

Praise For *Joy at Work*

“I love this book! Steve is an incredible teacher and a futurist. His writing is inspired, and he gives clear, concise and practical steps that fuel confidence and a sense of empowerment. A book for all ages – if I had this book when I first started working, it would have made a world of difference.”

Catherine Oxenberg, actress, author
and women’s rights advocate

“Steve Nobel has beautifully blended ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern insights, reflections, stories and practical exercises that offer to help transform your current work experience from necessity to opportunity and possibility. Instead of suffering you can grow and learn from the inside out.”

Shamash Alidina, author of
Mindfulness for Dummies

“A thought-provoking entree into how our evolving perceptions and attitudes mould our lives. An indispensable reference guide as to how to live a more fulfilling life in both your personal and working environment.”

Hazel Courteney, author,
broadcaster and journalist

“Steve Nobel elegantly shows us how to transform the samsara of meaningless work to the bliss of fulfilling work that is aligned with our soul’s true destiny. A vital message of ‘awakened action’ for today’s world.”

Amoda Maa Jeevan, author of
Change your Life, Change your World

“An inspiring, powerful meditation on work, relevant to anyone whether happy at work or not.”

Nina Grunfeld, author of *The Life Book*
and founder of Life Clubs

“Steve Nobel walks his talk. He knows from personal experience what it means to be unhappy at work, and he has found solutions that uplift, enrich and lead to greater fulfilment. A must read!”

Ed and Deb Shapiro, authors of *Be The Change*

“It’s not often a book manages to be so inspirational and informative, compassionate and practical, clear and thorough, simple and deep. This is the spiritual and compassionate path to finding your right work and loving what you do. Steve Nobel’s approach to the world of work is inspired, insightful, practical, very real and truthful. A must read!”

Arielle Essex, author of *Compassionate Coaching*
and NLP Trainer

“This book is a breath of fresh air for anyone who wants to find a way to create more meaningful work. I love the blend of both modern and ancient teachings that gives work spirit and soul.”

Jackee Holder, author of *Soul Purpose* and
Be Your Own Best Life Coach

JOY AT WORK

How to Find Fun, Happiness
and Meaning in What You Do

Steve Ahnael Nobel



WATKINS
1893

Joy at Work
Steve Nobel

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This book is dedicated to my four granddaughters.
May they grow up in a world filled with more
opportunities and creative play at work.

This book is also dedicated to you and your
descendants. May you courageously step beyond
your comfort zone onto a path that leads to a more
meaningful and joyful way at work.

Introduction

This may seem an obvious statement but here goes: many people around the world are now suffering in their work in some way. Not everyone suffers, but I am sure that many do – perhaps millions, probably even billions. I know about suffering at work from personal experience; I suffered for many years, and I have done my time! And so here is my message to you about suffering. First, suffering can come in many forms. It can come through feeling aimless and bored, where the only reason for being at work is to collect the paycheck at the end of the month. It can come through stress, overwork and burnout. Sometimes, it comes through overarching ambition, when we have tried too hard and for too long to climb up the corporate ladder, only to find it is leaning in the wrong direction. There are always challenges at work and there will always be the inevitable disappointment and frustration. Sometimes, suffering arises through unrealistic expectations, when we are not able to see the truth in a situation. We can also suffer when we are without work for short or long periods. All of these factors have been intensified since the pandemic: people were isolated and working from home, some lost their jobs and others had more work added to their plate to compensate for the reduced staff. Pay increases were often put on hold while companies waited to see how they would be financially affected by the lockdowns.

Whatever our work, there is always the possibility that we can feel undervalued, criticized or harshly judged. Suffering can arise from feeling trapped in a job that feels joyless or hard. We might feel we have little say in the content or context of our work, or that we are unable to follow a direction that gives a sense of meaning or joy. We might even feel incapable of making positive changes to our work.

Suffering can be physical, emotional, mental and even spiritual. There is the kind of physical suffering that arises when the stress

or joylessness of work creates ongoing tension in the body. This, in turn, can lead to ill-health and serious illness. There are degrees of emotional suffering when we feel ongoing anger, grief, misery and unhappiness at work. We can suffer mentally by recycling thoughts around failure, insignificance and powerlessness. These thoughts can coalesce into fixed beliefs that tell us we cannot positively influence or shape our destiny in any way. Then there is spiritual suffering, which is more commonplace than you might think. This arises when our work disconnects us from our true light, our true essence.

Whatever the cause of suffering, it can easily start in one area and then spread. Physical suffering will tend to lead to emotional, mental and, sometimes, spiritual suffering. Suffering can be infectious. If you are long-term unemployed, then your stress can easily feel deeply ingrained. In our celebrity culture, where the bright and the beautiful are viewed as good, suffering is seen as something bad, to be shunned and kept at a distance. We read about suffering in the newspapers and assume it will only affect other people – something that we won't experience. Suffering is seen as an illness, as shameful, as something that must be avoided at all costs. When it comes knocking at our door, we feel that we should hide away and not speak of it.

