

GOOD WORK
RECLAIMING YOUR INNER AMBITION

PAUL MILLERD



**PATHLESS
PUBLISHING**

WELCOME TO THE PREVIEW!

Hey there,

Thanks for giving my book a shot.

It's a narrative non-fiction story about my relationship with work, something that radically shifted about six years ago.

Sitting at a table in Taiwan, I decided to reorient my life and, well, I don't want to spoil it yet.

I'm a self-published author and have done a lot of creative experiments with this book including illustrations, a fictional epilogue, a quotes section, and some passages written by my wife.

It was a joy to create.

I've included the intro for you to read for free.

If you like it? I'd love your support.

If the book delights you, I'd love a share even more.

But if it's not for you?

WELCOME TO THE PREVIEW!

Great. There's so much good stuff to read.

Thanks!

Paul Millerd, September 2024

INTRODUCTION

Could it be this simple? Just do things you like?

Sitting there at the table in my Airbnb in Taipei, a cup of coffee by my side, I felt that my reality had shifted.

It all started to make sense: the endless job-hopping in my twenties, the dissatisfaction that never seemed to go away, the desire to escape to Asia after quitting my job and blowing up my life. The whole time, I had been desperately searching for something I could never quite understand, and now I had found it.

“How could I have missed it?” I thought. For years I had written for fun and always found so much joy in it. Since I had quit my job sixteen months earlier, writing had been my only consistent activity. But I never considered it “work.” At 33 years old, I finally realized that this act of creative expression was an essential part of me.

It was my good work.

I stopped writing, took a deep breath and took in my

INTRODUCTION

surroundings. Rain pattered down on the metal awnings of the buildings on the street. The air in the room was heavy and humid and carried a musty scent from the wooden furniture that had likely been passed down from previous generations. In a city where most cafés don't open until 11am, my pot of freshly brewed coffee filled the air with a distinctly American urgency I had yet to let go of.

Since I had arrived in the apartment a few weeks earlier, this table had been my sanctuary. Each morning, I would make coffee, sit down, and write. But on this particular morning, I had a profound awakening. Channeling my curiosity into a newsletter post destined for just a small number of readers, I noticed a deep connection with my work, hyper-aware of it for the first time. I felt at ease, filled with a sense of abundance and possibility.

The moment was a stark contrast to my life up until that point. For ten years I had bounced from job to job, searching for a sense of connection to my work that remained elusive, and by the end I simply ran out of energy to keep going. Pinpointing the exact cause of my burnout is an impossible task. It may have been the meetings where everyone only pretended to care, or how emails from clients were treated as secret messages to be decoded as the team jumped into crisis mode. Maybe it was simply knowing that I was playing a role in the whole performance, turning myself into the kind of person who gets a good review and a 5% raise at the end of the year.

A perfect explanation doesn't really matter because by the end, I was depleted. Despite having what was, on paper,

INTRODUCTION

a promising career, I saw no reasonable path forward. When I quit, it wasn't an act of defiance but surrender. I had been vanquished by the demands of a modern career and as I walked away, I saw work itself as my unofficial adversary. *It had done this to me.*

With this mindset, I had no bold visions of success when I became self-employed. I wasn't taking a leap to build a successful startup or even trying to increase my earnings. Quite the opposite. I saw work as something I needed to escape and my plan was to eliminate as much of it from my life as possible. I'd live simply and scrape by.

As I cut my cost of living in that first year, I had the thrilling sensation of becoming free. *Wow! It was working.* I was doing the bare minimum to pay the bills and I felt better.

I thought I had it all figured out, but I was only getting started. Without "work," I spent more time doing things I enjoyed, like writing. No matter where I was I kept finding myself lost in flow, typing away, trying to find a rhythm with my words. But it was not until sitting at that table in Taipei that I saw it for what it was: work worth doing. I didn't want to escape work; I just craved work I cared about.

In seeking to break free from work, I rediscovered it in a simpler and more powerful form. I realized that my conception of "work" had been far too narrow.

