

RICHARD J. LEIDER  
DAVID A. SHAPIRO

# whistle while you work

HEEDING  
YOUR LIFE'S  
CALLING



BY THE AUTHORS OF THE BESTSELLING BOOK *Repacking Your Bags:  
Lighten Your Load for the Rest of Your Life*

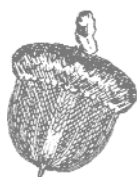
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**BK**

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## Whistle While You Work

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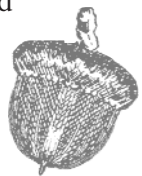
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# preface

## Repacking *Our* Bags

Six years ago, we embarked on a life-changing adventure. Having completed *Repacking Your Bags*, our first book together, we found ourselves faced with the opportunity to put into practice the ideas and suggestions we had written about. Our message in *Repacking* was that each of us needs to develop his or her own vision of the “good life”—which we defined as “living in the place you belong, with people you love, doing the right work, on purpose”—and having done so, must then “repack our bags” so the only burdens we carry are those that really assist us in getting where we want to be.

Walking this walk for us meant examining our own lives and asking ourselves the initial question in *Repacking*: “Does all this really make me happy?” What we discovered, individually and together, was that many of the choices we had made around place, work, relationships, and purpose were indeed contributing to our overall sense of well-being. But some of them needed to be re-evaluated and discarded. As a result, we both made a few fairly significant



changes in our lives—some external and others of a more introspective nature.

Dick reconceptualized his vision of both his career coaching practice and his work as partner in *The Inventure Group* to focus more on writing and speaking. His deepening understanding of his own sense of purpose and direction led, in part, to his 1997 book, *The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning In Your Life and Work*.

Dave gave up his career as a corporate consultant in favor of graduate school in philosophy. He has subsequently become deeply involved in doing philosophy with elementary and middle school students, work that, in part, inspired his 1999 book, *Choosing the Right Thing to Do: In Life, at Work, in Relationships, and for the Planet*.

In the six years since *Repacking* came out, we have each done a good deal of repacking ourselves. We have both moved; Dick has gotten married; Dave has become a father. Our lives have continued to present us with new opportunities for shaping our own visions of the good life.

Through it all, we have continued the discussion that led to *Repacking*. We have remained deeply intrigued by what it means to live a good life and what people really need in order to be happy. Our conversations on these issues have ranged far and wide; we've talked with each other, with colleagues and clients, with young children and older adults. Surprisingly, the one component of the good life that has consistently come to the fore has been work. While we've seen that relationships, place, and purpose contribute greatly to people's overall sense of satisfaction, we've been somewhat taken aback to discover the degree to which people's feelings that they are—or are not—doing the work they were “meant to do” makes a difference in their overall sense of fulfillment.

This observation, coupled with what we have learned by talking to a number of people who *are* doing what they were meant to, has led to this book, *Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life's Calling*. Whereas *Repacking* was centered around an examination of all four components we considered necessary to the good life, *Whistle* focuses on the singular issue that has emerged in our lives—and the lives of those we have spoken to—as essential: *the challenge of discovering meaningful work*.

You may find *Whistle* to be helpful if you are asking yourself questions like:

- “What do I want to be when I grow up?”
- “How can I make a living doing what I love?”
- “What was I born to do?”
- “What is my life’s work?”

Our intent in *Whistle While You Work* is to help readers discover their own answers to such questions, answers that reveal to a person’s own innate sense of *calling*—what we define as the “the inner urge to give our gifts away.” Calling is not unlike purpose, but it’s more vocationally focused. Purpose is characterized in terms of *who we are*; calling is more about *what we do*. So it’s natural that, along with our examination of calling, we should spend most of this book exploring the world of work. People who have a powerful sense of calling about their work tend to love what they do and to experience a level of joy on the job that most of us only dream of. You will meet a number of these people in the following pages. We hope their stories illustrate how a life lived in alignment with calling is well within our reach.

Writing this book has been an incredible opportunity to express our callings. Each of us, in conducting interviews, facilitating seminars, teaching classes, having discussions, and putting our thoughts on paper has had the great good fortune of giving away our gifts in service to something we care deeply about. It has been a joyous experience even when—perhaps *especially when*—we were working the hardest. We offer this book as a token of our gratitude for being able to experience the power of calling in our own lives.

Heeding one’s life’s calling is a lifelong process. Our ongoing dialogue about calling has enriched our lives immeasurably and promises to keep doing so. We welcome you to participate in this conversation yourself and to experience the joy and fulfillment that follows from heeding your life’s calling.

*Richard J. Leider, Minneapolis, MN*  
*David A. Shapiro, Seattle, WA*



## Introduction

# if you can't get out of it, get into it!

Look around: How many people do you know who are living their lives on hold, just biding time until the right job comes along that will magically fulfill all their hopes and dreams?

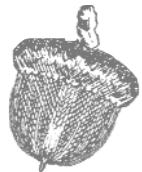
Look within: How often do you find yourself longing for “something more,” fantasizing about suddenly getting the perfect job, relationship, or living situation?

Look again: How many of us feel trapped? How many see no escape from jobs and lives we never chose?

Dick has seen firsthand how people get stuck in situations that they feel are inescapable. He recalls an incident that showed him what we believe is the only way out.

*Africa—at last!*

*I have always dreamed of coming here. And now, I've finally made it, invited by Derek Pritchard, Executive Director of the Voyageur Outward Bound School, and former director of the Kenya Outward Bound school on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. Derek is leading a group of seasoned outdoorspeople—Outward Bound leaders and board members—on this East African adventure. Little do I know that the real excitement and growth on our trip will be the inner journey—the “inventure.”*



*We are taking a route that probably should not be taken—it is that challenging. But this group wants to “push the envelope,” to have an authentic wilderness experience. And so, we find ourselves with full backpacks in a remote area along the eastern edge of the Serengeti Plains, climbing up from the Rift Valley—scrambling along the great rift itself—as we make our way forward under the brutal African sun. Our goal is to hike across the Salei Plain to the Ngorongoro crater where we will meet the truck that left us several days ago. None of us have taken this route before; it is new even to our Masai guide. And so, we are unsure of what lies ahead, nervous about our limited water supplies holding out.*

*Animals are everywhere; their screeches, growls, and yelps are a constant counterpoint to our own sounds of labored breathing and heavy footfalls. There are ten people in our group—men and women—and we are mostly silent, conserving our energy for the trek ahead. Our thoughts do not stray far from the experience at hand; ancient fears of the wild and savage continent lie just beneath the surface for us all.*

*And at the moment we have good reason to be on edge. We are hiking through tall grass that obscures our view beyond just a few paces. It is called, appropriately enough, “lion grass,” because it is a favorite habitat of lions on a hunt. They hunker down in the dry stalks to hide from their prey, ready to spring when an unsuspecting animal comes across their line of sight.*

*Our group is spread out in a line behind our guide. I am near the rear, taking my time, trying to experience each moment of our trip as fully as I can. The only other member of our brigade that I can see—and I glimpse him only occasionally through the tall grass—is a man I’ll call “Tom,” a fairly experienced hiker, an Outward Bound board member, who in the “real world” is an extremely successful New York City attorney. Tom is on his first trip to Africa, too, and seems even more blown away by the experience than I am. He has certainly prepared well for the journey; his gear is brand-new and of the highest quality. If nothing else, he certainly looks the part of the intrepid African explorer.*

*Suddenly, though, out of the corner of my eye, I see him freeze. He stands, still as a statue, then sits down heavily, the tall stalks swallowing him up from my view. I swim through the grass to where he now sits. As I come upon him, he is trembling.*

*“Lion,” he whispers, pointing off into the distance behind us. I scan*

the area where he is pointing but can't see anything. "Lion," says Tom again, his eyes saucer-ing.

Still unable to see anything, I try to get Tom to move, but he won't budge. He is paralyzed with fear. Leaving Tom, I rush ahead to our group and fetch Derek. He tells our guide to hold up the march and returns to Tom with me, who is still sitting where he was, shaking like a leaf.

Derek, an Englishman, questions Tom with the stereotypical straight-forwardness of the classic British explorer. "What it is, old chap? You can't sit out here in the sun all day, you know."

Derek's right. It's late afternoon; the temperature is well over 100 degrees. Even standing still, we can feel the sweat pouring off our bodies. Tom just purses his lips and stares into space.

"Dick tells me you saw a lion. Not surprising, really." Derek brushes a clump of the tall grass with the back of his hand. "They call this stuff lion grass after all, don't you know?"

Tom is not amused. He shakes his head and mutters something.

Derek leans closer to the sitting man. "What's that?" he asks.

Tom is silent a moment and then repeats himself. "This is insane."

