job. It was not an easy path in the short term, but it's been much easier in the long run, especially when I notice the results people who followed the accepted get-a-job approach have achieved. Very few of them seem happy and fulfilled with their lives. At work they pretend everything is OK, but privately they feel miserable and trapped. And it gets harder each year. Personally I don't think most jobs are very healthy, considering what they do to the human spirit. I'm sure there are exceptions, but those aren't the norm.

Despite lots of people telling me to “get a job” (often with various expletives tacked onto the end of that sentence), I never did get a job after college, and I've been happily jobless ever since. I just accepted that being employed wasn't something I wanted, and I noticed that people who did have jobs didn't seem to want them either, so I ignored their advice and listened to my intuition instead. (I explained how I do this on Podcast #6: How to Make Money Without a Job.) By unraveling this incongruity in my beliefs and resolving it, I was able to achieve a better result for myself — abundant income generation, stellar career opportunities, and a fun social life without the confines of employment. Best of all, I'm ridiculously happy with my life.

The ultimate simplification of time management is that time management is *accuracy*. In order to use your time effectively, you must strive to create the most accurate understanding of reality you can. This means giving adequate consideration to all the data that presents itself to you: sense perceptions, facts, logic, intuition, emotions, etc. And the ultimate goal is to bring all of these things into alignment. So what you perceive, feel, think, say, and do are all congruent.

Debugging Beliefs

I've made tremendous progress in this area, but I certainly haven't reached the pinnacle of alignment. There are plenty of incongruencies I have yet to resolve. Whenever I experience uncertainty in some area, I look for ways to conduct personal tests. For example, the Million Dollar Experiment is intended to test the power of intention. What role does intention play in achieving results? I don't know the answer to that, but I can't overlook the potential of the intention-manifestation model because it could be very significant, and I've already seen some promising results. I don't yet have a deep enough understanding of how it all works though. The real benefit of such experiments is that they provide me with data I can use to upgrade my mental model of reality. And a better model allows me to make more accurate decisions and thereby use my time more effectively.

It isn't enough just to write down a goal and work to achieve it. It isn't even enough to create a mission statement and live your life in accordance with it. How do you know whether your mission and goals are intelligent to begin with? Haven't you ever set a goal you later realized was stupid or pointless? Will future historians summarize your entire life with the label “misguided?” How do you know you won't look back on your current goals a decade from now

and conclude that you were on the wrong path all along? What a waste of time and of life to put so much effort into achieving goals that ultimately won't even matter.

Accuracy is the standard for knowing whether or not your goals are well chosen. If your goals are based on the most accurate model of reality you can muster, then you have nothing to worry about. You've done the best you can, and you can expect no better results. But accuracy isn't remotely easy. This is why many of my goals are directly targeted at increasing the accuracy of my beliefs. I figure that if I don't understand reality well enough to be confident that my goals make sense, then my first priority should be to increase the accuracy of my current mental model of reality. To the degree my model seems accurate, I act within it, but when I find incongruencies, I refine the model itself. Sometimes I find my model so broken that I must discard it completely and rebuild a new one from scratch. The ultimate test of your model of reality is reality itself.

Now while you may not want to dedicate your whole life to the pursuit of accuracy, I think you'll realize substantial improvements in your time management by moving accuracy to the top of your time management philosophy, as opposed to efficiency, effectiveness, or some other standard. Whenever you have to make a tough decision about how to use your time, take a step back and revisit your current understanding of reality. What do you know to be true? And what does that truth dictate is the correct course of action for you? Once you know the correct course of action, then you can strive to get it done effectively and efficiently, and that's where modern time management systems can be of use.

To Improve Accuracy, Eliminate Inaccuracies

Although it's very hard to know when your beliefs are accurate, it isn't as difficult to detect inaccuracies, so focus your improvement efforts there for starters. Symptoms of inaccurate beliefs include chronic procrastination, mixed emotions, lying, self-sabotage, setting goals that fizzle, fear of failure, fear of rejection, timidity, depression, anger, frustration, resentment, and wearing excessively baggy pants where the crotch is down to your knees (you do NOT look cool in those; you look like a dolt).

It's usually not that difficult to identify incongruencies in your beliefs. You probably have lots of them, but you may have been taught that it's just normal to feel incongruent. I'd say it's common, but it's not normal. I think it's more normal and natural to be congruent. Having mixed feelings is generally an unpleasant state. When you experience this sensation, take some time to privately journal about your feelings on both sides and explore them as deeply as you can. Most people don't go nearly deep enough. Eventually you will uncover a new truth that you've been unwilling to face. For example, as I previously explained, I had to face the reality that I didn't want to spend my life working for someone else, but I still had to earn money to meet my needs. I admitted that both of these were true (my inner feelings and the external reality), but they were incongruent. And that allowed me to devise a congruent solution that honored both sides without forcing me back into a state of incongruency. I opted to find a way to make a good living without needing a job. It was hard in the short term but much easier in the long run. Inaccurate beliefs don't serve you, so dump them whenever you can.

If you take care of the highest level of time management (accuracy), the other parts have a way of taking care of themselves. My purpose, mission, roles, goals, projects, and actions all filter down from my current understanding of reality. Based on my understanding of reality, my purpose is clear. Based on my purpose, my mission is clear. And so on down the line. Clarity at the top creates clarity at the bottom. There is still plenty of room for choice at the

lower levels, but it's like picking options for a new car you purchased. The big decision has already been made, so the details just aren't going to matter all that much. The details will control the flavor and texture of your life but not the essential nature of it.

When it comes to time management, the accuracy of your beliefs about reality will basically dictate your results. It doesn't matter so much what particular system you use. As you strive for greater accuracy and congruency, be patient with yourself. This quest for greater accuracy is ongoing. I'm not sure human beings will ever reach the pinnacle of accuracy — that would require that we become gods. There are always more inaccuracies to eliminate, more experiments to conduct, more pieces of data to integrate. The important thing is not to settle. Don't settle for conflict in your life when you could achieve congruency. Sometimes it will take a year or more to replace conflict with congruency, such as in the case of divorce or career changes, but that time is going to pass anyway, so you might as well put it to good use.

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The Power of Clarity

March 15, 2005 by Steve Pavlina

H.L. Hunt, a man who rose from a bankrupt cotton farmer in the 1930s to a multi-billionaire when he died in 1974, was once asked during a TV interview what advice he could give to others who wanted to be financially successful. He said only two things are required. First, you must decide exactly what it is you want to accomplish. Most people never do that in their entire lives. And secondly, you must determine what price you'll have to pay to get it, and then resolve to pay that price.

Clear Goals Are Essential

Clear goals and objectives are essential to the success of any business, and this is no less true of building your own career. If you don't take the time to get really clear about exactly what it is you're trying to accomplish, then you're forever doomed to spend your life achieving the goals of those who do. In the absence of a clear direction for your life, you will either meander aimlessly or you will build a career that you don't feel good about. You may make some money, and you may do some interesting work, but the end result will not resemble anything you ever made a conscious decision to build, and ultimately you will be left with the sinking feeling that maybe you took a wrong turn somewhere along the way. Do you ever look at your career and think to yourself, "How on earth did I get here?"

If setting goals is so critically important, then why is it that so few people take the time to define exactly where they want to go? Part of the reason is a lack of knowledge about how to set clear goals. You can go through years of schooling and never receive any instruction on goal setting at all. A failure to understand the immense importance of establishing clear goals is also common. But those who truly know what they want often outperform everyone else by an enormous degree.

A frequent deterrent to goal setting is the fear of making a mistake. Teddy Roosevelt once said, "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." Setting virtually any goal at all is better than drifting aimlessly with no clear direction. The best way I know to guarantee failure is to avoid making clear, committed decisions. Every day is already a mistake if you don't know where you're going. You're probably spending most of your time working to achieve other people's goals. The local fast food restaurant, TV advertisers, and the stockholders of the businesses you patronize are all very happy for that. If you don't decide what you really want, then you've decided to hand your future over to the whims of others, and that's always a mistake. By taking hold of the reins yourself and deciding where you'd like to go, you gain a tremendous sense of control that most people never experience in their entire lives.

Many people assume that because they have a direction, they must therefore have goals, but this is not the case and merely creates the illusion of progress. "Making more money" and "building a business" are not goals. A goal is a specific, clearly defined, measurable state. An example of the difference between a direction and a goal is the difference between the compass direction of northeast and the top of the Eiffel Tower in France. One is merely a direction; the other is a definite location.

Define Goals in Binary Terms

One critical aspect of goals is that they must be defined in binary terms. At any point in time, if I were to ask you if you had achieved your goal yet, you must be able to give me a definitive

“yes” or “no” answer; “maybe” is not an option. You cannot say with absolute certainty if you’ve fully completed the outcome of “making more money,” but you can give me a definitive binary answer as to whether or not you are currently standing on top of the Eiffel Tower. An example of a clear business goal would be that your gross income for the month of April this year is \$5000 or more. That is something you can calculate precisely, and at the end of the month, you can give a definitive answer as to whether or not your goal has been achieved. That is the level of clarity you need in order to form a goal that your mind can lock onto and move towards rapidly.

Be Detailed

Be as detailed as possible when setting goals. Give specific numbers, dates, and times. Make sure that each of your goals is measurable. Either you achieved it, or you didn’t. Define your goals as if you already know what’s going to happen. It’s been said that the best way to predict the future is to create it.

Commit Goals to Writing

Goals must be in writing in the form of positive, present-tense, personal affirmations. A goal that is not committed to writing is just a fantasy. Set goals for what you want, not for what you don’t want. Your subconscious mind can lock onto a clearly defined goal only if the goal is defined in positive terms. If you put your focus on what you don’t want instead of what you do, you’re likely to attract exactly what it is you’re trying to avoid. Phrase your goals as if they are already achieved. Instead of saying, “I will earn \$100,000 this year,” phrase it in the present tense: “I earn \$100,000 this year.” If you phrase your goals in future terms, you are sending a message to your subconscious mind to forever keep that outcome in the future, just beyond your grasp. Avoid wishy-washy words like “probably,” “should,” “could,” “would,” “might,” or “may” when forming your goals. Such words foster doubt as to whether you can really achieve what you are after. And finally, make your goals personal. You cannot set goals for other people, such as, “A publisher will publish my software by the end of the year.” Phrase it like this instead: “I sign a North American retail publishing contract this year that earns me at least \$100,000 by the end of the year.”

Objectify Subjective Goals

What if you need to set subjective goals, such as improving your own level of self-discipline? How do you phrase such goals in binary terms? To solve this problem, I use a rating scale of 1 to 10. For instance, if you want to improve your self-discipline, ask yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate your current level of self-discipline? Then set a goal to achieve a certain specific rating by a certain date. This allows you to measure your progress and know with a high degree of certainty whether or not you’ve actually achieved your goal.

Goal Setting Is an Activity

Setting clear goals is not a passive act. It doesn’t happen automatically. You must take direct conscious action in order to make it so. Everything counts, and nothing is neutral. You are either moving towards your goals, or you’re moving away from them. If you do nothing or if you act without clarity, then you are almost certainly a victim of “being outgoaded.” In other words you are spending your time working on other people’s goals without even knowing it. You are happily working to enrich your landlord, other businesses, advertisers, stockholders, etc. Each day you spend working without a sense of clarity about where you’re headed is a step backwards for you. If you don’t actively tend your garden, then weeds will grow automatically. Weeds don’t need to be watered or fertilized. They just grow by themselves in the absence of an attentive gardener. Similarly, in the absence of conscious and directed action on your part, your work and your life will automatically become full of weeds. You

don't need to do anything at all to make this happen. And when you finally get around to taking a serious look at where you are and where you want to go, the first thing you'll have to do is pull out all those weeds.

Reading this article will do absolutely nothing for you unless you turn it into some form of physical action. The best thinking unfortunately gives you zero results. In reality, you won't even be paid a penny for your thoughts. You can have the most creative idea in the world, but ideas themselves are utterly worthless. You only get results from the physical actions you take, never for the ideas you have. In order to get any kind of tangible results at all, you must act on an idea. You must communicate it, build it, implement it, and make it real.