There is a difference between pain and suffering. Pain cannot be avoided. Pain is something we will all encounter at some point. We may be the most optimistic, affirming person on the planet, yet we will still encounter pain. We cannot keep it at bay forever. Hopefully, when pain comes we will know how to use it to uplift us and allow ourselves to grow and move on.

Suffering can be avoided. When we deny pain or suppress the pain of certain feelings, we create unnecessary suffering that may take any number of forms. Similarly, when we suppress our dreams and our inner potential, we create suffering. All of this is like trying to force shut the lid on a boiling saucepan – not a good idea.

The good news is that we can unravel patterns of suffering and look beyond to find inspiration, meaning, direction, joy, love and

possibility. Life can be an amazingly rich tapestry of experience and growth. This book has a simple philosophy: suffering happens; there is no merit in it but if we embrace and transform the suffering, we can reach something different and more positive.

I suffered considerably for the first ten years of my working life from a deep sense of meaninglessness and depression. I worked in international banking in the City of London, and I couldn't see a point in the work I was doing. I had no real affinity with it. Worse than that, I deeply questioned the ethics of some of the things I was working on. For instance, for some years, my day would start with processing paperwork that dealt with the export of arms to various foreign regimes. Not the most inspiring work I have done in my life!

I had very little say over my day-to-day work. It was initiated elsewhere and simply landed on my desk for processing. It did not matter whether I agreed with it or not; I was there to toe the company line and unable to argue the matter. I often looked to see if anyone else in the company shared my feelings of disquiet and unease, but the vast majority seemed quite happy to get on with it. As long as they got paid every month and collected their bonuses at the end of the year then all was well. Of course, there was a working culture that encouraged drowning your sorrows with a few beers. Some colleagues seemed to need a drink in the middle and at the end of the day! Those ten years were perhaps the unhappiest of my working life.

I remember that while working in that job, I had strong migraines that would emerge unexpectedly. There was also an assortment of other minor ailments – nothing serious, but it went on for many years. I sought relief through changing my diet, macrobiotics, yoga, tai chi and different forms of meditation. I discovered eventually that the source of my suffering was nothing to do with my lifestyle, and instead everything to do with my work.

In time, the build-up of tension and stress led me to burn out, and consequently take a year off work and begin psychotherapy. The physical tension subsided but the depression stayed. My ten years in banking were at an end, but where next? I could not see a

particularly bright future. All I had ever known was working in the dull and stressful world of international banking.

During this period of convalescence, and with the support of a psychotherapy group, I began to unearth much that was previously unexamined in myself. I found a new job in an inner-city borough, working with special needs and elderly tenants who has housing needs. I had moved from a structured, conservative environment to a socialist, idealistic and rather chaotic environment. This was not without its challenges, but I felt more at home and discovered certain hidden abilities. For example, I found that I was good with people and that I was able to manage and problem solve. I started to trust myself and develop my intuition.

My depression faded and, in its place, emerged a burning passion for spiritual information and wisdom. I began to attend spiritual and personal development workshops, which helped me transform different aspects of my life, but my work still felt out of sync with my heart and spirit. I was promoted to a good position with a higher scale of pay, but this didn't help much. I was feeling the winds of change calling once more. My heart was telling me that now was the time to leave, but my head said stay. Since I was more spiritually aware, I decided to ask my innermost spirit, my Higher Self, the Universe (the name felt unimportant), a question: "Should I resign from this job?" I waited, and within 48 hours I received the answer. During a lunch break, as I was walking back to work one day, there was a guy walking several feet ahead of me. On the back of his T-shirt there was the Nike slogan saying, "Just do it". The message hit me like a thunderbolt, but my mind cut across, very quickly discounting the message. I was reminded by a stream of thoughts that I had responsibilities and should not throw everything away because of some random slogan on a T-shirt. As I continued walking, my attention was drawn to a nearby window and there was a sticker with the same message: "Just do it".

Okay, that was it, I gave in, I surrendered, and shortly after I handed in my letter of resignation.

I can still remember the bliss of that day and how grey everyone else in the workplace seemed. Thus began my next adventure with work. Now I had let go of the “safe” career, and instead I threw myself into every kind of job that I could find. I painted houses, did landscape gardening, sold books, sold health products, worked in an office, made tea. I started to notice when I was in flow and when I was struggling. I learned that chasing jobs put me in a negative headspace. The more I trusted the process, the more I felt in flow.