As I awakened to this new perspective, I became upset:

Why didn't anyone tell me that this is possible?!

Why do so many of us pretend that formatting PowerPoint

INTRODUCTION

slides is the height of human existence? That jobs are the only form of work?

I loved the feeling of connection and flow I experienced from writing and it became everything to me. I became determined to build my life around doing things like writing. Things that mattered to me. Things that brought me alive. No matter what.

Despite not having earned any money in months, and with no evidence that this ill-formed approach to life was sensible, I fully committed to this new direction.

But the changes I started making as I continued down this new path were hard for me to understand and even more incomprehensible to others:

“What’s your plan?”

“I don’t know, I feel like I’m on to something though.”

“What do you do all day?”

“Um, well, I just sort of see where my interests take me. Most days, I wake up and find myself writing.”

“Are you trying to get paid for that?”

“No.”

“Aren’t you worried about the future? What about making money? Are you going to get another job?”

“If I can help it, I’ll never get another job. I like what I’m doing, I just want to see where it leads.”

“You are crazy.”

“Thank you.”

I was embracing what I eventually started calling my pathless path, which did not come with any semblance of a plan. This is the challenge of good work: searching for it

INTRODUCTION

might lead you away from what others view as “success,” and it might even lead you to question your own sanity. For me, however, the resulting transformation has been worth it. For too long, I had embraced a shallow version of life, seeing work as a means to an end, as a pursuit of goals that were supposed to make me happy.

Through writing, I started to find what I truly craved, and as a result, I completely lost interest in the outcomes of my work, namely making money and external achievements. Writing was a refuge, a place where I could transcend feeling lost in my life. It was enough. So I designed my entire life around creating the time and space to think, wander, and write. Nothing else mattered. And for the next few years, I committed myself to this path, putting creative work, especially writing, above all else. To get by, I experimented with all kinds of gig work, doing my best to find things that paid the bills without draining my energy or time. If I achieved any kind of financial success, I wanted it to result *only* from a life centered around good work.

Now, six years after committing to writing, and seven years after quitting my job, I am far wealthier in terms of time, freedom, and a sense of agency in my life. Here’s the crazy thing too: my good work has started to generate *some* money. In the last few years, I’ve sold more than 50,000 copies of my first book, *The Pathless Path*, generating more than \$200,000 in profits. This resulted directly from my commitment to good work.

Which is wild.

Does this mean good work can make you a lot of money?

INTRODUCTION

I can't promise that. In fact, the idea that you *should* be able to make money from your passions is a story that holds too many people back from finding good work. Personally, I've sacrificed hundreds of thousands of dollars in income to pursue this path, something which will make more sense after you read Chapter 12.

In writing this second book, I'm again choosing to spend most of my time doing something that's not guaranteed to make money. This decision was easy, however, because writing a book involves channeling my inner ambition, the deepest expression of what I want out of life. At the beginning of my career, this inner fire drove me to pursue impressive achievements. But over time, that flame faded, and I almost forgot it existed. By embarking on a pathless path, I've rekindled that flame, which guides me not toward societal benchmarks of success, but toward a life centered around good work. Through the connection to my work, I feel fully alive, able to show up as the boldest expression of who I want to be. On this path, I can channel my ambition beyond life as only a successful worker, showing up as a fully present and connected father, spouse, and friend.

This inner drive has pulled me through writing this book as I manage the hard constraints of being a parent. I've adapted my writing process to fit my life, writing in three hour blocks at cafés, sometimes with fellow writer friends, and sneaking more time when my daughter Michelle is asleep. At the end of each week I feel content and fulfilled. In my twenties, I never felt this way. I wasted my time doing work of little consequence. Now, after experiencing the

INTRODUCTION

nourishing feeling of doing work that matters to me, I'm willing to do almost anything to continue to live this way. As long as I have some buffer in savings to keep going, I will.

Good work is powerful. It can reshape what you desire from life. It can fill your days with a renewable form of life energy that you want to protect. Nevertheless, good work is hard to define, which makes it difficult to explain. Good work is often tied to a certain activity or combination of activities that you don't want to skip. Throughout my life, my good work will likely consist of many activities I enjoy, like writing, teaching, mentoring others, and even being a father. Right now, writing is the core activity, and it includes many kinds of expressions, such as essays, videos, and books.