Clarity Is a Choice

If you've been running your career in an unfocused manner, just waking up each morning and seeing what happens, then it is absolutely crucial that you take the time to decide and write down exactly where it is you want to go. How much longer will you continue to climb the ladder of success, only to realize too late that it was leaning against the wrong building? Just pick a point in the future, whether it's six months from now or five years from now, and spend a few hours writing out a clear description of where you want to be at that time. I know many people who aren't sure where they want to go, so they avoid committing anything to writing in order to "keep their options open." What would happen if you pursued that attitude to its logical conclusion? If you always kept your options open and never made any firm commitments, then you'd never get promoted, start your own business, get married, have a family, move to that new home, etc. except to the degree that someone else made that decision for you.

I used to have a friend like this, who still hasn't decided what he wants to do with his life. He yields control of his life to others without even realizing it, simply because he's unwilling to take the time to define a vision for his own life out of fear of making the wrong choice. His life is ruled by others who push their goals onto him, which he accepts by default. Ask yourself if you're in the same boat. If a friend of yours became totally committed to getting you to change something in your life at random — your career, your living situation, your relationship, etc. — could s/he do it just by being absolutely certain and committed that it's the right thing for you? Could a business associate come along and radically alter your plans for the week without you ever deciding consciously that such a change is consistent with your goals? We all suffer from problems like these to the degree that we fail to set clear goals for ourselves. There is a big difference between recognizing and acting on a true opportunity and being knocked off course without making a conscious decision to shift gears.

Waiting for something to inspire you and hoping that the perfect outcome will just fall into your lap is nothing but a fantasy. Clear decision making doesn't happen passively; you actually have to physically put in the time to make it happen. If you don't have clear goals simply because you don't know what you want, then sit down and actively decide what you want. That sense of knowing what you want isn't going to just come to you in a form of divine inspiration. Clarity is a choice, not an accident or a gift. Clarity doesn't come to you — you have to go to it. Not setting goals is the same thing as deciding to be a slave to the goals of others.

Clear Goals Sharpen Present-Moment Decisions

Your reality will not match your vision exactly. That's not the point. The point is for your vision to allow you to make clear daily decisions that keep you moving in the direction of your goals. When a commercial airliner flies from one city to another, it is off course over 90% of the time, but it keeps measuring its progress and adjusting its heading again and again. Goal

setting works the same way. Maintain a clear list of goals not because that's actually where you'll end up but because it will give you tremendous certainty in deciding what you need to do today. When someone contacts you with an "opportunity" out of the blue, you'll know whether it's a real opportunity or a waste of time. The long view sharpens the short view. As you begin moving towards your goals, you'll gain new knowledge along the way, and you'll have to adapt your plans as you go. You may also change your vision if you get partway there and decide it's not quite what you really want. Ill-formed goals are still far superior to no goals at all.

I was once told by someone that I should end each day by crossing it off my calendar and saying out loud, "There goes another day of my life, never to return again." Try this for yourself, and notice how much it sharpens your focus. When you end a day with the feeling that you would have lived it the same if you had the chance to repeat it, you gain a sense of gratitude that helps you focus on what's really important to you. When you end the day with a feeling of regret or loss, you gain the awareness to try a different approach the next day.

You'll see a measurable difference in your life the very first day you establish clear, committed goals, even if your first few attempts aren't perfect. You'll be able to make decisions much more rapidly because you'll see how they'll either move you towards or away from your goals. On the eve of his death, Walt Disney had a reporter crawl into bed with him so he could share his vision for Disney World, six years before its completion. When Disney World finally opened, another reporter commented to Walt's brother, Roy, "It's too bad Walt did not live to see this." Roy replied, "Walt saw it first. That's why we are seeing it now." Clear goals allow you to achieve the first half of H.L. Hunt's success formula. By deciding exactly what you want to accomplish, committing it to writing, and reviewing it on a daily basis, you bring your goals into reality with the power of your focus.

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Ones and Tens

September 22, 2014 by Steve Pavlina

When you present yourself to the world, do you have a tendency to sanitize your public image? Do you show other people, especially strangers, your safest and most socially acceptable aspects first? Do you find it sensible to avoid the risk of judgment so as to make socialization easier?

When you get to know other people, do you engage with their sanitized public selves first as well? Do you stick with the most socially acceptable topics for discussion, so as to avoid any significant risk of causing offense?

When you explore a potential romantic connection for the first time, do you play it safe there as well? Do you stick with safe subjects like work, school, and past experiences? Do you attempt to create a light bond first before delving into anything potentially controversial?

Playing It Safe Socially

Playing it safe is an effective social strategy if your goal is to create loose bonds with a variety of people. When you stick with polite conversation, keep your most striking differences and oddities private, and do your best to avoid controversy, you're likely to do well socially on a surface level.

This is essentially the mindset put forth in books like Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

The strategy is popular because it works. If you use this approach, you will get people labeling you as a friend and inviting you into their social circles. You can certainly achieve some popularity this way, as well as a degree of influence.

If this outcome is important to you, then feel free to use that general approach. Be polite. Be modest. Be non-judgmental. Keep your most striking differences to yourself.

I was rather shy as a kid, so this path of development was a good way to branch out socially and to make more friends. Eventually I found it easy to make and maintain plenty of friends. This was fun at first, but after some years on this path, I grew bored with the types of connections that I was experiencing. They were light-hearted and friendly, but mostly superficial.

When I was 18 years old, I would often hang out in various student lounges in the dorms at UC Berkeley. This was a time when I was goofing off academically (and finally expelled in my third semester), but during the first two semesters, I spent a lot of time working on my social skills. I lived on the eighth floor of an eight-story dormitory, and many evenings I would hang out in one of the lounges on a different floor, so I could meet other students and make more friends.

The Berkeley students tended to be very bright, and I enjoyed discussing a variety of topics with them. But what impressed me most was when I met other students who seemed willing to take social risks during these conversations.

One evening I was having a casual conversation in a lounge with a fellow student who told me

that she was an atheist. She began sharing her strongly held beliefs about how stupid religion was and how the world would be better off without it. I was also an atheist at the time, and I really resonated with what she shared. But mostly I was impressed that she shared it so early in our conversation, especially since there were other students around who could overhear us. Berkeley has an atmosphere that tends to encourage these kinds of exchanges, which I liked, but I was still impressed that she could be so open about her beliefs. She wasn't playing it safe like so many others were.

As she talked I felt a special connection to her. She shared on the outside what she felt and believed on the inside. We only had a fairly short conversation that evening, but 25 years later, I still remember her.

That said, it's fair to say that the main reason I felt such a connection to her was because she was sharing something that really resonated with me at the time. Most students talked about their classes, where they were from, and their favorite music. She took a risk and got a match with me, but she could have gotten a mismatch if I had been a different kind of guy.

Sevens vs. Ones and Tens

The *Win Friends* approach to socializing is an attempt to become a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10 for everyone. Since you don't take major social risks, it's very unlikely that you'll be anyone's 9 or 10, but you can float comfortably in their 6-8 range.

By not taking major social risks and hiding your most striking differences, you can safely avoid offending most people, so almost everyone can feel comfortable with you. Many people will grow to like you on a surface level if you don't give them a reason not to like you.

But if you never take social risks, you'll also prevent yourself from attracting those deeply intimate 9s and 10s. These types of connections require some risk taking, such as by sharing the parts of yourself that aren't popular and which aren't as socially acceptable.

In order to get those 9s and 10s, you must risk creating some 1s and 2s. Many people fear the 1s and 2s more strongly than they desire the 9s and 10s, and so they settle for 7s at best.

If you settle for 7s for too long though, you're bound to feel — eventually — that something is missing. You may find yourself in a room of friends and notice that you're still lonely or empty inside. You may feel that you'd rather be alone than go out with friends because you know that the connections will only satisfy you on a surface level and that your deeper cravings will remain unfulfilled. You may oscillate between wanting to be around people and wanting to be alone, but feeling dissatisfied with either option.

Intimacy

That missing ingredient is real human intimacy. Part of you still desires the opportunity to share your deepest thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with another person and to feel acknowledged, appreciated, and supported.

It's not just the sharing that helps. It's the ability to connect with those 9s and 10s who see you, understand you, and agree with you. These are the people that you'd say are "on the same wavelength" as you.

These people exist, but how are you going to find them? How will they find you?

If you do your best to avoid taking social risks, and if most other people in your life do the

same, you'll have a hard time finding people who match your less popular qualities. Your social life will become a series of partial matches, but the really deep connections will remain outside your grasp.

For example, I could hide or downplay the fact that I'm an ethical vegan and that I believe it's wrong to cage, torture, and kill animals for entertainment, sport, or food. This could make it easier to foster shallow friendships with partial matches, but it would also make me less visible to my best matches.

If you want more surface friendships, it makes more sense to use the *Win Friends* approach. If, however, you'd like to experience deeper intimacy, then it's more sensible to openly share your most different thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, so as to raise your visibility among your best matches.

If you go the intimacy route, then even if most people would rate you on the lower end of the scale, how many 9s and 10s do you need anyway? How much value would you place on finding and adding one good level 10 match to your life? Is it worth creating dozens or even hundreds of 1s and 2s who will quickly dismiss you if it also means having the opportunity to attract a 9 or 10 and attracting an amazing best friend or lover for years to come, perhaps even for the rest of your life?

The Challenge of Finding 9s and 10s

For some people it's not so difficult to find 9s and 10s. If, however, you stray further from social norms than most people, finding such quality matches can be a real challenge.

Even with the high profile I have as a well-known blogger, author, and international speaker, finding someone who's a 9 or 10 match for me is a rarity. I meet lots of 8s, but the 9s and 10s are few and far between.

For someone to be a 9 or 10 for me, that person would have to match on many of the core qualities that I value most. These include being vegan, being non-religious, being intensely curious about life, having a long-term commitment to personal growth, being open-minded about open relationships, having a love of exploration and experimentation, being very honest, and following one's path with a heart.

At the recent Conscious Life Workshop last month, some attendees asked me if Rachele and I have explored a Three-Person Relationship yet, since I had written about that idea in February 2013. Rachele and I haven't found a single good match for this type of exploration yet, so we haven't experienced it. We're willing to explore this with someone who's a strong match for this type of exploration with us, but we're not interested in doing it with a weak match just to do it. If we eventually encounter a good match, then wonderful — we can explore together. But if not, I think it's best not to force it.

Partial Matches as Training

Sometimes when your 9s and 10s don't show up right away, you can gain more clarity about what those 9s and 10s would look like. Having even one match like this in your life can be an intense experience, so you may also discover that you've been repelling the ideal match due to a lack of readiness. One of the ways you do this is by saying yes to partial matches along the way.

When I set a new intention, especially if it's a social one, I often notice a string of partial matches coming my way first. I regard these as clarification questions. Each partial match asks

me to refine my understanding of what I really desire.

When you encounter a partial match, you may recognize that it's off in some way. But how is it off? What's missing? What's not quite right about it? Answer these questions carefully, and use your answers to clarify your desires. Release the partial match, and set your intention again.

When a partial match shows up, and you realize it's a repeat of similar patterns from the past, feel free to decline to engage with it and let it go (unless you just want to relive another round of the same). Then you'll either see different types of partial matches arriving with new lessons, or you'll finally welcome the manifestation of your desires.

Quality human relationships are one of the great joys of life. One good relationship can completely transform you. To initiate this journey, set a bold intention from your heart, share your desires openly, explore with partial matches, and refine your desires over time. The turning point will come when you discover how to express your desire not as a static state but as a dynamic continuation of your path of growth.

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Fatal Dating Mistakes

March 4, 2015 by Steve Pavlina

Did you ever make a foolish mistake and screw up an otherwise good connection with someone you were attracted to?

Maybe you made the mistake during your approach. You said or did the wrong thing at the wrong time and killed your chances.

Or perhaps it happened during a date. Everything was going okay up to a certain point, and then you hit a snag, and you could just tell that you made the wrong decision. Game over.

Or did it happen later? Maybe things were going well for a while. Then you made that one fatal error — that moment of poor judgment — and the connection died then and there, never to recover.

This applies not only to errors of commission but also to errors of omission — the action you didn't take, the golden opportunity you missed, the hesitation that caused everything to fizzle. And of course what happens afterwards? You replay the situation in your mind again and again. You fantasize about a different outcome. You beat yourself up for that one stupid mistake.