During this time I started doing some part-time work for an amazing organization called Alternatives, based in St James’s Church, Piccadilly, London. This organization promoted spiritual author talks and workshops. After a year or so, they offered me the job of full-time administrator. I wasn’t keen on administration work, but I loved the organization, so I accepted. In my free time I continued doing personal development seminars and spiritual workshops. (I was fast becoming a workshop junkie!) Then, after a year of admin work, I was offered a directorship of Alternatives. Within a short period of time, two other co-directors resigned and I found myself running the organization alone. Not having much business experience, I meditated and prayed. Fortunately, the Universe was listening and responded. I was guided to employ the perfect people for the right jobs and make some important decisions to restore the organization to a place of high morale and financial stability and abundance.

I remained a director of Alternatives for 13 years. In this position I helped organize around 2,000 events. I learned how to be creative and entrepreneurial, how to play and make inspiration a daily practice and how to turn one good idea into a successful income stream. I learned more about the power of generosity and “what goes around comes around”, and about the importance of community and finding “the right tribe”. In 2001 I started to write my first book and I soon became a published author. Writing is something I have come to love dearly – both the research aspect and the creative aspect. Around 2004 I discovered an interest in coaching and NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), and after a

few years of training, I started a personal and business coaching company, which I ran part-time for a few years.

After resigning from Alternatives, leaving at the Winter Solstice of 2012, I went on to do some consulting and social media work. When I found myself in need of money, I found my last “normal” job before I started my own business: driving a London bus for a year! This was a totally new experience. For example, there was a lot more complaining and adversarial management than I was previously used to. I decided to treat the job like a meditation. Before starting each journey, I would take a minute or two to centre myself and call in energetic protection for the journey. There were lessons for me to learn there and so I opened up to absorb these lessons so that I could move on.

Then I began noticing the numbers 11:11 every day for a week. I went online and checked some numerology sites, all of which said that these were master numbers that indicated my spirit guides were trying to contact me. I went into meditation after a few days of this and the message was clear. It was time to move on. I could not say I really enjoyed my time in this job. I had experienced a level of work and challenge that was completely new to me. It was not the work that set me on fire each day. However, it did motivate me to move forward and never look back because going back to this kind of work was not an option for me!

That same year I began my own healing, coaching and mentoring business called The Soul Matrix Ltd. This new work venture has been an incredible learning curve and adventure. Over the past decade I have written a couple more books and become more proficient in recording meditations and affirmation downloads and in creating videos for YouTube. Fortunately, I was well prepared when the pandemic hit, since I had already followed my strong intuition to put all of my work online. My daily commute these days is from my bedroom, living room or kitchen to my home office. I feel blessed not to have to waste time travelling to and from some distant office. All of this allows me to experience a whole new array of learning, creative self-expression and joy.

The journey of work can feel like a hero's journey. It takes courage to follow your heart rather than putting up with things that cause you suffering. It is important to know you are not alone on this journey; you are always being guided. The trick is to learn how to tune into your inner guidance and inner wisdom.

If you are unhappy in the work you do, you have two choices: you can change your outlook to your existing work or you can decide to leave and find something else. Now that sounds simple in theory but harder to do in practice. This book is an invitation to transform your own limiting attitudes and perspectives regarding your work, which will, in turn, open you up to new ways of being and behaving, and allow you to feel a shift within your existing work. This is a good place to start, but of course it may not be enough. From there, you can also use this book to explore how to change direction in the work you do. At this stage you may not have a plan or strategy for changing your work, so use this book as an aid to gain more clarity and perhaps the courage to make necessary changes. Let the ideas and methodologies of this book lead you in the direction of your heart – to activate inner resources you did not realize you had, and to open you to more courage, peace, purpose, passion, flow, wisdom and joy in your work.

At the end of every chapter I have included a section called *The Power of Intention*. This is a set of intentions that you can use or adapt for your own purposes to help you clarify what you want to experience from your work today, tomorrow, next month, next year or in the next decade. Make setting positive intentions a daily habit; choose a time of day that best suits you and set aside 10 minutes to repeat these intentions aloud, checking in on whether you have achieved them with your work that day. This will set universal forces in motion that will help you move forward in your desire to find and activate the work you love. This is the way of creating your life intentionally.

Researching and writing this book has been a journey of tremendous discovery for me and has changed my views on both

work and growth. In this book I draw on wisdom from several sources: Buddhism, coaching/NLP, New Thought Movement, shamanism and Taoism. I have included what worked in my own journey, but please remember that everyone's journey is different. What worked for me may not work for you, and so please feel no pressure to follow any advice that is written herein. I simply encourage you to try on some of the ideas for size and see what happens. I offer this book in the spirit of adventure, compassion and service, in the hope that it will help you find your own unique way to find the work you love doing.

Steve Ahnael Nobel

Chapter 1

Why Suffer?

All the world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming.

