



## Employee ID: Work as Self-Expression

Practicing paying attention through Week 1, you may have noticed that there are lots of ways to perceive work challenges. For some people impediments to being happy at work roll like water off a duck's back. For others, not so much.

From obstacle to growth opportunity, the ways we frame the world around us is of our making and has real impact on the quality of our life experience. The comments submitted by readers of this series give a great illustration of this – ranging from (paraphrasing) “I love my job if not for all those irritating people I have to deal with”, to “It IS our work to interact with each other”.

But what IS your work? Is it part of your identity? Is it a cross to bear? There's a cliché that Americans live to work and Europeans work to live, but in both equations work is somehow separate from life.

Taking a clue from nature, all living things work and live. A tree could not be a tree without doing the work of being a tree, while all other plants also conduct this work, the essential nature or treeness of the tree is what that work (photosynthesis) supports. The work supports the tree's essential nature, as our work supports ours.





Consider this example: when asked what his greatest work was, passion driven workaholic, inventor, artist and renaissance-man Leonardo DaVinci responded, “Leonardo DaVinci”. His sentiment contrasts with our modern demonization of identifying with work. I remember at a party asking someone what they did for work and being lambasted with indignation that such a question has anything to do with who they are suggesting that only people reminiscent of the greedy banker character Gordon Gekko in the movie Wall Street so identify with their work. But wait – if we are on a path of cultivating satisfaction in our lives, shouldn’t EVERYTHING we do somehow be an expression of who we are?

Back to the tree example: imagine a tree that does less than 100% effort in photosynthesis – not much of a prognosis for survival. Suggesting there can be no conditions applied to how we embrace and exert in all venues of life, Martin Luther King Jr. said this:

If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Leontyne Price sings before the Metropolitan Opera. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: “Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.”





This week, consider how work is your identity or NOT. How is work like a title or a mask, and how is it a form of expression of who you are, what you value?

Notice when others around you are uncomfortable being associated with what they do.

Notice when they seem to *only* exist through what they do.

What does this tell you about YOU? About your relationship with what you do? Are you “sweeping streets as Shakespeare wrote”?