If you're looking for a contrived list of the top 10 mistakes and how to avoid or remedy each one, you won't find that here. I don't think that type of advice is particularly helpful for such situations, so let me give you a different — and significantly more empowering — perspective.

Vulnerability to Mistakes

Consider that if a connection you're exploring with someone is so vulnerable to mistakes, even at the very beginning of your connection, then maybe the other person wasn't so compatible with you to begin with.

Even if you had managed to avoid that one mistake, another equally fatal one may very well have occurred later — and if not that one, then some other one.

If stepping on a single landmine could kill the connection so abruptly, perhaps the mistake wasn't that you stepped on a mine. Perhaps the mistake was that you walked into a minefield to begin with, and you were unlikely to create a strong connection no matter what you did. You were doomed at hello.

Even if you succeed in creating a decent connection under such circumstances, you'll always be dodging mines to preserve it. If you drop your guard and stop being so vigilant, you'll accidentally step on a mine and kill or seriously damage the connection. You'll never feel free to be yourself. You'll never feel relaxed in such a relationship.

I've had several experiences of connecting with a woman where things were going well for a while and then the connection took a wrong turn and died. I can often recall the exact moment that happened, something she or I said or did that killed it. Initially there can be some regret about that. If only that one mistake had been avoided, then everything might have been golden.

But after some time passes and I look back on those connections more objectively, I can see the minefields that I initially overlooked. It was clear that in each of those situations, the

compatibility was weak from the start. Even if we had avoided all the mines, those connections were unlikely to ever flourish. Sometimes our lifestyles were incompatible. Other times there was a major difference in values. And still other times, the attraction just wasn't there.

That one exploding mine was a gift. It saved us both from going any further down the wrong path.

Fault Tolerance

In my experience, connections that have the potential to become very strong tend to be fault tolerant from the beginning. If the compatibility is high, then the minefield is largely absent. You could still kill such a connection deliberately if you chose to, but if you actually want to make it work and the other person does too, then there's little chance of stepping on a fatal mine.

When I meet someone with whom I share some deep compatibility, especially on lifestyle and values, it's hard to screw it up. I can make all sorts of mistakes, and the other person won't hold it against me. She might not notice, or she'll brush it off, or she'll be bothered briefly and quickly forgive me. And I'll do the same with her.

We tend to sense early on when the compatibility is strong, and so we're more likely to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. We see such connections as being investment worthy, so we're very willing to cut the other person some slack.

When I've found myself in situations where the compatibility was weak, I have to admit that I probably stepped on a mine or two deliberately, knowing that it would bring things to a close. But if I were to take the same action with a high-compatibility connection, it wouldn't have the same effect.

When I look back on how Rachelle and I first connected, we were so compatible that I think it would have been hard for either of us to screw things up when we first got together. I could have said or done the stupidest things, and she would have forgiven me, or she would have pointed out that I was being a dork, or she would have played back at me. And I'd have done the same with her. And in fact, if I look back, I can see that this is exactly what happened. We each made many mistakes that would have killed less compatible connections, but for us those missteps made no difference. Since the connection was investment worthy for both of us, it wasn't so vulnerable to mistakes.

Without the need to be vigilant about avoiding mines, we can both be fully ourselves. We can make mistakes, and they don't even matter. We don't have to worry about stepping on any mines because there's no minefield.

Other good connections I've had, including friendships, followed a similar pattern. When the compatibility was there, I didn't have to be vigilant about saying or doing the right things and avoiding mistakes. Mistakes didn't matter.

But one of those same mistakes would instantly annihilate a low-compatibility connection.

Investment Worthiness

As I've gotten older (and hopefully wiser), I've lost interest in chasing low-compatibility connections. I have no desire to learn someone's minefield and try to maneuver through it

cautiously. I'd rather just be fully myself, knowing that my normal behaviors will be enough to repel connections that wouldn't have worked out anyway. This saves me a lot of time.

Investment worthy connections are less common, but they're ridiculously rewarding. One good connection of that type is easily worth more than a hundred low quality ones.

One of the main reasons people don't enjoy more investment worthy connections is that they're wasting time on partial matches. Many are currently stuck in a relationship with a partial match, which is a huge repellent for an investment worthy connection that comes along. Because you appear to be unavailable, you won't even notice the golden opportunities you're missing; they won't present themselves while you're entrenched in a partial match.

Look for Mines Early

Because investment worthy connections are so much more empowering than partial matches, it makes sense to filter out partial matches early, so you don't get bogged down in their minefields.

Instead of trying to chase someone and build a connection, I focus instead on filtering for compatibility. If the compatibility is there and if I can see that there's no minefield, that's when I'll get excited and pour my heart into a connection.

But if I step on a mine and that scares the other person off, then I feel confident that I just saved us both some needless disappointment down the road.

Stepping on a mine doesn't mean being rude or obnoxious and seeing if the other person will tolerate you. That's not at all what I'm referring to here.

Stepping on a mine means testing the strength of your compatibility, especially when it comes to lifestyle and values.

To give you a better idea, here are some of the mines I often check for:

- Is she the jealous type? How does she feel about non-exclusivity and open relationships?
- Is she religious? Could she handle connecting with an unrepentant sinner?
- Does she like to explore, travel, and try new things? Does she like to grow? Or is she stubborn and inflexible?
- Is she caring and compassionate? Or does she boast about her cruel and vengeful side?
- Is she comfortable with lots of touch and affection? Or does she have issues with physical intimacy?
- Is she playful? Does she enjoy light-hearted teasing? Can she have fun?
- Is she awake and self-aware? Is she interesting to talk to? Or does she act like a mindless NPC?
- Can she play along when I want to lead? Or does she always need to be in control?
- Does she generally like herself? Or is she wallowing in low self-esteem?
- Is she ready and able to go deeper? Or will she bolt as soon as an unresolved trauma gets triggered?

Most of the time when I meet someone new, I'll find one or more mines in the first conversation.

Finding a mine doesn't necessarily mean I'll drop this person from my life, but I'm unlikely to invest in a deeper connection if the core compatibility isn't there. I'd rather save my energy to go deeper with someone who seems like a better match for me.

Minefields in Business

You may find it interesting that this is the same approach that many successful entrepreneurs recommend in business. They say to fail early, fail often, and fail faster. Make more mistakes. Try lots of ideas, especially early on, and kill the ones that don't perform. Then put more time, energy, and resources into your most investment worthy ideas. The advantage of this approach is that it lets you map out the nearby minefields, so you don't keep stepping on mines by accident.

I think it makes sense to do the same with relationships. Being clingy with an incompatible match is very much like clinging to a bad business idea. A bad business idea comes with its own minefield. It's very vulnerable to mistakes. Yes, you can still make that kind of idea work, but it will take constant vigilance to do so. It's your choice if that type of business — or relationship — appeals to you.

I prefer a more fault tolerant business model. I like that blogging is a very fault tolerant medium. I don't have to worry about being perfect. I can write whatever I feel inspired to write. I can cover a wide variety of topics. I can take time off whenever I want. I can change up the income streams now and then. And it still works. My best readers stick with me because they can see we're compatible in the ways that matter. I don't worry about chasing incompatible readers.

This makes the business pleasant to run. I can run it largely by being myself. I don't have to feel paranoid that one mistake could kill the whole thing.

Who wants to run a business where one honest mistake will kill it? Who wants to be in a relationship under those conditions?

Respecting the Mines

Sometimes you can step on another person's mine, and it won't kill the connection. It may actually open the door to greater intimacy. How this plays out depends on how you both deal with the mine, and this depends on how investment worthy the connection is for each of you. Some people actually pride themselves on the strength of their minefields. They may even show off just how many mines they have. This repels most connections, but it also ensures that if someone does connect with them, that person is likely to be able to handle that particular minefield.

Also, what looks like a minefield for one person may not seem very dangerous for another person.

I usually appreciate it when someone exposes their potential minefield upfront. It makes it easier to see if those mines might be an issue for me, and it saves me from stepping on one by accident later. For instance, if a woman tells me she's in an open relationship and has a couple kids, that may be a huge minefield for someone, but to me those aren't even mines. By sharing this upfront, she can save herself a lot of time by not having to invest time and energy in incompatible connections, and she can better filter for compatible connections.

Some mines invite the opportunity for healing. This is especially true of mines that are rooted

in fear, shame, guilt, anxiety, or past trauma. When you see such a mine, you could choose not to deal with it. Or, if the other person seems willing, you could do some healing work together. I encounter these situations semi-regularly. Sometimes I just don't feel like investing, and I pull back and save my energy. Other times I'm up for doing some healing work with the person. Usually my willingness depends on how ready the other person is to progress.

It's up to you to decide how you'll deal with future mines you encounter in your social connections. You can beat yourself up for stepping on them. You can become hyper-vigilant at navigating minefields. You can use mines as compatibility filters and preserve your energy for the very best connections. And you can treat some mines as opportunities for healing.

Whatever approach you buy into, I hope you enjoy and invest in at least one highly compatible, deeply meaningful, and richly rewarding connection in your life. <3

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10 Reasons You Should Never Get a Job

July 21, 2006 by Steve Pavlina

Just for fun I recently asked Erin, “Now that the kids are in summer school, don’t you think it’s about time you went out and got yourself a job? I hate seeing you wallow in unemployment for so long.”

She smiled and said, “Wow. I have been unemployed a really long time. That’s weird... I like it!”

Neither of us have had jobs since the '90s (my only job was in 1992), so we’ve been self-employed for quite a while. In our household it’s a running joke for one of us to say to the other, “Maybe you should get a job, derelict!”

It’s like the scene in *The Three Stooges* where Moe tells Curly to get a job, and Curly backs away, saying, “No, please... not that! Anything but that!”

It’s funny that when people reach a certain age, such as after graduating college, they assume it’s time to go out and get a job. But like many things the masses do, just because everyone does it doesn’t mean it’s a good idea. In fact, if you’re reasonably intelligent, getting a job is one of the worst things you can do to support yourself. There are far better ways to make a living than selling yourself into indentured servitude.

Here are some reasons you should do everything in your power to avoid getting a job:

1. Income for dummies

Getting a job and trading your time for money may seem like a good idea. There’s only one problem with it. It’s stupid! It’s the stupidest way you can possibly generate income! This is truly *income for dummies*.

Why is getting a job so dumb? Because you only get paid when you’re working. Don’t you see a problem with that, or have you been so thoroughly brainwashed into thinking it’s reasonable and intelligent to only earn income when you’re working? Have you never considered that it might be better to be paid even when you’re not working? Who taught you that you could only earn income while working? Some other brainwashed employee perhaps? Don’t you think your life would be much easier if you got paid while you were eating, sleeping, and playing with the kids too? Why not get paid 24/7? Get paid whether you work or not. Don’t your plants grow even when you aren’t tending to them? Why not your bank account?

Who cares how many hours you work? Only a handful of people on this entire planet care how much time you spend at the office. Most of us won’t even notice whether you work 6 hours a week or 60. But if you have something of value to provide that matters to us, a number of us will be happy to pull out our wallets and pay you for it. We don’t care about your time — we only care enough to pay for the value we receive. Do you really care how long it took me to write this article? Would you pay me twice as much if it took me 6 hours vs. only 3?

Non-dummies often start out on the traditional *income for dummies* path. So don’t feel bad if you’re just now realizing you’ve been suckered. Non-dummies eventually realize that trading time for money is indeed extremely dumb and that there must be a better way. And of course there is a better way. The key is to de-couple your value from your time.

Smart people build systems that generate income 24/7, especially passive income. This can include starting a business, building a web site, becoming an investor, or generating royalty income from creative work. The system delivers the ongoing value to people and generates income from it, and once it's in motion, it runs continuously whether you tend to it or not. From that moment on, the bulk of your time can be invested in increasing your income (by refining your system or spawning new ones) instead of merely maintaining your income.

This web site is an example of such a system. At the time of this writing, it generates about \$9000 a month in income for me (*update: \$40,000 a month as of 10/31/06*), and it isn't my only income stream either. I write each article just once (fixed time investment), and people can extract value from them year after year. The web server delivers the value, and other systems (most of which I didn't even build and don't even understand) collect income and deposit it automatically into my bank account. It's not perfectly passive, but I love writing and would do it for free anyway. But of course it cost me a lot of money to launch this business, right? Um, yeah, \$9 is an awful lot these days (to register the domain name). Everything after that was profit.

