

### "A man who at length has found something to do will not need a new suit to do it in" Thoreau

My first job after leaving University was as a trainee social worker in Hackney. I bought a Harris Tweed jacket and had leather patches sown onto the elbows, because that's what social workers wore in the early 70s. I set out not just to play the part of trainee social worker (it didn't last) but to wear the right outfit. I pretended to myself that I was being ironic but what I was actually doing was distancing myself from the job—and myself. I wasn't being real or 'present'. I was playing a part and watching myself do so. I suppose I imagined at the time that this was what everyone did. Work was drudge to get money for other things.

As work life went on I tried out any number of 'new suits', even adding a pipe to the ensemble when working for a rural county council—country gent? I didn't always get it right. At my first ever appraisal years later by then in the NHS, my boss told me I should wear a formal suit and 'proper shoes'. He said that wearing what he called 'brothel creepers' made me look like a Pathologist. Of course, I took him at his word and began dressing with a formality that I

took to be an ironic repost to his appraisal. He, naturally, was pleased with my improved performance.

This went on for many years until I eventually realised that I needed to find out who I was and how I could get personal alignment in my work life.

We talked about this issue at the **December Monthly Meeting**. That is, how, if we have such detachment or disconnection then getting personal job alignment will not be possible, as such alignment is based on a real assessment of ourselves and what gives us energy.

Last summer I started a new role as Chairman of a private hospital. Naturally, I went out and bought a new suit.

**This month's newsletter focuses on Seeing Ourselves, the first step in Personal Job Alignment. There's a personal story and also an exercise to work through.**

#### February Monthly Meeting—change of date!!

Turns out 14 February is half term.

NEW DATE

7 FEBRUARY

Same time same place.

#### Seeing Ourselves

On the next page of this newsletter is an exercise about Seeing Ourselves, the first step in Personal Job Alignment. My experience above is an example of knowingly putting on a work persona like putting on a suit—to keep myself distanced. It's also possible to try actively to fit in and be someone you are not. Read a short narrative about Kathryn's experience (page 4).

#### January Monthly Meeting: 10 January 2007

The next monthly meeting is on Wednesday 10 January at the Harewood Arms, Nr Leeds. Details are on the web site.

This month we'll talk about Stage Two of the Personal Job Alignment process—Seeing Our Role at Work.

#### Economists wake up to the possibility of work being more than a drudge

"Economics...thinks of labour as a chore. People sell it, at the expense of their leisure time, purely as a means to the end of consumption. For many people work is just a way to pay the rent. But some fortunate people also found deep satisfaction from losing themselves in their work finds Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Claremont Graduate University." *The Economist* 23 December 2006

Of course, now the search is on for the practical steps to make this happen. One example given is hospital cleaners being allowed to hold patients' hands. This may be a good thing but it misses the point, as it's something suggested as something managers need to get their staff to do. The point is that we all need to do our own work to get Personal Job Alignment.

## An exercise to help us SEE OURSELVES at work

For work to be stress free, fun or play we need to find out what's really important to us and in relation to work, where we draw our energy from. The words energy and work come from the same root. In one way work is expending energy; in another it's a source of energy—or can be.

The task we set ourselves as we set out on this journey is to identify not how we expend energy at work (we might say that this is a definition of the problem) but how work can be a source of energy. By identifying this source of energy we shall be close to identifying what for us is fun or play.

### The 'what I talk about' test

Here is an exercise. Try it. You may find it helpful to go through this exercise with your partner or a close colleague.

When you get home from work and you've had a good day [or a good experience during the day] what is it that you talk about? Write your answer here

Ask your partner or close colleague what it is you talk about when you've had a good day. They'll often see you better than you'll see yourself. Write down what they say here

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Now consider what you have written down. Are they things that gives you energy [you enjoy/doesn't feel like work]

What is it about these activities/experiences that gives you this response? Do you want to do more of it?

Here are some responses to this exercise that people have given me:

I found out that it's not really the apparently strategic stuff, writing papers and going to meetings. I get my energy from working with local people to help them design services that make sense to them.

It's quite simple really. I need to have a project and be responsible for getting something done. When I'm making something happen I'm having fun.

Now think about what your boss or others in positions of authority say you are good at. Write down what they say here

This is what makes you useful to the organisation/company. It may or may not be the same or similar to what gives you energy. If what the organisation finds useful in you is different from who you are (what energises you), this can lead you to become or attempt to become who you think you should be—what the organisation wants. In turn this leads to identifying the capabilities you should have and the huge potential for feeling vulnerable if you don't have these capabilities. It also means that you have problems relating to others as you are relating not as you but as who you think you should be.

Read Kathryn's story.

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Remember: The important story is that each of us has our own work to do to make sense of our lives at work and that stress free work can be the outcome.

## Kathryn's story

Kathryn is an experienced personal development and community engagement specialist. Working in these areas gives her energy and underpins the value she brings to others. When she's doing this kind of work, work isn't work, it's fun.

Kathryn works for a large consultancy company where the great majority of the work she undertakes is technical and process reviews. She's good at these areas of work and is highly valued by the senior team for the work she does in these areas. Although she's good at it, Kathryn finds this kind of work draining; it saps her energy. It's not her; it's the drudge that pays for the holidays and the other good things in life.

Not surprisingly Kathryn wants to get on in the company and be valued for her contribution.

So Kathryn found herself in the position of attempting to become the person the company valued—the expert in and volunteer for technical and process reviews. This led her to identifying capabilities that she would need as such an expert and she began to feel vulnerable from the lack of some of them. She was not really a technical person at all. Again not surprisingly, this internal clash, between who she was and who she was attempting to be, led to increasing stress. The company wanted her to do more and she wanted at the same time to do both more and a lot less of this kind of work. She had become inappropriately attached to an idea about who she should be at work, yet at the same time knowing she could not be that person. This kind of situation can feel like a vice on your soul.

Fortunately Kathryn, in a first stage discussion around Personal Job Alignment (Seeing Ourselves), came to see what was happening. In her particular case she has decided that she cannot get Personal Job Alignment with the company she is currently working for. And there's no hurry to change. She can carry on doing what she's valued for but without the anxiety; she's now detached enough to not get stressed about not being who she never was. The relief for Kathryn has been evident.

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