Helen Keller, American author and political rights activist

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Prince Siddhartha was born in 563 BC in Nepal to a rich and royal family. Just before his birth, his mother had a dream that a white elephant entered her womb through her side. A wise man interpreted this dream, saying that the child would either be a world leader or a monk. His mother died two days after giving birth and so the young prince was raised by his father in a palace beneath the majestic mountains of the Himalayas. The King, determined that his son would not be a monk, gave orders that he should never leave the palace grounds. At the age of 16, his father arranged his marriage to a beautiful princess and built a richly ornate palace for the couple. But the prince became restless and wanted to venture beyond the palace grounds.

Eventually, the young Prince found a way to leave the Palace for short periods. On his first visit to a nearby town he encountered old age. On his second visit he came across sickness. And on his third visit he witnessed death – yet he

also met a holy man who appeared content and at peace with the world. The prince felt so moved by the sight of the monk that he abandoned royal life and took up the spiritual quest. For the next six years he explored ascetic life, and experienced prolonged fasting and exposure to hardship and pain. Exhausted, he finally decided to follow the path of moderation between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial. He sat in meditation under a fig tree, henceforth known as “The Tree of Awakening”, and vowed not to arise again until he had achieved enlightenment. After many days of meditation, he was able to see deeply into the nature of suffering and, finally, he awakened as the Buddha, or the Enlightened One.

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Work and Unhappiness

Unlike the early life of Prince Siddhartha, most of us are destined to perform some form of work in the world. Work can be a rich source of joy and yet it can also be a source of pain and suffering. Many people are unhappy in their work unnecessarily. In some developing countries, where workers receive poor pay in return for long, hard hours, work is no better than slave labour. There are many people in the developing world who feel trapped because they have no voice, no freedom to organize and generally feel exploited.

In the developed West, work can also be a source of suffering, resulting in symptoms such as overworking, stress, criticism, bullying and uncaring employment practices. I have met many people who feel unhappy in their work, and I have met others who feel unhappy because that they have no work. The scale of the problem is huge. The real issue most people face is one of a lack of confidence, self-value and settling for work out of a need to survive. Anxiety around money and survival is one of the core reasons countless individuals stay locked in misery.

Work was not always a source of misery. Before the Industrial Revolution in Britain, people worked closely with the land and in communities. It is a myth that everyone worked in dreary conditions from dawn to dusk. Before the Industrial Revolution, according to some accounts, the tempo of life was relatively slow and leisurely, and the pace of work was quite relaxed. The pre-Industrial calendar was filled with holidays – mostly religious – and there was also plenty of time for feasting and merrymaking. This all changed, of course, as factories, mills and railroads began to dominate the landscape. Coupled with religious ideas that manifested as the Puritan work ethic, work quickly turned into an activity that was long, hard and stressful, where time was something not to be enjoyed but exchanged for money.

Over the past few centuries, we have been conditioned with some unhealthy ideas that need to be challenged if we are going to transform our rather unhappy way of thinking about work in the Western world. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, wrote about his experience and insights just after the war in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl wrote about three psychological reactions experienced by concentration camp inmates: the first was shock when people were admitted to the camp; the second was apathy as inmates became accustomed to camp existence; the third was depersonalization and disillusionment. Does any of this sound familiar? It is bizarre to note that the sign welcoming the millions of unfortunate inmates into many concentration camps, such as Auschwitz and Dachau, read “Work makes you free”.

Let's look a little more at the different ways that work can cause you to suffer.

An Absence of Work

The effects of unemployment can range from emotional trauma to problems with being hired in the future. (Although being made redundant or being fired can be the best thing that has ever happened for some people.) Being unemployed can generate feelings of apathy, discouragement and embarrassment. Not working can lead to a

crisis of meaning and a lack of connection and engagement with the world. Losing a job for a short period of time can cause stress and even depression. If unemployment is longer term the psychological problem of decreased self-esteem, stress and depression can be more far reaching.

Meaningless Work

Far too many jobs feel dull and meaningless. There is an old English proverb that says, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”. The original meaning of the word “dull” was more akin to stupid than boring. Nowadays, there are many jobs that are simply boring. Some jobs are little more than mind-numbingly tedious admin work – highly repetitive and filled with unnecessary paperwork.

What is not so well known is that dull and meaningless work is a killer. Meaning in work is more important for most workers than income, job security, promotion and hours of work. After many years of research what has become evident is that workers lose a sense of meaning when they lack autonomy, variety, challenge, meaningful feedback, and the chance to complete something from start to finish.¹

Shallow Work

One of my favourite films is *Before Sunrise*, which tells of a love story between two young people meeting for the first time on a train to Paris. Jesse is a good-looking young American guy on his way back to the States and Celine a beautiful young French woman returning to her home in Paris after visiting her grandmother. Celine tells Jesse about her father’s comments on her career choices. For example, when Celine would say she wanted to be a writer, her father would respond by saying, “So you want to be a journalist?” Celine would say she wanted to be an actress and her father would say she should be a TV newscaster. Celine would say she wanted to create a refuge for stray cats and her father would reply with the career of veterinarian. Celine complained, “It was this constant conversion of my fanciful ambition into these practical, money-making ventures.”

