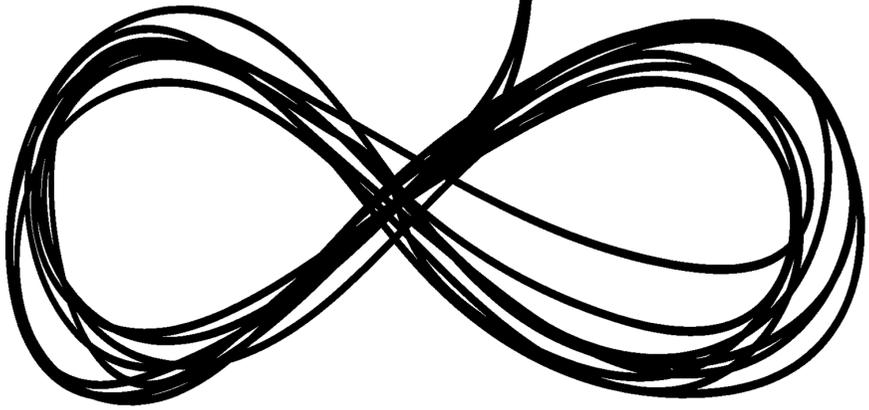


Limitless



How to Ignore Everybody, Carve Your
Own Path, and Live Your Best Life

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Measuring What Matters

First things first—first thing in the morning, that is. Your alarm rings out, rousing you from slumber. What are your first thoughts? How do you approach the day? Do you jump up to greet it and make it count, excited to tackle the challenges ahead, to suck the marrow out of life, knowing full well how each thread of effort weaves into the larger tapestry of impact? Or do you groan, hit the snooze button, roll over, and close your eyes again, fantasizing about working basically anywhere else on earth, doing anything else on earth?

Perhaps you aren't as giddy as the eager beaver jumping out of bed. But if your demeanor is anything approaching that of the groaning, cover-burrowing wretch, you've got some work to do.

Let me be crystal clear here: There is no perfect answer. There is no perfect person. There is no master combination.

You need to find the right combination for who you are now and, later, for who you become as you evolve throughout your career and life. And you can't figure it out until you stop asking the jazz-lovers to rate your hip-hop performance.

Believe me, I know. Because despite the eventual success of my firm, I still had some major growing pains that were limiting me. It all started because I was using the wrong scorecard.

The Wrong Scorecard

For too long, we've measured what matters using an outdated list of universal boxes to check, one that asks us to decide our opinion of a potential job based on metrics limited by old economies and previous generations. Using metrics that measure the job before using metrics that measure *our own interests* is precisely why we burrow under the bedcovers and hit snooze. When we take only from what is offered to us, picking the best worst choice, we fail to carve a path based on what we really want. From the very start, we accept that there should be limits—and then we wonder why we find ourselves constrained by those limits.

When the company I founded was five years old, I sat down with a business coach. Things had been going well, but I knew that with the right help, we could build the company even bigger and better. Ever the gold star chaser, I brought a whole host of spreadsheets and strategic plans and marketing collateral to the meeting, looking to show off. But, much to my chagrin, the coach didn't look at a single one of my documents. Instead, he asked me one seemingly innocent question: "How do you pay yourself?"

I'm not ashamed to say that I gave him a terrible answer. I was doing the usual rookie entrepreneur thing: paying myself whatever was left over at the end of the month. I ate what I killed; some months were steak, some months were ramen. I'd pay my staff, pay my expenses, invest back into the company what was needed, conservatively sock away a little for a rainy day, and then pay myself what remained. I told all this to my coach, proud of the fact that I was doing pretty okay.

He took one look at me and told me to stop being an idiot. Ouch. And then he gave me some homework.

Updating the Metrics of Success

The business coach's recommendation sounded simple enough: write down a list of goals about the kind of life I wanted to live. As it turns out, this wasn't simple at all. What he wanted to hear was not just that I dreamed of having "a successful business" and "a happy home life" and "a fulfilling career." Instead, he wanted me to define what each of those things meant to me.

When I told him I wanted to travel the world, he asked how fancy the hotels would be and whether I'd be satisfied flying coach. When I told him I wanted my home life to be harmonious, he asked if that meant the flexibility to leave work when I wanted so I could attend my kids' music recitals and ultimate frisbee tournaments. When I told him I wanted a fulfilling career, he asked how I would know that I was fulfilled, and how I was defining *career*.

What the business coach was asking me to do was describe for him *why* I was doing what I was doing. He wanted me to let go of the traditional definitions of *success*. He was guiding me to figure out which boxes I really, truly wanted to check off, and not letting me be satisfied with showing off how pretty I'd made the checkmarks.

