

Screw Work,  
Let's Play

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# Screw Work, Let's Play

How to do what you love and  
get paid for it

JOHN WILLIAMS

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To my father,  
Edward Glyn Williams  
for five months of play



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## About this book

This book will show you step by step how to get paid to play by turning the things you most love doing into a living. Whether you're currently feeling trapped in a job you don't enjoy or you're sloggng away at your own business that's never quite taken off, you'll find both the life-changing concepts and the practical strategies you need to transform your working life.

This is not about just having fun and hoping the money will magically fall out of the sky. I will show you the key to getting paid for doing what feels like play to you, how to win your first 'playcheque', and then how to scale it up to making a living – and maybe even get rich. And if you still have no idea what you want to do with your life, I'll show you how to get clear on that first.

Whether you want to launch your own business or freelance career, create your ideal job from scratch, write a book, get famous for your art, or change the world, this book will help you. I can't show you how to 'get rich quick'. I haven't found anything yet that does that (let me know if you do!). If anything, it's about how to get *happy* quick. The fact is, whatever you want your life to be, you can create some taste of your ideal right now in the present. Doing this will make you happier and, as you will see, happiness often leads to success and wealth.

### The ten secrets

The book is arranged as ten secrets to getting paid to play. These are not secrets that anyone is wilfully withholding from you and yet it's remarkable how few of us know them. We're certainly not taught them in school or college. They sometimes run counter to

commonly held wisdom we hear every day and, until you know them, you are likely to be trapped forever in unsatisfying work.

The secrets are arranged in sequence to take you all the way from having no idea what work you would enjoy to making a full-time living doing something you love. It's therefore best to read each chapter in sequence as each one builds on the last.

This is what you will discover in each chapter.

### **Secret one: How to work out what you really really want**

If you know you want to do something different but can't for the life of you work out what it is, this will finally help you. And if you're already on the way to doing what you want, don't skip this chapter because it will show just how important choosing the right work is to becoming a success.

### **Secret two: How to choose what to do next**

How to find the sweet spot between what you love doing and what people will pay for. How to choose what avenue to pursue even when you feel completely stuck – either because you have no idea what you want or because you have so many ideas you can't make up your mind. Oh, and the scientifically proven formula for happiness.

### **Secret three: How to get started right now**

How to escape the trap of endless research and get started right away on your new life. Why you don't need elaborate plans or even to set goals. How to start even the grandest project in a scaled-down form without quitting your current work.

### **Secret four: How to guarantee your success**

It can be a rocky ride on the way to getting paid to play. Read this chapter to find out how you can become indestructible and guarantee you can make it whatever may happen along the way.

### **Secret five: How to play for profit**

Worried that doing what you really enjoy will land you in poverty? This chapter will show you how to do things that are fun for

you in a way that provides real value to people – and so get paid for it.

**Secret six: How to play the fame game – and win**

How to get known, or even famous, for what you do so that you attract the opportunities you want. How to start using the latest online social media systems to help you launch yourself onto the world at little or no cost.

**Secret seven: How to create an irresistible offer**

How to offer something people really want and choose the best way to deliver it, from selling a service to creating something on the internet that makes you money while you sleep.

**Secret eight: How to win your first playcheque**

How to earn your very first piece of income for something that feels like play to you – without having to quit your current work.

**Secret nine: How to play full time**

How to scale up your first experiments to something you can get paid for full time whether in self-employment, a portfolio career, or in what I call Job 2.0 – the customised job. How to make it happen quicker than you might expect.

**Secret ten: How to play your way to the rich life**

This chapter will show you how to get clear what a rich life looks like to you; is it financial riches, the freedom to travel the planet, having plenty of free time, or the power to change the world? Discover the 5 keys to get you there including the P.R.I.C.E. strategy to charge what you're really worth.

## The 21 myths of work

I've worked with hundreds of clients over the past five years, and over and over again I see the same mistaken beliefs that stop people from doing what they want. These are often beliefs inherited

from a previous generation that had far fewer choices about their work than we do now. I've boiled these down to 21 myths. You'll find them peppered throughout the book and can see each one being dismantled. You can also read the full list at the end of the book. How many of them are you currently holding as the truth? They may well be what's holding you back. Are you ready to open your mind to some new ideas about work?