"I'm not sure I'd go that far," replies Derek, assuming Tom is talking about his reaction. "But I would agree that it's not the most useful response to seeing 'Simba' in the bush."

The mentioning the lion again seems to send shivers through Tom's body and loosen his tongue. "No. It's us. Here. This is crazy. Too dangerous. We shouldn't be here."

"Well, be that as it may," says Derek, "we ARE here. And there's only one way out—the way we're headed."

"I'm not going," insists Tom. "No way. No."

Tom's intransigence has brought home the seriousness of the situation not only to Derek and me but also to the rest of the group, who have filtered back and are now standing near us in various states of concern and disbelief. They are wondering whether our expedition will—or should—continue.

Derek tries reasoning with Tom. "Listen, old chap, you can't just sit here. It will be getting dark soon and if we don't find a camp near water tonight we'll all be in serious trouble tomorrow. Lions or no lions."

"I just want out of here," says Tom. "I want to go back."

Derek reminds Tom that we've already come two days' walk from

where the truck dropped us off. And besides, it's no longer there. At present, it should be making its way in a big semi-circle to where we plan to rendezvous next week. "There's nothing to go back to, Tom," says Derek, rather mildly.

"I just want out," repeats Tom. "Out of this. Right now."

Derek kneels down next to the group. He speaks to Tom, but what he says is clearly meant for us all. "Tom, you can't get out of it. There's no getting out—this is what it is." He pauses a moment and then continues, louder, as if announcing to everyone: "We have a motto at Outward Bound precisely for this sort of situation: 'If you can't get out of it, get into it!'"

Derek's words have an immediate impact on the entire group—Tom included. "If you can't get out of it, get into it!" When there's no way out of a situation, there's only one thing to do: get into it.

At that point we realize that we're in so deep that our only recourse is to dive even deeper. Our situation is inescapable and so, instead of trying to escape it, we must embrace it. To get out of it, we have to get into it.

And so, we do.

After only a few words, the group decides to press on. We realize that heading back to where we came from is not an option; our only way out is to get into it.

Derek's motto becomes our group's mantra for the rest of the trip. We face other near-crises in the days ahead, but with each one, we accept that the only way around it is through it. By the end of our trek, we need only give each other a look which says it all: "If you can't get out of it, get into it."

In the years since that first trip to Africa, Derek's words have come back to me often. The motto never fails to create a shift in my perspective. I have been involved in wilderness experiences—whether in the plains of Africa, the mountains of Colorado, or even the boardrooms of corporate America—and whenever I find myself or my group becoming stuck, I am reminded of this simple truth: "If you can't get out of it, get into it."

We recall these words now because we see so many people who are "stuck" in their current career situation. They want out of where they are. They fantasize about winning the lottery, about becoming

a millionaire, about meeting someone who will hire them and solve all their problems, about space aliens making contact with humanity and changing the entire world as we know it. In short, they fantasize about getting out of it.

But the simple fact is this: there is no getting out of it. The difficulties and dissatisfactions of work are only met in one way: head on. If we want to get out of our current situation, if we want to experience real joy in our work, there's only one thing to do: get into it.

And for us that means getting into the process of hearing and heeding our calling.

So then, let's get into it.

## The Call

Calling is the inner urge to give our gifts away. We heed that call when we offer our gifts in service to something we are passionate about in an environment that is consistent with our core values.

Considering the concept of "calling" metaphorically, one of the great success stories is the telephone. What else comes so quickly to mind when we think of hearing a call?

The story of the telephone's success depends in no small part upon its simplicity. The fact that it doesn't (or at least historically didn't) require a number of complex steps to operate has made the telephone accessible to everyone. People with little or no technological sophistication are easily able to make and receive calls. The simplicity of the telephone has given people everywhere access to connections. Had it not been so easy to use, it's unlikely that its impact would have been felt so powerfully today.

As explorers of a different concept of "calling," we also hold simplicity in high regard. It's our belief that the message of calling is best presented in a manner that is straightforward and uncomplicated. It ought to be as easy to use as the telephone.

Thus, we would like to dial in four guiding principles of calling:

## 1. *The Call comes from a Caller.*

Each and every one of us is called. Where does the call come from? There is no calling without a Caller. Calling is an inherently spiritual concept that challenges us to see our work in relation to our deepest beliefs. The concept of calling is founded on the recognition that we are all born with God-given gifts to fulfill specific purposes on earth. Our calling emanates from a Source much larger and more powerful than we are. No one fully understands all that is “hard-wired” into newborns, but it is clear that we come into the world already endowed with unique gifts. These gifts have the potential to enrich our lives immeasurably if they are unwrapped and given away. And yet, calling is not revealed to us automatically at birth. Heeding our calling requires an effort on our part. It is an effort, though, that can be performed almost effortlessly. Quite simply, we must *listen*. We must choose to hear what summons us. We must open ourselves to that inner urge to share our gifts with the world in a meaningful way. When we are clear about our life’s calling—when we have heard the call and can heed it—our full potential for joyful work can be realized.

## 2. *The Call keeps calling.*

Calling is revealed to different people at different times in different ways; it may not come to us in a time or a form we expect. And yet we become aware of it in consistent themes that run through our lives: those things we remain passionate about, the work that we continue to believe needs doing in the world. Discovering our calling is a process that has stages, much like the process by which we learned to walk. Each stage—rolling over, crawling, walking, running—had to be experienced in turn. Likewise, we move from *jobs* which pay the bills, to *careers* which help us grow, to *callings* which give us meaning. All three—job, career, and calling—are related, but at different levels and stages. And the com-

mon theme that ties them together is the gradual revelation of our calling over time.

### 3. *The Call is personal.*

There are as many callings in the world as there are people on the planet. This isn't to say that other people might not do the same things we do or that they can't be passionate about the identical issues that compel us. It does, however, mean that each of us is called directly; no one else is called to do the same things we are *in the same manner we are*. Our calling is our embedded destiny; it is the seed of our identity. The emphasis here is on *being*. We express calling not only through the work we do, but more importantly, through *who we are willing to be* in our work. *Heeding* our calling involves a conscious choice to be ourselves—to uncover in the here and now our God-given nature. Our calling is like our signature or thumbprint, uniquely ours. *Heeding* our calling means we realize that we are here to contribute to life on earth something that no one else can contribute in quite the same way.

### 4. *The Call is long-distance.*

*Heeding* our calling is a deliberate choice to use our gifts to serve others and make a difference in the world. Our calling is made manifest through service to others. We come alive when our efforts make a difference in other people's lives. It's paradoxical but true: we are more likely to receive the satisfaction and fulfillment we seek when we enable *others* to achieve the satisfaction and fulfillment *they* seek. When what we do is grounded in a sense of calling, we experience a special joy—a whistle—in our work. As a result, we are even more willing and able to give our gifts. We are in it, then, for the long-term; the overall meaning of our lives is revealed through the long-term expression of our calling. Calling is thus the active source of our legacy.

These four guiding principles represent the essence of our message about calling. Of course, there's much more to be said about how calling is revealed to us and the ways we can bring a heightened sense of calling into our lives and work, but the basic idea is quite basic—as we hope to show in the following chapters.

In *Chapter 1: What Do I Want To Be When I Grow Up?* we provide a framework for reflection upon a question we all need to revisit sooner or later. We also explore how our answers contribute to our fulfillment on the job—that is, the degree to which they put a whistle in our work.

*Chapter 2: What Is My Calling Card?* features the “Calling Card” exercise, a powerful interactive way of developing a clear sense of one's calling. Once we discover the “golden thread”—our embedded destiny—we can then begin to examine it in light of our current or future work.

*Chapter 3: Gifts—Is My Job My Calling?* asks us to think about the work we were doing the last time we were so absorbed that we lost all track of time. This provides us with a way to explore the *gifts* component of calling. We also begin to look at ways in which people can take charge of their current work lives in order to express their calling. This is intended to illustrate that heeding our calling does not necessarily mean that we change jobs; another alternative is to change the job we have.

*Chapter 4: Passions—What Keeps Calling Me?* explores the *passion* component of calling. Passions are the specific questions that obsess us constantly; they are the particular issues, interests, and problems that attract us—at work, in our lives, and with the people around us. Understanding our passions gives us insight into the many arenas where we can put our gifts to work.

*Chapter 5: Values—Where Do I Make the Connection?* gets at the *value* component of calling by exploring calling in a wider context than just on the job. Values frame the sort of environment in which we are most likely to flourish. Consequently, this chapter offers guidance and direction for figuring out what environments we're mostly likely to thrive in.

*Chapter 6: How Do I Heed the Call?* centers around an exploration of the challenges associated with heeding our calling. We



share many examples of how people have dealt with the frustration of hearing a “busy signal” when trying to connect with their calling. This broadens the discussion of calling, and helps us to keep listening in spite of the inevitable missed connections we all experience.

