

How to Enjoy Your Work¹

It amazes me how many people think that they need to be miserable at work. It's almost as if they suppose that they shouldn't get paid for doing something they enjoy! I believe that everyone deserves more than that, which is why I decided to investigate how some people really enjoy their work practically all of the time.

"Would you come back to work if you won the lottery?"

"Oh ye – definitely!"

I once found myself working opposite a man who was dejected at work all the time. His only joy was the weekend. I found myself wondering what his life must be like, being miserable five days out of seven.

I then decided that, rather than thinking about how miserable he was, it would be much better to find out what it would be like to really enjoy every moment at work – to enjoy work just as much as the rest of life – to look forward to going to work just as much as looking forward to going home. So the first task was to find some people who are happy at work so that I could find out how they do it.

How do you tell if someone is really happy at work? I didn't want to investigate people who "grin and bear it". I wanted to find people who are really happy at work practically all of the time – the people who are real experts at it. I decided that the best test would be all about money.

1 People who enjoy their work

How do you test to see if someone really enjoys their work? The criteria I chose was simple – I asked the question "*Would you go back to work if you won the national lottery?*"

For most people, the answer was definitely "no". If they had enough money to retire or go and work somewhere else, they would. It seems to me that anyone who would

leave their current job if they could does not enjoy their work enough.

A few people said "yes, but ..." "I would only work part time." or "I would renegotiate what I actually do." or something else. These people enjoy some of what they do at work, but not fully.

Finally, there were a very few people who said a definite "yes", and who look askance as if I was stupid to think anything different.

This gave me three groups of people:

- The "No" group
- The "Yes but" group
- The "Yes" group

The "Yes but" group was small and the "Yes" group even smaller – and it was these groups that I investigated.²

"Work simply is the best."

They came from a wide variety of professions. What interests me is how different their jobs are. Some are paid well, others are not. Some deal mostly with people, some hardly deal with people at all. Some jobs are highly creative, some are highly procedural. Some jobs are high pressure, others are fairly relaxed. They were:

- Special needs teacher
- Musician (Playing the Tuba)
- Administrator
- Hospital education advisor
- Deputy head teacher
- Computer program developer
- Hairdresser
- English as a second language teacher
- Stand up comedian

¹ This paper was presented to the annual NLP-by-the-sea conference in August 2006. See www.nlpbythesea.com

² It seems irresistible to categorise oneself in this grouping. I found myself to be in the "yes but" group.

2 Modelling³

Having found a few people to model, the next phase was to determine how they did it. What is the difference between them and everyone else? I did this by observing them at work, by listening to them and watching them talk about their work, and by asking them open-ended non-leading questions.

The first stage was to determine what all the people in my sample group had in common. This is likely to be the difference that makes the difference between those who enjoy their work and those that do not.



3 Results So Far

So far I have determined the following factors that appear to be the difference that makes the difference. That is, these were common features that appeared in all the people I worked with.

Believe in what you do

People who enjoy their work *believe* in what they do. This means that:

- They have a clear understanding of who benefits from what they do.
- They have a clear understanding of what that benefit is.
- The benefit that they are delivering to other people is an important value for them.

They were able to experience a vicarious pleasure in the benefit their "customers" received. The hairdresser experienced the pleasure she imagined her customers to have when they left her salon with

³ The modelling process described here is what John Grinder and Carmen Bostic St Clair describe as "Analytic Modelling" – See "The Model Magazine", 3, 2005 "A proposed distinction for NLP".

beautifully styled hair. The computer programmer imagined the experience of the users of his software, and the pleasure they would have in using it.

For those people who enjoyed their work most (those in the "yes" group), the value they delivered was part of their vision or mission in life and was strongly connected with their relationship with their "customers" – even if they never actually met them.

Get on with people around you

People who enjoy their work get on with all or most of the people they work with. They take time to be friends with them. They distinguish between their role as a friend and their role as the boss or colleague.

"I enjoy working with everyone, and I really get on with my boss"

Do what you enjoy

The people who enjoy work all chose jobs where they are doing what they enjoy. Some were able to have enough influence in the workplace to steer what they were actually doing towards what they enjoyed.

This seems very obvious, but it is surprising how many people are doing a job because that is what they trained in, because that is what they have been told they must do, or because it is what they have been doing for years – but actually don't enjoy what they do on a day-to-day basis.

Control your stress levels

People who enjoy their work control their levels of stress. There are a number of ways of controlling stress that were used. This needs further investigation to understand how experts control their stress levels. However, the common theme that I recognised in this group seemed to be:

- Realistically planning what they are going to do
- Accepting that things go wrong
- Improvising when plans don't work

The plans for their work varied tremendously – the computer programmer had plans that lasted months, whereas the stand-up comic had a plan that lasted the

length of his set. Most of them had experienced times when things went wrong, and when their plans collapsed – they did not get upset by it – they changed their plans or changed their goals.

4 Mapping to Other Models

One of the well-known models in NLP is Robert Dilts's Neurological Levels model⁴, in which different aspects of a person's being or personality are mapped. I find this model a useful way to help create broad distinctions in the modelling process.

The diagram below maps the four different aspects discussed earlier to Dilts's neurological levels model. The interesting thing to note is that the first aspect, believing in what you do, is more related to the upper levels in the model, and therefore is likely to have more influence. This correlates with my observation that this was a very strong feature of the "yes" group.

	Believe in what you do	Get on with people	Enjoy what you do	Control stress levels
Mission / Vision / Spirituality				
Identity				
Beliefs and values				
Capability and skills				
Behaviour				
Environment				

⁴ See Encyclopaedia of NLP pp 866-868 by Dilts and De Lozier, 2000 for a full description of this model. A facsimile is available at: <http://www.nlpuniversitypress.com/html2/N32.html>

5 Conclusion

There are four key aspects to enjoying your work that appear to be important. The most influential of these appears to be the belief in what you do. This means that you are delivering something that you consider to be of value to someone else.

"I imagine what my customers are going to think – that's what really motivates me."

Other aspects are: Getting on with the people you work with, enjoying what you do, and controlling your stress levels.

This research is ongoing. I am still looking for more people who really enjoy their work. I am still looking for those finer distinctions that distinguish those who really enjoy their work.

Further work is needed on this model in order to reach the next stage, which is learning what to do in order to increase enjoyment at work to the extent that I can train others to do so. It is all very well to understand what distinguishes people who enjoy their work, but to be of real value, it is important to understand how to transfer that skill to others.

We spend a huge amount of time at work. Everyone deserves to enjoy their life, but no-one has the responsibility to give you that happiness – except you. I hope I can offer these few ideas to help you find that enjoyment and seize it with both hands.

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