I think of the 21 myths like this: imagine an old prop plane sitting on the runway with its engine running. If you release the brakes and remove the chocks, it's inevitable that it's going to start rolling – but you're still going to need to apply some gas in order to take off. If I can just take away all the myths you believe about work, it is inevitable you will start moving towards what you want. Of course, you'll still need to apply some gas to take flight and get where you want to go.

## Expert interviews

To support the ideas contained in the book, I interviewed ten successful players and quizzed them on the beliefs, habits and actions they used to get where they are. Some of them have created, run and sold million-pound businesses. But I didn't just interview the well established; I interviewed people just starting out who had a very playful approach and were already seeing some success from it. Some interviewees are very wealthy; others are living on a relatively modest income but have succeeded in structuring their lives around freedom, creativity and variety. Some are on a mission to change the world. They are all living rich lives in the broadest sense of the word.

You can read and, in some cases, listen to or watch the full interviews with the players at [ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com](http://ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com).

## The website

Throughout the book and at the end of each chapter, I have pointed you to further information, tools and resources on the accompanying website [ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com](http://ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com). Go there now to listen to audio recordings, download worksheets and read updates to the book as they become available.

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Thanks to the coaches I was lucky enough to learn from first-hand: business coach, colleague and friend Judith Morgan who first suggested the idea of a year off; Jerry Hyde, creativity guru, who told me to write a book and, like most of his advice, I only listened to it two years later – thanks for so much inspiration over the past seven years. Thanks also to the members of Jerry's very creative men's group who have encouraged me throughout the writing process.

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many years later. This book wouldn't be the same if you hadn't led the way.

A debt also to Pat Kane for giving us the Play Ethic and for showing us there is an alternative to the tired old work ethic. And also to Seth Godin for his very human marketing genius, and Dan Pink for his fresh take on work and careers. And respect to Roger Hamilton for the creation of his remarkable Wealth Dynamics.

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And finally to you for reading this book. I hope you'll go out and recruit more people to the play cause.

You can contact me at [ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com](http://ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com) or follow me on Twitter as [@johnsw](https://twitter.com/johnsw).

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# Join the play revolution

*For the first time in the human experience, we have a chance to shape our work to suit the way we live instead of our lives to fit our work . . . We would be mad to miss the chance.*

**Charles Handy, management expert and author**

We're lucky. We've reached a remarkable point in the history of work. Today, it's possible to make a living out of pretty much anything. Seriously; whatever you can think of, someone somewhere in the world is making a career of it.

During the course of my research for this book I've met remarkable examples like Chris Guillebeau who is travelling to every country in the world and living off the blog he writes along the way; Sam Bompas & Harry Parr who create architectural jellies and breathable cocktails; Petra Barran who travels from festival to festival selling gourmet chocolate treats in the UK's only touring choc-mobile; Sarah de Nordwall who has carved a career as a professional bard writing poetry and performing it everywhere – from a drug rehab unit to the House of Lords.

These people are part of a growing tribe around the world who are not content just to make a wage to pay the rent, but want their lives to be about something larger – creating something unique, saying something important, trying new experiences, having some fun, taking a few risks, and daring to fall flat on their faces – or win big and strike it rich. They want freedom, variety, challenge and excitement; they want to stretch themselves, and to keep evolving every day.

What we're witnessing is no less than a revolution in what work can be. The word 'job' is irrelevant; even the word 'work' seems a poor choice for the lifestyles this new tribe have crafted for themselves. Musician turned entrepreneur, Derek Sivers, who recently sold his business for \$22 million says, 'This isn't work, it's play'.

Our vocabulary is out of date. Some of these people call themselves entrepreneurs or business people but the old image of someone dressed in a sober suit spouting management speak just doesn't fit. The player's uniform is just as likely to be jeans and T-Shirt or, for those working at home, pyjamas.

Even the senior figureheads of this new tribe are more playful, irreverent, informal. They're as much in it for the creative buzz as for the money. In his book *Business Stripped Bare* Richard Branson describes being asked in an interview with senior newsman Bob Schieffer why he had gone into business: 'I just stared at him. I suddenly realised I had never been interested in being "in business". And, heaven help me, I said so, adding: "I've been interested in creating things."'