Sure it takes some upfront time and effort to design and implement your own income-generating systems. But you don't have to reinvent the wheel — feel free to use existing systems like ad networks and affiliate programs. Once you get going, you won't have to work so many hours to support yourself. Wouldn't it be nice to be out having dinner with your spouse, knowing that while you're eating, you're earning money? If you want to keep working long hours because you enjoy it, go right ahead. If you want to sit around doing nothing, feel free. As long as your system continues delivering value to others, you'll keep getting paid whether you're working or not.

Your local bookstore is filled with books containing workable systems others have already designed, tested, and debugged. Nobody is born knowing how to start a business or generate investment income, but you can easily learn it. How long it takes you to figure it out is irrelevant because the time is going to pass anyway. You might as well emerge at some future point as the owner of income-generating systems as opposed to a lifelong wage slave. This isn't all or nothing. If your system only generates a few hundred dollars a month, that's a significant step in the right direction.

2. Limited experience

You might think it's important to get a job to gain experience. But that's like saying you should play golf to get experience playing golf. You gain experience from living, regardless of whether you have a job or not. A job only gives you experience at that job, but you gain "experience" doing just about anything, so that's no real benefit at all. Sit around doing nothing for a couple years, and you can call yourself an experienced meditator, philosopher, or politician.

The problem with getting experience from a job is that you usually just repeat the same limited experience over and over. You learn a lot in the beginning and then stagnate. This forces you to miss other experiences that would be much more valuable. And if your limited skill set ever becomes obsolete, then your experience won't be worth squat. In fact, ask yourself what the experience you're gaining right now will be worth in 20-30 years. Will your job even exist then?

Consider this. Which experience would you rather gain? The knowledge of how to do a specific job really well — one that you can only monetize by trading your time for money — or the knowledge of how to enjoy financial abundance for the rest of your life without ever

needing a job again? Now I don't know about you, but I'd rather have the latter experience. That seems a lot more useful in the real world, wouldn't you say?

3. Lifelong domestication

Getting a job is like enrolling in a human domestication program. You learn how to be a good pet.

Look around you. Really look. What do you see? Are these the surroundings of a free human being? Or are you living in a cage for unconscious animals? Have you fallen in love with the color beige?

How's your obedience training coming along? Does your master reward your good behavior? Do you get disciplined if you fail to obey your master's commands?

Is there any spark of free will left inside you? Or has your conditioning made you a pet for life? Humans are not meant to be raised in cages. You poor thing...

4. Too many mouths to feed

Employee income is the most heavily taxed there is. In the USA you can expect that about half your salary will go to taxes. The tax system is designed to disguise how much you're really giving up because some of those taxes are paid by your employer, and some are deducted from your paycheck. But you can bet that from your employer's perspective, *all* of those taxes are considered part of your pay, as well as any other compensation you receive such as benefits. Even the rent for the office space you consume is considered, so you must generate that much more value to cover it. You might feel supported by your corporate environment, but keep in mind that you're the one paying for it.

Another chunk of your income goes to owners and investors. That's a lot of mouths to feed. It isn't hard to understand why employees pay the most in taxes relative to their income. After all, who has more control over the tax system? Business owners and investors or employees? You only get paid a fraction of the real value you generate. Your real salary may be more than triple what you're paid, but most of that money you'll never see. It goes straight into other people's pockets.

What a generous person you are!

5. Way too risky

Many employees believe getting a job is the safest and most secure way to support themselves. Morons.

Social conditioning is amazing. It's so good it can even make people believe the exact opposite of the truth.

Does putting yourself in a position where someone else can turn off all your income just by saying two words ("You're fired") sound like a safe and secure situation to you? Does having only one income stream honestly sound more secure than having 10?

The idea that a job is the most secure way to generate income is just silly. You can't have security if you don't have control, and employees have the least control of anyone. If you're an employee, then your real job title should be *professional gambler*.

6. Having an evil bovine master

When you run into an idiot in the entrepreneurial world, you can turn around and head the other way. When you run into an idiot in the corporate world, you have to turn around and say, "Sorry, boss."

Did you know that the word boss comes from the Dutch word *baas*, which historically means *master*? Another meaning of the word boss is "a cow or bovine." And in many video games, the boss is the evil dude that you have to kill at the end of a level.

So if your boss is really your *evil bovine master*, then what does that make you? Nothing but a turd in the herd.

Who's your daddy?

7. Begging for money

When you want to increase your income, do you have to sit up and beg your master for more money? Does it feel good to be thrown some extra Scooby Snacks now and then?

Or are you free to decide how much you get paid without needing anyone's permission but your own?

If you have a business and one customer says "no" to you, you simply say "next."

8. An inbred social life

Many people treat their jobs as their primary social outlet. They hang out with the same people working in the same field. Such incestuous relations are social dead ends. An exciting day includes deep conversations about the company's switch from Sparkletts to Arrowhead, the delay of Microsoft's latest operating system, and the unexpected delivery of more Bic pens. Consider what it would be like to go outside and talk to strangers. Ooooh... scary! Better stay inside where it's safe.

If one of your co-slaves gets sold to another master, do you lose a friend? If you work in a male-dominated field, does that mean you never get to talk to women above the rank of receptionist? Why not decide for yourself whom to socialize with instead of letting your master decide for you? Believe it or not, there are locations on this planet where free people congregate. Just be wary of those jobless folk — they're a crazy bunch!

9. Loss of freedom

It takes a lot of effort to tame a human being into an employee. The first thing you have to do is break the human's independent will. A good way to do this is to give them a weighty policy manual filled with nonsensical rules and regulations. This leads the new employee to become more obedient, fearing that s/he could be disciplined at any minute for something incomprehensible. Thus, the employee will likely conclude it's safest to simply obey the master's commands without question. Stir in some office politics for good measure, and we've got a freshly minted mind slave.

As part of their obedience training, employees must be taught how to dress, talk, move, and so on. We can't very well have employees thinking for themselves, now can we? That would ruin everything.

God forbid you should put a plant on your desk when it's against the company policy. Oh no, it's the end of the world! Cindy has a plant on her desk! Summon the enforcers! Send Cindy

back for another round of sterility training!

Free human beings think such rules and regulations are silly of course. The only policy they need is: “Be smart. Be nice. Do what you love. Have fun.”

10. Becoming a coward

Have you noticed that employed people have an almost endless capacity to whine about problems at their companies? But they don't really want solutions — they just want to vent and make excuses why it's all someone else's fault. It's as if getting a job somehow drains all the free will out of people and turns them into spineless cowards. If you can't call your boss a jerk now and then without fear of getting fired, you're no longer free. You've become your master's property.

When you work around cowards all day long, don't you think it's going to rub off on you? Of course it will. It's only a matter of time before you sacrifice the noblest parts of your humanity on the altar of fear: first courage... then honesty... then honor and integrity... and finally your independent will. You sold your humanity for nothing but an illusion. And now your greatest fear is discovering the truth of what you've become.

I don't care how badly you've been beaten down. It is never too late to regain your courage. Never!

Still want a job?

If you're currently a well-conditioned, well-behaved employee, your most likely reaction to the above will be defensiveness. It's all part of the conditioning. But consider that if the above didn't have a grain of truth to it, you wouldn't have an emotional reaction at all. This is only a reminder of what you already know. You can deny your cage all you want, but the cage is still there. Perhaps this all happened so gradually that you never noticed it until now... like a lobster enjoying a nice warm bath.

If any of this makes you mad, that's a step in the right direction. Anger is a higher level of consciousness than apathy, so it's a lot better than being numb all the time. Any emotion — even confusion — is better than apathy. If you work through your feelings instead of repressing them, you'll soon emerge on the doorstep of courage. And when that happens, you'll have the will to actually do something about your situation and start living like the powerful human being you were meant to be instead of the domesticated pet you've been trained to be.

Happily jobless

What's the alternative to getting a job? The alternative is to remain happily jobless for life and to generate income through other means. Realize that you earn income by providing value — not time — so find a way to provide your best value to others, and charge a fair price for it. One of the simplest and most accessible ways is to start your own business. Whatever work you'd otherwise do via employment, find a way to provide that same value directly to those who will benefit most from it. It takes a bit more time to get going, but your freedom is easily worth the initial investment of time and energy. Then you can buy your own Scooby Snacks for a change.

And of course everything you learn along the way, you can share with others to generate even more value. So even your mistakes can be monetized.

Here are some free resources to help you get started:

[The Courage To Live Consciously \(article on how to transition to more meaningful work\)](#)

[Podcast #006 – How to Make Money Without a Job \(audio\)](#)

[Podcast #009 – Kick-start Your Own Business \(audio\)](#)

[Podcast #014 – Embracing Your Passion \(audio\)](#)

[10 Stupid Mistakes Made by the Newly Self-Employed \(article\)](#)

[How to Build a High-Traffic Web Site \(or Blog\) \(article\)](#)

[How to Make Money From Your Blog \(article\)](#)

One of the greatest fears you'll confront is that you may not have any real value to offer others. Maybe being an employee and getting paid by the hour is the best you can do. Maybe you just aren't worth that much. That line of thinking is all just part of your conditioning. It's absolute nonsense. As you begin to dump such brainwashing, you'll soon recognize that you have the ability to provide enormous value to others and that people will gladly pay you for it. There's only one thing that prevents you from seeing this truth — fear.

All you really need is the courage to be yourself. Your real value is rooted in who you are, not what you do. The only thing you need actually do is express your real self to the world. You've been told all sort of lies as to why you can't do that. But you'll never know true happiness and fulfillment until you summon the courage to do it anyway.

The next time someone says to you, "Get a job," I suggest you reply as Curly did: "No, please... not that! Anything but that!" Then poke him right in the eyes.

You already know deep down that getting a job isn't what you want. So don't let anyone try to tell you otherwise. Learn to trust your inner wisdom, even if the whole world says you're wrong and foolish for doing so. Years from now you'll look back and realize it was one of the best decisions you ever made.

Final thoughts

While I wouldn't recommend starting an online business for everyone, for many people it's one of the best ways to generate income without a job. It has certainly worked disgustingly well for me. If you're interested in learning more about this option, please see this page for details.

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Jobs vs. Passive Income

May 11, 2012 by Steve Pavlina

Many people have the limiting belief that passive income is weird, unusual, complicated, or confusing. As I've mentioned previously, passive income isn't particularly difficult in practice. In many ways, earning a living through streams of passive income is easier than earning a living through a job or as an independent contractor, especially in the long run.

The difficult part has to do with getting comfortable with a passive income mindset.

To tackle this mindset issue, let's turn this around and look at it from the other side.

Suppose you were already very comfortable with passive income, just like I am. Imagine that you had many thousands of dollars coming in every month, more than enough to cover all your expenses. Whether you work or not, fresh income keeps flowing to you month after month and year after year, based on streams you set up years ago.

Imagine that this is your normal everyday reality. You've already been living like this for more than a decade.

Now imagine that a friend with a regular job tries to convince you that what you're doing is weird or unusual and that you should adopt his mindset, give up your passive income lifestyle, and get a regular job instead.

If a job-loving friend did this with me, here's what such a conversation might look like...

Friend: You know... you should join the world of real people and get a regular job. This passive income stuff you're doing is just too strange.

Me: It seems to work well enough. What's wrong with it?

Friend: Well... it's not what most people do. Most people get jobs.

Me: How does that work?

Friend: Basically you go to work for some other company, usually a corporation. You do the work, and they give you a paycheck.

Me: Ok. Is my paycheck somehow based on the value I contribute?

Friend: More or less.

Me: So will I receive a fair amount relative to my contribution?

Friend: Depends on what you mean by fair. Obviously they're not going to pay you 100% of what they think you're contributing. They have to make a profit as well.

Me: Well do I get 80% of it or something like that?

Friend: Realistically it's probably closer to 30%, but it's not tracked that precisely. They don't really know how much value you're contributing relative to everyone else. On larger teams it's especially difficult to know how much value any individual is contributing. So salaries invariably involve a lot of guesswork.

Me: Where does the rest of the value I create go?

Friend: It gets distributed in many different ways — as income to investors and stockholders, to company profits, to corporate taxes, to higher pay for officers, to various perks like company picnics, and so on. That's for the higher-ups to decide, so it isn't really up to you.