Chasing money can eventually become a source of suffering. Money itself cannot provide real meaning. Yes, money is important to live in the modern world, to pay the bills and support a family, but work is about so much more than money. The question worth asking is, “How much money can compensate you for a life unfulfilled?”

Stressful Work

Stress creates unhappiness. Work is often challenging, presenting various deadlines, frustrations and demands. Our job may require us to work long hours and even spend hours commuting. Stress in small doses can be a motivating force, but when stress is ongoing it can lead to feeling frazzled and overwhelmed. If it goes on for too long it will start to feel like a way of life.

Stress can also be a killer. In a 2020 UK study, 79 per cent of workers said they commonly experienced work-related stress. While there are many factors involved, this study suggested that the larger the company (250+ employees), the greater the potential for stress. Those working in smaller companies (less than 10 employees) reported lower levels of stress.²

Driven Work

Ambition can lead to unhappiness. A good friend of mine studied to be a doctor, and early on her group were asked what motivated them to want to be doctors. One by one the students responded, and the answers mostly revolved around money and status. When it was her turn, she said she wanted a job that could help people and make a positive contribution to their lives. She told me that there was an uncomfortable silence in the room after she answered. It was a rude awakening for her that most of the other students were not motivated in the same way that she was.

Ambition alone may not sustain you through a lifetime of work. The word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek language, meaning “to be possessed by a God”. Ambition can lead us to push for certain levels of achievement, but ambition without enthusiasm can lead to suffering. I have met many people who set themselves life goals. For

example, “By the age of 21 I will get a first-class honours degree in my chosen subject, then I will have an MA by the age of 22, then I will travel the world for a year, then I will get a top job in a company I have been researching”, and on it goes. If the drive and focus are strong, then these goals may well be reached. But having such a checklist is no sure way to long-term happiness.

When you lack the enthusiasm but continue to persist in attaining ambitious goals, you might find yourself sacrificing the needs or rights of others in order to reach that goal. Ambition can easily shift into negative ambition, which will often manifest as greed and selfishness.

Stuck Work

You may feel stuck in a job and unable to move on because you think you have been there too long, the pay is good, you have invested a lot of time and energy in this job or you have bills to pay and moving is risky. You might have a family to consider and so staying put seems the simplest option, you think you are too old to move or you feel you lack the competencies and skills to move toward what you really want to do.

Aggressive Work

Unfortunately, conflict is a common cause of misery at work. Whereas creative disagreement can lead to new ideas and possibilities, destructive conflict rarely produces anything useful. Whenever there are big egos on the loose in the workplace, conflict and disagreement are bound to happen. When people feel insecure and afraid, they may react defensively and aggressively.

Bullying at work can come in different forms: face-to-face, by letter, through a phone call, by email or through social media messaging. There are various ways people can feel harassed in the workplace, including feeling constantly picked on or criticized, humiliated in front of colleagues, regularly treated unfairly, verbally abused and blamed for problems not of their making, or threatened with punishments. It is important to feel respected and safe in the workplace.

Insecure Work

In the past there was the expectation that you would have one job for life and at the end of a long period of dedicated service you could then expect a pension and perhaps a gold watch and framed certificate. I still remember my grandfather's gold watch and the certificate hanging on his bedroom wall honouring his 40 years of service. I used to look at that certificate with great admiration and wonder about his work. At the time, I had no concept of how long 40 years really was.

Now there is no job for life and this can be a source of excitement and adventure, or insecurity and clinging, depending on your point of view. In fact, we are starting to see a rise in zero-hour contracts. Although the law in the UK has removed some of the more abusive elements of these contracts, there still remain several disadvantages. You miss out on benefits that full time or permanent employees get as standard (no pension and no fixed income). You no longer work to a consistent schedule, and not knowing when you'll be asked to work could interfere with leading a happy social and/or family life. There is also a loss of stable cash flow, which is crucial if you're living paycheck to paycheck.

Unequal Work

The spotlight is increasingly being shone on equal access to promotion, pay and opportunity for all. However, despite many employers paying lip service to equal rights and the idea that no one should be held back on the basis of their gender, race or disability, unfortunately many people do suffer because they know they are being unfairly treated. This book is not the place to explore these issues but it is important to be aware of them, whether we are employees or employers.

Unsustainable Work

There is an expectation within every business to maximize profits and minimize outgoings. Sometimes these expectations don't complement modern environmental goals. We only have one

planet, and polluting or damaging the planet for short-term profit is no longer acceptable. The ideal solution is to create a sustainable workplace where the needs of the planet and human communities go hand in hand with profitability. If you work within an unethical or unsustainable business, then on some level you are contributing to the suffering on the planet. (I have met many employees who have deep reservations about company policy, and I have noticed the longer they stay, the more demotivated and unhappier they tend to feel.)

