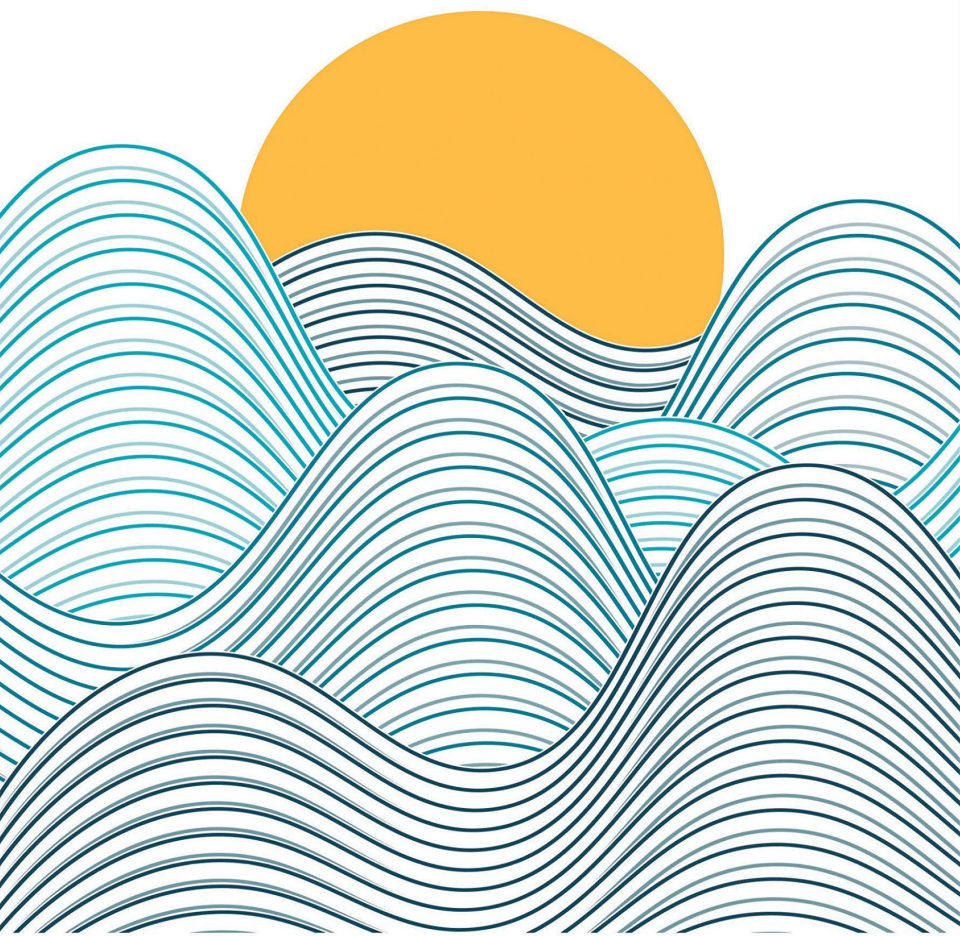


SHAPERS

**REINVENT THE WAY YOU WORK
AND CHANGE THE FUTURE**



J O N A S A L T M A N

CHAPTER 1

THE MAGIC OF MEANING

Work is now a practice through which we search for meaning to help shape a colourful life. The choice we have is to move beyond ourselves and connect with something larger. This deep sense of commitment and purpose is non-negotiable and is what gives shapers their shimmer.

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Last I checked, they don't stock bottles of happiness on store shelves. (OK, depending on where you shop and what's in the bottle, perhaps they do.) Instead, the shelves are lined with books about the *pursuit* of happiness. If you want to learn how to find your bliss, chase down the things that spark joy, and untether your soul, there's no shortage of authors and teachers who are glad to point the way in exchange for a handful of your dollars. What you don't see lining the walls of bookstores and the splash pages of your go-to guru is the promise of *keeping* happiness once you have it. It's a promise nobody—at least, nobody honest—is going to make.

Shapers know that happiness is perpetually in flux and hinges upon getting what you want, or at least getting what you think you want at various times. And it's fleeting. It comes and goes, flexes and flops, rises and pops. A double-scoop ice-cream cone might fall to the floor or melt divinely in your mouth; but either way it's gone and so is the momentary happiness it brought. And that makes happiness a moving target and, therefore, a crappy career goal.

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THE MAGIC OF MEANING

Meaning, a close cousin to happiness, is much more astute. The magic of meaning is that it persists through time. We can move to and from meaning again and again because it's not a destination to which we hope to arrive—but discursively comes from what we give our attention and energy to. Often it's when we connect with something larger than ourselves that meaning makes a cameo.