*Chapter 7: Legacy—Did I Answer the Call?* explores the *legacy* we leave through the choices we make around calling. What do we want our lives to have been about? How do we want to be remembered? Who will we see when we look back upon ourselves? In this chapter, readers will have an opportunity to reflect on others' stories to draw lessons for their own lives and legacies.

Through these chapters, we hope to provide a process for readers to hear and heed their own unique calling. Ultimately, the discovery of calling is about connecting who we are and what we do. So our own exploration of calling can perhaps best begin by connecting with the question that, for most of us, is the source of our current experience: “*What do I want to be when I grow up?*”

## Chapter 1

# what do I want to be when I grow up?

## Everything Happens for a Reason

*I'm already late for my plane. The alarm in my hotel room didn't go off—or maybe I slept right through it. I'm stressing hard; if I miss this flight, I'll be two hours late for my meeting, not to mention deeply embarrassed in front of my clients when I finally do show my face.*

*Traffic is awful. My taxi driver coughs and shifts in his seat as he faces the long line of cars ahead of him. I see his reflection in the rear-view mirror. He looks like he's straight from Central Casting's cab driver department: the big, red, Karl Malden nose, the watery bloodshot eyes, the few greasy strands of hair sticking out from under the flattened wool cap.*

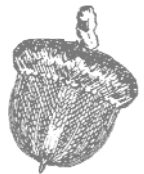
*"What time's your flight?" he asks, glancing up at the mirror to meet my gaze.*

*I tell him—the hopeful, pleading tone of my voice all too apparent.*

*The driver shakes his head. "You ain't gonna make it. Sorry. This traffic's outta control."*

*I sigh involuntarily and mumble something about the meeting I'm going to miss.*

*My driver waxes philosophical. "Everything happens for a reason," he says. "You wanna know why I'm a cab driver?"*



*Why not? I've got time to kill now.*

*"Because the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor."*

*This I've gotta hear.*

*"Yeah," continues the driver. "You ever hear of the Sullivan Act?" He doesn't wait for me to answer. "Four brothers—all Navy—got killed in the bombing. So Congress passes a law that if you have a brother on active duty, you can't be drafted. Okay. My brother, who's a cop, is in Vietnam. And back in 1969, I'm just outta high school, and because I always do everything he does, I'm gonna enlist and go over there, too. I write him a letter telling him my plans and he writes back saying don't do it, this place is a mess, so I stay home, get into some trouble with the law and disqualify myself from following my brother's footsteps onto the police force. 'Course I wouldn't have that option if it wasn't for the Sullivan Act—I'd a been drafted. My number's already called. So you see, if it wasn't for Pearl Harbor, I'd be a cop today. Instead, here I am."*

*Sounds like he was fated to drive a cab.*

*"It's a good thing, too," says the driver, smiling wryly. "If I were a cop, I'd be dead. I got the kind of personality, you put me on the street with a gun, I'm not so sure things would work out, know what I mean? So, you see? Everything happens for a reason. If it wasn't for Pearl Harbor, I wouldn't be driving this cab. And if weren't for missing your wake-up call, you wouldn't have met the best taxi driver in town."*

Think about your own life and the complex turn of events that led you to where you are today. Perhaps you can't trace the origins of your current career all the way back to the Second World War, but you probably recognize that a few key events played a major role in determining who and what you are today. The question to ask is "How involved was I in the course of those events?" Did you make choices that reflected what you really care about or were you pretty much borne along by forces outside your control? Are you, in other words, being what you wanted to be when you grew up?

## Whistle While You Work

The Disney classic, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, features the unforgettable song, "Whistle While You Work." The tune, sung by

Snow White and the forest animals who come to her aid, captures the feeling of work done with a sense of joy, commitment, and focus. As Snow White works and whistles, we are reminded that, ultimately, the way we work is an expression of who we really are. And we share in Snow White's feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction as she busily completes her many tasks.

In doing so, we are naturally led to wonder about our own jobs. Like Snow White, many of us have too much to do. And like her, we are bothered by many troubles. How many of us, though, are able to put on a grin and start right in? How many of us find ourselves really able to whistle while *we* work?

Of course, Snow White's whistle is only half the story. Behind the scenes, the movie offers an even clearer model for joyful, committed work: the model of Walt Disney himself. Through his movies, his artwork, and his vision for the fantasy kingdom, Disneyland, Walt Disney created a legacy that any of us could hope to aspire to. An incredibly gifted animator, director, and businessperson, he was also incredibly passionate about his work; his values for high-quality family entertainment came shining through in all he did. Who can doubt that Walt Disney, as he created the many characters and stories that are now so deeply a part of our culture, whistled while he worked?

Naturally, we can't all be Walt Disney. Most of us, in fact, probably have jobs more like Snow White's friendly dwarfs. But this doesn't mean we can't bring to them the powerful sense of calling that Walt Disney did. And it certainly doesn't mean that we can't find a way to whistle while we work.

This feeling of doing what we were meant to do—of performing the work that we were born for—is something every one of us craves. We have a deep hunger to feel useful and to know that our natural abilities are being employed to their fullest potential. The desire is especially powerful because we've all had a taste of it; we've all had the experience of being deeply connected to what we're doing—that sense of timelessness and flow that fills us when we're doing exactly what we were meant to do.

When we were kids, we imagined work would be like this when we grew up. When parents and teachers asked us what we

wanted to be, we usually had a ready answer. “An astronaut. A fire fighter. An explorer.” We envisioned a life of excitement and challenge on the job—a life in which we’d employ our best-loved talents on projects we were passionate about.

For many of us, though, it hasn’t exactly worked out that way. We find ourselves in working situations that are far from what we envisioned as children. Our jobs are *just jobs*. They pay the bills, but they don’t provide us with the joy that, in the end, is what really matters. We’ve lost the whistle in our work. Even worse, we’ve forgotten what we wanted to be when we grew up.

So maybe it’s time to ask ourselves again:

*What do I want to be when I grow up?*

Maybe it’s time to take a lesson from a group of sixth-graders Dave worked with in a Seattle middle school. They all had very strong feelings about what the future ought to hold for them—and even stronger feelings about what it ought not. Each of them had already answered the question that we’re still asking:

*What do I want to be when I grow up?*

Dave tells a story that made this abundantly clear to him, in a way that helped him realize what his own answer finally was.

David A. Shapiro  
Writer



*Fostering  
Understanding*

*We’re playing a game called “Hand Dealt,” which explores the question, “Is life fair?” by providing each player with a predetermined “life.” Students are each dealt three cards; one card determines a fictional relationship they are in, one establishes a fictional job or jobs; the third tells them where they live. There is a wide range of relationships, occupations, and accommodations, from the quite affluent to the extremely poor. Thus, one player may end up having been dealt a “life” of two parents, one of whom is a chemical engineer making \$80,000 a year, the other of whom is a banker earning \$125,000 annually, two kids, living in a four-bedroom house, while another player is dealt a “life” of an unemployed single parent of 4 children living in a one-bedroom apartment. Not surprisingly, the kids who get the “good” lives tend to respond to the question of life’s fair-*

ness in the affirmative while those who are dealt less desirable lives usually respond that life is horribly unjust. This gives us the opportunity to wonder aloud about the relationship between monetary success and happiness, and ultimately, about just what it means for life to be fair or unfair.

But that's not all. It also gives us a chance to explore what it feels like to be dealt a life we didn't choose. And this, more than anything else, is what energizes our discussion. The kids are adamant about the injustice of having to live with choices they didn't make.

"I wouldn't mind being a janitor," says a boy I'll call Carlos, whose bleached-blond surfer look belies an unusual level of thoughtfulness for an 11 year-old, "if being a janitor is what I wanted to be. But since it isn't my choice, I don't think it's fair."

But the cards were passed out fairly, weren't they? Didn't everyone have an equal opportunity to be whatever they ended up being?

"That's not the point," says Miranda, a rather small girl with a rather large personality. "What makes it fair or not is that it's your own life and that nobody's forced you into it."

"Yeah. Some people are actually happy being, I dunno, schoolteachers. But that for me would be like worse than prison." This comment from Will, one of the class's several class clowns, elicits a humorous grimace from his teacher and chuckles from his classmates.

"Could you imagine coming to school for the rest of your life?" shouts curly-haired Maya with a theatrical shiver. "What a disaster!"

Amidst the general assent of her fellow students, I wonder out loud what kinds of things these 11- and 12-year-olds could imagine doing for the rest of their lives. I'm taken aback at the assurance with which they respond.

"When I grow up, I'm going to be a movie director," says Erin, a seemingly shy girl who spends much of her time drawing. "I'm going to start by doing commercials and then videos and then feature films."

