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## What craft hack

wildpixel/Getty Images A life is, to some extent, the product of what we contribute to the world. That's why, when it comes to defining the right career, just asking, What can I contribute? often leads to a better outcome than starting with your own personality, passion, or interests. Asking this question focuses your energy outward towards the people who matter most and the achievements that will continue to grow in your absence. Think of it as moving from: You're what you do in You're how you help. When we add our work to the contribution it makes, this adds motivation and meaning. However, many of us continue to sit back and take a what the company wants from me approach, which is a disservice for our own careers and the people we serve. Many jobs and products they produce are flat out killing people when they should make us healthier. A lousy job can be even more harmful to one's health than having no job at all. Instead of looking for more meaningful change in their work, people often feel trapped in their current jobs and assume that leaving their organization is the only option. That is why the basic concept of work must evolve. A task is more than the sum of the responsibilities described in a sterile CV. And a career is much more than performing the tasks assigned to you in exchange for a paycheck. Instead of the idea that we work primarily for pay, we need to think about how we work for a purpose that creates a concrete improvement in another person's life. A purpose beyond a Purpose paycheck can (and should) accompany a paycheck. The problem, to a large extent, is our own too low expectations. After two decades of working with organisations and leaders on this issue as a consultant, I can clearly see that we cannot just rely on companies to help us maximise our contribution and improve our prosperity. Each of us must take over when it comes to finding our own contribution. In my experience, there are many managers and leaders who want people to have more important jobs and personal lives. However, organisations are mainly held accountable for short-term economic results. Most organizations do not (yet) have a comparable mandate to promote the well-being of workers. It is up to each of us, individually, to rewrite the definition of our work and reconnect the way we work. The play may sound daunting, but it's not. Reorienting your efforts to focus contributions can start small and develop over time. Determining how your work can have a more positive effect on another person is an important step in the right direction. Moving beyond what you're doing? I've learned that just asking people what they're doing doesn't reveal much. Almost every time I ask this question, the initial answer is unclear. People answer, I'm a lawyer, I stay home with my kids, or I'm in commercial real estate. What I have found to be much more insightful is a brief continuation of the typical question. As soon as tells me their functional position, I, somewhat naively, probe a little deeper. I ask, Well, what does this a typical day look like . . . What do you spend most of your time on? This is where I enter the very most interesting and revealing parts of each person's story. I hear the lawyer talking about relationships with her clients and how she enjoys arguing in written form while working on legal briefings. I hear parents talking about quality time they spend with their children, witnessing certain milestones and coaching youth sports teams. However, there are many times when people hesitate before they respond, as they realize their average day is not as pleasant as it should be. One central learning I've gathered listening to people's answers to this question over the years is that rebuilding a typical day can be a useful exercise in a number of cases. I got this idea from the research methods used to study daily well-being, where scientists ask people to remember their activities and experiences from the day before. My takeaway from all this research is that asking someone to reconstruct yesterday is a better lens on their happiness than simply asking them if they are happy overall. If you are considering any type of work change, ask someone who has done that job for a long time to reconstruct a typical day. The answer can be priceless. When you're struggling at work, try rebuilding the most recent day (or week) and looking for tasks you might be able to perfect in terms of where you invest time and energy. In particular, consider how using each hour is an additional benefit for the people you serve. Linking your contributions to results On a weekly basis, I hear from people who claim to be unhappy or lost in their careers. In most of these cases, people ask me questions about how to make their work more satisfying once they have already started sending resumes around to prospective employers. The problem is, once the mental switch turns, it's usually too late. The time to ask tough questions about whether you can create a sustainable worklife in your current job is as early as possible. Start with a very basic question: Who can, does, or will ultimately benefit from my efforts? See if you can answer with the names of real people, not abstract groups. Even when you can (literally) see people benefiting from your work every day, it can still be difficult to recognize the value you create and remind yourself of the meaning behind these efforts. I hear from the who were in a rut until they found a way to recognize the daily influence they had on the development and development of at least one child. In my work with hospice nurses, who spend most of their time dealing with the very sick and dying, I've heard countless stories from nurses who got so caught up in the routine and mechanics of their work that they failed to recognize the meaning created as they helped help and their families in the last months of their lives. One common element that I have noticed, in all professions, is that your contributions come in a clearer view as you approach the beneficiaries of your work. The more you learn about a person who directly benefits from your time and effort, the more motivation you need to improve that person's life in the future. Finding a way to positively influence others through your work requires constant analysis, where you learn more and more about those you serve, from internal customers to final consumers of products or services. How can you spend more time asking questions of the people you serve, listening to their needs and observing what you could do to improve their lives? Just as an organization is unlikely to invest millions of dollars in a product that has a small chance of serving many customers, you don't want to devote thousands of hours of your learning and development time to an area for which there is little demand from your employer or community. This is one of the criticisms of follow your passionate advice – it assumes that you are at the center of the world, and that the pursuit of your own joy (not in the service of others) is the goal. I have found that those who leave a permanent mark on the world, on the contrary, always ask what they can give. Life has an unknown expiration date, but contributions to others don't. The time, energy and resources you invest in your community and the people you care for are growing exponentially. That is why we need to find ways to recognize, every day, how our efforts have a positive effect on at least one other person. Fortunately, you don't need any kind of permission to have that kind of influence... You just have to start today. Parts of this article are excerpts from the upcoming book, Big Question of Life: Discover How You Contribute to the World (Silicon Guild, 2020). Andrew McCaul Loan out books without fear that they would never see their dog-eared pages again. In honor of National Reading Day (March 2), we created several, poppy bookplates so your literature-loving friends will always know where to return borrowed books. Pick up the labels (ours is 31/2 by 21/8) from an office-supply store, and download one of the following templates. Print the labels and stick them in your books. Folks will be able to check out your library selection - no membership card required. 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