Me: Do I at least get a share of those company profits?

Friend: Not usually, although some companies do have a profit sharing plan, but even then they won't share all the profits... usually less than half. Sometimes you'll indirectly get a small

cut, like in the form of a bonus.

Me: Hmmm... Do I have to work every day?

Friend: Usually just weekdays, but it depends on the job. You may also get a few weeks per year for vacation time.

Me: Only a few weeks? What if I want to travel for a month or two?

Friend: Well, you usually can't. Maybe if you save up vacation time for a few years, then they would let you, but it's not good to be gone so long at a stretch.

Me: Why does vacation time need to be saved up? Time passes on its own. If I can afford to go on vacation, why can't I just go?

Friend: Because they need you to work.

Me: What if I'm burned out and don't feel like working?

Friend: There's free coffee.

Me: Good coffee or bad coffee?

Friend: Depends on the job, but there's always a Starbucks nearby if they only serve Folgers in the office.

Me: Can I take my laptop to the Starbucks and work there?

Friend: Depends on the job, but usually not.

Me: Can I go on more vacations if I work from the road on my laptop now and then?

Friend: Not usually.

Me: Why not?

Friend: Well, they probably wouldn't trust you to work if you're out of the office too much.

Me: So they have to watch me work?

Friend: Basically yes. But also some jobs are collaborative, so they want everyone together in the same place.

Me: I often do work now that's collaborative. We collaborate over the Internet or by phone.

Friend: Yup, some jobs are moving in that direction, but most employers still want you to show up each day.

Me: Where do I get to work?

Friend: That depends heavily on the type of job. For many office jobs, you'll work in a cubicle.

Me: What's a cubicle?

Friend: It's a subdivision in a larger room, delineated by short fuzzy walls. You should have enough room for a desk and a chair. Typically you'll have 50-80 square feet of space for yourself.

Me: So it's like the Shire?

Friend: Pretty much, but usually not as green.

Me: My home office is about 200 square feet, and it has its own bathroom and shower. But I can work wherever I want, so I'm not confined to that space.

Friend: Yeah, you won't get a space that size as a regular employee most likely, unless you work in management or some other high value job that warrants its own office. That isn't what most employees get, but it isn't out of the question. It just depends on the job.

Me: Do I get to pick my own job title?

Friend: Usually it's assigned, but sometimes you can. It depends on the company.

Me: Can I pick *Master*?

Friend: Mmmm... probably not.

Me: What about the pay?

Friend: Well, you'd probably earn a lot less than you do now for doing the same kind of work. Just to give you an idea, the average salary for a blogger is about \$17-38K per year (source).

Me: Wow... that's a lot less than I earn now passively, even when I'm on vacation. How would I even live on that?

Friend: Other people get by on that much. You'd have to cut back quite a bit, especially since you'll need more money for commuting (gas, car maintenance), professional work clothes if required, and various other expenses incurred by employees. But you might get a free

company t-shirt and coffee mug and maybe a mouse pad if you're lucky, so it sort of balances out.

Me: Ouch. But what if I could somehow earn the same amount I do now, but from a job instead of from passive income?

Friend: That would be very unlikely, but if you did manage that, you'd pay a lot more in taxes since this would all be W2 employee income. You can't use your business like you do now to lower your taxes.

Me: How much more in taxes are we talking?

Friend: The extra taxes you'd pay would be enough to buy a new car every year.

Me: That doesn't sound too appealing. Seems like it would be harder to get ahead if so much of each paycheck goes to taxes.

Friend: Yes, but the government understands this, so they make it look less painful by hiding a portion of those taxes, so it doesn't seem like your income is being taxed as heavily. You never receive that part of your salary in the first place. Some of your taxes are disguised in the form of taxes paid by your employer, like the employer's contribution to Social Security and Medicare for having you on the payroll. So even though your paycheck stub will report a certain base pay, your actual base pay (from your employer's and the government's perspective) is higher. You can bet that your employer is wanting to recoup those extra taxes from you in extra value you must contribute.

Me: I'm aware of this. U.S. tax laws are clearly hardest on regular W2 employees, who pay the highest taxes of anyone relative to their income. So why would people want to have their income allocated as W2?

Friend: Most people don't know any better. Besides, they wouldn't know what to do with all that extra money anyway. Lower pay keeps them out of trouble, and it ensures that they keep showing up for work. Gotta keep the economy going.

Me: Alright.

Friend: There are some job perks too.

Me: Like what?

Friend: You get health insurance.

Me: I have that now, but I hardly ever use it since I prefer to just stay healthy.

Friend: Well, you could afford to be less healthy if you had a job, and you wouldn't have to pay for it.

Me: Hmmmm...

Friend: Free coffee too.

Me: You said that already.

Friend: Did I mention that you can have as much as you want?

Me: Ok. So what kind of work would I do at a regular job?

Friend: That depends on the job, but big picture... it's usually something that supports the company's goals.

Me: Who sets these goals?

Friend: At a well run company, the officers figure them out, with input from board members, key investors, and sometimes from employees too.

Me: Where can I see those goals?

Friend: Usually you don't get to, but sometimes they'll share snippets in the form of a company mission statement, a list of objectives, or perhaps a memo. But you're not really going to know what the company's true goals are. That's normally shared on a need-to-know basis only, and most employees don't need to know.

Me: Ok. So how do I know which goals to work on?

Friend: Usually your boss determines that, so you just do whatever your boss tells you.

Me: I have to have a boss?

Friend: Yup, everyone does. Even the CEO is accountable to the board and the shareholders.

Me: Ok, so what if my boss doesn't do a very good job of telling me what to do?

Friend: That often happens. You muddle through. Just make sure you look busy when you're being watched, and you should be ok. Personal accountability tends to be pretty low, so as long as you don't stand out as being obviously idle, you're probably safe.

Me: What if the boss and I disagree on how to achieve the company's goals?

Friend: That's where you start getting into company politics, which can be messy. Some people do what the boss says anyway, even when they know it won't work. Other people try to push back or negotiate. Sometimes that works, but sometimes they get marginalized or even let go if the boss doesn't like it. Usually people compromise somewhere in the middle.

Me: Are these compromises normally intelligent?

Friend: Not usually.

Me: If I do a good job of helping the company achieve its goals, do I get extra rewards for that?

Friend: Yes, sometimes. You might get a raise, a bonus, or a promotion. Or you might get intangible rewards like praise, appreciation, and recognition. Sometimes, however, you don't get anything more than your base pay.

Me: How do promotions work?

Friend: You get a new job title and have more responsibility, which usually comes with higher pay. Sometimes it means longer hours too.

Me: What if I come up with a really great idea, but it's not part of my assigned duties?

Friend: Umm... yeah... don't do that.

Me: Why not?

Friend: You'll just be a rabble rouser. The other employees won't like it if you try to upstage them, and they'll make your social life at work unpleasant till you back down.

Me: So if I try to work harder or smarter and get promoted faster, the other employees may try to hold me back?

Friend: Probably. Your boss may not like it very much either.

Me: My boss wouldn't like it? Why not? Isn't it part of his job to cultivate good talent?

Friend: Perhaps, but he wants to look good too. It's not good for him if one of his underlings is outshining him.

Me: That doesn't sound like an environment where I can really do my best work.

Friend: Yeah, but it's all good. Fortunately your best isn't required. You just need to get by. It's actually easier this way.

Me: But if I know I'm not doing my best, then won't I feel worse about myself? Won't that lower my self-esteem?

Friend: Sure, but you get used to it. Everyone adapts.

Me: So what is it like to work with a group where no one is doing their best, and everyone thinks less of themselves and their coworkers because of it?

Friend: Pretty boring actually. But again, you get used to it. The free coffee helps it go down easier.

Me: Ok. So what about the sex?

Friend: What are you talking about?

Me: Well, if I'm with a female coworker, and we both get horny, then where do we go to take a shag break? Are there special rooms for that?

Friend: Oh no no no. That would be very much frowned upon. You could both get fired for that sort of thing.

Me: Fired? Why? What if it's just a quickie and we still get all our work done?

Friend: Yeah, don't do that. The company could get sued.

Me: Sued by whom?

Friend: Probably by the woman you had sex with.

Me: So if we have consensual sex, she would sue the company? For what?

Friend: Sexual harassment I guess. People have won millions of dollars doing that sort of thing.

Me: Ok, so I have to settle for blowjobs only then?

Friend: Goodness no. That's just as bad.

Me: So what do people do if they get horny at work? People still get horny at their jobs, don't they?

Friend: Sure... they get horny all the time. But they suppress it and pretend they're not. Then they take care of themselves later, usually with Internet porn.

Me: People look at porn at their jobs?

Friend: Oh no. That's frowned upon too. People could get fired for that as well.

Me: So basically while they're at work, people still get horny, but they pretend to be asexual till they can take care of themselves later... like at home.

Friend: Yup, that's pretty much it.

Me: Seems easier just to have a quickie, maybe take a short cuddle nap, and then go back to work refreshed and happy.

Friend: I'm pretty sure that's illegal in a corporate setting.

Me: Ok, but those positive after-sex feelings make collaboration easier. Trying to suppress one's sexual desires every day seems like it would be very distracting.

Friend: It is distracting of course, but remember that you aren't expected to be too productive anyway, so it works out okay. And again, the free coffee helps with this as well.

Me: Ok, so let me get this straight. You're suggesting that I shut down all my passive income streams, go to work for someone else, get a boss and do what he says even if his decisions are unintelligent, do mediocre work instead of my best, socialize with people who also do mediocre work, work longer hours for less pay, take fewer and shorter vacations and ask permission to take them, pay a great deal more in taxes, and on top of all of that... no sex?

Friend: Pretty much, yes. But you're overlooking the security aspect.

Me: What's secure about it?

Friend: Well, you'll get a steady paycheck.

Me: How steady? Does it ever end?

Friend: Well sure it can end. You could get fired or laid off.

Me: Can I prevent myself from getting fired or laid off?

Friend: Not necessarily. It could happen due to circumstances beyond your control. Or you might just make a mistake. Or someone higher up may not like you.

Me: So how is that secure?

Friend: Well, it's mostly secure.

Me: So if I get fired or laid off, how much residual income will I continue to get?

Friend: Usually none. You might get a severance package for certain jobs, but that's only short-term for transitioning. For the most part, once your job ends, you stop getting paid.

Me: But currently I get paid whether I'm working or not. And I can't be fired or laid off.

Friend: Yeah, that's weird.

Me: Just feels normal to me.

Friend: Well, I know you're kind of set in your ways, but jobs are very popular. They obviously work for lots of people.

Me: What about finding a job? Does everyone get one automatically?

Friend: Oh no. People have to seek them out and apply for them.

Me: How do they find jobs? Do they decide what they like doing and then find a job that lets them do it?

Friend: Usually it's not that simple. Most of the time they have to see what's available, and it probably won't match perfectly with what they really like.

Me: And once they find a job and select it, then they get hired?

Friend: No. Again, it's not that simple. It's a competitive marketplace. They have to apply, but they probably won't be chosen. They may have to apply to many jobs before they're offered one, and it may not be the one they most wanted. Also, millions of people who want jobs can't seem to get hired at all.

Me: This sounds very time consuming and stressful. What do they do if they can't find a job?

Friend: Well, they have to mooch off someone else to get by... off the government, off a relationship partner, off a friend or family member.

Me: And what if they still can't find a job, and no one lets them mooch anymore?

Friend: Then they might become homeless.

Me: That doesn't sound too secure to me.

Friend: Well, most people don't end up there. So it works okay overall. And being homeless isn't as bad as it seems. People cope.

Me: Do most people like their jobs?

Friend: No, at least 80% don't.

Me: So why do they keep going to work?

Friend: They need the money. And what choice do they have?

Me: They could earn money without a job.

Friend: Yeah, maybe... but who does that?

Me: I do.

Friend: Yeah, but you're weird.

Me: I appreciate your sharing all of this, but in a world that considers this job thing normal, I think I'll stick with my current approach, even if you think it's weird. I enjoy the work I do, I get paid well whether I work or not, I can travel whenever I want, I don't have a boss, I can't be fired or laid off, I don't feel I'm overpaying on taxes, I can do my best without feeling pressured to be mediocre, and if I'm working with someone and we get horny, we can shag the dickens out of each other and then go back to work with a smile... and no one gets sued. Best of all, I get to use *Master* as my official title.

