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Work it Out!

How to Find the Work You Always Wanted
in a Shifting Jobs Market

Written by Des McCabe

Published by Hay House UK

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Work It Out!

HOW TO FIND THE WORK
YOU ALWAYS WANTED IN A
SHIFTING JOBS MARKET

DES McCABE



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To Ma and Da, with love

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Contents

Introduction	1
1 The New World of Work	7
2 The Work It Out! Philosophy	27
3 Work It Out! Workpieces	55
4 Creating Your Own Workpieces	83
5 Practical Work It Out! Skills	107
6 Moving Forward	127
7 The Work It Out! Extended Family	141
8 Work It Out! for All Ages	153
9 Work It Out! and HR	169
10 An End to Unemployment	187
11 Work It Out!: A Way of Life	197
Index	205

Introduction

Work It Out! is a new way to think about your working life.

Looking at rising unemployment, the daily toll of redundancies and the squeeze on pensions, it's not hard to spot that the traditional model of working full time for a single employer, or starting a business and being self-employed full time, is no longer a realistic option for most of us. Work It Out! is the alternative to devoting all your time to one job – often to the exclusion of other interests. The Work It Out! approach helps you to build a career out of individual 'pieces' of work, put together and integrated with the other aspects of your life.

Work It Out! is about far more than what you do to earn money. It provides a template for making work fit into your life, providing you with an income and financial security but also accommodating the needs of family and relationships, while also satisfying your personal ambitions.

Along with changing views of how work should be structured, Work It Out! addresses how we expect to be compensated. Of course we still need income, but the Work It Out! network makes it possible to barter skills and time, to be able to do volunteer work and to work at cost, for example as an investment in a joint piece of work.

Such 'workpieces' can include:

- paid or unpaid freelancing
- part-time working

- looking after children
- selling online
- temporary contracts
- caring for a sick friend or relative
- learning a new skill
- providing a service
- volunteering
- starting up new projects
- testing new business ideas.

You no longer have to sit and wait for someone to offer you a job. Work It Out! enables you to create your own set of workpieces and to change and adapt these over time.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET, POLICY-MAKERS AND EDUCATION

The Internet is playing a central role in the end of the traditional work model as we know it – but it also underpins the new world of work, enabling us to communicate and collaborate with fellow Work It Out! workers anywhere in the world, to create and fulfil workpieces.

Where once we cooperated with colleagues in the workplace, we can now use social networking sites to make connections, scope projects, find clients and deliver the goods.

Work It Out! also has important implications for policy-makers. In particular there is a need for governments to shift from supporting companies as the main tool of job-creation and start to invest in supporting individuals.

A good education will still help you to find work, but now education must encompass the skills of workpiece creation and collaboration – skills that last a lifetime.

THE END OF WORK AS WE KNOW IT

All this talk about ‘the end of work’ may seem gloomy – after all, although there is a recession at the moment, won’t it end at some point? Well, yes, but not before employers have glimpsed the flexibility, lower cost base

and productivity gains they can derive when they no longer package up the work that needs to be done into full-time jobs. Given the support of a Work It Out! network, employers will be able to establish exactly the skills and amount of time that they need, when they need it. It's a totally new model of human resourcing – featuring lots of very focused tasks rather than a few jobs, and creating opportunities for Work It Out! workers.

In this scenario, unemployment schemes are no longer just about keeping people off the unemployment register. Work It Out! initiatives for those who are out of work can actually offer real hope, encouragement and practical help. They are a springboard for creating and supporting new careers. A community project with a Government allowance can become an individual's first workpiece, allowing him or her to build from there.

Work It Out! is already a reality. Given round-the-clock Internet access from mobiles and computers, it is now possible to manage all our different activities seamlessly from home, in transit or from an office. The Internet provides the platform and resources to plan, develop and execute workpieces, and for each of us to become self-sufficient.