Meaning is nuanced and textured. It's subjective. It's a choice that emerges from those things to which we ascribe significance. But it's slippery as hell because it's not always clear what those things are at any given time. It could be pinned on someone, something, or some place. When felt, when lived—meaning spirals into our soul and provides for an expansive sense of self. It helps connect the once seemingly unconnected through time.

Meaning matters because it lets us show up in the world as we were meant to be. It propels our inner drive. It gives us energy. It provides the colour to our lives. We need meaning both for the will to live and the ability to grow.

Since most have abandoned religion in favour of work in the secular West, we now seek an enduring sense of purpose not from the house of God but the church of work. The largest religious group in the U.S.A is, you guessed it, 'non-believers.' We've supplanted the altar with the office, the bible with the smartphone, and come to expect righteous Sundays every damn day.

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We're searching for 'daily meaning as well as daily bread,' wrote broadcaster Studs Terkel about work. It's in the spiritual practice of work where the hunt for self-actualization and even transcendence now takes place. And for something to hold meaning, it must be seen as valuable in the eyes of the beholder, to our culture, or both. For shapers, this search is a compulsion—they're always getting closer.

In order to boost our chances of finding and sustaining meaning—we need to *stop* divorcing ourselves from our work. Basta! Instead, we should inject ourselves quirks and all, into what we do. For shapers this is a heartfelt obligation. It's how they make their best contribution to the world. And then like a swell in the ocean, that unmistakable feeling of meaning rushes in.

To be certain, we can often confuse urgency with meaning. When the pressure is so heavy and the exigency so real, we attribute what we're experiencing as supremely significant. It may be in the face of adversity or confronting our fatality that might expedite a sense meaning, but none of these are necessary conditions. All that's required is the ability to choose.

When you believe in your uniqueness, you stop trying to fit a mould; you move closer to becoming your truest self. You cater to your impulse to create. 'If happiness is about getting what you

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want, it appears that meaningfulness is about doing things that express yourself,' reveals social psychologist Roy Baumeister. For a shaper, this is the ultimate freedom *and* responsibility.

It may be paradoxical, but shapers understand that finding meaning typically appears when we're not looking for it. By plunging into something bigger than ourselves, setting aside our 'convulsive little egos' as the father of American psychology, William James would put it, meaning can gently bubble up. For example, I studied digital marketing to go into the music business, and lo and behold, I bumped into the love of my life.

Meaning ensues from a process of discovery and defeat. During the ups and the downs, turning points, and in between all the gnarly waves that life brings, shapers show up wholeheartedly in the present. They enjoy the fruits of their labour as well as the process, the sweat, and the struggle. This unyielding commitment to a purpose is what gives shapers their shimmer

Shapers begin with their *why*, and then figure out the *how*. Their interiority let's them create meaning time and again. Their self-efficacy let's them shun the negative self-talk and spiral upwards. They feel part of something larger than themselves. There is sacrifice, yes. Settling, no.

DUTY AND LUXURY

In a large international study of the most meaningful things in life, work was mentioned 44% of the time, ranking second only to family. Of course, if we poll different people at different stages in their life, and from across different cultures – we're bound to get different results. But for many people, work will always be their darling.

One of the most pervasive facets of Japanese work culture is the distinct pride they take in their work. The Japanese call this *shokunin*; a term once reserved for the domain of craftspeople, today it's seeping into many aspects of Japanese working life with the implicit duty to perform at one's best. Japanese sculptor Toshio Odate explains:

The Japanese word *shokunin* is defined by both Japanese and Japanese-English dictionaries as 'craftsman' or 'artisan,' but such a literal description does not fully express the deeper meaning. The Japanese apprentice is taught that *shokunin* means not only having technical skills, but also implies an attitude and social consciousness ... The *shokunin* has a social obligation to work his or her best for the general welfare of the people. This obligation is both spiritual and material, in that no matter what, the *shokunin's* responsibility is to fulfil the requirement.

Irrespective of who it is or what responsibility they may be fulfilling, many Japanese workers have pep in their step. There are sev-

eral reasons for this phenomenon, but two reasons stand out. The first boils down to Japan as an island country. Just a bit bigger geographically than Great Britain, their respective island mentalities couldn't be further apart. In Japan, there is a cultural conformity to give everything you got to whatever it is you do. This 'we're all in this together' sentiment is reinforced by strict legislation. In other words, if an investment banker in the City of London shifts the bed on a deal, he gets fired, but the same banker in Tokyo simply gets transferred to Osaka.

The second reason has to do with family. The drive for this kind of conscientious behaviour in Japanese workers stems from deep-seated family bonds. It's precisely why out of all the businesses worldwide that have been around for over 100 years, 90% are Japanese. And they all keep it tight with fewer than 300 employees. Instead of striving to grow faster, they endure because they endeavour to grow better.