Friend: Sure, that all sounds good, but most people can't do it.

Me: Why not?

Friend: I don't think most people are smart enough.

Me: There are lots of not-so-bright people earning passive income. You'd be amazed at how much mental capacity is freed up when you don't have to deal with a boss or company politics... and when you don't hold yourself back doing mediocre work instead of your best... and when you aren't stressed about being potentially fired or laid off or having to be celibate.

Friend: True, but those people are weird too.

Me: Perhaps.

Friend: Also, passive income is way too complicated for most people.

Me: If people can handle all the complexities of jobs, I think they'll find it a breeze to earn passive income. There's no job hunting, no resume, no application, no boss, no company politics, no need to save up vacation time, no risk of being fired, no commuting, and lower taxes. Yes, there's a different learning curve in the beginning, but if people can handle working for someone else, I think they can easily handle setting up passive income streams. And once they've done it once or twice, it's pretty straightforward after that.

Friend: Well, I'm still skeptical, so I suggest you give this some further thought. Again, jobs are very popular. I think you should give it a try.

Me: Do you think I'd like it?

Friend: No, but you'll get used to it. Trust me. It will all be fine. Again, it's very popular.

Me: Maybe for the free coffee.

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Be a Fun Broke Person

June 13, 2014 by Steve Pavlina

Eliminating limiting beliefs about abundance won't help much if you still cling to limiting beliefs about being broke.

Could you be totally broke the rest of your life and still have a blast? If you can't see that yet, you're:

- blind to what really matters in life
- turning money into a power source
- being boring

Don't expect the universe to lavish abundance on you for being blind, powerless, and boring. Being broke is fun!

It's an adventure.

It's a challenge for your creativity — not to race past it, but to fully enjoy the experience of being broke.

You needn't put your life on hold just because you're broke.

You can still fall in love.

You can laugh.

You can exercise.

You can read the greatest books ever written.

You can write. You can compose music. You can create art. If you have no money for art supplies, make art with sand. If you have no money for musical instruments, sing.

You can couchsurf and explore new places.

You can have really great sex.

You can work on your social skills and make tons of new friends.

You can have really great sex. (I know, right!)

When I was broke, I used a cardboard box as a piece of furniture. Should I have felt down about that? Wouldn't it be better to laugh at the silliness of it? Being broke is filled with silliness. Laugh at your late fees. A late fee is kind of ridiculous, isn't it? You got charged \$35 because you forgot to put a piece of paper in the mail by a certain date? Call the company and tell them to remove that silly fee. They usually will.

If you're broke, so what? Stop making it into this terrible thing that you have to escape as quickly as possible. Stop stressing out about it. By global standards, if you're reading this, you're probably far from what many would consider truly destitute. You're probably still among the wealthier half of the world. Many people on this planet would LOVE to upgrade to your version of brokenness, which they'd regard as unimaginable wealth. You have clean water to drink? You aren't under daily threat of violence? Internet — what is that? You must be so rich!

See your life through their eyes. Realize that you've been pretending to be in a state of lack, when you already have such lavish abundance.

And stop being so boring. Being broke is no excuse for that. Put the fun back in your life. Pursue your passions, even while you're broke, not because you're trying to escape brokenness but because you realize you're already more than rich enough. Stop wallowing in fear and self pity. Make your life ridiculously fun right now. Don't put your dreams on hold just because you don't have money. That's stupid. And it's really boring to watch!

Quit stressing yourself out about not having much money. Take some pride in being broke. There's nothing wrong with it at all. Some people revel in it.

Focusing on abundance is great, but don't envision an abundant future and neglect your present. See the abundance you already have. Squeeze all the juice out of today, right where you are.

Transform your relationship with here and now. Dwelling on there and then is less important. These days I have more financial abundance flowing through my life. But what I treasure most was losing my fear of being broke. I learned to be rich when I didn't have much. And so I don't fear going broke again. It wouldn't be a failure or a shameful thing. It would just be more fun and adventure.

Some people say, "I've been broke and I've been rich. Rich is better."

Screw that! Rich isn't better. It's just different. You're not really rich at all if you think that way. Squeeze the richness out of each moment. If you're really rich, you'll remain rich no matter how much money you have. So reinterpret that previous expression as being about mindset (broke vs. rich), not about resources.

Again, stop being a boring broke person. Why on earth would you expect people to lavish opportunities on you if you're constantly being boring?

I love connecting with broke people, but not the boring ones... not the ones who drown in self pity... not the ones who constantly stress over what might go wrong next. Let stuff go wrong, and laugh at it.

So you got a late fee. So you couldn't afford your rent. So your car keeps breaking down. In the grand scheme of life, does any of that matter? Is it really something to fret over? Other people are working on how to send humans to Mars, and you're stressing out about your rent? Seriously... get some perspective. You could be helping us invent more Star Trek stuff instead.

Be a fun broke person.

Laugh more, especially at your problems.

Read.

Get some exercise.

Smile.

Hug people.

And definitely have more sex. Trust me on that one.

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10 Reasons You Should Never Have a Religion

May 27, 2008 by Steve Pavlina

While consciously pursuing your spiritual development is commendable, joining an established religion such as Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism is one of the worst ways to go about it. In this article I'll share 10 reasons why you must eventually abandon the baggage of organized religion if you wish to pursue conscious living in earnest.

Since Christianity is currently the world's most popular religion, I'll slant this article towards Christianity's ubiquitous failings. However, you'll find that most of these points apply equally well to other major religions (yes, even Buddhism).

1. Spirituality for dummies.

If you have the awareness level of a snail, and your thinking is mired in shame and guilt (with perhaps a twist of drug abuse or suicidal thinking), then subscribing to a religion can help you climb to a higher level of awareness. Your mindset, however, still remains incredibly dysfunctional; you've merely swapped one form of erroneous thinking for another.

For reasonably intelligent people who aren't suffering from major issues with low self-esteem, religion is ridiculously consciousness-lowering. While some religious beliefs can be empowering, on the whole the decision to formally participate in a religion will merely burden your mind with a hefty load of false notions.

When you subscribe to a religion, you substitute nebulous group-think for focused, independent thought. Instead of learning to discern truth on your own, you're told what to believe. This doesn't accelerate your spiritual growth; on the contrary it puts the brakes on your continued conscious development. Religion is the off-switch of the human mind.

Leave the mythology behind, and learn to think for yourself. Your intellect is a better instrument of spiritual growth than any religious teachings.

2. Loss of spiritual depth perception.

One of the worst mistakes you can make in life is to attach your identity to any particular religion or philosophy, such as by saying "I am a Christian" or "I am a Buddhist." This forces your mind into a fixed perspective, robbing you of spiritual depth perception and savagely curtailing your ability to perceive reality accurately. If that sounds like a good idea to you, you'll probably want to gouge out one of your eyeballs too. Surely you'll be better off with a single, fixed perspective instead of having to consider two separate image streams... unless of course you've become attached to stereo vision.

Religious "truths" are inherently rooted in a fixed perspective, but real truth is perspective-independent. When you substitute religious teachings for truth, you mistake shadows for light sources. Consequently, you doom yourself to stumble around in the dark, utterly confused. Clarity remains forever elusive, and the best answer you get is that life is one giant mystery. Religious mysteries, however, arise not from what is truly unknowable; they arise from the limitations of trying to understand reality from a fixed frame of reference.

A more intelligent approach is to consider reality through a variety of different perspectives without trying to force your perceptions into an artificial religious framework. If you wish to learn more about this approach, read [Spiritual Depth Perception](#).

3. Engineered obedience training.

Religions are authoritarian hierarchies designed to dominate your free will. They're power structures that aim to convince you to give away your power for the benefit of those who enjoy dominating people. When you subscribe to a religion, you enroll in a mindless minion training program. Religions don't market themselves as such, but this is essentially how they operate.

Religions are very effective at turning human beings into sheep. They're among the most powerful instruments of social conditioning. They operate by eroding your trust in your own intellect, gradually convincing you to put your trust into some external entity, such as a deity, prominent figure, or great book. Of course these instruments are usually controlled by those who administrate the minion training program, but they don't have to be. Simply by convincing you to give your power away to something outside yourself, religion will condition you to be weaker, more docile, and easier to control. Religions actively promote this weakening process as if it were beneficial, commonly branding it with the word *faith*. What they're actually promoting is submission.

Religions strive to fill your head with so much nonsense that your only recourse is to bow your head in submission, often quite literally. Get used to spending a lot of time on your knees because acts of submission such as bowing and kneeling are frequently incorporated into religious practice. Canine obedience training uses similar tactics. Now say, "Yes, Master."

Have you ever wondered why religious teachings are invariably mysterious, confusing, and internally incongruent? This is no accident by the way — it's quite intentional.

By putting forth confusing and internally conflicting information, your logical mind (i.e. your neocortex) is overwhelmed. You try in vain to integrate such contradictory beliefs, but it can't be done. The net effect is that your logical mind disengages because it can't find a pattern of core truth beneath all the nonsense, so without the help of your neocortex, you devolve to a more primitive (i.e. limbic) mode of thinking. You're taught that this faith-based approach is a more spiritual and conscious way to live, but in reality it's precisely the opposite. Getting you to distrust your own cerebral cortex actually makes you dumber and easier to manipulate and control. Karl Marx was right when he said, "Religion is the opiate of the people."

For example, the Old Testament and the New Testament in the Bible frequently contradict each other with various rules of conduct, yet both are quoted during mass. Church leaders also behave in direct violation of the Church's teachings, such as by covering up criminal and immoral activities by their own priests. Those who try to mentally process such glaring contradictions as coherent truth invariably suffer for it. A highly conscious person would reject membership in such an organization as patently ridiculous. So-called divine mysteries are engineered to be incomprehensible. You aren't meant to ever make sense of them since that would defeat the whole purpose. When you finally wake up and realize it's all B.S., you've taken the first step towards freedom from this oppressive system.

The truth is that so-called religious authorities don't know any more about spirituality than you do. However, they know how to manipulate your fear and uncertainty for their own benefit. How nice of you to let them.

Although the most popular religions are very old, L. Ron Hubbard proved the process can be replicated from scratch in modern times. As long as there are large numbers of people who fear the responsibility of their own power, religions will continue to dominate the landscape

of human development.

If you want to talk to God, then communicate directly instead of using third-party intermediaries. Surely God has no need of an interpreter. Don't fall into the trap of becoming a mindless minion. It's a mistake to think that turning off your neocortex and practicing mindless "faith" will bring you closer to God. In truth it will only bring you closer to dog.

4. Toilet-bowl time management.

If you devote serious time to the practice of religion, it's safe to say you practice *toilet-bowl time management*, flushing much of your precious life down the drain with little or nothing to show for it.

First, you'll waste a lot of time filling your head with useless nonsense. This includes reading some of the worst fiction ever written. Then there are various rules, laws, and practices to learn.

Seriously, if you have insomnia, try reading religious texts before bedtime. You'll be asleep faster than you can say Methuselah. Why do you think hotels put Bibles next to the bed? It's the greatest sedative known to man. I have to give props to the Scientologists for at least incorporating space aliens into their stories. It's a shame Gene Roddenberry didn't formally invent his own religion; *Stovokor* sounds like a lot of fun.

Once you finally realize your head has been filled with utter nonsense, you must then purge such garbage from your mind if you want your brain to be functional again. That can take considerably longer, assuming you succeed at all. It's like trying to uninstall AOL from your hard drive.

Next, you can expect to waste even more time on repetitive ritual and ceremony, such as attending mass, learning prayers, and practicing unproductive meditations.

If I add up the time I attended mass and Sunday school, studied religion in school as if it were a serious subject, and memorized various prayers, I count thousands of hours of my life I'd love to have back. I did, however, learn some important lessons, many of which are being shared in this article.

I especially remember listening to a lot of bad sermons; most priests are hideously poor speakers. Maybe it's because they drink alcohol while on duty.

Now if you really go overboard and throw in learning a dead language for good measure, you can kiss years of your life goodbye.

The more time you devote to religious practice, the more you waste your life on pointless, dead-end pursuits... and the more you'll want to delude yourself with a phony "Hehe, I meant to do that" attitude.