Ryan, who collared me the moment I entered the classroom to show me his daily journal, in which he is recording tidbits for the autobiography he is working on, pipes up that he's going to be a writer. "Maybe I can write your movie scripts," he says to Erin.

Other students have similarly well-formed notions of what they love doing. I'm enjoying immensely talking to them about what they plan to do, how they plan to do it, and the philosophical implications of

*their choices—and their freedom to make those choices. I’m wondering how they manage to have such optimism and clarity about their lives at this young age. I’m wondering how—at this age—they seem to know themselves so well. When did they have the discovery that so often eludes adults: the discovery of what they want to be when they grow up?*

*And suddenly, I come to understand that I am having that same discovery myself. As I stand in a classroom, doing philosophy with children, I realize that finally, after years of searching, I am at last doing what I most love to be doing. All the other jobs I’ve ever had—from busboy to videodisc designer to corporate training consultant—have been merely steps upon the way to where I am now. I feel completely connected to the process of inquiry we’re conducting; I’m immersed in the subject matter and delighted by my young colleagues and their inquiring minds. Time flies by. What I notice is how authentic it feels for me to be helping these students to better understand the questions and answers we are exploring and in the process, to better understand themselves. And it occurs to me that in all the other jobs I’ve ever had, this is the common theme that has given me satisfaction. At some level, “fostering understanding” has consistently been key.*

*And I realize that after all these years, I’ve finally become what I always wanted to be when I grew up. It’s taken me more than 40 years to rediscover the answer to the question that my young friends in this classroom have found for themselves in just over a decade.*

*What do you want to be when you grow up?*

## The Roots of Calling

At a fairly young age—by fifth or sixth grade, certainly—most of us have a pretty good sense of what we love to do—and what we don’t. Of course, we usually can’t put a job title on it at that point; for an 11-year-old, loving to draw doesn’t translate into being an art director; nor is finding math class fun a sign that a youngster should think about becoming an accountant. Moreover, given that well over half of the jobs that kids will grow up into haven’t even been invented yet, it’s obvious that we can’t expect too much specificity in career choice at such a young age.

Still, the essential core is already there. Our gifts, though nascent, have already begun to take shape. Deep within, a part of us knows that we are here on this planet for a reason. A sense of destiny, unformed as it is, lies just beneath the surface of our awareness. And, even as children, we naturally incline towards the experiences that allow us to express this.

Somewhere along the line, though, we get sidetracked. We silence that voice within that speaks to us about what really matters. We make choices—or have them made for us—that are driven by practical concerns. We set aside “childish” dreams in the interest of making a living or satisfying someone else’s plans. We seem to forget what we knew as boys and girls—what we most love to do.

But that wisdom never really goes away. It can be revived. We can open ourselves to that innate knowing that guided us when we were young: the inner urge to give our gifts away.

The roots of calling in our lives go back very deeply—to even before we were born. Calling is an expression of our essence; it’s our embedded destiny. The seed of this destiny lies within us; one way or another it seeks to fulfill itself in the world. So the question we need to ask ourselves is whether we’re doing all we can to bring the fruits of our calling to bear.

## Seeds of Destiny

One unmistakable conclusion that Dick has drawn from a lifetime of coaching individuals about life and career design is this: *we all possess seeds of destiny*. Each of us has within us God-given natural gifts—unique potential for creative expression. From birth we have what we need to become all we can be. The challenge, of course, is to figure out how to make a living with our uniqueness; how to connect who we are with what we do.

But often we don’t have to look very far to find our life’s calling. We can simply start doing whatever we are already doing—driving a taxi, being a lawyer, raising a child, waiting on tables—with greater reverence for and attention to our natural gifts.

On a day-to-day basis, most jobs can’t fill the tall order of making the world a better place, but particular incidents at work can



have real meaning when we make valuable contributions, genuinely help someone in need, or come up with creative solutions to difficult problems. These transactions are meaningful because we do them with good will rather than simply to earn a paycheck. They are naturally rewarding and often occur effortlessly. Such moments put a whistle in our work. They fill purposeful lives—lives that are apt to be happier than lives that lack such moments.

The way we approach our work depends on our “big picture” of life. Unfortunately, many of us lose that perspective; we get so focused on the particulars at hand that we make decisions impulsively, losing touch with what is really important to us.

Michelle Stimpson  
Marketing Coordinator



*Creating  
Joy*

Michelle Stimpson, Marketing Coordinator at the Minneapolis-based Carlson Companies is committed to helping people reconnect with what really matters to them. Too often, she has seen the “business” of business crushing people’s spirits; in response, she has made it her special mission to help lift that heavy weight. She makes time on a daily basis to get to know the people she works with as *people*, not just co-workers. “I feel obligated to create a positive first impression with everyone who comes to work here—showing them how they fit into the big picture, why they’re important.”

Michelle’s parents must have known intuitively that their daughter’s calling was *creating joy*—her given middle name is Joy. Michelle’s joy has always been to build bridges between people. Even as a small child, she loved to listen to people’s stories, particularly stories about how they overcame obstacles. She recalls, “I’ve always loved to touch people’s lives, to be a friend who was there. My gift is to surround myself with positive energy and give it off to other people.”

Throughout her life, Michelle has chosen activities in which she could cheer people on and get them excited about things. As an intern at the Courage Center for the physically challenged, she researched patients’ stories and sent them to their hometown newspa-

pers. In college, she volunteered for the “welcome committee.” *Creating joy* has been the common theme for her; she has expressed this destiny in many variations along the way. Michelle carries a small card in her billfold to remind herself of her true priorities: family, joy, simplicity, peace, and love. She and her husband Bill work hard at living these values every day—and, as Michelle’s joy demonstrates, they are succeeding.

Michelle’s embedded destiny to create joy illustrates the depth of calling within us. Each of us is, you can say, like an acorn. Somehow, almost magically, the acorn knows how to grow up to be an oak tree. It doesn’t matter where you plant it, whether you put it in an oak forest, an orange grove, or even a junkyard, as long it gets the necessary sunlight and water, the acorn will develop into an oak tree. The acorn’s destiny to flourish as an oak is implanted within itself. Attempting to make the acorn grow into a pine tree, for instance, will be—at best—fruitless; more likely, it will destroy the tree altogether.

The same can be said for our own destinies. Like the acorn, each of us contains within us the power to realize the fullest expression of who we are. Naturally, we need a good environment in which to grow and thrive, but assuming we can cultivate that, we can grow our roots down and reach up to become tall and mighty in our own way.

Sadly, many of us spend our lives trying to grow our acorns into pine trees—or palms or sycamores or something even more exotic and unlikely. And this stunts our growth. Yet our destiny continues to seek fulfillment in becoming an oak tree. Small wonder so many of us grow up feeling rather gnarled and twisted. Small wonder so many of us end up making work or lifestyle choices that hinder our natural growth.

One of the most common messages many youngsters receive is that they should rein in their natural creative capacities. How many of us have heard “You can’t sing,” “You can’t draw,” or “You’re not a writer”? How many of us were told we were not good in one or all of the creative arts? And even those of us lucky enough to have had our creativity supported were likely to have been told that we could never make a living as a singer or artist or poet. Each time these

limitations were imposed upon us, most of us acted as if they were the truth. We accepted the limitations, imposed them upon ourselves, and thus the limitations became real.

The lesson is that when we are given strong positive messages about our creative abilities, we tend to bring them forth quite successfully. Those of us fortunate enough to have had parents or mentors who encouraged our creative expression often find ourselves using those very abilities in our work lives as adults. Dick, for instance, who now makes a good deal of his living by giving speeches, had programmed into him from a very young age this simple message: “You can speak.” He bought it.

Dick Leider  
Founder, The Inventure Group



*Uncovering  
Callings*

“When I was in my pre-teens,” says Dick, “my father strongly encouraged me to get up early every morning and look up a new word in the dictionary. At breakfast, I would share from memory my new word with him. I always picked ones that I thought would impress him—words like ‘ameliorate’ or ‘erudition.’ He believed that to be successful in any work or in life you needed to be able to express yourself clearly and articulately. For him, having the vocabulary to say precisely what you meant with a certain poetic flourish was a vital component of success. Encouraging me to learn a ‘word a day’ was how he impressed upon me the importance of this.

“His next push was for me to take elocution lessons. I dreaded this. My friends would be playing hockey at the corner playground on Saturday mornings while I sat with Miss Loker learning how to speak. Miss Loker was a dowdy gray-haired woman in her 70s who seemed plucked directly from the musty volumes of English literature that she carried with her for my lessons. Always perfectly put together and freshly coiffed, she showed up on Saturdays with poems to be memorized and lessons on pronunciation and inflection to be learned. I would avoid the work she gave me all week long and try to cram it all in Friday afternoon. Consequently, I dreaded her visits and the inevitable humiliation of having to stand before

her, in my own living room, reciting the week's lesson over and over and over.