Previous generations had little choice about their working lives; a job for life was standard, and the alternative of starting a business often required expensive premises, a team of staff, and huge advertising costs. The business world was littered with gatekeepers who got to choose who could come in based on background, race, gender or any other arbitrary parameter. Now, no one can stop you crafting your work life exactly as you would like it.

The internet and mobile technology have freed us all to work however, wherever, whenever we want. Old restrictive boundaries are dissolving; between local and global; employee and entrepreneur; professional and amateur; consumer and producer; home and office; work and play. Our options are now so much broader than just employee or business owner. What does all this mean? It means that there really is no reason left to suffer boring, unfulfilling work.

We no longer need to be driven by the old work ethic; we have entered the era of what author Pat Kane calls ‘The Play Ethic’:

*This is ‘play’ as the great philosophers understood it: the experience of being an active, creative and fully autonomous person. The play ethic is about having the confidence to be spontaneous, creative and empathetic across every area of your life . . . It’s about placing yourself, your passions and enthusiasms at the centre of your world.*

**Pat Kane, author of *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living*,  
taken from [www.theplayethic.com](http://www.theplayethic.com)**

Does ‘play’ sound selfish to you? It’s actually the opposite. Players are often as interested in what they can give to the world as what they can get from it. Tim Smit left the music business to create ‘the world’s first rock ‘n’ roll scientific foundation’ at the Eden Project. Innocent Drinks, the famously playful brand with the majority share of the UK smoothie market, have committed 10 per cent of their profits to The Innocent Foundation. They are funding projects to help some the world’s poorest people in the countries where they source their fruit. And Google, famed for its playful work environment, kicked off its not-for-profit arm with a \$1 billion fund. Its mission is to address some of the world’s most urgent problems including climate change, global public health, and poverty.

So are you ready to play? Perhaps you’re currently stuck in a job that’s reducing you to tears. Or you’re slogging away at a business that’s never quite taken off. In all likelihood you’ve been doing a lot of thinking about this, going round and round in circles trying to discover the way out. Well, it’s time to end all that. Let’s begin your transformation from worker to player. This book will show you the way – how to have fun and get paid for it; how to design a life big enough to hold everything that you are; how to explore and indulge your every interest; how to embrace a new world of uncertainty and enjoy the ride; how to get results you never dared dream of with a lot less struggle; and how to stop waiting and get started on all this right now.

## Join the revolution

*It is my opinion that the 21st century will be the century of play.*

Brian Sutton-Smith, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and prominent play theorist

American author Daniel Pink is a leading thinker on the changing world of work. In his recent book *A Whole New Mind* he suggests we have reached a new era requiring very different skills if we want to stay in the game. Back in the nineteenth century the industrial revolution gave us massive factories and efficient assembly lines. The factory worker needed physical strength and manual skills to thrive. The twentieth century ushered in the information age with the knowledge worker who needed analytical and logical skills. Today in the twenty-first century we find ourselves in the Conceptual Age. The skills we need now, Pink says, are what you might call right-brain functions such as design, empathy, meaning and play. Those of us showing inventiveness, empathy, and big picture capabilities – players – will be the ones to excel.

This is not a shift you can sit back and opt out of. Logical Information Age skills are still necessary but they will no longer be sufficient. Work that can be easily defined and reproduced is likely to be either automated or outsourced. New forms of automation are now affecting this generation's white-collar workers in similar ways as it did last generation's blue-collar workers. To survive, you must develop skills that computers can't do better, faster, or cheaper. What can't be automated may be outsourced to equally capable but cheaper staff in other countries like India, China and the Philippines. This has already extended from IT to financial analysis, editorial work, legal research and completing tax returns.

The industrial revolution, predicated on the Protestant work ethic, gave us the *worker*. Today's digital revolution has given us the *player*.

Don't be one of those workers that use the current state of the economy as an excuse to put off making a change: people that say they're not thinking about their career right now because there's a recession on (or the recession is only just over, or they've heard there's going to be another recession . . .) so they should just keep their head down, stay put and play safe.