I had been thinking in the terms that are familiar to most of us throughout our working lives, the terms we use to rate the value of a job: its mission or goal; the opportunities it provides for leadership, challenge, and impact; what new skills or prestige it might bring; and the financial or other personal rewards we expect it to provide. These terms, he explained, are too general, too broad, too universal. Instead, he wanted me to figure out what job or work scenario would produce the right balance for me of the metrics that mattered to me.

Though I didn't realize it yet, what he was asking me to do was translate the potential value of the job not just as the marketplace would rate it, but measured against my own personal needs—the metrics which I would later distill into “the four elements of consonance”: *calling, connection, contribution, and control*.

The exercise helped me realize that I needed to figure out how to save the world through my lever of talent (*I care!*), while also building a business that would throw off enough income to afford first-class travel (*But I'm also a princess!*). How could I check off both boxes when each demanded full commitment—when each opposing set of goals was filled with judgment about my activities in pursuit of the other? I didn't think I could.

Forced to answer these questions, however, I discovered that I was going through the motions with my business, hurtling forward with momentum and goals, but no specific purpose. I had *connection* with how my work was building the company I'd started. I had *control* over whom we hired and which clients were part of our portfolio. I enjoyed getting deep into the muck and solving problems in part-nership with our clients, all of which were nonprofits, allowing me to wear the white hat while helping save the world, even if it didn't quite yet afford me the first-class airline seats. But I was still behaving like a hamster on a wheel, just running faster and faster, trying to serve more clients and manage more staff.

My company continued to grow by leaps and bounds, but our profit margin only took baby steps. My frustration was increasing. We were working harder, but not scaling our income along with our impact. I was limited by that old scorecard. When I tried to solve the problem, I kept coming back to the on-paper version of success that told me I was getting it all right. I couldn't find the solution because I couldn't see the real problem.

It wasn't until I stopped to consider the *contribution* that I wanted this work to make to the life I wanted to live—more flexibility to be involved in my community and family, more money for those fancy airline seats, and more of a way to live the values that I held dear about the world I wanted to create—that I was able to build the company in a way that completed my picture of purpose.

For me, this meant no longer trying to be all things to all people, so I brought on a business partner who could do the internal management and develop the team—not my strong suit. That freed me to be the out-front champion of our people and the proselytizer about our bold new way of doing search, which is where I was at my best and where I had the most fun. Once I learned to interpret the old way of measuring the value of a job through the new way of determining what gave me consonance, I eschewed the limits that constrained me. And when I did, we thrived.

Rehabilitating the Eight Motivating Factors

Back in high school and college, guidance counselors were there to help you plot out a future educational path based on the career choices that were expected of you by parents, teachers, friends, and potential employers. You studied your options and then you placed a value on each job opportunity, choosing from a scorecard of check-boxes that were meant to guide you.

But in the end, those checkboxes were only limiting you. These metrics probably included the following eight motivating factors that were intended to help you rate the specific value of your first job. And, whether you knew it or not, these eight metrics probably influenced your thinking about every job you've taken since.

- *Mission*: What is the goal of the organization, department, or job? Do you have passion for the work of the company or cause? Does it matter to you personally?
- *Leadership*: Are you inspired by those in charge? Are you encouraged, motivated, and cheered on by those at the top? Do you respect and look forward to being taught by the leadership of the company?
- *Challenge*: Is the work in question something that interests you? Do you feel as though the job represents something bigger than just you? Does it force you to dig in and be your best self?
- *Scope of impact*: Does your work matter? Will it make a difference? How much, how broad, and how deep will the scope of your impact be?
- *Acquisition of new skills*: Do you need to up your game in order to be successful in this job? Will you learn new skills? Will those skills directly benefit the future you?
- *Prestige*: Is the reputation of the company or brand something you can be proud of? Are you happy to talk about your work in public and to family and friends? Does the job make you feel good? Will it look good on your resume?
- *Personal needs*: Does the job allow you to make accommodations for additional concerns in your life, such as ailing parents or small children? Do you have a side gig that forces distinct scheduling needs, such as consulting or teaching, a beloved hobby, a custody arrangement, or an impairment or personal obstacle? Are you seeking employment that offers

flexibility, benefits, or geographical considerations that differ from the norm?

- *Money*: And then, of course, there is money. For some, it's the number one issue. For many, however, it takes a back seat to other priorities. How much do you need to make? How much do you want to make?

Now, don't get me wrong. These eight metrics are useful. But they provide an incomplete picture. They are floating in space, untethered to what matters to *you*.

The truth is, everyone looks at these metrics differently.

For some, on the upswing of their career, the brand prestige, the acquisition of new skills, and the scope of impact will matter more than the mission or the money. For others, perhaps balancing family demands, money, and personal needs such as flexibility will be paramount. In every case, these metrics still matter. They just don't give the full picture. And when we use them and only them, we mistake filling in checkboxes for flinging away our limits.