"The true terror, though, was the recital, six months out, where she brought all her students together in an auditorium to recite a selected piece. For months, I came up with every conceivable excuse to avoid this event. Unfortunately, there was no way out. I ended up on stage before scores of expectant parents, reciting my piece under the stark glow of the theater lighting. Much to my surprise, though, I liked it. Hearing my voice reverberate through the hall and seeing the smiles and hearing the applause of the audience gave me a thrill I never forgot.

"As a sensitive and mostly introverted 13-year-old, elocution lessons did not help me get picked for hockey games on Saturday afternoons or be able to talk to girls at school. But they did teach me to be comfortable speaking in front of groups. In fact, after two years of lessons, I found within me a natural enjoyment for sharing stories in front of a live audience. I discovered that I had a gift for communicating my thoughts and feelings to groups of people.

"Today I make my living sharing stories and lessons learned with audiences of all sizes. Speaking in public is a part of my occupation that I truly enjoy. It brings forth the whistle in my work.

"I often wonder if my parents saw this natural inclination of mine for public speaking or whether they just felt it would be a good skill for me to acquire. In any case, they nurtured my gift for it, and in doing so, helped make it possible for me to make a living doing what I love to do."

## Doing What You Love, Not What You Should

How many of us ended up where we are because someone—probably a parent or a teacher—"should'ed" us? Somewhere along the line, an adult or mentor of some sort told us that we *should* go into some line of work or some course of study "to make a good living" or because some other occupation "isn't practical," or so we can have "something to fall back on," if what we *really* love to do doesn't work out?

This is common with college students. An eighteen year-old freshman loads up his schedule with lots of math and sciences, even though what he really loves is theater. If he's lucky, about the time he's a junior, he realizes he's made a mistake and changes his major. If he's not, he ends up graduating and taking a job that makes him miserable.

Dave remembers a young woman who took an Intro to Philosophy course from him. "She was quite good at it. She had a natural knack for understanding the often abstruse arguments of the philosophers we were reading. She seemed to really enjoy the interplay of ideas in the classroom; she wrote great papers, and often came to my office hours to discuss philosophical questions. Given her enthusiasm for the material, I naturally assumed she was majoring in Philosophy. But no, she said, she was pre-med. "Well, then, you'd better watch out," I joked, "given your talent, if you're not careful, you're going to end up a philosophy major." She just laughed.

"After the class, I lost track of her and didn't see her again until about two years later, when we happened to meet by chance in the library. I asked her how her studies were going, what courses she was taking, and so on. She listed the classes she was enrolled in that quarter—they were all upper division philosophy courses!

"I thought you were pre-med," I said.

"I switched to philosophy," she told me.

"I kidded her about the comparative job prospects of a philosopher and a physician. 'Well, your parents must have been delighted about that!'

"She laughed, 'Yeah, I thought when they found out I changed, they were going to kill me.' Then she got serious. 'But I thought that if I didn't change, I might kill myself.'"

The message is this: we limit ourselves by doing what we think we *should do*. But by doing what we *love to do*, we expand our potential and increase the likelihood that the work we do will be consistent with our gifts. We maximize our chances for whistling while we work.

Nobody but you knows what your path should be. Maybe it means taking a job as a taxi driver. Perhaps it's the seminary or

teaching philosophy to children. Maybe expressing your calling means to form a collectively owned organic farm; maybe it is to run for mayor of your small town. Or perhaps you will heed your calling to become a chef, a poet, or an adoptive parent. There are thousands of callings and limitless ways to express them—and only we can name our calling and act upon it.

People who whistle while they work tend to have exercised choice in getting where they are. They tend to have—at some point or another—taken the proverbial “bull by the horns” and set a direction for their lives. They tend to have pursued that direction, using their intuition as a compass to navigate with. This isn’t to say they necessarily travel in a straight line—they may change course many times along the way—but the mere fact of choosing their life’s course enables them to pursue their dreams energetically. And the sense of power that comes from knowing that their direction is freely chosen provides them with the impetus to keep choosing throughout their lives.

It’s a useful exercise, therefore, to look back on our own lives and think about the twists and turns that led us to where we are today. What were the key decisions we made—or didn’t make—that resulted in our becoming the person we are, with the work we have, living in the place we do, with the people we know?

## Parents at Work

Our parents’ attitudes toward work are the foundation upon which we build our own. The way Mom and Dad work—and talk and think about work—are the first images we have of the world of work and, therefore, have a deep and powerful influence on our own attitudes.

Growing up, we formed opinions about work by observing the behavior and listening to the words of our elders. Our parent or parent figures—the most important people in our lives—modeled for us the meaning of work. Our own relationship to work evolved from that starting point.

For some of us, Father was the parent who most clearly characterized the nature and meaning of work. For others, it was Mother, and for many, it was both. If our parents whistled while they

worked, and saw work as joy, we are more likely to seek enjoyment in our own work. If they saw their jobs as drudgery, as only a way to pay the bills, we are more likely to want to avoid it ourselves.

Of course, our beliefs and attitudes about work are complex and have their origins in many sources, but our basic pattern was formed by observing the work lives of our parent figures.

Dick observed his father and formed the foundation of his perspective on calling. “My father was a banker, an executive who worked for the same organization for 39 years. He worked hard—got up early in the morning six days a week to go to the office. He did so not simply to make a living, but because he believed that his efforts had a positive effect on individuals and the St. Paul, Minnesota community. This symbolic message, that work is a way to make a difference in people’s lives, is deeply programmed into me. The bright side of what my father modeled to me about work was his masterful ministry to people. When I went to his office and saw him relate to people or we walked together down the streets of St. Paul, it was obvious that he was very skillful and enjoyed what he was doing. He whistled while he worked. He created the aura of an artist when he worked, echoing the words of Suzuki, who wrote, “I am an artist at living and my work of art is my life. I learned from my father that through giving yourself away you find your true self.”

## The Message We All Want to Hear

Our family, through parents and other significant elders, communicates a strong sense of limitations and possibilities as to what our work might be for each of us. We hear the message, “You’re not good at this; you ought to do that . . .” These limitations and possibilities are often the projections of our parents’ own fears and dreams.

Many of us were brought up to believe that we can’t possibly make a living doing what we enjoy. We have a choice: either we can enjoy what we do or we can eat!

Step back for a moment and ask yourself if this makes sense. Is it true? Are all the people you know who enjoy their work starving?

Growing up, most of us were told by well-meaning parents that work is not something to be enjoyed. “It’s not supposed to be fun; that’s why they call it work,” we were told. That early message made a powerful impression which was reinforced by seeing grown-ups drag themselves to their jobs, complaining all the way. Those of us lucky enough to have adult role models who whistled while they worked probably came to consider those people anomalies. Certainly, popular culture images—from Ralph Kramden to Archie Bunker to Homer Simpson—don’t represent most people as particularly joyful in their work.

Probably very few of us heard a message like this when we were young:

*“Welcome, my child! You’ve been born into an exciting era with unlimited potential. We don’t know what your God-given gifts are, but we’re committed to helping you discover them. We could never see the world thorough your eyes because God designed you to be you and to live a life that is yours alone to live. You have gifts that will come to you so naturally that no one can teach you how to use them, not even us! Your gifts will give you untold joy and will be as easy for you as breathing. We will give you plenty of chances to explore what you really enjoy doing in order for your gifts to truly flourish. We’ll be proud of and celebrate whatever calling you choose for yourself, whatever it is that makes you happy.”*

Nevertheless, many people *have* found a unique, life-inspiring calling. Few, if any, were given the kind of support illustrated in the above paragraph. They had to discover for themselves the work that made them whistle.

Our callings exist within us; they are inborn, a natural characteristic, like our hair color or whether we’re right- or left-handed. But until we heed our calling, we’re not living authentically; we’re adopting someone else’s model for who we should be. Perhaps it’s who our parents thought we should be; perhaps it’s a false image that we ourselves have opted for. In any case, that false image must be examined, re-evaluated, and, if necessary—discarded if we’re to whistle while we work.

