

The Nature of Work

Post by “Elayne” of February 20, 2021 at 9:26 AM

Hi [isychos](#) ! This is exactly the kind of big question I hope people will take up, when they commit to choosing pleasurable lives. I agree with the things Cassius has said. We definitely don't realistically expect 100% pleasure 24-7. However, work for most of us takes up so much time that there's no sense standing in an anthill if there are other options!

A few other things to think about... you say you have tried many sorts of working roles. That doesn't necessarily mean you have ruled out the possibility that there's a type of work you would find intrinsically pleasurable! Considering many people do find such work (including me), maybe you can too. Maybe visiting a career counselor would be helpful in exploring this?

Another possibility is that your enjoyment has been negatively affected by extrinsic rewards throughout life. Your friends who've advised you to see work as a means to an end are demonstrating this, and I think your intuition is dead on that this is not the right direction--based on a large body of evidence.

Humans have a deep-seated, automatic tendency to devalue something they get extrinsic rewards for. To test this for yourself, imagine if I told you "if you eat all this pie, I'll give you cake." What?? There's got to be something wrong with that pie! We never tell children "oh you are such a good boy for eating all your pie!" And if we did? They would want and enjoy pie less. We know this from experiments on rewarding kids and adults for enjoyable actions, even including sharing their toys. They lose interest and enjoyment. Yikes, right?!

We are all subject to this extrinsic reward cycle from childhood, and it can have devastating effects on pleasure.

The more you can stop thinking of work as a means to an end and find pleasure intrinsically, even if it is also providing for your income and pleasure outside work, the more of your day will be enjoyable.

I recommend two books: Daniel Pink's Drive, about the science of human motivation (basically, wanting and liking -- anticipation of pleasure and pleasure in our activities); and Alfie Kohn's Punished by Rewards.