



Is Your Work a Job or a Calling?

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Sister Mary Norbert was my second grade teacher at Presentation School on the west side of Chicago. A cheery, warm, and loving angel tucked in a black habit, she talked to us constantly about our vocation in life. Of course, she meant a religious vocation!

She encouraged us to listen for the voice of God to see if we had a vocation to serve as a sister. (I actually considered it in high school! I became interested in a cloistered community and was quite serious about it until I understood that a cloistered order meant living a life of silence. Since I've been making my living as a professional speaker these past 18 years, you can see that was definitely not my calling!)

Later, though, I learned that the word vocation comes from the Latin word "voca" which means "to call." I now believe that we all have a vocation, that every one of us is called to a unique purpose, and not just those who are called to the religious life.

Personally, I can't think of anything more adventurous than living out our call in the paid work we do! What could be more exciting, more fun, or more humbling! What would our workplaces look like if everyone was living their call?

The idea of our work as a calling has definitely been on people's minds lately. Publications such as Fast Company magazine, and Life @ Work magazine have both had cover stories on the topic in the recent past. Lauri Beth Jones' book, "The Path," and Stephen Covey's popular, "7 Habits of

Highly Effective People" follow the long standing work of Richard Bolles' "What Color is Your Parachute?" They, and other authors, write about people's hunger for doing meaningful work and about serving others by listening for and following our call.

In reality, for some of us, the work we do is just a job; it's tasks. It's a way to make money. Perhaps, though, it's become a job. Even if we've been successful by the world's standards, we may be doing work that's not for us any more. Maybe we've become complacent. We just keep on doing what we've always done rather than make a change and respond to that call inside that's prompting us to move in a different direction.

People ask, "How do you know when it's a call? Does the phone ring?" Ah, were it so easy!

For a few, it's an immediate awareness, an aha, known early on. Like Michael Jordan and basketball, or Nancy Lopez and golf. The talent itself is the call, and we cannot not follow it. Even Mother Theresa knew at age 18 what she was called to do. Her call was so clear, she said she actually received it as an order from God to live in India and minister to the poor.

Those who have discovered it may tell you they "just know." For most of us, though, we search and hunt and wonder, perhaps all of our lives.

Here are three ways that will help you uncover or clarify your calling.

- Listen and be attentive to your feelings and surroundings. Find quiet time, be still and get

out of the constant state of busyness most of us live in. Be so connected to your spiritual self that you can discern when something is right for you.

- Get your ego out of the way: In his book, "Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC," Frederick Bueckner says "There are all kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work. The challenge is to find which is the voice of God, ego, or self-interest. The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."
- Ask yourself questions such as, "What makes me most alive?" The discovery could be in the question.

In a world that seems upside down, where change is so rapid and continuous, where there seems to be no job security for any of us, we need and are hungry for meaning in our lives and our work.

The word "work" comes from Greek, meaning "to worship." No, it doesn't mean to worship our work. It is a way of worshiping God. We've all been given unique talents, skills, abilities and gifts. We don't own them. We are called to uncover our gifts, develop them and use them to serve others.

It's what leaders do.

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