Each of us has a unique and special calling. *What’s yours? What are you here to do that no one else in the world can do in the way you can? What is your special role to perform in life’s great drama?*



## Chapter 2

# what is my calling card?

## Doing What You Do

*I settle into the taxi, hoping to get a bit of work done before my upcoming meeting. As the driver pulls away from the curb, I open my briefcase and take out a folder. Even as I try to focus on my papers, I can see from the cabbie's face in the rear-view mirror that he wants to talk.*

*"So, whattayou in town for?" he asks.*

*"I'm giving a speech. A presentation to some businesspeople," I say, hoping to make it sound uninteresting so the driver will leave me alone.*

*He doesn't take the hint. "Oh yeah? What's it about?"*

*I'm not interested in giving the speech twice, so I offer the Reader's Digest abridged version. "Hearing and heeding your life's calling—doing the work you were born to do."*

*My cabbie scoffs. "That's a good one. You gotta section on how to make a million bucks while you sleep, too?"*

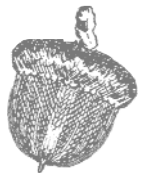
*Now he's hooked me. "You sound skeptical."*

*"Hey look, what am I supposed to say? Your life's 'calling?' C'mon, I drive a cab here. What's that got to do with a calling?"*

*I close my folder and catch the driver's eye in the rear-view. "You weren't born to drive a taxi?"*

*He just laughs.*

*"But you like your work well enough?"*



*He shrugs. "I guess it has its moments."*

*"I'm interested. What are those moments?"*

*"You mean besides quittin' time?"*

*I lean forward and put my hand on the front seat. "I'm serious. What is it about this job—besides the money—that you find satisfying? What is it that gets you out of bed in the morning?"*

*He smirks like he's going to say something sarcastic but then stops. Gradually, his face softens. He laughs a little and says, "Well, there's this old lady."*

*I stay silent and he continues. "A couple times a week, I get a call to pick her up and take her to the grocery store. She just buys a couple items. I help her carry them into her apartment, maybe unload them for her in her kitchen, sometimes she asks me to stay for a cup of coffee. It's no big deal, really; I'm not even sure she knows my name. But I'm her guy. Whenever she calls for a taxi, I'm the guy that goes."*

*I wonder why. "Does she tip well?" I ask.*

*"Not really. Nothing special, anyway. But there's something about helping her that, I dunno, just makes me feel good. I guess I feel like I'm making a difference in somebody's life, like somebody needs me. I like to help out."*

*"There's your calling right there," I say.*

*"What?" The smirk returns. "Unloading groceries?"*

*"You said you like to help out. That's a pretty clear expression of calling."*

*A smile spreads across his face. "Well, I'll be damned. I guess that's right. Most of the time, I'm just a driver, but when I get that chance to help somebody—as long as they're not some kinda jerk or something—that's when I feel good about this job. So, whattayou know? I got a calling."*

*He is silent for the rest of the short trip. But I can see his face in the rear-view mirror and even when we hit the mid-town traffic, he's still smiling.*

Each of us, no matter what we do, has a calling. Of course, some jobs fit more naturally with our calling, but every work situation provides us with some opportunities for fulfilling the urge to give our gifts away. Satisfaction on the job—and ultimately, in life—

will be due in part to how well we take advantage of those opportunities. What this requires, though, is that we *hear* our calling, that we learn what to listen for. We need to recognize, as the taxi driver did, what our calling really is. We need to identify our Calling Card.

## Connecting Who You Are with What You Do

Calling is proactive. It seeks expression in the world.

Historically, calling has been about the ministry. Preachers, evangelists, missionaries, and clergy people speak about being “called” to do God’s work. “Calling” in this sense is deeply rooted in a theological tradition and excludes people who are not similarly motivated.

But there is a more inclusive sense of calling, a sense to be found in the word “vocation.” Vocation comes from the Latin, *vocare*, meaning “to summon.” We are referring to the inner urge, or summoning, we have to share our uniqueness with others. In this sense, everyone has a calling, not just those in the ministry. Each of us has something—or perhaps several things—that we are, it seems, quite literally called upon to give. We feel a strong pull in a certain direction and our lives seem incomplete unless that direction is pursued.

In this way, calling is *active*. It’s a summons to play our part. Calling is a present moment notion; it is constantly alive, tugging on us during our entire lifetime.

Although calling runs through our whole lives, we are not called once for life. Responding to our call is something we do every day. Calling breaks down into daily choices. In responding, we ask ourselves again and again: “How can I consistently give my gifts away?”

We bring our calling to our work every single day, by expressing our gifts, passions, and values in a manner that is consistent with the legacy we want to leave.

People who have discovered their calling and choose to bring it to their work tend to be phenomenally energized about what they do. They have an almost childlike passion for their projects and a great sense of gratitude for their good fortune. They have answered

the eternal question we face every day: “Why do I get up in the morning?” They have answered it by aligning who they are with what they do.

## “It’s for You”

Inside each of us right now is a call waiting to be answered. It has been with us throughout our lives. The call was placed the moment we were born; it has been ringing in the background every day we have lived.

Taking that call—hearing and heeding our calling—is not the easiest path through life, but it is a path filled with joy. It is a path of joy quite different from the traditional conception of jobs and careers most of us grew up with. If we are going to find joy in our work, we will do so by approaching our work as a calling. And if we feel no such joy, it’s clear that we have yet to make that approach.

Many people discover a sense of calling in fairly dramatic ways: through sensing an inner voice, in a vision, from a dream, as a result of a near-death experience, from a shamanic journey, or in meditative insight. For others, the call comes more subtly: through an inner knowing, a sense of inner peace, a realization that “it fits,” or an overall perception of “rightness.” Sometimes calling is revealed by a process of elimination, through the turn-offs and dead-ends of life. In some instances, a teacher’s influence is central; sometimes it’s a book or a lecture or the example of others. Many people report gaining insight about their calling through religious revelation or while traveling to new places. In many instances, our calling comes once we are removed from everyday routine—when we have the opportunity to listen to what authentically moves us inside.

All callings are, ultimately, spiritual in nature. Each one of us has unique potential—distinct, God-given gifts—with which to serve the world. These gifts provide us with a source of identity in the world. But until we connect who we are with what we do, that source remains untapped.

Some people are lucky enough to hear their calling easily and to find work that allows them to express it fully. But what about the rest of us who listen for our calling but don’t hear a thing? Or hear

conflicting things? What if I'm in a job that pays well, but brings me little joy? Or a job that pays poorly and provides a sense of fulfillment? What good is a calling if I'm trapped in a dead-end job?

All of us go through periods when our work feels dead and lifeless. All of us have dreamed of winning the lottery and never having to work again. Similarly, most of us have also had some opportunities to feel the joy that follows from doing work that is an expression of our deepest nature. Yet when it comes to heeding our calling, most of us have the cards stacked against us. Naming our calling—and more importantly, getting *paid* for living it—seems as unlikely as winning the lottery.

Nevertheless, right here, right now, there are ways to bring your calling to your work. The challenge is to find or create aspects of your work that express your calling—even if the work as a whole leaves something to be desired.

## Should I Quit My Day Job?

Discovering our calling doesn't mean that we should immediately quit our day jobs. It does, however, require us to work the process of connecting who we are with what we do.

Ultimately, the realization of our calling can occur anywhere. No special circumstances are necessary; what matters is a willingness to recognize the call when it occurs, even if our intuition seems to be guiding us in an unexpected direction.

Heeding our life's calling means thriving, not just surviving. It means that we refuse to accept less than full employment of our God-given talents. It means not settling for a relationship with our work that lacks passion.

*It means asking, "How do I find my life's work?"*

The moment we start asking this question and exert the energy to answer it, we make a commitment to the expression of our birthright gifts. We begin to clarify our calling when we sincerely ask:

- What gift do I naturally give to others?
- What gift do I most enjoy giving to others?

- What gift have I most often given to others?

The Calling Cards exercise described later in this chapter is a systematic way to go about developing your own answers to these questions. It is designed to prompt you to detect the theme of your life's work. Using the cards provides you with a framework to name your own personal Calling Card—that precious gift within you seeking expression in the world.

You can read through the Calling Cards casually for some insight into the concept of calling and how it applies to you. Or, you can make a serious commitment to working the Calling Cards process in the hope of having a breakthrough experience and seeing how far you can take it. This will require more than just a casual read, though. It will take serious self-study and input from others.

We believe it's worth it, however. And we're not alone. Many people have found the Calling Cards extremely liberating in overcoming blocks to the expression of their natural gifts. Using the Calling Cards has helped them trust their intuitions, take risks, and bring forth inner wisdom in the ongoing quest for meaning and fulfillment in their work.

## Labor of Love

A calling is not something you do to impress other people or to get rich quick. It's a labor of love that is intrinsically satisfying. It's something you would happily do even if it never makes you rich or famous. Of course, there's nothing wrong with making money or being widely acclaimed. But we should also recognize that there are other ways to pursue a calling: helping others, learning, promoting change, or dedicating oneself to an art form.

No one more clearly exemplifies a life lived in accordance with calling than Arne Anderson, now 83, a physician from Scandia, Minnesota. Arne's calling reminds us of the possibility of pursuing a stewardship orientation to life, of shifting our commitment from personal success to serving others. Looking back upon his life, we see how Arne's calling has continually been a labor of love in the form of service to others.