Work: Beyond Suffering

One of the quotes I really love that perfectly describes the two different paths of work is by Robert Frost, who said, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference.” Throughout the first 20 years of my working life, I took the stressful and unhappy path. If there is one thing I have learned in my working life, it is that we are not on this bright Earth to stay in any job that makes us unhappy. For a limited time, we may choose to work just for money. But this is not an ideal long-term plan! We do not have to sell our time and happiness for money. Our time on this Earth is finite and it is the one resource we will never recover, at least not in this lifetime. Unhappiness in any job is not mandatory; it is optional, and the person who decides whether you suffer or not is not the boss, the company, your government or your culture – it is you!

Unhappiness is a form of feedback that tells us something is amiss, that something needs to change. Nowadays in the Western world, we are being called to take charge of our destiny – our working lives are no longer largely organized for us. The values of our parents and grandparents cannot guide us as they could in previous decades.

FOUR POSSIBILITIES

The first teachings of the Buddha after his enlightenment were called the Four Noble Truths. These teachings involved the nature and origins of misery and suffering, and the path and methodologies for ending that misery and suffering. I have taken the liberty of creating Four Possibilities which are intended to open the mind to something more interesting and useful than misery and suffering.

1. There is the possibility that at some point in your work you may encounter pointless challenges, unhappiness and even suffering.
2. There is the possibility that you will find your courage, tenacity, inner balance and inner power, and choose to move beyond pointless challenges and suffering. This will open a new way – a more open, lighter and healthier way.
3. There is the possibility that you will heed an inner calling to discover more of your true nature, inner potential, gifts and talents. This is the path of ongoing learning where you become more creative, innovative, resourceful and playful, and ultimately find your true direction in your work.
4. There is the possibility that you will feel the guiding hand of a higher intelligence in your life, listen to your inner guidance and intuition, take effortless action, raise your vibration and flow. This will help you find or create work that you love. Then you will experience a deep sense of grace, joy and bliss.

Work and Meaning

Work requires a clear sense of direction and purpose, and a meaningful contribution to others. The journey of work can be a series of stepping stones to something greater. Purpose is an inner fire, a clarity, a heightened sense of aliveness. Purpose shines through the eyes, body language, the way a person speaks and moves through the world; there is a vibrancy in the voice. A better word for purpose is direction: knowing where you are going and why you are going there. Finding your true direction is like falling in love – you do not know what it is until you experience it for the first time. The journey is meant to be visionary rather than goal driven. Here we become the artists of our working lives. No longer limited by the dreams and hopes of others, we let our own dreams soar and take flight.

Work and Presence

Work demands that we are awake and conscious, rather than asleep or on autopilot. When work is painful, we will avoid that pain with all manner of things that put us to sleep. In this state of sleep we cannot be fully present in what we do. We can be simultaneously alert to danger and seek to be elsewhere in our minds.

When we enjoy what we are doing and enjoy the people we work with, then we will naturally be more present. This can transform even the most menial kind of work. I have met people who do very menial tasks and bring to it such care, devotion and joy that uplifts everyone around them. I once knew a Jesuit priest who commanded great respect simply because of the power of his presence. He listened and spoke with great attention and focus. He never rushed, always took his time and gave very thoughtful responses. He brought a great presence to everything he did and everyone he met. Presence is an important quality to develop on the journey.

Work and Courage

Work requires courage. Another word for courage in this context is self-confidence: being bold, going for it, feeling the fear and doing it anyway. For centuries, we have been taught to conform to a system,

but this is finally changing. The current working climate does not favour conformity; it favours courage and innovation.

Courage is about maintaining a healthy individuality; it's about knowing our values and standing by them. This can be challenging in some working environments, for sure. When things are tough, courage is the pivotal energy that can flip us out of situations our head says we must endure. Without courage, we will simply put up with situations that we otherwise would not! Courage makes us stand up and speak out, makes us move when we need to move and acts as a doorway into tenacity and radical change. Courage says enough is enough! Back in the late 1990s I felt the impulse to leave my well-paid job, but I had no idea what I would do instead. It took courage and a certain nudge from the Universe to get me started on the track I am on now.

When I talk about courage, I do not mean to encourage rash or impulsive decisions. Courage is not reactive; it is deeply contemplative. Rashness or impulsivity are reactive knee-jerk states where there is no real sense of inner power. Courage is also linked to tenacity, and this is a quality very much needed on the journey ahead.