Take, for example, the metric of money. What you *need* to make and what you *want* to make are two different numbers. You must meet the first number; making enough money to survive is table stakes for everyone. But you can weigh the value of the other seven motivating factors as you reach for—or compromise on—the second number. Rather than thinking about these metrics to measure the job (*What does it pay?*), you should use metrics that measure yourself and your unique desires (*What kind of lifestyle do I want to live?*). By tweaking the outdated metric, you can determine how this particular work contributes to your personal definition of success.

Now let's think about a different metric that might be important to you: the prestige or brand value of the company. This involves how the company name will look on your résumé—what it will say about

you and the type of person you are, what it will communicate about the training you've received or the accountability to which you've been held. Depending on your industry or field, working for a particular company certainly might have a great impact on your future career trajectory. In other words, taking a lesser job at a company that is at the top of its field could contribute greater brand value to your future career than taking a high-level job at a company with a soiled reputation. If this matters to you, then you should hold the prestige metric paramount over the others.

Thinking about these eight motivating factors is an exercise that can help you rank the metrics that matter to you. Your answers will reflect where you are at your particular age and stage of life. And here's the great news: there is no wrong answer.

Discovering a Deeper Need

If you're shaking your head, realizing that you have been thinking far too narrowly about your career for far too long, don't feel bad. Given my career as an executive recruiter, I'm supposedly the expert, and it took me some time to figure it out, too.

As I was smiling and dialing, cold calling candidates and recruiting them out of the blue, I relied on the old scorecard of those eight motivating factors—mission, leadership, challenge, scope of impact, acquisition of new skills, prestige, personal needs, and money—as signposts along a roadmap: If I heard interest in one or two of those metrics, I knew there would be a second conversation. If I heard interest in three or four, I knew the bait was on the hook. And any more than five nibbles meant that the candidate was practically in the boat.

Once I knew what to listen for, building the candidate pools was like shooting fish in a barrel. But then I noticed something else happening: my candidate pools, though rich in numbers and potential, would slowly disintegrate as the three- to four-month search process dragged on. A once-robust pool would dwindle as my prospects

dropped out of the search, one by one, for a variety of reasons. These motivating factors all remained important considerations—try as I might, I've never been able to get my bank to take good karma in exchange for a mortgage payment. But what mattered more than the amount of money offered was *what the money meant to the candidate and the life he or she was building*.

Until I was able to figure out the true value of the money, the leadership, the mission, and so forth—that is, the value assigned by that candidate in particular—I was simply checking boxes. And that didn't stick.

You see, I was trying to sell a product—the job—to people who weren't necessarily in the market. I was calling them because they were successful at what they were doing and because that success made them attractive to my client, the employer. I was asking them to throw their hat into the ring for a search they didn't even know existed until they picked up the phone. And rather than a value proposition that was meaningful to the person on the other end of the line, I was armed only with generic checkboxes.

Once I realized this, I knew that the only way to nestle into the imagination of a candidate and inspire them, to really influence them to care about the potential new position, was to make the correlation to a deeper need. I had to show them that they were limited by the way they currently interpreted those metrics. Then they could see themselves, in the job I was offering, as limitless.

The job I was offering wasn't simply about the money, the brand prestige, or the acquisition of new skills. It was about how the income could contribute to the life that person wanted to live, how the value of the brand could contribute to his or her career development, and how the bigger toolkit acquired in this new position would help them bring velocity to their chosen trajectory. So, to speak to the values and needs of the individual candidate for a particular job, I had to go deeper.

But that wasn't all. Depending on the individual, I could then take each of those eight factors—each of the person's treasured values I had dug down deep to uncover—and broaden these into a larger conversation about consonance. For the people who valued *connection*, I could talk about the advantages offered by the company's strong leadership or the challenges the job represented. For those who needed a deeper sense of *calling*, I went straight to the firm's innovative mission or the wide-ranging impact that came with the position. I could discuss *contribution* not just through the salary and benefits package, but also through the values that the company manifested in its work. And I could talk about *control* by telling stories of other workers who had sought and achieved similar promotions, flexibility, or agency.

My business coach was right. Finding the right work isn't about checking off the boxes on a list of timeworn values, metrics, and choices. It's about how this list gives us a way to measure consonance, to understand whether the work we do matters to us. It's about using this list to remove the limits placed on us by someone else's expectations.

Once I understood this, my close rate went way up. Candidates had a reason to be in the hunt for work that mattered to them. They had a reason to stick it out through the long and demanding search process. They could see how this product I was peddling—the job—was in consonance with their own life plan. They could feel the limits being lifted off them as they imagined themselves in the potential role. It just made sense.

And once you understand what these metrics mean to you—what they mean *for* you—it will begin to make sense for you, too.

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