



ENHANCING A CAREER FOR BETTER CONTRIBUTION

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Often, we spend more time at work than elsewhere – for those who are fortunate to have a job. Indeed, for some, work is a calling. Work is love made visible, as the Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran makes us believe. Viewing work as a calling, Elizabeth Jeffries makes a point that “if we only did what felt comfortable, the work of the world would never be accomplished.” According to Joe Batten, love is a powerful, unifying, integrating, healing, renewing, fulfilling, stimulating, reconstructive and reassuring life force. It should be at the center of all that we do. One of the most important lessons I have learnt in my career is to always choose love. Caring, kindness and compassion get so much done. Even at times when the tough is going, love shows the way. It is through love that we remain to be of service to others. Humility should keep us grounded.

To make a career more meaningful, to make it significant and to ensure that we contribute better to our communities and societies through our careers, self-leadership is critical. The Chinese philosopher Lao Tsue puts it better when he says “mastering others is strength, mastering oneself is true power.” For me, it starts with figuring out what is most important in life. Others view this as a necessary dream in order to be able to live a meaning full life – dare to dream big but be realistic. Others see the desire to make a meaningful contribution in life and career as life’s purpose or one’s goal in life. I have come to understand that it is very important to be clear about what is most important in life in order to make a better contribution at work and in life in general.

We often confuse happiness and meaning. We also generally view wealth in a wrong way. We sometimes dream of wealth of other people – all the monies, the possessions and the assets. Happiness without meaning is meaningless, as Marshall Goldsmith argues. I have come to understand that to live a fulfilled and fulfilling life, nice things do not help. Find your mojo – find that which gets you (and keeps you) going, both in your career and in your personal/private life. Cultivate relationships that matter. Learn to let go. Be patient. Be kind to yourself.

Although we spend more time at work than in other places, it does not seem that we take enough time to understand our work environments fully. To function well at work, take time to better understand your work environment. Indeed there are many things that we cannot change where we work, but we can at least control how we react or respond to others and other things in our work environments. Over the years, I got to appreciate how critical it is to map the various networks wherever I work or positions I occupy and have a better sense of who is connected to who both professionally and socially. In a leadership role, also make time to know those that you lead in order that you can support them better. This is always work in progress because there is usually not enough time to do proper scanning of the work environment, and never enough time to get to know colleagues enough.

Linked to meaning and purpose in life and in our careers, those guided by certain values and principles do better. For those in leadership roles, values and principles should be connected to credibility, integrity, consistency, accountability and related guiding lights. This comes handy when difficult decisions are made, and in complex situations. I have come to appreciate how important it is to lead by example. Accountability without integrity is pointless. Values and principles also guide us in how we relate with people in general, not only at work. If we accept that no one is perfect, we can focus on strengths that others have than their weaknesses. We learn that everyone has an important role to play, in life and at work. Always care for your loved ones and all those around you.

So much has been written about finding one's voice. Like power, we all have voice no matter where we find ourselves. If we keep this simple but powerful fact in mind, we come to the conclusion that we can make changes we consider important – be it at work or in life in general. It helps to understand your environment. One of the most important lessons I have learnt is that everyone can lead no matter the position. It is important to know that, like voice and leadership, everyone can play power up or down or straight depending on the situation at hand. One may not have significant influence in certain environments, but we all have voice and power. Keep the eyes on the prize.

Overall, staying focused and being authentic can go a long way. It begins with knowing who you are and what matters most for you as many studies confirm. Indeed, we evolve as human beings and our environments change. It can be hard to stay true to who you are, but remaining true to who you are will always help you to sleep peacefully. This is true even for those who think they have many weaknesses. Vulnerability and frailty, as an example, are part of who we are than weaknesses. It is about being human. Being always yourself helps you to be consistent. For those in leadership roles, followers or direct reports observe whether you are always true to yourself. Leadership is not only a process, but also it is an example – it is what you do that would count for many. Live your life in a way that does not contradict how you lead. Value everyone.

When all is said and done, as Oprah Winfrey puts it:

Each of us has a personal calling that is as unique as a fingerprint – and that the best way to succeed is to discover what you love and then find a way to offer it to others in the form of service, working hard, and also allowing the energy of the universe to lead you.