

FRONTIERS Work and Leisure

THE most important product of our work is not the changing of raw materials into the TV's, houses, and hamburgers that we produce. The main reason we work is to change *ourselves*. It is *we* that want to be warmer, drier, or happier, and we work either to produce these changes directly or to indirectly make them possible. Since the way we work to provide food or shelter can at the same time contribute directly to our happiness and well-being, it seems absurd that we frequently choose work patterns that destroy skills, self-respect, security, health, and happiness.

In focusing on the external products of work and failing to consider the more important effects of work upon the worker, we have failed to recognize the essential unity of work and leisure and their true importance to our lives. Good work requires time for patience, thoroughness and quality—time for the worker to explore untried possibilities and to refine and improve familiar ones. It requires focused attention and peace of mind—free from pressures, distractions, and anxieties. Good work requires the worker to gain satisfaction from it and to grow through it. In short, leisure is necessary for good work. Similarly, leisure requires opportunity to do rewarding things; to avoid the boredom, restlessness, and lack of meaning that we associate with "free time." Quantity of work—either in number of hours spent "working," or in amount of "output"—is not an effective measure of either the inner or outer value of work. Our complex and roundabout patterns of production and thoughtless decisions of what to produce result in the seemingly efficient production of unimportant things. We spend, on an average, only about five hours a *week* in productive work. Better purpose in our work is therefore more important today than better efficiency. Producing one good car rather than many junkers, making one important scientific discovery rather than many trivial ones, or writing one good song rather than many

ordinary ones, has greater lasting effect and value. With such work we know our effort has been of more value to others as well as being more rewarding to ourselves. The quality of what we produce is no less important than the quantity.

So much of our work is related to trivial purposes, to dealing with the logistics of unnecessary institutionalization, scale, and quantification, and to secondary purposes like gaining a promotion or becoming famous or infamous that we lose the feel for what meaningful, productive work is. Stress-related diseases have become one of our society's greatest problems, but we fail to connect that with the fact that our work patterns are riddled with anxiety, tension, and stress. As a result, we fail to deal with the basic considerations of security of work and income, and the freedom of pace, purpose and process necessary for peace of mind and good work. Work has become so disconnected from its rewards by how we approach and organize it that we only think of completing it and being free to seek reward in other activities. We have become, as Alan Watts might say, like singers whose only concern is to get to the end of the song. We have lost sight that the joy is in the singing.

Making our work a continuous process of absorbing and rewarding action involves different changes for each of us. Reducing our wants, and thus the income and work we need to produce, can give us the elbow room necessary to evolve secure and rewarding work patterns, free our time from distracting consumption patterns, and to find satisfaction in work itself rather than in secondary products it might provide. Providing for our own needs, or producing and exchanging things directly within our local communities can shift our work to the more tangible benefits of direct production instead of the abstract, fragmented, paperwork-burdened work of institutionalized production.

In our work itself, we need to see what parts are rewarding, what parts are productive, and what parts are not. What does the work produce

in us—growth or frustration, anxiety or satisfaction? And how? What is the value of its external product? Almost all work can be done in ways that broaden busy work and work that is merely mindless and repetitive. The mindless is not necessarily bad. We usually try to pass on to someone else the routine parts of a job, seeking for ourselves the parts of work that are exciting and creative and require our fullest attention. Both kinds of work, however, are important and necessary to us. If properly approached, the mindless parts of a job provide us a wonderful opportunity to draw upon our unconscious and intuitive dimensions while focused on a particular job. They help us meld our hands and minds into one seamless, unified flow. Whether typing or washing dishes or laying bricks, "mindless" work rests our conscious processes, opens our receptivity, allows problems to stew and work in our unconscious, and simultaneously restores and strengthens the unity of our selves and our actions that conscious processes destroy.

Equally important are changes in our attitudes. We need to realize that we can never accomplish all our dreams. Our dreams expand as fast as our accomplishments and stay always tantalizingly out of reach. We should look instead at what we *are* doing, and do it well for its own reward, rather than racing from one thing to another, and leaving each thing poorly done and ourselves in a dither from our haste. We need also to realize that someone else will eventually get done what we don't accomplish. And there may be more important things in life than achievement.

Knowing that we can never finish all of what we dream gives the peace to explore the limitless perfections and possibilities that lie in each thing we do. We can understand and rejoice in the extravagance of a nature that produces the perfect wonder of hummingbirds and wildflowers and snowflakes, and waves breaking on a beach, and put the same wonder into all that we do. Knowing that we can't do everything helps us

develop a bullseye intuition to sense where our effort will have most effect and give the greatest rewards. Our whole sense of accomplishment becomes transformed, as well as what we *do* accomplish.

True leisure requires us to be at peace and at rest with ourselves and our world. So does good work. It involves a deep acceptance and love of all parts of life, and brings a particular relaxedness, freshness, and readiness to work which cannot be confused with the tense activity of most of our familiar work. Leisure is a mental and spiritual attitude, not merely the existence of time left over after work. It means not pushing things but letting them happen. It is, as Joseph Pieper says, a receptive attitude of mind—not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation. Work performed from leisure is renewing and revitalizing. It touches and draws upon life-giving powers, and opens a path of effortless action that lies far beyond the conditions of work that we have set for ourselves today.

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