CHAPTER 1

The New World of Work

The old realities of the job market have been swept aside by globalization, outsourcing, the Internet and, now, the economic crisis. This is putting a new spin on the question, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' Even worse, the assumption that if you study hard you will get the job of your dreams is no longer guaranteed. *Work It Out!* is a template for putting together a collection of 'workpieces' – some paid, some not – to provide financial independence while improving the balance between your work and the other aspects of your life.

WHAT WOULD YOU REALLY LIKE TO DO?

'I've just had the worst day of my life,' was the answer I got when I asked the upset young woman sitting across from me if she was OK. It was the last train from Belfast to Dublin and Mary was on her way to a job interview the next day. 'I've just failed my driving test and got yet another "No" to a job application. Who waits until they're 24 to take their driving test?' she said, chastising herself. 'I'm probably wasting my time going to Dublin for this interview.'

Mary is a Marketing graduate who should know all about promoting herself in an increasingly competitive job market. This was more than a 'bad day'. She was weary from all the rejections and disappointments, and clearly in no frame of mind to impress a potential employer. For Mary the upcoming interview was not an opportunity to display her talents, but rather another painful step in the process of trying to find a job. Financial pressures had forced her back home to live with her parents in Belfast, and Mary was desperate to get work.

It was when I asked her, ‘What would you really like to do?’ that Mary looked up and her eyes engaged me properly for the first time. With a nervous half-smile, she told me that her ambition was to open a clothes shop for older women. Mary knew exactly what the shop would sell and where it would be located. We chatted about how she could do something now to start to make this a reality – find out what older women in the area really wanted, identify gaps in the market, assess the competition, identify potential designers and suppliers, and so on. Basic research and creating links were two priorities if Mary was ever going to make her dream a reality. Her marketing brain started to kick in and she was buzzing.

It seems to me there is little point in dreams and ambition if we never act on them. What was Mary waiting for? She could continue to apply for jobs and re-sit her driving test – but now she had a project that needed some proper attention. Within a few minutes her whole attitude had changed. She saw she could take control of her own situation. Rather than being a passive cog, Mary could envision actions she could take to move forward.

The following morning I told this story to an enterprise specialist with responsibility for helping people to start up their own business. When I mentioned how asking Mary, ‘What would you really like to do?’ had provided such a spark, his expression changed. It was clear that no one had ever asked *him* the question,

either. His body language told me that whatever he wanted to do, it certainly wasn't a government role trying to encourage people into self-employment. And he told me that many of his clients felt forced into going it alone because the job market had dried up. 'Reluctant entrepreneurs' is what he called them.

Our current world of work allows for only two options: sending out CVs in the hope of landing that elusive job, or starting your own business. Yes, there are courses to take and new qualifications to acquire, but that merely means being better qualified to compete in the same job market (and remember, too, it can be possible to be overqualified).

Now a third route is emerging; one that charts a different path. It's called Work It Out! and it involves developing different, discrete pieces of work and linking these together.

Before embarking on this path it is important to be able to answer the question, 'What would you really like to do? This provides the first step in the direction you should take. So ask yourself:

What would I really like to do?

1.
2.
3.

Keep these thoughts in mind as you are reading this book and thinking about your situation. As you get more ideas, write them down.

Thinking about what you want to do is the first step. Exactly how to go about achieving this – building income, developing a collection of workpieces and creating a sustainable career – is what this book is about.

STUDY HARD AND GET A GOOD JOB?

We have been brought up to believe studying hard at school will ensure we get a good job. We'll earn enough for a nice lifestyle and a pension when we retire.

Our conditioning, then, is all about being best equipped to find employment – to be able to compete for the best jobs. We are not taught how to turn our skills and abilities into income in other ways – how to create a business, for example, or how to become self-sufficient.

But the workplace is so different now. A good education no longer guarantees a good job or long-term security. Just look at the massed ranks of recent graduates who cannot find work. We can no longer say to our children, 'Study hard and you'll get a good job.' Traditional qualifications are no longer enough. New skills are required to survive – and thrive – in the new world of work.

