

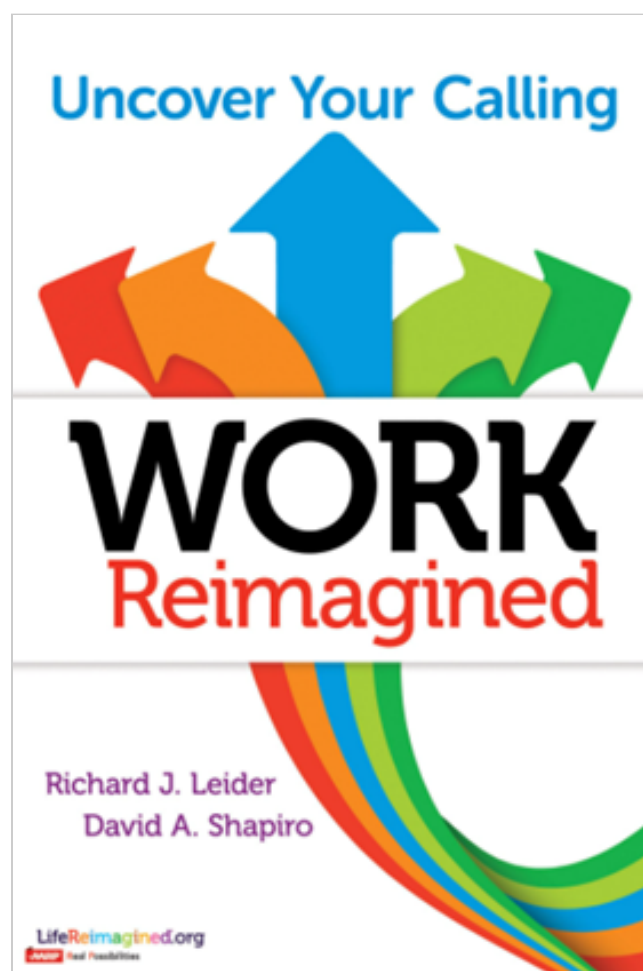
Finding the meaning and the music in your work

Work Reimagined: Uncovering Your Calling. By Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015, 155 pp., \$16.95 paperback.

In this time of global pandemic, one would be hard pressed to find a more aptly titled vocational book than *Work Reimagined: Uncovering Your Calling*. With millions of Americans being out of work, working from home, or contemplating the next chapter of their careers, the U.S. workforce is at an inflection point. In the introduction to their 2015 book, authors Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro presciently herald “the end of work as we know it.” This is their way of describing the fluidity of work, with innovation as the driving force. The authors observe, for example, that teleworking was relatively rare 20 years ago, whereas now entire industries have arisen to connect the workforce remotely via the internet and satellites. In a work world where change is a “new normal” marked by continual downsizing, restructuring, new technologies, globalization, automation, and robotics, Leider and Shapiro assert that reimagining work has become “a critical life skill.”

So what is work reimagined? The book’s thesis is that despite the ever-changing landscape of the work world, people remain “hungry” to find meaningful work that allows them to express their gifts and core values and to find a purpose greater than themselves. This is the concept of “calling.” The authors caution, however, that there is “no such thing as meaningful work; the meaning is what we bring to it.” Leider and Shapiro thus insist that when people work out of a sense of calling, they are not simply “making a living” but “making a life.”

The authors take great pains to distinguish a “calling” from a job or a career, explaining that people who have a “job” are primarily focused on gaining material benefits from work and do not expect any other type of reward. People who have a “career,” Leider and Shapiro contend, have a greater personal investment in their work, viewing their achievements not solely in monetary terms, but also in



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terms of professional advancement that often brings higher status, higher self-esteem, and more power. By contrast, people with a calling “find that their work is inseparable from their lives,” and thus they value it not just for monetary gain or career advancement, but for the fulfillment it brings them. Best of all, according to the authors, when people discover and heed their calling, they “never have to work again” because they have found what they want to do.

While the book contains exercises to help readers uncover their calling, it is not merely a collection of all-too-familiar occupational personality tests. Indeed, as the authors observe, an inquiry into one’s life calling “is not something that can be answered with simple checklists or standardized formulas.” Rather, the book invites readers on an inward, contemplative journey to discover (or rediscover) those things that motivate and energize them—and for which they are particularly suited. Like the professional and academic backgrounds of the authors themselves, the book is part life coaching and part philosophy. Not surprisingly, then, it is liberally sprinkled with references to an eclectic mix of thinkers and writers ranging from Aristotle and Immanuel Kant to Ralph Waldo Emerson and Dylan Thomas.

Leider and Shapiro have skillfully divided the book into six thought-provoking chapters. In chapter 1, “Reimagining Work—What Do You Do?” readers are invited to reflect upon their career choices and gain a deeper understanding of what they are drawn to, good at, and inspired by. Chapter 2, “Reimagining Calling—Should You Quit Your Day Job?” encourages readers to consider whether they should be working in a different job, or simply working differently. In chapter 3, “Reimagining Gifts—How Do You Do It?” the authors use an exercise to help readers explore their gifts. Chapter 4, “Reimagining Passions—Why Do You Do It?” explores people’s efforts to find inspiration and purpose in their work and identify the beneficiaries of those efforts. Chapter 5, “Reimagining Values—Where Do You Do It?” encourages readers to find a “working environment that fits” and is aligned with their deepest values. Finally, chapter 6, “Reimagining Legacy—Have You Played Your Music?” explores the meaning of success and “the good life.”

People can uncover their unique calling at any stage of life, according to the authors. This should be welcome news for readers, given that, whether by necessity or choice, many people are working well past retirement age. It is equally reassuring for those who have found themselves unemployed, underemployed, or furloughed because of the pandemic. Leider and Shapiro suggest that by uncovering their calling, such individuals can readily retool their skills and adapt to a new work environment, arming themselves with greater “clarity and confidence” about their professional passions and strengths.

Fittingly, the book concludes by focusing on legacy. The authors state that our legacy emerges from a life lived in a manner consistent with our calling, describing it as “the music that plays after we are gone.” They quote Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’s poignant observation that “most people go to their graves with their music still inside them.” The most common reason for this predicament, according to Leider and Shapiro, is that people never truly identify their song—in other words, they never really identify their calling. For this reason, the authors urge readers to consider carefully the legacy they want to leave from their working lives—and to finish that song.

Many of the concepts discussed in the book are not new. The Greek word that succinctly sums them up is “*meraki*,” which means to do something with soul, creativity, or love, and to put something of yourself into your work. What is new is the enthusiasm, wit, and wisdom that Leider and Shapiro display as they offer readers a roadmap to uncover their calling. This makes the book an enjoyable read, which I highly recommend.