Whether in or outside of work, what spurs us to integrate is evolution itself. More folks could take a cue from the Japanese where good work, good business, and good citizenry for that matter, envelop a deep personal commitment to making your best contribution.

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Take Simon Mhanna for example. Emigrating from Lebanon to Canada, Mhanna has swiftly become a national design leader. The quintessential shaper wakes up each day knowing he's flexing his chance to serve. 'I worked hard to find opportunities that align with my passion and that allow me to fulfil my purpose. I show up true to myself, my feelings, and my beliefs—which makes it hard for me to separate the self from the work,' he explains. It's his authentic intention and sense of self that enables Mhanna to deeply connect with his work.

By knowing what you value and how you are valued, you can blend yourself into your work. That feeling that you're making a real difference is unmistakable. And when you're a part of something larger than yourself, meaning is bound to come.

LOVE AND WORK

We glorify love and work and indeed the two are forever enmeshed in an intricate dance. 'They are also locked in mortal combat,' claims philosopher Alain de Botton. Like love, work is a practice—a daily operation that, over time, shapes the fabric of our lives.

This business of finding fulfilling work is no easy feat. With less replication, stability, and certainty, we've gained more choice in work, but we've also encountered a sweeping sense of self-doubt.

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Never has the burden on the self been so damn heavy. Amidst more uncertainty, we yearn for a sense of control often found by succumbing to that taunting voice in our heads to do more. But we don't need to control everything to get a good outcome.

We have to take time for ourselves to quieten the inner critic, manage our anxiety, and minimise our stress. I'm exhausted just thinking about it, let alone writing about it. This approach all adds up to a thick layer of emotional labour that's rarely talked about, not valued, much less quantified or even seen.

Meaning, if and when it shows up, can be beautifully random and randomly beautiful. And work, whether or not we like it, is a popular laboratory for making meaning. Like love, we throw ourselves into it. We encounter it. We fall into it. Sometimes we do so as a diversion from other facets of our lives. Other times we do so to move just that bit closer to our dreams. And in some instances, we do both.

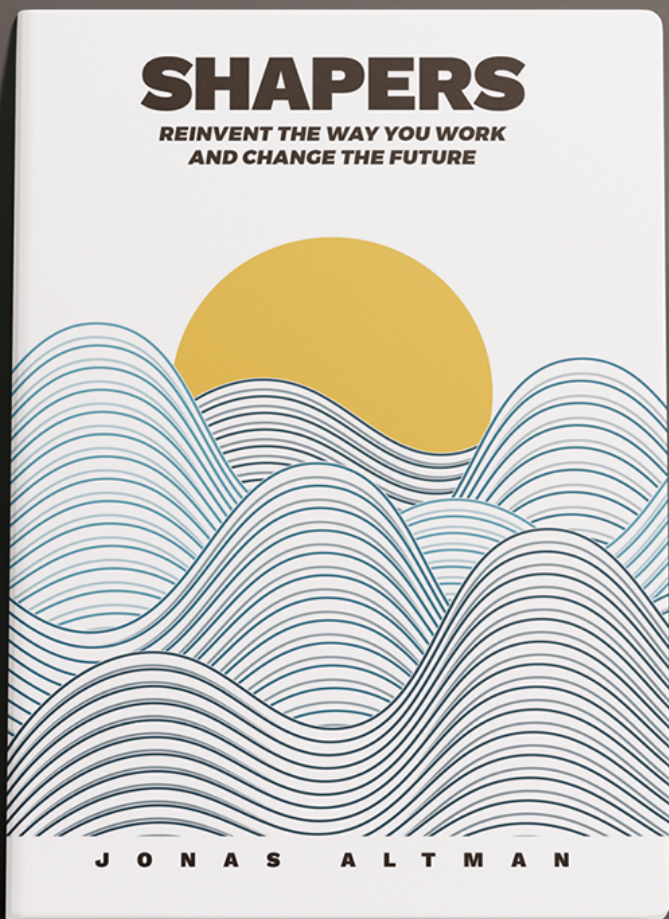
Is it any wonder, then, that we feel stifled when we can't see ourselves making progress in work? That we feel disillusioned when the career ladder has collapsed and our attempts to impact our communities and leave a mark on the world has become more challenging? Work progression now resembles a labyrinth, and we're left feeling stunted as the result. This topsy-turvy trajectory gets frustrating, even infuriating. But shapers find that

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it's precisely this psychologically uncomfortable feeling that leads to meaningful change.

These times where things don't quite go as well as expected, can, if we're open to it, lead to the most interesting of new horizons. We have an opportunity to nurture our talent, fuel our interest, and make an even bigger impact in the world. The only question is whether we choose to do so.

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