

# THE NUANCES OF WORK

## *How Subtleties Drive Success*

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*Work, for me, must have life in it; vitality.* —CLIFF HAKIM

### LAUNCH

Ernie, an engineer and vice president of manufacturing, impressed me because he cared so much about the little things. He knew all his employees on a first name basis, he personally called and thanked all the job candidates who did not get hired, and he only took on projects that he felt had a real creative spin. One day he said, “It took me a long time to learn that these subtle things count.”

This newsletter explores how paying attention to the subtleties can make you feel more vital and lead to greater job satisfaction and overall success. When you’re aware of the subtle things, your spirit is energized, you’re more confident and you make better decisions. You also use more of your talents and move closer to self-fulfillment.

Once you start to honor the nuances of work, you will have a different definition of “making it.” You will no longer settle for a lucrative job that fails to use your gifts. You will no longer coast while others make decisions for you. Work will no longer be just about getting the next promotion and adding the next line to your resume. It will be about the nuances that you bring to the job, and the rewards that come to you.

As a career counselor and executive coach for over twenty years, I have shepherded thousands of individuals through career transitions. The

truly successful ones have paid special attention to their preferences and inner urgings.

“Though I have a decent income and it looks like I have a great job,” Lida said, “I kept hearing this inner voice that said, ‘Something’s missing.’” Instead of ignoring this feeling, Lida took it seriously. She interviewed with a company that valued work–life balance and offered her flex-time so she could get home early enough to prepare dinner for her children.

Carlos was tired of dress codes and cubicles, but instead of panicking and jumping to any old job, just for the sake of change, he decided to explore his subtleties. An engineer, Carlos discovered that what mattered most was not his technical expertise but his communication skills. He had a rare ability to consult with the customer to uncover problems, analyze them, and come up with good solutions. He changed his title from software engineer to professional services consultant and was able to combine his primary strengths.

Jacob didn’t want to change jobs but he was having the worst time with his boss. Jacob was a multi-tasker whose attention shifted rapidly from one issue to another. His boss accused him of being bored or unsettled. But Jacob explained that he was fundamentally a facilitator; he was compelled to find better ways of addressing the problems his team faced on a daily basis. Today

Jacob feels more valued because he spoke honestly with his boss and was able to stand up for his approach to work: “I identify urgent needs, places we are stuck. This helps me keep an eye out for problems and quicken our response to them. It’s all about the nuances.”

As the genius improviser Robin Williams said, “You’re only given a little spark of madness. You mustn’t lose it.”

The Nuances of Work aren’t addressed by experts on time-management, how to write a better resume, or ways to beat the competition. There is only one way to find out what these nuances are, and that’s by looking at your own experience. Once you do, you’ll know exactly when and how your spirit gets expressed—or stifled—on the job.

This newsletter will help to explore those magical parts of your personality. It will help you understand what kind of problem solving or communication mode makes you unique.

One of my clients, Fernando, took a detour to understand the nuances involved in his notion of “getting ahead.”

“The small business I dedicated myself to for the last three years cracked open like Humpty-Dumpty,” he recalls. “I did everything I could to save it, working nights and weekends. Still, the company crashed, and as a result I asked myself, how do I want to do business, live my life, differently?”

The answer came from following the subtle urgings of his spirit. Fernando joined another firm, part time, as an account development manager. The rest of the week he practiced drumming and worked on a CD with his band mates. This was not only fun, it gave him the perspective he needed to look at his business and analyze what went wrong. “This was an extremely valuable exercise,” he says. “It allowed me to take stock of my strengths and weaknesses, and as I looked back, I realized how I could do a better job of managing sales and revenues.”

To make room for these insights, it helps to adopt a “beginner’s mind.” Allow yourself to take a fresh look at your current situation.

Then ask:

- What did I love to do as a child? What passion have I been ignoring for too long?
- Do I feel that I am currently growing in my job? (Be honest!)
- If someone said, “I’ll pay you a million dollars to do Y.” What would Y represent?
- In the past five years, when have I felt most alive? Tell a story. What subtleties or nuances does this tale reveal?
- How might you apply these discoveries to energize your spirit and achieve greater success?

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