Burying your head in the sand is the last thing you should be doing in a time of huge change and uncertainty. Firstly, this is the time you are most likely to lose your job. If your boss calls you in this Friday and says it's your last day, wouldn't you rather have done the thinking already on what to do next than have to rush to start from scratch the following Monday? Secondly, it's in the times of greatest change that the most exciting opportunities emerge. More people became millionaires during the Great Depression than in any other time in American history.

This book will show you how to test out your new line of work without quitting what you do now so that you're ready when the recovery comes – or when you feel brave enough to jump anyway. And if you're reading this book because you've been made redundant, don't waste this chance to rethink your work and move towards play.

It pays to have fun

*I never went into business to make money – but I have found that, if I have fun, the money will come.*

**Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin**

Having fun is at the heart of the idea of playing. And fun makes good financial sense too. The world's richest and most successful people

including billionaires Richard Branson, Steve Jobs, Warren Buffett and Oprah Winfrey say they do what they do because it's fun. They clearly don't continue working because they need the money.

Here's the advice of Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computer and former CEO of Pixar Animation Studios, as given at his Stanford University commencement address:

*Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle.*

If you're currently chasing success and money in an attempt to make yourself happy you may have got things the wrong way round. Research by Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California recently revealed that happiness, in many cases, leads to successful outcomes, rather than merely following from them.

After reviewing 225 relevant studies, her results show that happier people are more creative and productive, more likely to attempt new challenges, and to push themselves to strive for fresh goals. They are also more likely to be liked by their peers, and thus recruited to better jobs and promoted to higher positions. As a result of all this, happy people accrue more money.

So how do we become happier? Choosing the right work is a good start. The evidence demonstrates that people who have jobs distinguished by autonomy, meaning and variety are significantly happier than those who don't. As the good professor explains,

*When it comes to work life, we can create our own so-called 'upward spirals.' The more successful we are at our jobs, the higher income we make, and the better work environment we have, the happier we will be. This increased happiness will foster greater success, more money, and an improved work environment, which will further enhance happiness, and so on and so on and so on.*

This book will show you how to begin this upward spiral by choosing the right work and by creating a happier, more enjoyable life in the present.

*When you find yourself in love with something you're good at, you never really work again.*

Sir Ken Robinson, British author and expert on creativity and education

The key to getting paid for playing is to choose the right things to play. And the right things are those that you are naturally good at. Your aim must be to get into 'flow', as serial entrepreneur Roger Hamilton calls it. Build a working life around the things you enjoy doing and have a natural talent for. But to do this, you need to widen your perception of what constitutes a talent far beyond the limited concept of 'transferable skills'.

It's important to understand the distinction between talent and skill. Talent appears early in life. Using our talents feels good so we do it a lot. Skill comes later as a result of practising that talent. We are musical before we ever pick up an instrument. People who are great communicators have usually been chatting to anyone who would listen since they formed their first words. Writers often start reading early. Great salespeople have been influencing and negotiating since they started school. Success is so much easier and more enjoyable when we build our work around our natural talents and developed skills.

So if we understand this, why aren't we all getting paid to have fun? Firstly, a lot of people are simply doing the wrong work. Most of us have made gross compromises in our choice of work, driven by the principles of a previous generation who didn't have the options we do today. We have never dared to be selective enough about what we do so that we can spend the majority of the time in flow. As a result we haven't sown that rich seam of gold among the masses of grey rock.

Some people think it's nonsense to make a living out of what you love because they've never experienced it. The school system sets us up for this when it encourages us to work on our weaknesses. Forget it. Work on your strengths, work *around* your weaknesses.

But, of course, in a conventional job it can be difficult to say 'I don't do presentations, I only do research' or 'I don't do research, I only do presentations'. We're supposed to be great all-rounders – good at being creative, organising our time, working in a team, creating thorough reports, presenting our findings, and dotting the I's and crossing the T's. In reality no one can excel at all these things, and trying to do so guarantees mediocrity. The result is that work becomes a struggle and we lose sight of just how talented we are.

When you finally work *with* your personality and strengths, and avoid the ill-fitting work that drags you down, the effect is like dropping into a jetstream. You will see not just an incremental improvement in your results but a dramatic multiplication.

This is one reason why people are increasingly attracted to various forms of self-employment.