That's not to say that I feel that an education is not important – quite the reverse. I think education is special for three reasons:

1. It gives us the opportunity to learn about a subject.
2. It gives us the opportunity to receive a qualification.
3. It provides us with the opportunity for personal growth which we experience as individuals studying and socializing with others – such as forming and sustaining relationships, learning to live on our own, etc. As well as the particular headline skill (e.g. bricklayer, architect, etc.), education encourages and enables us to develop a broad skill set – learning to create new concepts or ideas, develop our creativity, address issues, learn to work through tasks systematically, meet deadlines, achieve outcomes, etc.

Unfortunately we rarely recognize these core attributes in ourselves, but they are the building blocks for succeeding with Work It Out! They are never out of date. So we need to look beyond the old job titles or the names of the formal qualifications and recognize all the skills we have that will enable us to create, build and grow our workpieces.

THE OLD WORLD OF WORK

With recession, the hardship of unemployment has become a reality for many. We are encouraged to think in terms of filling in endless application forms to find a new job. But traditional job-search techniques are proving less and less effective as jobs become fewer and fewer.

Some people use the spur of unemployment to set up a business; others learn new skills. Re-skilling or re-training may make for a weightier CV, but moving from position 374 to position 178 in a league of 500 applicants is no comfort if there is only one vacancy.

HOW GOVERNMENTS USED TO CREATE JOBS

In previous recessions, governments would dust down job-creation strategies and put money into a number of measures – but how useful are these today?

- **Incentives for employers to create new jobs.**
This may have been effective in the past, but now the lack of demand for products and services means employers don't have the work and can't afford to employ people, no matter how big the incentive.

- **Attracting inward investment.** In the past, tax breaks and myriad other inducements were deployed to attract international companies to set up local operations. But now, manufacturing has flown to low-cost economies and broadband networks make it possible to set up offshore services, ranging from IT to architectural design, anywhere in the world.
- **New business creation.** There are many and varied programmes that aim to provide the spark for would-be entrepreneurs. But too often this is presented as a last resort. The underlying message is not that self-employment is valued, but rather, since you can't get a job why not start a business?
- **Public sector finance** – infrastructure projects for building schools, hospitals, roads, and so on. This may be a way to maintain employment in a recession, but it is not an employment tap that can be turned on at will, especially when public finances are tight.

Beyond job-creation, there are often measures used by governments to move people off the jobless count, such as:

- **Re-training programmes** to improve an individual's ability to compete in the labour market, and/or to provide skills that are in short supply

- **Job-creation/social employment schemes** for the long-term unemployed.

But the world has moved on since the last recession, and these old methods of creating jobs are no longer suited to the task. Globalization, the Internet and changing work patterns have remade the job-creation landscape. A new approach is needed to address and take advantage of this new reality.

There are fewer jobs and the competition is greater than before. Global markets mean that everything is interconnected. Demand has fallen worldwide, and companies can't expand if there is no market for their products and services. There is far greater competition to fill any vacancies, and wages are falling. Skills-training was formerly seen as one way to make candidates more attractive to employers, but what will we re-train people for now?

The external market has little to offer the individual in the traditional job sense. And it is no longer possible to rely on governments to guarantee meaningful long-term work. Politicians have as little idea as the rest of us where the economy is going, and coherent strategies to create jobs in the short term will not be forthcoming, for some of the reasons outlined above.

So what do we do? People cannot sit back and wait two or three years for the economic cycle to turn up and hope that employment grows, too. Remember,

there was initially a ‘jobless recovery’ after the last recession. We need to create alternative work options, for everyone in society.

THE RELUCTANT ENTREPRENEUR

What is the message going out to those who cannot find a job? In truth, there are very few palatable alternatives to being in employment. One is to start a business – but it’s only a small percentage that see themselves doing this. In any case, there is little encouragement to those willing to take the risk. There’s also the thought, as mentioned, that this is a bit of a last resort. It’s seen as a thing to do in desperation, if you can’t get ‘a proper job’.

