

Find Your Drive

By CHRISTOPHER P. KRIESEN

When I was in college, I had a high paying summer job working on an assembly line for a company that made parts for cars. My co-workers were members of a union and had been on the job for over twenty years (or planned to be). I worked the second shift, 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Every day I went in, punched in, and sat in the place on the assembly line assigned by the shift supervisor. The line supervisor showed me how to operate the air press I would use to add the parts in a bucket next to me to the parts coming down to me on the line. I never knew what I was making. “Parts for cars” is about all I knew.

I did not love this job.

Daniel Pink wrote an excellent, best-selling book, *Drive, The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, published in 2009. I’m always surprised by how few people know the book when I mention it, so here’s a primer: We are motivated by autonomy, mastery, and purpose. When we control how we do work (autonomy), are excellent at the work we do (mastery), and the work we do holds meaning (purpose), we love what we do. The opposite—micromanaged, in over our heads, and no meaning—is a way to be miserable in the work we do.

My job on the assembly line was micromanaged and meaningless (but I did master the air press in a day).

Any work can become a version of my assembly line job. You can find yourself in



over your head, micromanaged, and have no sense of meaning in what you do.

About five years ago, I shifted my practice to ADR. I had Pink’s book very much on my mind. Work as a mediator and arbitrator lends itself to his principles.

People select me to mediate and arbitrate their cases, not the firm, because of how I handle the processes, so there is no one to manage me. Also, I set my schedule (not the courts), so if I need a week to do something else, I block it off and schedule no hearings.

I know what I am doing but am constantly learning to do it better. Unlike operating an air press, mediating and arbitrating require intuition, flexibility, and a feel for gestalt. You can’t master it in a day. It’s more of a lifelong journey.

Finally, my work holds meaning for me. I am giving (in arbitrations) or guiding (in mediations) people in conflict to fair resolutions.

I do more than ADR hearings. The autonomy part gives me flexibility to teach, mentor, and travel—last year I spent a month traveling in Nepal (did you know all Sherpas are all descendants of Tibetans), Bhutan (no meat is slaughtered there), and India (the Taj Mahal is a tomb for two people: an emperor’s wife—his favorite one—and the emperor himself, tacked on to the side of her tomb). I am 56

and have no plans to retire.

You don’t need to do ADR work to love your legal work (and not everyone would love ADR work). You can find love in any practice area. I have asked several lawyers over 65 when they plan to retire.

“Never—I love it!”

Most of them own their firms, which are mostly small firms. And I know of a group of lawyers over 80 who have no plans to retire. What do they all have in common?

My bet is that each of these lawyers has autonomy, mastery, and purpose in their professional lives.

Pink’s rubric is a powerful measure of whether the work you do is fulfilling. You might have a vague sense something is missing, but you don’t have time to think about it because someone is telling you how to work, which you don’t understand, and you are not sure why the work is so important. You might feel like I did that summer pressing parts together.

Or, maybe you love your work—if so, look at Pink’s elements and see how present they are. May you live long enough to join that octogenarian club. ■



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