## Get the autonomy you crave

Given the limitations of conventional jobs, it's not surprising so many people would like an alternative. A survey in 2006 found that a third of all employees were seriously considering self-employment or had already taken steps to work for themselves. No doubt many more dream of doing something similar but never dare take the steps. Too many are held back by the myths of what it takes to work for yourself (we'll be dismantling every one of these myths later in the book).

A common belief is that the natural alternative to a job is to launch a business with all the risk and complexities of premises,

staff and funding. But there are now so many different ways to make an income without a job: self-employed, internet marketing, passive income streams, portfolio career, micro-business. The line between employed and self-employed is blurred and it is no longer necessary to jump straight from one to another. Now we can test out our ideas, prove that they work and earn our first *playcheque* before we quit – or we can just keep it as a nice sideline to our employment. We can even reinvent the humble job to create the ‘customised job’, moulded to suit our personality, and our preferred working structure and location.

Whatever its form, the difference is primarily one of attitude. It’s a shift in responsibility from passive employee to active creator; a 180-degree about-turn, from looking outward for someone else to define our work to looking inward and creating the working life we really want. It’s the shift from worker to player.

This is a new century and it’s a new world of business. The industrial revolution gave us mass production – treating employees as interchangeable components in a machine, creating generic products, and selling them to a mass market of undifferentiated consumers. Nearly two centuries later, today’s digital revolution is changing the face of work all over again but this time it’s about a shift towards individuals and micro-businesses creating innovative products for niche markets, and attracting fans that market the products they like to each other. Business is becoming sexy and entrepreneurship is the new rock ‘n’ roll.

## The world will be your office

Thanks to laptop computers, mobile phones, and Wi-Fi, we are now freed from the tyranny of the office cubicle. If your work is portable, you are free to choose where you work and who with. You’ll find the new free-range humans in parks, cafés and even

sitting beside the swimming pool. Bored of your dreary co-workers? Now you can find your people in a loose work gathering like Jelly, a semi-weekly work-together that's taking place in over a hundred cities where people have come together in a person's home, a coffee shop, or an office to work for the day. As the Jelly site says, 'We provide chairs and sofas, wireless internet, and interesting people to talk to, collaborate with, and bounce ideas off of. You bring a laptop (or whatever you need to get your work done) and a friendly disposition.'

For a more consistent sense of community, you can become a member of one of the many shared workspaces popping up around the world that sell desk space by the hour or month. This book was largely written in a workspace for social entrepreneurs called The Hub. Now with branches in 12 cities around the world, it's a workspace, meeting space, café and social community. The members are people who want to build businesses and organisations where making a difference is as important as making a profit. Similar spaces are appearing for artists, media professionals and start-up businesses.

Once you're free of the office, the next step is to realise that you may also be free of the country you live in. Why not join the growing tribe of 'digital nomads':

## Case study

Management consultant Lea Woodward and her graphic designer partner Jonathan Woodward were both working exhausting hours in corporations when they decided to do something completely different.

They launched their own businesses as a freelance graphic designer and business coach. It dawned on them that they could run their businesses from anywhere in the world and enjoy a higher standard of living for the same or lower cost. So after six months, they decided to leave the UK to find somewhere new to make their home.

Now, after two years on the road, Lea and Jonathan have run their businesses from Panama, Buenos Aires, Grenada, Toronto, Grenada, Dubai, Thailand, South Africa, Hong Kong and Italy.

Lea has just returned to the UK to have their first baby but they are planning to go off again with baby in tow in a few months' time.

They support other digital nomads with their popular locationindependent.com blog and have just launched a new blog locationindependentparents.com.

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Now that the world is your office, you can live and work wherever you choose. Where would you like to go?

## From worker to player

*To call yourself a 'player', rather than a 'worker', is to immediately widen your conception of who you are and what you might be capable of doing. It is to dedicate yourself to realising your full human potential; to be active, not passive.*

**Pat Kane, [ThePlayEthic.com](http://ThePlayEthic.com)**

So what we're seeing is a new generation of people with a very different attitude to work. They are not workers but players. What exactly does that mean? Here are nine traits of players that this book will help you to understand and adopt.

### 1. Players put creativity, fun and fulfilment first

The worker expects work to be a chore. As players we place what really matters to us at the centre of our worlds and we fill our lives with whatever we find most exciting, enjoyable, challenging, rewarding and fulfilling. We want to indulge every aspect of ourselves. We want to play all day and get paid for it. The player's ultimate career goal is 'to get paid for being me'.