From the fruitless search for a job to the half-hearted idea for a new business that gets nowhere, it’s no wonder that many lose their momentum and end up checking out daytime television and being forced to rely on benefits. Whatever the rhetoric about ‘benefits scroungers’, this is truly a situation few want to be in.

Despite, or maybe because of, the best efforts of television shows such as *The Apprentice* and *Dragons’ Den*, entrepreneurship retains its ‘wide boy’, ‘used car salesman’ or ‘Del boy’ reputation. Working from home, or for yourself, should be the ultimate perk, but homeworking is frequently seen as not a ‘real’ job. How can you have a proper job if you don’t have an employer, and what is it exactly that you do all day?

So, entrepreneurship has a negative image, and going it alone is usually seen as a second choice to mainstream employment.

Of course, there are some positive role models, people like James Dyson, Richard Branson or Stelios Haji-loannou, with the dynamism, the great ideas and the build-an-empire mentality to succeed. We desperately need to recognize the achievements of these individuals. But for the vast majority of us, the scale of their achievements is itself daunting. Rather than yearning to be corporate moguls, most of us merely want a solid income and an opportunity to do something useful with our lives. And, given that work takes up at least 37 hours of our week, wouldn't it be great to do work we believe in, which helps others, is fun and feels as if it's worth getting out of bed for?

JOBS AND WORK ARE NOT THE SAME THING

Job-seeking is among the many facets of modern life that have been transformed by the Internet. On the one hand, this is empowering. Rather than looking for adverts in the local paper, it is possible to browse hundreds of recruitment websites, send off CVs on spec to companies we think we would like to work for, and list our credentials in the hope of making a connection or an impression on an employer.

The problem is that all of this is *passive*. Sending out a CV involves no more than a few keystrokes on the computer. Doing a job-search via the Internet fills up time and makes us feel we are doing something useful, but it takes an increasingly heavy toll. When there are so few jobs around, the ability to be busy sending off CVs by email or filling in online forms for job websites can easily lead to increased frustration and lowered self-esteem when we get little feedback. It makes it harder to resist the corrosive thought, 'If I were any good I would have got a job by now.' And it is easy to slip into the self-blame game: 'I'm not good enough' or 'I'm a loser.'

Losing a job means that the professional and personal connections you've built up over years of being employed are suddenly taken away at the time when you need them most. The unemployed are isolated from their major support system. Not only have the ground rules changed but so too have the external environment and a major part of your personal support network. This adds to the strains and pressures brought on by unemployment.

Those facing up to the bleak reality of being unemployed need a new network to provide the positive influences that are required to rebuild confidence and show there are viable options and ways forward, easing the migration from the world of full-time employment to that of *work*.

The paradox here is that, while *jobs* may be scarce, there remains an abundance of *work*. Once we can appreciate this insight, all we need is help and advice to

identify and gather the workpieces that complement and enhance our individual competencies and experience.

AFRICA AND THE ECONOMIC LADDER

In his book *The End of Poverty: How we can make it happen in our lifetime*, the renowned Harvard Economics professor and campaigner against extreme poverty, Jeffrey Sachs, explains the wealth-creation model for families in dire poverty in Africa. These families don't look for jobs. They look for ways to get food or earn money. A few hens or a couple of goats provides food for the family, and gives them eggs or milk to barter. These are the first rungs of the economic ladder. Families tend their meagre assets (hens and goats) and look for opportunities to build on them, swapping goods and exchanging skills and knowledge with others, creating additional ways to build income. This may involve getting together to make clothes, crafts or foodstuffs. This might then become a community enterprise or a business that is capable of providing skills-training for others, thus promoting and encouraging self-sufficiency and building wealth in poor communities.

BEYOND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Faustian pact of the Industrial Revolution saw people move from making a living on the land, where

they were in control of their own resources, to being paid more money but losing control to their new employers.