Work and Flexibility

Work demands that we are adaptable, that we know how to change and that we can move with agility from one set of skills to another. Adaptability is a core principle of evolution. We are now evolving from one mindset and identity into another. If we try and work in the new age of work with an old mindset we will struggle. The world of work is moving into the Virtual Age, and since it never stops evolving, it will carry on evolving beyond the Virtual Age. For example, recent developments have seen a rise in Zoom or Microsoft Teams hosting company meetings, as people work from home instead of commuting into the shared office space.

Being adaptable means that you can shed what you do not need, you can downsize, take time out, try out new things, think outside the box, and move career paths if you desire.

Work and Learning

Work is about ongoing learning. Unfortunately, most school curriculums are designed to produce left-brain dominant thinkers who can fit, like a cog, neatly into some larger system, whether that be a factory or an office. School has taught us how to obey the rules and how to unify logic with intuition. What school did not teach most of us is how to be truly creative and abundant in the world. You would be very fortunate if your school taught you how to think and act more entrepreneurial! However, you still have the opportunity to learn, thrive and grow in the ever-changing vista of work. In the new landscape of work some old rules will be bent and some will be broken.

Work and Inner Harmony

There are key differences between our left brain and right brain – the left side is more logical, dealing with reading and writing, whereas the right side is more visual, intuitive and emotive. It is only when we find a balance between the two that we can access a new level of flow in our work. When both sides of the brain are working in harmony, we are more at ease with our ideas and our work.

Work and Freedom

Work and freedom are not mutually exclusive. Liberation happens first in the mind. A free mind can create a life that feels free; a trapped mind is not aware of its true capabilities, gifts and potential. A trapped mind is blocked by limiting beliefs, old stories, perceptions and expectations. We cannot truly know ourselves or see the world through such mental distortions. When we transform our limiting beliefs and stories, we can see and experience a new world. My personal definition of freedom at work is to do the work we want, when we want and where we want. In today's modern world, with all its emerging technologies, there is more opportunity than ever before to take charge of our time. The traditional nine-to-five job is no longer the only option

available. With more hybrid working options, and therefore less time wasted on commutes, employees can now tweak their hours around their life.

Work and Talent

Work demands that we bring our natural talents to the table and play to our strengths. It is sometimes through our work that we are connected with our gifts and inner resources – often ones that we do not realize we possess. When you access and utilize a gift, you lift and bless the world around you. Perhaps within you is a latent talent to teach; perhaps you have the latent talent of being a great cook or a great writer. Now is your time to find out! When I was working in a bank many years ago, I never knew I had the ability to coach, mentor, be the director of a spiritual organization, create podcasts and videos, speak at public events, run workshops and retreats. I only discovered these abilities by taking the journey.

There are gifts and talents within you that are needed in the world, and these are things other people will pay you for. You may be a latent artist, coach, doctor, engineer, healer, leader, social worker or teacher, but if you are not utilizing your talent within your work, you will to some degree remain unhappy.

Work and Intuition

Work calls us to be more whole-brained. We cannot rely on only logic and intellect; we need our intuition and imagination to survive and thrive in these times of change. Relying on logic alone just will not do it anymore. You need to awaken your intuition and combine it with your logic. Intuition is your personal compass to navigate challenges in the workplace, find new solutions, make more empowered choices and take more effective action. Whether it's about asking your boss for a raise, trying to predict the erratic nature of the world markets or deciding to stay or quit your job, your intuition will save you a lot of time and energy. It is your internal GPS that will get you to where you want to go.

Work and Creative Play

Work can be fun. If your work is not fun, then you need to consider changing something, either your outlook or the work itself. Many forms of work hold little creative potential. The old work ethic, about hard work and ongoing graft, no longer fits our current landscape. There is a new ethic emerging that focuses more on play and fun. This is about shifting your identity from being a worker to a player. As a worker you know about hard graft, but as a player you know about fun, ease and grace. Players naturally move toward what they love doing and away from what seems hard and overly serious.

Fun and play will lead you to being more productive and happier in your work. Play is a state of mind that is naturally creative and innovative. Play helps us to break out of our habitual thinking and doing and to try something different. Playful environments have a *joie de vivre* feel about them; they are lively, humorous, engaging and non-critical, and there is a genuine appreciation of good work done. If you want to know if you are on the right track or not, ask yourself, “Is what I am doing here fun?”

Work and Love

Work is a love affair. When you are doing something you love, it will not seem like work. Without a sense of passion we are ruled by our head and not our heart. We need the heart to be fully engaged in our work.

We are passionate when we are working in accordance with our values. If we have no idea what we truly value, then we are essentially a boat without a rudder. Without an understanding of what you value in your work, it will be difficult to connect with that feeling of passion. When you know what is important to you and you work in accordance with your values, you will see a different world. The world an impassioned person sees is different to the world seen by a person who is passionless. Passion is the doorway to inspiration, which is the space in which our hearts and minds are both on fire. Passionate work is sensual work; it uses our hands and all our senses.