5. Support your local pedophile.

In addition to being a serious waste of time, religious practice can also be a huge waste of money.

For starters when you donate to a major religion, you support its expansion, which means you're facilitating the enslavement of your fellow humans. That isn't very nice, now is it? If you feel the urge to donate money, give it to a real and honorable cause, not a fabricated one. Better yet, go outside and do something that really helps people. If you can't think of anything better, grab a can of paint and clean up some local graffiti.

Your religious donations fund freeloaders who mooch off society but who generally provide little or no value in return. Sure there are some religious people who perform valuable public services, but for the most part, that isn't their bailiwick. These freeloaders typically operate tax-free, meaning they're effectively subsidized by taxpayers. That's a great racket if you're on the receiving side... not so great if you're funding it though.

Religions offer a suite of special services to generate additional income. They'll spout some gibberish while feeding you a crusty wafer, pronounce you bonded to a fellow human being, snip some of your excess skin, pour water on your head, proclaim your manhood, cast out your demons, pronounce your transgressions forgiven, and so on. When they can't think of anything else, they make up some drivel like confirming you're still loyal to them. The bill may read "suggested donation," but it's still a bill.

When you donate money to a religious organization, you're doing much worse than throwing your money away. You're actively funding evil. If you think that spending a billion dollars to defend pedophiles and rapists is a good use of your hard-earned cash, perhaps you should run for Pope. You could hardly do worse. At least Wall Street is honest about its greed and lust.

One of my Catholic high school teachers was later revealed to be a repeat child molester... written up in the newspaper and everything. I didn't see any suspicious behavior at the time, and to be totally honest, I actually liked that teacher and was shocked to learn of his extracurricular activities. He was shuffled from one location to another by those who knew about his appetite for young flesh. I'm glad I wasn't on the menu, but I feel sad for those who were. Methinks God should raise his standards... just a tad.

Why aren't Catholic priests allowed to marry? This has nothing to do with what's written in the Bible or with any benefits of celibacy. This rule was invented by the Church to prevent their priests from producing heirs. When the priests died, their property would go back to the Church, thereby enriching the rich even more. Apparently God needed more cash. It was a very effective policy, as the Church is now among the richest and most powerful organizations on earth. It's hard to fail when you have a loyal force of lifetime indentured servants who work cheaply and then yield their life savings to you when they die.

Lay religious people (i.e. non-clergy), on the other hand, are encouraged to have lots of babies because that means more people are born into the religion, which means more money and a bigger power base. Condoms are a big no-no; they're bad for business. Marriage is a big yes; it means more brainwashed babies will be made.

Would you seriously consider this sort of structure a "good cause" worthy of your hard-earned cash?

I have got to get me one of these...

6. Incest is best.

Religions frequently promote inbred social networks. You're encouraged to spend more time with people who share the same belief system while disengaging from those with incompatible beliefs. Sometimes this is done subtly; other times it's more obvious.

If you're one of the saved, blessed, or otherwise enlightened individuals who stumbled upon the one true belief system, then supposedly everyone else remains in the dark. Certain religions are overtly intolerant of outsiders, but to one degree or another, all major religions cast non-subscribers in a negative light. This helps to discourage members from abandoning

the religion while still enabling them to proselytize. The main idea is to maintain social structures that reward loyalty and punish freedom of thought.

This us-vs-them prejudice is totally incongruent with conscious living. It's also downright moronic from a global perspective. But it remains a favored practice of those who pull the strings. When you're taught to distrust other human beings, fear gets a foothold in your consciousness, and you become much easier to control.

When you join a religion, your fellow mind-slaves will help to keep you in line, socially rewarding your continued obedience while punishing your disloyalty. Why do they do this? It's what they've been conditioned to do. Tell your religious friends that you're abandoning their religion because you want to think for yourself for a while, and watch the sparks fly. Suddenly you've gone from best friend to evil demon. There's no greater threat to religious people than to profess your desire to think for yourself.

There are better ways to enjoy a sense of community than joining a slavery club. Try making friends with conscious, free-thinking people for a change — people who are willing to connect with you regardless of how silly your beliefs are. You may find it intimidating at first, but it's quite refreshing once you get used to it.

Since I get asked this question all the time, I might as well answer it publicly. Do I accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior? No more than I'd accept a credit card from Crapital One. Either way I'd be worried about the fine print. Does this mean we can't be friends anymore? Please don't hate me because I'm doomed.

7. Idiocy or hypocrisy – pick one.

When you subscribe to an established religion, you have only two options. You can become an idiot, or you can become a hypocrite. If you've already chosen the former, I'll explain why, and I'll use small words so that you're sure to understand.

First, there's the idiocy route. You can willingly swallow all of the contrived, man-made drivel that's fed to you. Accept that the earth is only 10,000 years old. Believe stories about dead bodies coming back to life. Learn about various deities and such. Put your trust in someone who thinks they know what they're talking about. Eat your *dogma*. Good boy!

Congratulations! You're a moron believer. You'll be saved, enlightened, and greeted with tremendous fanfare when you die... unless of course all the stuff you were taught turns out not to be true. Nah... if the guy in the robe says it's true, it must be true. Ya gotta have faith, right?

Next, we have the hypocrisy option. In this case your neocortex is strong enough to identify various bits of utter nonsense in the religious teachings that others are trying to ram down your throat. You have a working B.S. detector, but it's slightly damaged. You're smart enough to realize that earth is probably a lot older than 10,000 years and that pre-marital (or non-marital) sex is a lot of fun, but some B.S. still gets through. You don't swallow all the bull, but you still identify yourself as a follower of a particular religion, most likely because you were raised in it and never actually chose it to begin with.

To you it's just a casual pursuit. You're certainly not a die-hard fundamentalist, but you figure that if you drink the wine and chew the wafer now and then, it's good enough to get you a free ride into a half-decent afterlife. You belong to the pro-God club. Surely there's safety in

numbers. Two people can't be wrong... although 4-1/2 billion supposedly can.

In this case you become an apologist for your own religion. You don't want to be identified with the extreme fanatics, nor do you want to be associated with the non-believers. You figure you can straddle both sides. On earth you'll basically live as a non-practitioner (or a very sloppy and inconsistent practitioner), but when you eventually die, you've still got the membership card to show God.

Do you realize how deluded you are?

Perhaps if you have to throw out so much of the nonsense to make your chosen belief system palatable, you shouldn't be drinking the Kool Aid in the first place. Free yourself from the mental baggage, stop looking to others for permission to live, and start thinking on your own. If your God exists, he's smart enough to see through your fake ID.

From time to time, some of my readers take a stab at converting me to their religion. Most of them come across as total loons, but I can at least respect their consistency. I've no idea why they bother to read my site (which is about raising, not lowering, consciousness). Perhaps some of them are getting ready to convert from fundamentalism to common sense.

You'd think I'd be quite a prize for any serious religion. With 2.4 million monthly readers, that's a lot of people I could potentially enslave convert, not to mention how much I could fill the Church coffers by soliciting indulgences donations on their behalf. Henceforth I expect a much better conversion effort. If you won't do it for the money, then do it for the souls. You can't let so many of us go to hell without trying in earnest to save us, can you?

Just keep those conversion emails below 10,000 words if possible, with no more than 9,000 of them quoted from your favorite great book.

8. Inherited falsehood.

Please tell me you aren't still practicing the religion you happened to be born into? Surely you've outgrown your baby clothes by now. Isn't it time you also outgrew your baby religion? What if you were born into a different culture? Would you have been conscious enough to find your way back to your current belief system? Or are your current beliefs merely a product of your environment and not the result of conscious choice?

Many religions are just a mish-mash of what came before. For example, Christianity is largely based on pagan rituals. If those pagan beliefs and rituals had been protected by copyright, Christianity wouldn't even exist. If you take the time to dig into the roots of Christianity, you'll encounter various theories that Christianity's teachings were largely assembled from pre-Christian myths and that Jesus himself was merely a fictional character pieced together from earlier mythical figures. You go, Horus!

Many religious teachers (i.e. priests, rabbis, ministers, etc.) are just brainwashed slaves themselves. They don't have any real authority and aren't even aware of the agenda being set by their superiors. This makes them better minions because they actually believe the B.S. they're spouting and don't know the truth behind it. A priest, a rabbi, and a minister walk into a bar, but that's as far as they get. They may interact with the bartender, but they never get to know the guy who owns the bar. They suffer from inherited falsehood just like everyone else. Is your religion based on the inspired word of God? No more than this article. Just because someone says their text is divinely inspired doesn't mean it is. Anyone can claim divine inspiration. The top religions are decided by popularity, not by truth.

Even the central figures in major religions didn't follow the religions that were spawned in their names. If they didn't swallow the prevailing "wisdom" about gods and spiritual leaders and such, why should you? If you want to be more like the people you worship, then follow their lead by striking out on your own.

Move beyond your baby religion. Consider maturity as a reasonable alternative.

9. Compassion in chains.

Religious rules and laws invariably hamper the development of conscience. This causes all sorts of problems like pointless violence and warfare. Those who preach nonviolence as a rule or law tend to be the most violent of all. Such people cannot be trusted because they'll violate their proclaimed values with the weakest of excuses.

When you externalize compassion into a set of rules and laws, what you're left with isn't compassion at all. True compassion is a matter of conscious choice, and that requires the absence of force-backed rules and laws.

The more religious a person becomes, the less compassionate s/he is. The illusion of compassion substitutes for the real thing. Religious people tend to be the most bigoted and non-accepting people on earth. They're the least trustworthy and suffer from the grossest character defects. They pretend they're doing good, but they're really collaborators in a system designed to push people into unconscious slavery to a "higher" authority. They are slaves promoting slavery.

Historically speaking, religious people love to fight each other. Instead of unconditional love, they practice conditional loyalty. The only unconditional aspect is their thirst for blood. If you disagree with them, you're a target... either for conversion or destruction (both of which are really the same thing).

If you value the ideal of unconditional love, you won't find it in the practice of religion. Real compassion doesn't arise from believing in God, from practicing various rituals, or from studying the concept of karma. Compassion can only result from conscious choice, and this requires the freedom to choose without the threat of punishment or the promise of reward. If you're obedient to your faith, it's a safe bet that compassion is absent from your life. You probably don't even know what real compassion feels like.

The more we collectively abandon all religion, the better off this planet will be. This doesn't mean we have to abandon all spiritual pursuits. It just means we must stop turning spirituality into something it isn't.

10. Faith is fear.

Religion is the systematic marketing of fear.

Blessed are the poor (donate heavily). Blessed are the meek (obey). Blessed are the humble (don't question authority). Blessed are the hungry (make us rich while you starve). Blessed are the merciful (if you catch us doing something wrong, let it go). Blessed are the pure of heart (switch off your brain). Blessed are the timid, the cowardly, the fearful. Blessed are those who give us their power and become our slaves. Muahahaha!

That's the kind of nonsense religion pushes on people. They train you to turn your back on courage, strength, and conscious living. This is stupidity, not divinity.

Religion will teach you to fear being different, to fear standing up for yourself, and to fear

being an independent thinker. It will erode your self-trust by explaining why you're unable to successfully manage life on your own terms: You are unworthy. You're a sinner. You're unclean. You belong to a lesser caste. You are not enlightened. Of course the solution is always the same — submit to the will of an external authority. Believe that you're inadequate. Give away your power. Follow their rules and procedures. Live in fear for the rest of your life, and hope it will all turn out okay in the end.

When you practice faith instead of conscious living, you live under a cloak of fear. Eventually that cloak becomes so habitual you forget it's even there. It's very sad when you reach the point where you can't even remember what it feels like to wield creative freedom over your own life, independent of what you've been conditioned to believe.

Faith is the coward's substitute for courage. It's also really good marketing if you're the one who controls the faith. If you're afraid or unwilling to assume total responsibility for your life, you're a perfect match for religion.

Fear in one part of your life invariably spreads to all other parts — you can't compartmentalize it. If you find yourself frustrated because you're too afraid to follow your dreams, to talk to members of the opposite sex, to speak up for yourself, etc., then a good place to start is to rid your life of all religious nonsense. Don't let fear get a foothold in your consciousness.

Stop trying to comfort yourself by swallowing religious rubbish. If you really need something to believe in, then believe in your own potential. Put your trust in your own intellect. Stop giving away your power.