An intimate relationship with the land and nature, and the struggle to survive in often very difficult circumstances, was replaced with a relationship with an employer in a mill or factory. The search for income sources and trading opportunities was replaced by a wage for producing so much, or for working 12-hour shifts.

This also heralded the move from the world of the artisan or craftsman, whose livelihood depended on the quality and range of his or her skills, to the era of mass production, a prime objective of which was to eliminate the need for individual skills.

The centuries-long struggle to build one's own economic ladder was replaced by the factory system, which provided work for the many. There was no need to search for pieces of work; it now came packaged as a job, complete with an employer.

The sole remaining vestige of those decades of scavenging for survival in the fields of yesteryear has become the sanitized and one-dimensional approach to creating wealth known as *entrepreneurship*.

JOBS VS EMPLOYMENT – THE ALL-OR-NOTHING APPROACH

Now we have a society where the skills of individual wealth-creation are long gone. We have much to learn

from Africa. In our post-industrial age where there are no longer any jobs for life, and where the option of moving from one full-time job to another is increasingly constrained, these skills are needed once more. But, as yet, efforts to rebuild such skills are at the margins. As mentioned, self-employment is often seen as a last resort, and if we are unemployed and manage to find a small piece of work around which to start building our economic ladder, we are penalized financially: benefits are withdrawn or reduced – sending out a clear message that this kind of individual effort is *not* to be encouraged.

This is wrong. Having a job has become the be-all and end-all. If you are claiming unemployment benefits it is necessary to demonstrate that you are applying for jobs and are available for work at all times. This is, however, an outdated model that was engendered and is kept alive by the traditional antipathy towards ‘dole cheats’.

FINDING THE WORK YOU DREAM OF

This is not to condone fraudulent benefit claims. But clearly, a new approach is needed for supporting people whilst they establish a number of income streams that will, in the end provide long-term security. The social security system should enable people to be in control of their lives, to face down the disempowerment unleashed by being unemployed. It takes time to find the kind of

work that is of real interest, is rewarding, brings with it a better work–life balance and offers security for the future.

The Work It Out! approach addresses these issues, challenges and opportunities. It is relevant to the unemployed, to those approaching retirement – and, most of all, to those in work.

But surely the employed are the safe, lucky ones? Not really. Those who are unemployed or approaching an impecunious retirement have the spur they need to do something. They need income and are keen to learn and begin the process of building a future in which they have control. As a result, they will give every good idea due consideration.

Those currently in ‘secure’ employment will face a very different world when they leave, or lose their job. Work now has a new context, and our understanding of what that means is unfolding. At one end of the scale, a completely different way of financing retirement is emerging. At the other end of the scale, the Internet is transforming education and skills, leaving our schools struggling to catch up.

This book is the starting point and template for approaching, understanding and thinking about this new world of work. It will act as a primer for creating the sort of life you want, showing you how to generate the income, build the resources and make the friendships you need to sustain and support you.

It is far removed from the economic model of selling your time to an employer in return for short-

term income security. You will find new ways to look at things that you have taken for granted. You will gain an understanding of how to unravel your dependence on the traditional employee–employer relationship.

Taking greater responsibility for our own future is daunting, and requires us to learn new skills. The changes also call on us to help those who are less able, and to reaffirm the right to work, contribute and be rewarded and recognized for doing so.

TOP 12 REASONS FOR USING WORK IT OUT!

1. I need to make some money.
2. I'm out of work and need to rebuild my career.
3. I'm in a rut.
4. I want to spend more time with my family.
5. I'm not really happy in my current job.
6. I want to give something back.
7. I'm looking for a fresh challenge.
8. I want to have more control over my life.
9. I want to sort out my life and have a clear direction.
10. I want to enjoy getting up in the morning.

11. I want a healthier work–life balance.

12. I want a real alternative to the rat race.

The world of work is being transformed. It isn't 'full-time job' – it's Work It Out! Make it work for you.