



## Me, Myself, and I: A New Perspective on The Role of The Individual In the Workplace

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Teamwork is boring. Did I say that out loud? Yikes. I think I did. Well, now that I've let the proverbial cat out of the proverbial bag, I should probably elaborate. Sure, while it is very true that any organization exists and thrives on the strength, determination, and creativity of individuals, considering teamwork from the perspective of the whole workforce around you can be a challenging task. Its hard to accept the concept of working together when you can think of at least one co-worker who would need an instruction book to sharpen a pencil. Perhaps you recall exchanging words this morning with someone who has developed small talk into high art? You know who I mean, the special someone with whom you have worked for years but about whom you couldn't name even one genuine fact other than that they like coffee. Are these teammates? Sometimes people like this seem expendable. Maybe someone considers you expendable. A sobering thought, especially since you can sharpen pencils like a pro. Maybe you find yourself catering to people who require that you meet them on their levels. If so, its likely that you aren't getting what you need for yourself in your

work environment in order to feel successful. No wonder hearing about teamwork again and again makes you want to step in front of a bus. It doesn't apply only to you. It applies to everyone, and you. Well, lets for once make teamwork, and the process of success itself, about you and you alone.

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Any association or company thrives on the unique and vital contributions of individuals. It is the strengths and strivings of individuals and their unique visions, that make a team powerful. That's what makes a team effective. Its not the slogan that drives the team. Its not the color of the office or the view or downtown. Its about you, the individual. Unfortunately, individuality is the first thing to go in the workplace, whether we realize it or not. I expect you understand, but in case you don't or incase you disagree, take the

next week off from work. On the first day back, ride into the office on a skateboard. After arriving at your desk, dance to a song only you can hear for exactly four minutes, and then paint your computer purple. Needless to say, I would expect a stern reprimand from your boss, and not a raise. Still, we're being a little dramatic here. Its not often that a scenario like the one above would even pop into your head as something you would actually do. I wouldn't do it either. I would have painted the computer yellow. But that's besides the point. More on target is the idea that your inclinations and inspirations are often lost in the midst of trying to accomplish the tasks in your job description, let alone complete and fulfill the expectations of your boss and higher-ups, people for whom your real ambitions are often not their highest concern. That's where this article comes in.

The great psychoanalyst Otto Rank said at the turn of the last century (not the millennium century, but the one before that...you know, when everything was black and white) that "the new meaning of soul is creativity", and also that exploration of creativity would lead to a new type of person, one who

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would usher in a new civilization. What I am suggesting is a return to center of sorts: an individual restructuring of the self. Rank's point was that the individual's sense of self is derived from a process of self exploration. He felt so strongly about this that he suggested that we would redefine our society as a whole if we were more in touch with our creativity. The idea is that we find real value in those activities that allow us to express ourselves. We find meaning in feeling creative. And for the sake of this discussion, let's not fall into the trap of defining creativity in terms of artistry in a traditional sense. I make my living making people laugh and inspiring audience worldwide through presentations that deal with redefining what we think is impossible. But even that's not what I mean by creativity. Sorry, me. And I also don't mean that you need to think of yourself as a painter or sculptor or an actor. Creativity doesn't need to take the form of hiring a team of acrobats to do cartwheels through a board meeting, but rather seeing ourselves as part of an ongoing expansion of the self, into who we can possibly become as individuals. This process, of coming into our own and discovering what we can experience and expand into, is itself a creative process, and this is not only what Otto Rank was talking about, but what I am wanting us to keep

in mind as we read and think about today. The actively lived life, the life that is engaging with challenges and process, that is a life of creativity, upon which an entire new society could be based. But the good news is that we don't have to consider societal change today. We just have consider our day to day lives at work, and how creative meaning can become a part of that.

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Teamwork needs to be considered from a group perspective as well. I have no doubt of that. I have often been asked to lead seminars towards that end. But for today, let's consider the contribution that you could make to the team overall if you were to explore and expand upon yourself as a creative individual of value in a meaningful environment. Let's not consider the others on the team for a moment, but rather just ourselves.

