

# THE NUANCES OF WORK

## *How Subtleties Drive Success*

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*Work must have life in it—vitality.* —CLIFF HAKIM

### FEELINGS

“I would rather be dead than take that job,” said Kimberly, when I asked about the company that wanted to hire her.

For the past two years, Kimberly had worked part-time as a clerk in a hardware store. After being laid off from her post in property management during the Great Recession, she saw this as a bridge to something better. When she first started interviewing, however, she found few opportunities in her field, and it took this long for her to get a bite. Now that she’d been offered a job in office-supply sales, she called to tell me that she just couldn’t warm to it.

“Everyone whom I interviewed with in the company, including my boss, was flat, unable to show enthusiasm for their work. That’s never been me; even now, with the pressure to take a full-time job in this economy, I still care about how I feel when I go to work each day.”

Many people struggle to balance their feelings—their need for meaningful work—with their responsibility to earn a living. For most of us, money represents only a portion of the compensation package. How we feel about the job comes into play as well. For example, we want to feel that we’re part of team, that we have a good rapport with the boss and with our colleagues. We want to feel confident in

the service or product that we represent. And we want to feel aligned with the values of the workplace.

My client, Jerome left his teaching position “because administration felt off focus to me. I wanted them to step up to make decisions based on what was best for the children. Decision-making, instead, was driven by teacher seniority and self-service.” In short, things just didn’t feel right.

Jerome decided to look for a new position, after he recruited a first-year, wide-eyed math teacher Sebastian to take over freshman algebra.

Sebastian would encourage fellow teachers to discuss their teaching methods. He asked the group, “What’s one thing you hated about math class as a high school student? How will your avoid repeating that in your classroom today?”

“They basically turned away from him, saying Sebastian was a busybody,” Jerome recalled. “But my gut was telling me that I needed to listen to him and it was time to make a change.”

After three years building a brand as a marketing director, Clive was laid off and before he cleaned out his office, he had to hand a pink slip to each member of his staff. Needless to say, it didn’t feel good to demolish the creative team

he had assembled and whose work he'd come to respect. The CEO linked these lay offs to poor performance and a grim economy, but that was just a ruse to put the company on the block.

“After the sale, the CEO and his top brass raked in millions!” Clive said, “And we all felt betrayed. All our hard work went to feed the greed of the men at the top.”

Clive decided to “cool out for a while—shed the toxins—and think through an entrepreneurial plan. Whatever I do, I will take more control of my career. In my next job, ‘independence’ will be on the top of my list.”

The most important thing to do, even in a difficult job market, is to pause and reflect, and then “trust your gut.” Recognizing and acting on the feelings in your belly is critical. Only then you can find the clarity and energy you need to move ahead.

As I tell my clients, “Ignoring your feelings is counterproductive. This will only erode your confidence and diminish your resilience and your capacity to act.”

What does it look like when you finally find the proper fit? When your feelings are in perfect or close harmony with your job?

After working for five different organizations, Etsuko took a position as human resources manager in the health care field. “I finally landed in a place where I am happy,” she said. “My name in Japanese means ‘child of joy’ and one of the values that defines our corporate

culture is ‘joy in work.’ We try to improve the wellbeing of our patients and our employees. Another value that we share in common is ‘thankfulness.’ We pause to express gratitude to one another. As we start a meeting, we ask each participant to share one positive exchange, from clear communication with a coworker, to early intervention to head off a potential customer problem. Although this takes effort and time, sharing these examples keeps our organization alive and healthy, and encourages us to learn from one another.”

**To find a job that’s in harmony with your feelings, ask yourself these questions:**

- How do I feel about my current work situation?
- How might I build on the positive feelings that I experience? What do I do, each day, that makes me feel strong and confident?
- When have I felt that I was doing meaningful work?
- When did I last honor my feelings at work and how did this lead me in a positive direction?
- How can I replace a soreness in my gut with joy?

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