Dump the safety-in-numbers silliness. Just because a lot of people believe stupid stuff doesn't mean it isn't stupid. It just means that stupidity is popular on this planet. When people are in a state of fear, they'll swallow just about anything to comfort themselves, including the bastion of stupidity known as religion.

* * *

Religion is spiritual immaturity.

It's entirely possible to enjoy your life without spending so much of it bent over in submission. Pull your head out of your rear, and look around with your own two eyes. If you need something to worship, then feel grateful for your own conscious mind. Pull it out of the cobwebs, and boot it up.

Besides... if some popular religious version of God does exist, there's a good chance he's a complete and total idiot. He made us in his image, right? So perhaps we shouldn't be so quick to worship an entity so lacking in intelligence. We're better off on our own.

God isn't going to smite you for not formally worshipping him. If he didn't smite me by now, it's a safe bet you'll slide beneath the radar as well. And if that doesn't work, you can borrow my fake ID. I've been baptized and confirmed, and I'm the son of an altar boy and the nephew of a priest, so I'm sure I'll be fine.

Praise Hestia!

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How to Discover Your Life Purpose in About 20 Minutes

January 16, 2005 by Steve Pavlina

How do you discover your real purpose in life? I'm not talking about your job, your daily responsibilities, or even your long-term goals. I mean the real reason why you're here at all — the very reason you exist.

Perhaps you're a rather nihilistic person who doesn't believe you have a purpose and that life has no meaning. Doesn't matter. Not believing that you have a purpose won't prevent you from discovering it, just as a lack of belief in gravity won't prevent you from tripping. All that a lack of belief will do is make it take longer, so if you're one of those people, just change the number 20 in the title of this blog entry to 40 (or 60 if you're really stubborn). Most likely though if you don't believe you have a purpose, then you probably won't believe what I'm saying anyway, but even so, what's the risk of investing an hour just in case?

Here's a story about Bruce Lee which sets the stage for this little exercise. A master martial artist asked Bruce to teach him everything Bruce knew about martial arts. Bruce held up two cups, both filled with liquid. "The first cup," said Bruce, "represents all of your knowledge about martial arts. The second cup represents all of my knowledge about martial arts. If you want to fill your cup with my knowledge, you must first empty your cup of your knowledge."

If you want to discover your true purpose in life, you must first empty your mind of all the false purposes you've been taught (including the idea that you may have no purpose at all).

So how to discover your purpose in life? While there are many ways to do this, some of them fairly involved, here is one of the simplest that anyone can do. The more open you are to this process, and the more you expect it to work, the faster it will work for you. But not being open to it or having doubts about it or thinking it's an entirely idiotic and meaningless waste of time won't prevent it from working as long as you stick with it — again, it will just take longer to converge.

Here's what to do:

1. Take out a blank sheet of paper or open up a word processor where you can type (I prefer the latter because it's faster).
2. Write at the top, "What is my true purpose in life?"
3. Write an answer (any answer) that pops into your head. It doesn't have to be a complete sentence. A short phrase is fine.
4. Repeat step 3 until you write the answer that makes you cry. This is your purpose.

That's it. It doesn't matter if you're a counselor or an engineer or a bodybuilder. To some people this exercise will make perfect sense. To others it will seem utterly stupid. Usually it takes 15-20 minutes to clear your head of all the clutter and the social conditioning about what you think your purpose in life is. The false answers will come from your mind and your memories. But when the true answer finally arrives, it will feel like it's coming to you from a different source entirely.

For those who are very entrenched in low-awareness living, it will take a lot longer to get all the false answers out, possibly more than an hour. But if you persist, after 100 or 200 or maybe even 500 answers, you'll be struck by the answer that causes you to surge with

emotion, the answer that breaks you. If you've never done this, it may very well sound silly to you. So let it seem silly, and do it anyway.

As you go through this process, some of your answers will be very similar. You may even re-list previous answers. Then you might head off on a new tangent and generate 10-20 more answers along some other theme. And that's fine. You can list whatever answer pops into your head as long as you just keep writing.

At some point during the process (typically after about 50-100 answers), you may want to quit and just can't see it converging. You may feel the urge to get up and make an excuse to do something else. That's normal. Push past this resistance, and just keep writing. The feeling of resistance will eventually pass.

You may also discover a few answers that seem to give you a mini-surge of emotion, but they don't quite make you cry — they're just a bit off. Highlight those answers as you go along, so you can come back to them to generate new permutations. Each reflects a piece of your purpose, but individually they aren't complete. When you start getting these kinds of answers, it just means you're getting warm. Keep going.

It's important to do this alone and with no interruptions. If you're a nihilist, then feel free to start with the answer, "I don't have a purpose," or "Life is meaningless," and take it from there. If you keep at it, you'll still eventually converge.

When I did this exercise, it took me about 25 minutes, and I reached my final answer at step 106. Partial pieces of the answer (mini-surges) appeared at steps 17, 39, and 53, and then the bulk of it fell into place and was refined through steps 100-106. I felt the feeling of resistance (wanting to get up and do something else, expecting the process to fail, feeling very impatient and even irritated) around steps 55-60. At step 80 I took a 2-minute break to close my eyes, relax, clear my mind, and to focus on the intention for the answer to come to me — this was helpful as the answers I received after this break began to have greater clarity.

Here was my final answer: *to live consciously and courageously, to resonate with love and compassion, to awaken the great spirits within others, and to leave this world in peace.*

When you find your own unique answer to the question of why you're here, you will feel it resonate with you deeply. The words will seem to have a special energy to you, and you will feel that energy whenever you read them.

Discovering your purpose is the easy part. The hard part is keeping it with you on a daily basis and working on yourself to the point where you become that purpose.

If you're inclined to ask why this little process works, just put that question aside until after you've successfully completed it. Once you've done that, you'll probably have your own answer to why it works. Most likely if you ask 10 different people why this works (people who've successfully completed it), you'll get 10 different answers, all filtered through their individual belief systems, and each will contain its own reflection of truth.

Obviously, this process won't work if you quit before convergence. I'd guesstimate that 80-90% of people should achieve convergence in less than an hour. If you're really entrenched in your beliefs and resistant to the process, maybe it will take you 5 sessions and 3 hours, but I suspect that such people will simply quit early (like within the first 15 minutes) or won't even attempt it at all. But if you're drawn to read this blog (and haven't been inclined to ban it from your life yet), then it's doubtful you fall into this group.

Give it a shot! At the very least, you'll learn one of two things: your true purpose in life -or- that you should unsubscribe from this blog.

Update 8/8/06: Be sure to read the follow-up to this article, especially if you're having trouble with this particular approach (there's an alternative method you can use): [The Meaning of Life: Discover Your Purpose](#).

How to Become an Early Riser

May 23, 2005 by Steve Pavlina

It is well to be up before daybreak, for such habits contribute to health, wealth, and wisdom.

– Aristotle

Are morning people born or made? In my case it was definitely made. In my early 20s, I rarely went to bed before midnight, and I'd almost always sleep in late. I usually didn't start hitting my stride each day until late afternoon.

But after a while I couldn't ignore the high correlation between success and rising early, even in my own life. On those rare occasions where I did get up early, I noticed that my productivity was almost always higher, not just in the morning but all throughout the day. And I also noticed a significant feeling of well-being. So being the proactive goal-achiever I was, I set out to become a habitual early riser. I promptly set my alarm clock for 5AM...

... and the next morning, I got up just before noon.

Hmmm...

I tried again many more times, each time not getting very far with it. I figured I must have been born without the early riser gene. Whenever my alarm went off, my first thought was always to stop that blasted noise and go back to sleep. I tabled this habit for a number of years, but eventually I came across some sleep research that showed me that I was going about this problem the wrong way. Once I applied those ideas, I was able to become an early riser consistently.

It's hard to become an early riser using the wrong strategy. But with the right strategy, it's relatively easy.

The most common wrong strategy is this: You assume that if you're going to get up earlier, you'd better go to bed earlier. So you figure out how much sleep you're getting now, and then just shift everything back a few hours. If you now sleep from midnight to 8am, you figure you'll go to bed at 10pm and get up at 6am instead. Sounds very reasonable, but it will usually fail.

It seems there are two main schools of thought about sleep patterns. One is that you should go to bed and get up at the same times every day. It's like having an alarm clock on both ends — you try to sleep the same hours each night. This seems practical for living in modern society. We need predictability in our schedules. And we need to ensure adequate rest.

The second school says you should listen to your body's needs and go to bed when you're tired and get up when you naturally wake up. This approach is rooted in biology. Our bodies should know how much rest we need, so we should listen to them.

Through trial and error, I found out for myself that both of these schools are suboptimal sleep patterns. Both of them are wrong if you care about productivity. Here's why:

If you sleep set hours, you'll sometimes go to bed when you aren't sleepy enough. If it's taking you more than five minutes to fall asleep each night, you aren't sleepy enough. You're wasting time lying in bed awake and not being asleep. Another problem is that you're assuming you need the same number of hours of sleep every night, which is a false assumption. Your sleep needs vary from day to day.

If you sleep based on what your body tells you, you'll probably be sleeping more than you need — in many cases a lot more, like 10-15 hours more per week (the equivalent of a full waking day). A lot of people who sleep this way get 8+ hours of sleep per night, which is usually too much. Also, your mornings may be less predictable if you're getting up at different times. And because our natural rhythms are sometimes out of tune with the 24-hour clock, you may find that your sleep times begin to drift.

The optimal solution for me has been to combine both approaches. It's very simple, and many early risers do this without even thinking about it, but it was a mental breakthrough for me nonetheless. The solution was to go to bed when I'm sleepy (and only when I'm sleepy) and get up with an alarm clock at a fixed time (7 days per week). So I always get up at the same time (in my case 5am), but I go to bed at different times every night.

I go to bed when I'm too sleepy to stay up. My sleepiness test is that if I couldn't read a book for more than a page or two without drifting off, I'm ready for bed. Most of the time when I go to bed, I'm asleep within three minutes. I lie down, get comfortable, and immediately I'm drifting off. Sometimes I go to bed at 9:30pm; other times I stay up until midnight. Most of the time I go to bed between 10-11pm. If I'm not sleepy, I stay up until I can't keep my eyes open any longer. Reading is an excellent activity to do during this time, since it becomes obvious when I'm too sleepy to read.

When my alarm goes off every morning, I turn it off, stretch for a couple seconds, and sit up. I don't think about it. I've learned that the longer it takes me to get up, the more likely I am to try to sleep in. So I don't allow myself to have conversations in my head about the benefits of sleeping in once the alarm goes off. Even if I want to sleep in, I always get up right away.

After a few days of using this approach, I found that my sleep patterns settled into a natural rhythm. If I got too little sleep one night, I'd automatically be sleepier earlier and get more sleep the next night. And if I had lots of energy and wasn't tired, I'd sleep less. My body learned when to knock me out because it knew I would always get up at the same time and that my wake-up time wasn't negotiable.

A side effect was that on average, I slept about 90 minutes less per night, but I actually felt more well-rested. I was sleeping almost the entire time I was in bed.

I read that most insomniacs are people who go to bed when they aren't sleepy. If you aren't sleepy and find yourself unable to fall asleep quickly, get up and stay awake for a while. Resist sleep until your body begins to release the hormones that rob you of consciousness. If you simply go to bed when you're sleepy and then get up at a fixed time, you'll cure your insomnia. The first night you'll stay up late, but you'll fall asleep right away. You may be tired that first day from getting up too early and getting only a few hours of sleep the whole night, but you'll slog through the day and will want to go to bed earlier that second night. After a few days, you'll settle into a pattern of going to bed at roughly the same time and falling asleep right away.

So if you want to become an early riser (or just exert more control over your sleep patterns), then try this: Go to bed only when you're too sleepy to stay up, and get up at a fixed time every morning.

Edit (5/31/05): Due to the incredible popularity of this post, I've written a follow-up with some extra detail and clarifications: [How to Become an Early Riser – Part II](#). And if you really want to

take sleep to the next level, read about my experiences with Polyphasic Sleep, where you only sleep 2-3 hours a day by taking 20-minute naps every few hours, around the clock.

Edit (5/29/06): Be sure to read the related article [How to Get Up Right Away When Your Alarm Goes Off](#).

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