## 2. Players are multifaceted

Workers take a restricted version of themselves to the office, putting on a mask for the corporate environment. Players bring all of themselves. Players are not one-dimensional beings (no human being is). Players are musicians who are also internet entrepreneurs, travellers who are also bloggers, consultants who are also songwriters, comedians who are also psychotherapists, finance administrators who are also filmmakers. We are all 'Jugglers', as author Ian Sanders calls us, managing multiple strands and projects.

## 3. Players respond to the world around them

The worker thinks that play is frittering away time. But playing isn't about sitting in a corner all day daydreaming, nor is it sitting on a beach drinking cocktails for the rest of your life (that's the dream of a worker not a player). Look at what children do when they play – they are interacting with the physical world around them, testing it and experimenting with it, and they are also interacting with others and learning about relationships. Play is exploratory and responsive. To be *in play* is to be actively engaged in the world.

A player therefore is not ignoring the real world – far from it. We are being more responsive than the worker who simply does what they're told or the business owner who follows whatever money-making strategy the latest expert recommends. Players make their lives a laboratory and learn from their own experience.

## 4. Players respond to their inner world

The worker is directed by external expectations and values. As players, we recognise what is happening inside of us, accept it, acknowledge it and use it – long before others are even aware of it. The musician, music producer and artist Brian Eno said recently that the question that has occupied much of his life is 'What is it I really like?' By accepting what he discovers years before it is

fashionable to do so, he has become a thought leader who created an entire genre of music (now known as ambient). He has gone on to work with some of the biggest bands in the world including U2 and Coldplay.

## 5. Players are mavericks

Workers stick to the conventions of their industry or specialism. As players we indulge all our interests no matter how whimsical or disparate they may seem – sometimes resulting in misunderstanding and ridicule from others. And later we emerge with genre-smashing creative works and rule-breaking businesses. Players change the game for everyone else.

*The truly great advances of this generation will be made by those who can make outrageous connections, and only a mind which knows how to play can do that.*

**Nagle Jackson, theatre director and award-winning playwright**

Players don't know when to stop. We get obsessive about things that others barely notice. We follow paths that lead us through seemingly unrelated topics and sometimes end up in some controversial area of art, politics or religion. In our free exploration we tread on others' taboos. We are broader than most, more whole. We are political beings, emotional beings, sexual beings and we know how to employ all of what we are to the greatest effect.

## 6. Players never stop exploring, never stop learning

When children play, there is often no predetermined outcome in mind: they are simply going where they are drawn in the moment. The play maps the growing edge of their human organism. Tomorrow's play will never be exactly the same as today. And then we reach adulthood and most people just stop. The worker will attend the standard company training programmes and learn some new skills for their job but they never re-enter that process of

following their growing edge wherever it leads them. Players, however, remain ever curious and are hungry to learn new things. We are still willing to experiment and follow the drive in us to expand. We're engaged in a lifelong process of learning and exploring. Many of us are 'Scanners', as careers expert Barbara Sher would call us, always moving on to the next new thing. We go where we feel instinctively drawn rather than following conventional rules of success and wealth. And that path leads to true originality. In a time of information overload, we add to the signal, not to the noise.

#### 7. Players are not naive

Players are not new-age dreamers. We play with capitalism, we notice what our market needs and we see providing value and making money as part of the game. Players understand that money makes play sustainable. And players often make *more* money than workers because we love what we do (and that passion is attractive); we are thought leaders creating original solutions; we focus on creating genuine value (not just making a quick buck); and we solve real-world problems.

#### 8. Players surf the big waves that others are drowned by

We need to be responsive, flexible and playful right now because we are on the cusp of massive change. We're still living through the aftershocks of the near collapse of the banking system. At the same time, there is a tidal wave coming from the East as countries like China and India explode in growth. Some say we are witnessing the end of the era of economic dominance by North America and Western Europe.

As the next wave of outsourcing sweeps away any work that is easily defined and repeated, creativity will be the safest pursuit as it is specific to the local culture and environment. Now, more than ever, everything is in play and only the playful will survive.