I suggest starting by asking yourself a series of questions and discovering how you can apply the answers to the moments you spend at work, as well as the moments you spend at home. After all, if we need to work, and many of us do, let's discover how we make our experience at work more fulfilling, and in fact, how can we contribute in a more fulfilling way to that work experience overall. That to me is what teamwork is really about: individuals self-empowered and motivated to contribute to a shared experience and goal.

So tell me...no, rather...tell yourself: What is it about your life that gives you meaning? When are the moments in which you feel most alive and most connected to being alive? With what do you connect throughout your day (other than the clock ticking down until 5 PM) that makes you inspired? What moments fill you with a sense of meaning? Sound too new-age for you? Let that go. Feeling connected to life is at the core of any vital moment, and in fact any vital process. In fact, without a sense of connectedness to life, we are like the walking dead. That shouldn't sound too intense, especially if you've been in the wrong job before. You know what it feels like to go day to day not connected to your work. You end up wishing you could be anywhere

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other than where you are. That's actually my definition of anxiety: not being able to reconcile yourself with your surroundings and your experience of being alive in the moment.

The process of connecting with vitality is an active process: creativity demands energy and determination. For us, as we answer the question of what in life gives us the deepest sense of meaning, whether its our connection to our kids, our bowling team, our group of friends we meet on Friday night with whom we go dancing, or our reflective moments alone, we need to keep in mind the process that got us to that point. We didn't just have kids out of nowhere. We don't create friendships instantly either. And we don't, without some knowledge of struggle or hardship, reach the point in life where we can sit quietly. French author Blaise Pascal wrote, and I am paraphrasing here, that all the unhappiness of humankind comes from our inability to sit quietly alone. That said, it important to recognize the process it took to be able to do such a thing, or anything of value in our lives. The same is true for the workplace. We are not going to find meaning or a sense of purpose if we wait for it to come to us. You have to make it happen for yourself.

Unfortunately for all of us, this world is filled with the surreal, the unreal, the illusion. It is filled with distractions, both inside and outside of work that make connecting to a vital sense of self difficult: "thanks for coming in today", "would you like fries with that", "will that be all, miss", and on and on. Our brains are filled with empty words and lifeless experiences. I honestly believe that all of our lives, both personal and work-related, would benefit greatly by tossing something different into the mix. Again, I am not suggesting that we ride skateboards into work. I want you to continue having a job if you want one.

My suggestion, in order to connect more deeply with what makes you a vital part of any team, in fact, a vital participant in your own life, is to connect with your potential through rediscovering what means the most to you and then implementing that spark as fuel throughout your days. And don't limit yourself to just one spark. Find a number of them. Find a whole torch actually. Most importantly, don't let another minute go by without engaging in this process. Don't let yourself burn inside with the unrealized desire to be an achiever. If you do that, all the world will see is you smoldering. Get it out. Take chances with yourself and your creativity. Write more

intensely, and more expressively. Communicate more clearly. Know yourself more deeply. Talk to people. Talk to yourself. Laugh with people, even if it hurts to reach out to them. Laugh at yourself. Restraint can be a valuable tool to use as you face the world, but it feels like handcuffs if you let your potential slip by and restrain yourself from sharing that potential with the world, or more importantly first, with yourself.

If you want to be a vital part of any team, consider first your role on that team. Would you want to play with you? Would you want to look to your left and your right and be standing side by side with someone who brings to the workplace and to life what you do? If the answer is no, its time to redefine. If the answer is yes, its very much also time to redefine. Remember, stagnation is worse than death because it wastes life. Lets all challenge ourselves to redefine the impossible and to push ourselves in ways we never thought possible before.

As always, if you have questions or suggestions, or if you'd like to hear more about how my "Connect With Your Potential" presentation can inspire your group, contact me anytime at [impact@gregbennick.com](mailto:impact@gregbennick.com). I would be happy to hear from you.