Arne Anderson  
Physician



*Seeing  
Possibilities*

Born into a first-generation Norwegian immigrant family, Arne had the importance of a good education drilled into him from the earliest age. But he had a hard time staying focused on what was happening in the classroom. “School was easy for me,” he says. “I had a very curious mind. I was always seeing possibilities in everything.” And seeing possibilities became his life’s work.

After finishing college, Arne went straight to work in his father’s company, E.B. Crabtree. He was a natural promoter of Crabtree’s line of cigars, candies, and gift items. In just a few months, Arne knew every corner store and bar in Minneapolis and his father wanted him to take over the company. “I had little doubt about my capacity to earn money,” he recalls, “but I wanted to do something that was of service not measured by money.”

On a drive between customers late one evening, Arne had a revelation: “I could become a doctor.” And the rest, as they say, is history. After passing all the pre-med requirements in nine months’ time, Arne enrolled in medical school. “The first year was like going to heaven!” he says. “I couldn’t get enough of medicine. I loved it!”

During his residency in San Diego, seeing many children in dire need of medical care, Arne decided to specialize in pediatrics. He was called, as a physician, to provide care to children. After a stint in the Army, where he served as Chief of Pediatrics at U.S. Army Headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany, Arne came to the Mayo Clinic. One of the big draws to that institution was the Rochester Child Health Institute and the breakthrough thinking of Dr. Benjamin Spock and his colleagues. “It was the finest faculty of child development experts in the world,” recalls Arne.

Not everyone finds a calling during his or her lifetime; even those who do usually pass through significant periods of seeking before achieving clarity about the central work of their lives. Arne and his wife Rusk were genuine seekers. They partnered the whole way. “Arne has a gift of seeing the potential in people and things,” says

Rusk. "And he was always willing to put his body where his mouth was."

After founding the innovative Park Nicollet Clinic, Arne went on to help found Children's Hospital in Minneapolis. As President and CEO of both organizations, he had a unique leadership style. He believed that to be a leader among physicians one had to be competent in both disciplines—leadership and medicine. So, he kept a half-time practice in pediatrics, despite his grueling schedule of meetings and fund-raising.

Always "seeing possibilities," Arne pioneered the concept of human ecology. He recognized how children were affected emotionally when they were ill and hospitalized. "We changed the hospital experience completely," he says, "from a trauma experience to a growth experience."

When he was 60, Arne decided to "retire." This meant keeping his half-time practice and retaining his role as Medical Director at Children's. It also meant expanding his opportunities to care for a wider constituency of children.

With the encouragement of colleagues and children, Arne and Rusk traveled to Togo on a six-month medical mission. Together, they saw new opportunities to be of service to humanity. After creating the Minnesota International Health Volunteers, they embarked on medical missions to Thailand, India, Laos, and Africa. As a team, Rusk and Arne were able to effect a cut in infant mortality rates and to expand the resettlement options in a camp of 35,000 refugees.

Arne says, "I wasn't doing these things out of choice. I was always called by the situations themselves. They chose me. We were just seekers."

Early in their careers, Rusk and Arne went to a Quaker Friends meeting and discovered what was, for them, a very practical means of living with their Christian ethics. Friends define themselves as seekers of truth. Arne and Rusk had difficulty accepting spiritual absolutes, but they fully understood the value of seeking. They also believed that life is all one piece, that the life of the spirit should find expression in all of one's relationships: at work, at home, and at play. Everyday pursuits could be just as surely a form of worship as



Sunday morning services. For Rusk and Arne, the whole of life is sacramental; it is all an expression of calling.

## Calling Cards

Arne Anderson illustrates how our callings are made manifest in our choices and through the serendipitous events that take place in our lives. Unless we bring our calling to light, though, it remains hidden from the world. As Arne put it, “If I died, they couldn’t find my calling in the autopsy.” Our calling is invisible except in action.

Discovering that calling, though, can be made easier through the use of the Calling Cards—a list of natural preferences that have emerged in our discussions and research with hundreds of people over the last few decades. Each of the callings describes a core gift. Each calling comes directly from someone’s experience. We have been collecting callings in seminars, workshops, and coaching sessions with individuals and groups from all walks of life. The list of 52 callings we have come up with represents the “essence of essences” in our research. (This doesn’t mean that there are not callings other than our 52; it does, however, mean that these 52 represent those that have best withstood real-world testing.)

Using the Calling Cards in a simple self-examination helps us name our calling—that gift which is invisible but wants to be unwrapped and given away.

The lives we live emerge from the words we choose to define our lives. So, as you examine the Calling Cards, listen carefully to what you’re telling yourself. To find joy in our work, we need a clear, simple way to name our calling. We need to reframe our concept of calling until the words feel natural and come to us easily. We must settle for nothing less than a description of calling that fits us and no one else exactly the same way. No one can choose our calling for us; no one else can tell us how to express our calling once it is found. Each of us, individually, must hear and heed our role in the world. Each of us must choose or create the Calling Card that expresses the gifts we feel an inner urge to give away.

So . . . go within. Examine the Calling Cards. Explore the possibilities of calling. Name your calling.

## List of Calling Cards



### REALISTIC

- Building Things*
- Fixing Things*
- Growing Things*
- Making Things Work*
- Shaping Environments*
- Solving Problems*



### CONVENTIONAL

- Doing the Numbers*
- Getting Things Right*
- Operating Things*
- Organizing Things*
- Processing Things*
- Straightening Things Up*



### INVESTIGATIVE

- Advancing Ideas*
- Analyzing Information*
- Discovering Resources*
- Investigating Things*
- Getting to the Heart of Matters*
- Making Connections*
- Putting the Pieces Together*
- Researching Things*
- Translating Things*



### ENTERPRISING

- Bringing Out Potential*
- Empowering Others*
- Exploring the Way*
- Making Deals*
- Managing Things*
- Opening Doors*
- Persuading People*
- Selling Intangibles*
- Starting Things*



### SOCIAL

- Awakening Spirit*
- Bringing Joy*
- Building Relationships*
- Creating Dialogue*
- Creating Trust*
- Facilitating Change*
- Getting Participation*
- Giving Care*
- Healing Wounds*
- Helping Overcome Obstacles*
- Instructing People*
- Resolving Disputes*



### ARTISTIC

- Adding Humor*
- Breaking Molds*
- Creating Things*
- Composing Themes*
- Designing Things*
- Moving Through Space*
- Performing Events*
- Seeing Possibilities*
- Seeing the Big Picture*
- Writing Things*

## Calling Cards Instructions

### *Step 1: Your Natural Preferences*

Examine the entire list of 52 callings. As you study them, arrange the callings in three groups according to your natural preferences.

Group 1: Those that fit your gifts and talents.

Group 2: Not sure if they apply to you or not.

Group 3: Those that don't feel like you at all.

Don't rush. Use your intuition. What does your hand turn to naturally? What calls to you? Continue to look through the first two groups to identify those callings that fit you best.

*Ask yourself: What gift do I naturally give to others?*

### *Step 2: Your Five Most Natural Preferences*

Concentrate on the Group 1 callings. Explore them more carefully. Which ones seem to be the "best of the best?"

Without thinking too much about it, identify the ones that seem to call to you automatically. Select the top five callings from this group—those that best describe what you naturally enjoy doing.

*Ask yourself: What gift do I most enjoy giving to others?*

### *Step 3: Your Single Most Natural Preference*

Consider the five callings you have selected. Knowing yourself as you do, which one card seems to "call to you"; which is the one that, throughout your life, you have most consistently given to others? If you were forced to pick just one, which one would it be?

*Ask yourself: What gift have I most often given to others?*

An alternative way to arrive at Your Single Most Natural Preference is to work through the callings, pairing them two-by-two, and choosing which of the pair you think more accurately reflects your calling. This works especially well with a partner.

Set the callings down between you and your partner. Have your partner name the first two callings. Quickly—within 3 seconds or so—choose which is a better expression of your calling. Put the “winner” in one group, set the “loser” aside. (If you honestly can’t decide—that is, if they’re both “winners,” put them both in the “winning” group. If neither seems appropriate for you at all, discard them both.)

Having gone through the callings once, you will have a group of 26 winners. Repeat the process from above, going through all 26. Now you will have 13 winners. Repeat the process with this group. You’ll have 6 winners. Then 3. Then 1. This final “winning” card is your Calling Card.

#### *Step 4: Your Calling Card*

Study your number one card. If the words do not fit exactly, feel free to edit so your own calling describes you accurately. You may find it useful to use words from your top five callings to perfectly describe your single calling.

#### *Step 5: Make a Call*

Discuss your Calling Card with a close friend or family member. See if others have insight into your calling that can help you refine it further.