## 9. Players understand that play is not effortless

Surely there's always work required to create a successful life? Well, I have a problem with the word 'work'. There are multiple meanings for the word. One meaning refers to paid employment and it's associated with that old two-state way of living between doing the things you get paid for and doing what you really enjoy in the stolen moments outside office hours. This is why we need some new vocabulary.

Another meaning of work, however, is simply the 'exertion of effort' which is still very much relevant. Play after all is not effortless: just watch a rugby match, U2 playing live, or a child building a sandcastle. Even playing a video game requires attention, concentration and persistence.

Players are engaged in something larger than the word 'work' can represent. They're creating businesses around their passion, pursuing creative and artistic experiments, starting their own social movements; they're exploring the world, what they enjoy, and what they can do. They are seeking the fullest expression of themselves. They're so passionate about what they're doing, they can't stop talking about it. What's work and what's leisure blur into one. It's all a form of play.

### Take a tip from the hunter-gatherers

For all of modern society's sophistication, we could still learn something from the hunter-gatherer tribes remaining in remote locations around the world. Peter Gray is a research professor of psychology at Boston College who has studied the research on hunter-gatherer cultures. He has concluded that they do not have our concept of work as a compulsory chore. He writes on [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com) that hunter-gatherers' work is simply an extension of children's play:

*Children play at hunting, gathering, hut construction, tool making, meal preparations, defense against predators, birthing, infant care, healing, negotiation, and so on and so on; and gradually,*

*as their play becomes increasingly skilled, the activities become productive. The play becomes work, but it does not cease being play. It may even become more fun than before, because the productive quality helps the whole band and is valued by all.*

And work is always a choice:

*They deliberately avoid telling each other how to behave, in work as in any other context. [Despite this] long-term shirking apparently happens rarely if at all. It is exciting to go out hunting or gathering with the others, and it would be boring to stay in camp day after day. The fact that on any given day the work is optional and self-directed keeps it in the realm of play.*

And guess what, they do fewer hours than us too:

*Research studies suggest that hunter-gatherers work somewhere between 20 and 40 hours a week, on average, depending on just what you count as work. Moreover, they do not work according to the clock; they work when the time is ripe for the work to be done and when they feel like it.*

*It's amazing when you think about it. During the 10,000 years since the onset of agriculture and then industry, we have developed countless laborsaving devices, but we haven't reduced our labor. Today, most people spend more time working than did hunter-gatherers, and our work, on average, is less playful.*

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## Scrap your career plan

*We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.*

**Joseph Campbell, mythologist, writer and lecturer**

The world is changing very quickly. A five-year plan for your career or business is likely to be redundant within less than a year. The CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, recently admitted that although they have a clear mission, 'we don't have a five year plan, we don't have a 2 year plan, we don't have a 1 year plan'. And despite this Google made over \$5.5 billion in just the first three months of 2009. The same rule applies even if you're just starting out; the business you start is rarely the business you end up succeeding with.

The old habit of setting far-off goals and making gross compromises in the present to get there makes less and less sense. Throw your attention back on the present and embrace 'life in perpetual beta', as new filmmaker Melissa Pierce calls it. Her documentary is exploring the cultural shift that technology creates as it enables people to live less planned and more passionate lives. And she is living her message by learning the required skills in the process of making the film and sharing content on her blog along the way.

Your long-term goals are not what will make you happy. Even getting rich is no guarantee. Research shows that when people win the lottery, they have a short-lived boost in happiness and then settle back to roughly the level of happiness they had before. What matters is how you choose to live today. Your aim in beginning to play is to create the positive experience you want to have in your life, starting right now even if it's scaled down to start with.

And ironically, pursuing your genuine interests, if done right, will make you richer than chasing the money ever will. You can't really excel at something when your heart isn't in it so if you do want to get rich, choose something that feels more like play than work. It makes good business sense; you can't compete with someone who loves what they do.

## My story: 'I never want another job for the rest of my life'

Many years ago when I had a job as a computer programmer, I knew I wanted something different but didn't know what it was. I realised the only way I was really going to work it out was to imagine for a moment that I could have anything I wanted.

And what I wanted was not to work.