Work and Vibration

Work is vibration. Everything is vibration: a thought, a feeling, a project, a work environment. Some environments vibrate with high levels of creativity, love and joy, and some vibrate much lower with anger, resentment and anxiety. The same is true of organizations, companies, projects and teams. There is a spiritual principle that says like attracts like and energies that mismatch tend to repel. A joyful person will not be drawn to a depressing workspace. An ethical person will be repelled by an unethical company. When we strive to keep our vibration light and high, we will attract high vibrational work.

Work and Vocation

Work is about satisfying a deep inner calling. Some call this a soul calling, others call it finding your vocation. Vocation comes from the Latin verb *vocare*, which means “to call”. A vocation used to be something like entering the priesthood and thereby devoting your life to God. Nowadays a vocation is so much broader. A job is about performance reviews, promotions and salary raises. Yet a vocation is so much more than a job. A vocation is a calling to make a difference in the world and touching lives in some way. Choosing a career path is not the same as being called to a certain line of work. You may never retire from a vocation. (Actually, I cannot conceive of a time I will ever retire from the work I am doing, I love it so much!)

Work and Joy

Work is joy. This feeling of joy can arise through persistent choices and actions that leads you to discover the work you love. Flow, rather than struggle, is a sign you are on the path of joy. Joy is a landscape we can meet when we reach beyond states of boredom, stress or fatigue. Joy tends to hang out with other companions such as relaxation, creativity, clarity, curiosity, focus and wisdom. Work can become a journey, much like flowing water that simply moves around any obstacles we may meet.

Work and Soul

Work can be done from the Soul. Flow, bliss, grace and divine providence are all spiritual concepts. Miracles can and do happen in this world. This is a mystery that we do not need to understand fully before allowing it into our lives, in the same way that we do not need to understand electricity fully before being able to turn on the lights in our home. Work and spirituality have not really mixed for centuries, but nowadays it is more important than ever that our work is a vessel for our spirit. The good news is that nowadays we can live a spiritual life without retreating from the world. Most of the spiritual people I have met do not live in monasteries but are happily engaged in varying work situations.

Work: Intend Something Different

As you can see, this book explores an approach to work that refuses to accept pointless challenges and suffering, and this new way begins with a different focus or set of intentions. These intentions are designed to orientate your heart and mind toward what you want instead of what you do not want. You may have noticed that focusing on problems – on what doesn't work – tends to attract more of the same. It is also a rather depressing and depleting practice! Working with intentions is a practice of stretching your mind beyond the limiting and painful landscape of problems to a vaster horizon where new possibilities exist.

The Power of Intention

1. I choose to transform and release all pain and suffering arising from my work and life. I choose to release all limiting conditioning, beliefs, inner resistance, assumptions, unconscious agreements, obligations and dramas that appear to block me.
2. I choose to be authentic, present, conscious and aware in my life and work. I choose to release any excessive reliance on living on autopilot. I am ready to be 100 per cent courageously myself.
3. I choose to transform my attitude and perspective in my work. I choose to face all my fears about the present and the future. I choose to see a bright, expansive, inviting, abundant future opening up before me.
4. I choose to embrace the fullness of my gifts, resources, strengths, and talents. I choose to use my intellect with my imagination and intuition. I choose to be innovative and play to my strengths. I am ready to find my niche in the world. I am ready to listen to feedback and use it wisely.
5. I choose fun, humour, laughter and creative play in my work. I choose to take myself lightly.
6. I choose to keep fun, playful situations and people in my life. I choose to reach out and connect meaningfully with other explorers and pioneers on this path of conscious work.
7. I choose to trust in my inner guidance and see this journey through, wherever that leads me. I choose to be in the right place at the right time, and that my path unfolds with ease and grace. I choose to read the signs, pay attention to the synchronicities and find my true way.
8. I choose to love the work I am already doing. I choose my work to be a love affair. I choose to know my heartfelt values, to allow enthusiasm and joy to enter into my work. I choose to dream the next phase of my work into being.
9. I choose to flow like water rather than struggle. I choose to take effortless action in alignment with my heartfelt values. I choose to work with ever more bliss.
10. My time on earth is limited. My time is precious. I choose to use my time well.

About the Author

Steve Ahnael Nobel is a mentor, spiritual coach and author of six non-fiction books; the most recent is *The Spiritual Entrepreneur*. He was a director of a not-for-profit spiritual organization called Alternatives for 13 years, leaving on the Winter Solstice of 2012. Subsequently, he began his own work creating a healing system called Soul Matrix Healing. He also began creating a series of meditations and transmissions which are freely available on his website and YouTube.

Steve runs regular webinars and a series of free monthly online Zoom meetings with his partner Liz for entrepreneurs who want to make a difference to this world.

If you wish to follow Steve Nobel's work, you can connect with him in a number of ways:

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