#### *Step 6: Imagine a Call*

Imagine that you could do any kind of work in the world, anything at all—as long as it fits your Calling Card. Jot down three or four things you can see yourself doing. What does this list tell you about your calling?

## Step 7: *Heed the Call*

Perhaps you're thinking: "This Calling Card looks great. But it's not my job! Moreover, I don't have the financial resources or personal freedom to do the work I love the most. How do I heed the call when I first have to heed my bills, my boss, and my family?" If you're asking questions like that, ask yourself these questions instead:

- Does your work give you a small opportunity—like the taxi driver at the beginning of this chapter—to express your calling? Does it ever let you do what you most enjoy doing?
- While you're working, do you ever get the sense that you're in the right place doing the right thing? How often does it happen? When it happens, what are you doing?
- What's one thing—a little thing—you could do right now to express your calling at work? What's stopping you?

## Get Into It!

Having chosen our Calling Card, we are faced with the unavoidable choice of whether to heed it. Either we do or we don't—and the time to decide has arrived. Since it *is* unavoidable, however, we may do well to recall the words of Derek Pritchard: "If you can't get out of it, get into it!"

Any kind of work can provide us with opportunities for expressing our calling if only we "get into it." Calling isn't our job, it's what we *bring to* our job. The core idea of calling is a simple and liberating truth: "It's not what you do that matters, it's how you do it."

In order to understand this aspect of calling more fully, it's helpful to ask yourself two questions. The first is "*What do you do?*" What kind of work are you currently performing? How consistent is it with your stated calling? Should you stay or leave your current job? The second question is "*How do you do it?*" What part of your job fulfills your sense of calling? How can you give away your gifts even if you're in a job that isn't exactly what you want to be doing? How can you express your calling, even if it's only partially?

Elements of our calling can be expressed in almost any job. When we begin to see what we do as an opportunity for heeding our calling, nothing changes—but everything changes. We still have our cab to drive, our patients to care for, our clients to serve. We still have our up days and down days, empowering colleagues and irritating colleagues, interesting projects and boring projects. We still have days when it's hard to get out of bed in the morning. Nothing seems to have changed.

But on the other hand, everything has changed. By expressing our calling, even in small, partial ways, our work is suddenly more fulfilling. We find meaning in what we do, even when it's not exactly what we were meant to be doing. On occasion, throughout the work day, we feel that we're in the right place, with the right people, doing the right work, on purpose.

When this happens, even for an instant, we experience who we are and what we do as one. We experience the power of heeding our calling, the feeling of aliveness which comes from giving our gifts away to someone who needs them, in order to create something that wouldn't have existed without us. It's the joyful feeling that we strive to make common in heeding our calling: the feeling of whistling while we work!

## Your Calling Journal

From time immemorial, reflective observers—writers, artists, travelers—have kept journals to put their thoughts about life into written form. A Calling Journal is a place to put our thoughts about calling into words. It's a personal place to listen, sort through our feelings, analyze our yearnings, and get ideas for connecting who we are with what we want to do. In our Calling Journal, we can give our thoughts free rein, free from the influence and advice of others.

A Calling Journal is a place to connect with ourselves and what's really important in our lives. When we record the details of our yearnings, we are more likely to connect at a deeper level with the Source of our calling. Keeping track of our dreams, ideas, and in-

sights can give us the extra push we need to heed our calling. Christina Baldwin, a well known author of books on journaling, writes in *Life's Companion: Journal Writing As a Spiritual Quest* that a journal is "an intermittent recorder of the inner life, written consistently, but not necessarily on a daily basis." Consistently keeping a Calling Journal keeps us in touch with our calling and connected to our inner life.

## Day One

Starting today, you can take a significant step toward heeding your life's calling. And you don't have to quit your job, move to another city, or even tell your boss what you really think of him or her. You simply have to start writing.

Make today Day One of heeding your calling. Get a blank journal book and keep it near your bed. Every morning, jot down a few sentences about how you might express or expand your calling in the day ahead. A line or two is enough. Don't turn the exercise into a huge and daunting task that you can't fulfill. Just take a change and put a few thoughts on paper. Trust the process and see what happens. If you need a push, ask yourself these questions:

- How am I going to express my Calling Card today?
- What will put a whistle in my work today?

Attend to your Calling Journal for a month. Go back at the end of each week and look at what you've written. At the end of the month, reread the entire journal. Do any of your thoughts call to you about work? Do your writings provide you with any new ways of putting a whistle in your work?

If this process proves worthwhile, continue to do it for another month. And then, another. The Calling Journal gives substance and permanence to the Calling Card exercise. Heeding our calling means being aware, listening and living one day at a time. Rather than trying to get it perfect the very first time, do something every day to attend to your calling.

Consider the following three principles of effective journaling.

## *Keep It Simple*

Dick is on the board of directors of Graywolf Publishers, a small, values-driven publisher of poetry and literature. Board meetings often begin with a reading from a Graywolf author's work. One of the favorites is the poet William Stafford. Stafford had the habit of writing a poem each day before breakfast. When asked how anyone could accomplish such a feat, he replied, "Simple. Lower your expectations."

Journaling is all about lowering one's expectations; in fact, it's about having no expectations at all. The journal page is your page. Write for yourself. The page is intended for your eyes only. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Write from your heart, not from your head. Free yourself to express whatever you feel about your calling—honestly and simply.

## *Keep It Short*

How can we be expected to take even more time from life's hectic schedule to write in a journal? Don't we already have too much to do? And even if we can, how can we possibly find time to reflect on what we've written? Most of us don't even have time to reflect on what we want for dinner, much less what we want for our lives.

The most common excuse people give for not attending to their calling is lack of time. But the reality is that if a task is important and satisfying to us, we can make time.

You can record your daily thoughts about calling in no more than five minutes. Just one less press of the snooze button on your alarm clock. Is five minutes of dozing worth more than a lifetime of work satisfaction? Try it for a month. You decide.

## *Keep It Going*

The easier ideas come, the more likely we are to make journaling a habit. Try to stick with the two questions for comparison on different days. The great value in journaling is the path it leaves. Each day, by itself, appears as an isolated footprint on the page. But as the



days add up, they form a path that not only shows where we've been but also points to where we are headed. The path shows us how we arrived where we are and shows us where we can go if we're lost. Over time, we start to see the consistent pathway of our calling; our Calling Card points the way.

Recall the definition of calling: "an inner urge to give your gifts away." As you reflect upon the path you've left in your Calling Journal, ask yourself whether this definition rings true. Does it clarify ways to help you whistle while you work?

## Your New Calling Card: Who You Are *and* What You Do

From the early part of the nineteenth century, people trying to be accepted into "society" commonly carried cards—much like today's business cards—but engraved only with their names. The practice of carrying and sharing calling cards evolved from people who wanted to claim members of the elite as their friends, people who wanted to be part of the social world of those who *were* the social world.

Calling cards also served as a discreet way to keep these social aspirants forever at distance, or at least, to hold them off for a while so as to screen those who would be seen from those who would not. Accordingly, in the Victorian world, with its complex social etiquette and mores, calling cards flourished.

In that era of formality and high manners, the exchange of calling cards was *de rigeur* socially, and played an essential role in developing friendships. It was customary to drop one's card at the homes of new neighbors, and to leave one for the hosts of balls, private recitals, and dinners on the day after the events. Leaving cards for one another was as meaningful as personal visits between acquaintances.

The origin of the practice can be traced to eighteenth-century France. By the end of the eighteenth century, the practice had spread throughout Europe and was popular in America. Handmade cards were inscribed with the bearer's name, a greeting, and a spot of ornamentation. More elaborate cards were embellished with the romantic detailing of hand painted vines, flowers, and fruits, or

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David is the co-author of *Repacking Your Bags* and the author of *Choosing the Right Thing to Do*, a practical guide for helping people make educated decisions about matters of ethical import in all aspects of their lives.

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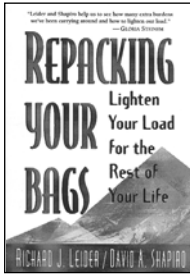
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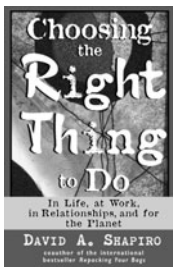
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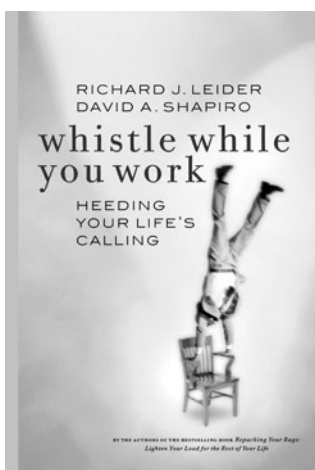
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