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How to View Work

By Dr. Kathleen Begley
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Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to fit into your bed with three dogs.*

Andre Agassi hates tennis. Who knew? Recognized as one of the best players of his generation, Agassi just wrote a memoir called "Open." It contains a chapter in which he reveals that he has always despised the sport that made him rich and famous. In early reviews of the book, the media gломmed onto the tennis great's other startling admission. Agassi used illegal drugs. ESPN commentators and other sports bloviators acted on television and radio as if he were the first athlete on earth to use a mind-altering substance. I, too, was mildly surprised that Agassi dabbled in crystal meth. But I was utterly thunderstruck that he despised tennis. I still can't get over it.

At a time when everyone promotes work as fun, Agassi publicly has taken a viewpoint that supposedly died with the World War II generation. Back in the second part of the 20th century, many men – perhaps your father or grandfather -- carried lunch pails to jobs in paper mills and automotive plants where the only appreciation came in the form of a paycheck. I look back with awe at my father's willingness to spend a third of his life in a dank, depressing, dismal job in order to support his wife and two daughters, one of whom was completely ungrateful.

Back in the 1950's and 1960's and 1970's, most people regarded work as work – not as a fun, empowering, rollicking good time. Many women of that era stayed home and took care of the family. My baby boom generation changed everything. College educated en masse for the first time, my contemporaries – women and men alike -- and I looked for careers that would feed really fat egos. I once stupidly quit a fabulous job that was the envy of my friends because I thought the managers failed to appreciate my genius. Ah, yes, youth is wasted on the young.

Considering that there are now six people competing for every open position in organizations across the United States, I'm wondering if the job-as-fun concept is undergoing a paradigm shift, at least temporarily. Could work be work after all? Larry Winglet thinks so. A former military officer, Winglet just wrote a book called "It's Called Work for a Reason." In a super authoritative style, he advises people to suit up and do their jobs as directed – without thoughts of self empowerment. Although Winglet's take-no-prisoners style offends my la-de-da philosophy of life, I think there's currently something to be said for a willingness to take lesser jobs just to get through this awful financial morass. Some ideas on coping:

Change your expectations. So you got a degree in graphic design, with expectations that the Walt Disney Company would beat a path to your door. To you, taking a job selling water ice or men's shoes is a fate close to death. Get over it. It's close to death, but not death. That hurts a lot more, according to reliable sources.

Think transition. Having been laid off from your marketing job more than a year ago, you may be so discouraged that you want to nestle under the bed covers for the rest of your so-called life. Not



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so fast. Take a job you think is beneath you. It will help ground you in reality and, when the economy improves, please God, make you better able to figure out your next step.

Forget the neighbors. If you suffer from the grass-is-always-greener philosophy, you probably think the people across the street have jobs where they spend most of their time laughing and joking their way through creative brainstorming sessions. Get real. Even the most light-hearted work places require that you regularly put your nose to the old grindstone.

Appreciate your situation. You and I and everyone else in the United States are going through an economic shift of unprecedented proportions. I suspect historians will be writing about the 2009 downturn for generations. Undoubtedly, some analysts will view the era as the turning point when employees recognized that their jobs were not a day at the beach.

Relate to the past. As I said, I failed to appreciate the thanklessness of my now deceased father's blue-collar job; worse yet, I was embarrassed that he didn't wear a suit and tie to work. Every day, he rose at 6 a.m. to labor in one of the Philadelphia area's oil refineries which back then had far fewer safety regulations. He returned at 5 p.m, reeking of the putrid smell of petroleum. Several times, he had a dinner-table story about a fire that had killed two or three of his co-workers. Occasionally, I think about the trauma he must have experienced seeing or hearing about people burned to death at his plant. Daddy, forgive me for my youthful insensitivity.

Do it. Years ago, a friend told me that I think too much. She was right. Since then, I've worked hard to discipline myself to act rather than analyze. When I get up in the morning, the last thing on earth I want to do is write an article or speak to a group, the two primary tasks of my home-based business. So I deliberately structure my morning in a ritualistic way – first drink coffee, then let dogs out, next take shower, after that get dressed, finally get to work Uh, oh. I forgot to let the dogs back in. Please notice, by the way, that diving back into bed is not on my list of options.

Recognize the source. On the wall of my office, I have a sign that says, "Sprout, Grow, Bloom." I believe I can do that anywhere, with anyone, on any job. Quite simply, you and I create our own happiness – not our work. Over the years, I have met innumerable low-paid toll takers, office cleaners, and security guards with visible zest for their jobs. I've always viewed them as evidence that highly-paid and high-powered careers are not, in fact, the source of all happiness. Now I have a mind-blowing example on the other end of the monetary spectrum: Andre Agassi.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody. If you feel you've become too busy to ever read this free, opt-in blogletter, please tell us to remove you from our mailing list. Although our feelings will be deeply hurt, we'll cheerfully delete you.