I didn't want to sit on the sofa all day doing nothing, I wanted to play – to do whatever creative, fun stuff I love doing, and still get paid. At the time this seemed an unrealistic desire but it wasn't long after this realisation that I got exactly what I wanted. The company announced a chance for voluntary redundancies and I jumped at it. I got paid several months of salary to go and do whatever I liked. Some of my redundant colleagues bought sports cars. I didn't. I played. I created music, did some writing and I created an installation in an experimental museum. This time of play led me into the most exciting and fun job in my career. But it was still a job.

When later I had a go at stand-up comedy, I put this into my routine:

*I worry I'm in the wrong job, in fact I worry I don't suit jobs. The money's OK, it's the working I have a problem with.*

*I think my life is just too full to fit a job in. I'm too busy doing stuff that's actually fun and that work thing just gets in the way.*

*My career goal is to be paid for just being me, living my life; I'm very busy, I'm putting in the hours, I should get compensated.*

*Name of role . . . being John Williams.*

*I'd wake up in the morning and my boss would come in and go 'well done John, another great week, here's your wage packet'.*

In reality this is exactly what I want; to be able to do whatever I want to do; to play all day and get paid: to get paid to be me.

Not all jobs are terrible, of course: I've had some good ones – special effects software developer, internet media specialist, senior managing consultant for a global consultancy – but whatever the job, I still felt like life was passing me by while I was stuck in front of a computer in some bland open-plan office.

In 2003 I finally escaped and publicly declared, 'I never want another job for the rest of my life'. Now I have a portfolio career consisting of careers and business mentoring, corporate creativity workshops, copywriting, blogging, internet marketing and running a monthly London event for creative people called Scanners Night. I set my own hours, choose my own co-workers and alternate my place of work between my home, my garden, the local café and a shared workspace for entrepreneurs.

Along the way I've conducted some interesting experiments: I turned a full-time job offer into a three-day-week contract paying the same money; I earned enough as a consultant to only need to work for three months of the year; I've travelled to America, Japan, South Africa and many parts of Europe on business (and often broke the old rule that you never get to see the place you work in), and I've enjoyed creative projects such as getting my experimental music played on radio stations around the world and appearing on TV news.

I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up. But I've found that the more I focus on what I enjoy doing even when it's not immediately obvious how I'll make money, the more successful I am. I'm not a millionaire but I've learned a lot about what works in my own career and those of my clients – and I know what holds people back. My mission to get paid to play continues to evolve; it's not a project that is ever done. But it's one that I hope to convince you to start.

## Let's talk about death

It might seem strange to bring death into a book about play but in fact it is at the very heart of the topic. Here's a defining event from my life that I think will show you why.

When I was 5 months old, my parents took me out with my brother in the family car to show me to some relatives. Just a few minutes from our home, we were hit head-on by a young drunk driver who had lost control and was on the wrong side of the road.

Both my parents were injured. My mother made a full recovery. My father died in hospital ten days later from complications with his injuries. He was 34.

Losing my father before I was even old enough to know him has coloured my whole life. It made it abundantly and painfully clear that life can end at any moment. With this stark reality in mind, now answer this question: do you really want to spend another few years doing some unsatisfying work in the hope that you can do what you really like later?

Here's the real message of this book:

**DON'T WASTE ANOTHER MINUTE OF YOUR LIFE**

What do you really want your life to be about? This book will show you how to start it right now. If you don't know what you want, your mission is to find out. This book will tell you how. It's less important that you complete your work mission than that you're engaged in it. It's in the *being in play* that you will find salvation. When you are fully engaged in the right project, you will easily attract others around you who are inspired by the same aims. And if the worst happens and you don't get to complete your work yourself, others will pick up the reins.

Do what really matters. Start playing. Start now.

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Apple CEO Steve Jobs came to a similar conclusion:

*When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like ‘If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.’ It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself, ‘If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ And whenever the answer has been no for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.*

*Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything – all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure – these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.*

**Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Inc. and former CEO of Pixar Animation Studios**

The first step in your journey to getting paid to play is to find out what you really want. The next chapter will show you how to discover what that is.

### **On the website [ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com](http://ScrewWorkLetsPlay.com)**

- ➔ Read and listen to interviews with ten successful players.
- ➔ Access more information and website links for the people quoted in this chapter.
- ➔ Connect with a global community of players.