Your good work may shift over time. For example, it may primarily help you find fulfillment or let you express your creativity, while at other times it may help you make money. Sometimes it may completely absorb you, while during other periods, you may struggle to stay connected to it. Good work doesn't usually happen on a factory schedule and often has a natural seasonality. But when you stop doing it, good work seduces you back. It is something you must do. Once you discover your good work, take it seriously and protect it, as it can be one of the most powerful ways to show up in the world, contribute, and feel useful.

When I quit my job I did not understand any of this. I assumed I would still have to orient my life around work I didn't enjoy. I was stunned when I discovered activities that didn't require me to grind, desperate to hit the bar every Friday.

INTRODUCTION

It's clear now: work doesn't have to suck.

I wrote this book to show you that this is possible and to help you reflect on your own path and figure out what “good work” means for you. But you won't find a simple framework or step-by-step playbook here. The reality is that good work is simple, but hard: it requires self-reflection, trial and error, and having faith in yourself and the world. My journey has taken years and is still evolving. I've had to mourn the loss of parts of myself that once served me, while also reconnecting with other parts of myself that I had suppressed. Going through this experience has tested me, but given me strength. It filled me with an inner confidence that helped me rewrite my own story, not as someone who “wasted” my career by walking away, but as someone doing something far more ambitious. Most importantly, this path allows me to openly admit that I care about what I do, without shame or cynicism – something I couldn't do in my former career.

That day in Taipei, I didn't just aim my life in a new direction – I took the first steps toward reclaiming my raw, inner ambition. It was a powerful moment, but it was also only the start. In Bali, several months later, I would be tested and need to reaffirm my commitment. Afterward, I would still spend the next few years learning to coexist with my own doubts and fears.

Now, I'm able to look back more clearly at all the challenges I've faced and see how I was able to keep going. It was only through this strange, confusing, and meandering journey that I have been able to find myself on a path where I genuinely feel like I'm thriving. How long can I keep this

INTRODUCTION

going? I can't tell you that. But for now, I've made it work for almost six years, and for me, that means it *can* work. That's enough.

I wrote this book to show you that reclaiming your inner ambition and finding good work is not only possible, but worth pursuing. It's also my attempt to inject you with the pragmatic optimism that is necessary in a world filled with cynicism and doom, particularly about work.

It's never too late to start looking for your good work. I didn't discover mine until my mid-thirties, but once I did, it sparked a transformation in every aspect of my life. The journey will be uniquely yours, filled with challenges and unexpected breakthroughs. My aspiration is that you consider this book your friendly companion as you step onto this path. May it help you rediscover your inner fire and craft a life around work that truly matters to you.

Like what you're reading?

Check out the rest: pmillerd.com/goodwork

PREVIEW OF GOOD WORK CONTENTS

- *Introduction*

PART ONE: AWAKEN TO GOOD WORK

- *Embrace The Unknown*
- *Follow Your Energy*
- *Commit To The Journey*
- *Have Faith In Good Work*

PART TWO: REWRITE YOUR WORK STORY

- *Find a Positive Edge*
- *Don't Mistake A Good Job For Good Work*
- *Question Your Work Scripts*

PART THREE: EMBRACE THE CHALLENGES

- *Solve the Puzzle of Good Work*
- *Do What Feels Right*
- *Find The Zeal*
- *See Your Work As It Is*

PART FOUR: COMMIT TO GOOD WORK

- *Leave Money On The Table*
- *Reclaim Your Ambition*
- *A Call To Action*
- *Final Reflections*

OTHER SECTIONS

- *Quotes That Inspired This Book*
- *Epilogue*
- *Acknowledgments*
- *About The Author*
- *Also by Paul Millerd*
- *Notes*
- *Live Fully Now*

BOOKS BY PAUL MILLERD

The Pathless Path

Good Work

More info:

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