

# FROM MILLENNIALS WITH LOVE

YOUNG PROFESSIONAL'S STORIES ON THEIR  
EXPERIENCE OF WORK

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Collective Work Coordinated By Ann-Victoire Pincé

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## **Preface: A few words of introduction**

*'Man(kind) is the only true source of wealth'*

Jean Bodin (1577)

Nineteen-eighty-nine was a busy year for my mother. Joining a company she had to quickly get up to speed on a topic that she did not master at the time. For a few weeks, she brought work at home and spent her evenings teaching herself the basics of the industry she had just entered: information technologies. In particular, she had to better understand the language engineers used for coding, which required using her personal computer. What that meant was that when my mother had to bring work home, she literally brought “work” home and that was hard work in itself. Remember those ancient times when personal computers were impossible to carry around, at the risk of breaking your back, and if you wanted to take on that risk, they could hardly fit into your car.

I am currently working on a computer that is just over 1 kilogram and I find it heavy already, but back in the eighties, computers were substantially different in terms of size and weight. They were just not as mobile. The entire family needed to be involved in

helping the transition from work to home: one to carry the 12” screen – which of course had a frame just as large around it; another one taking care of the tower, a third one for the keyboard, mouse and other accessories and cables. If your arms were long enough to carry your computer screen alone – mine never were – you would size this massive screen, due to the weight and lack of visibility, were forced into making very small steps, almost jumping left then right, and basically looked like an old grumpy bear. No wonder why at the time, people avoided bringing work at home too frequently.

When I think back about what I have observed and stories I have heard of my parents’ working lives, I realise the amplitude of the revolution we have undergone, or I should say, are undergoing. And this is what lies at the heart of the stories we would like to share in this book.

This book is a collection of personal stories about how young professionals see and experience work, reflecting the realities in which we evolve today. Those stories touch on topics such as the challenges and opportunities of starting to work at the beginning of one of the most important economic crises of the last hundred years; what do we want, as young professionals, from our work, our manager, our CEO and organisation; how do we think about what it means to work; or how do we envisage the world of work evolving tomorrow.

We do not pretend to give any general truths, but rather personal perspectives. Our only interest here is to share our stories, hoping to open up a conversation. Although some of the contributors of this book are academics, the narratives you will find are little grounded in research. Rather, they are grounded in experience.

The book has developed as a conversation itself, which is reflected in its structure. It is organised around five narratives, each focusing on different aspects of the working experience of the contributors. After completion, each narrative was shared with another person involved in this initiative, and discussed during a one on one interview. Narratives and interviewees were matched based on their interests, experiences and background. Those interviews sometimes went a little off topic and became a platform to discuss work experiences at large, yet we have decided to keep them verbatim and to amend them as little as possible.

We then have in total ten individuals who contributed to this journey, constituting a fairly diverse group. Contributors are either living or coming from the following countries: Chili, China, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK. However, we have more in common than what this cultural diversity seems to suggest. We are all organisational psychologists who studied at the same school, enrolled in the same program. We went to the London School of Economics, following the MSc of Organisational and Social Psychology, and graduated between 2007 and 2008. More importantly, we share a passion for organisational life and a perspective on how to look at it.

We have another point in common that is important to note: we are very lucky people. How to describe the opportunity of education differently? And this is probably where our personal accounts of organisational life are biased and raise primarily the questions of the “lucky” ones, or in other words, those who have a choice. This brings some partiality in our stories and it seems

imperative to me to stress that what we discuss here might not reflect the reality of the majority.

Now, how the idea of this book has come about? Well, the idea of this book finds its origins in my own experience of acculturation. Despite the fact that I was born and raised in France, from the age of four till I reached eighteen, I went to a German school and left the country to finish my studies abroad in an Anglo-Saxon environment where I ended up staying for six full years. Over the years, being exposed to different cultures, ways of being, thinking and relating to one another, I have felt less and less French, and increasingly a citizen of the world. I experienced and integrated Anglo-Saxon ways of working, management style and working life patterns. When moving back to France a couple of years ago, I started reading about French organisations and the local business culture. One of the books I read at the time “shocked” me culturally speaking. Reading through this book hurt my ideals, my vision of the world and my hopes for organizational life. This book was negative, portrayed organizations as fully dysfunctional and allowed for no improvement perspectives. What was so surprising to me was not so much the message – the author, of course, had full rights to express his views of organizations – but the impact of this message. The book was granted awards, rated highly by the press as well as by readers. The pathos of the depressed organization seemed to resonate with readers. It did not with me. Frustration levels rising with every line read, I started discussing the matter with a few people around me. It emerged from those initial exchanges that what was described in that book may have been particularly anchored in the realities of the French context, and that a more international account would bring a different light. It also appeared that my perspective may have been biased by the

specificities of the generation I belong to, the so-called Generation Y, bringing a more optimistic view of organisations.

This initiative then started in reaction to that book, with the desire of giving a positive account of organisational life. Reality is of course more complicated than that, so, we ended up with stories about our experiences of work, both positive and negative.

I am now going to briefly describe how the book is structured, and in order to better understand the cultural diversity of the accounts provided in this document, I will highlight where our contributors come from.

In the first part, Patrizia Hoyer shares her journey in finding her balance between money, magic and meaning at work, first as a management consultant, and then as a doctorate student. Patrizia lives in Switzerland but is actually German and has Bangladeshi origins. Her narrative was then discussed with Johannes Froehlich, another German citizen, who has been living in the UK for over ten years.

Our second part takes us to the South American continent. Eidi Cruz, who is from Mexico and lives in between Mexico City and London, explores the essence and definition of how work may be understood, and anchors her narrative in her geographical and historical contexts. The interview to discuss this narrative was conducted with Manuel Riveros, who is Chilean and has been living in Europe for numerous years.

The third part our journey continues to India. In her narrative, Toru Jhaveri discusses her search for appropriate levels of passion at work and the importance to put work into perspective,



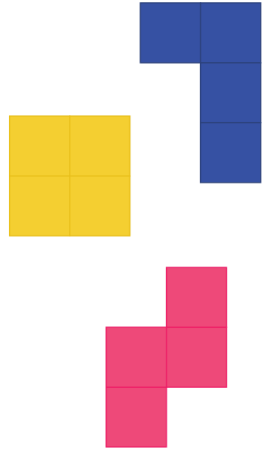
understanding work as one part of life. She then discussed her narrative with Daphna Salomon, who is Israeli and living in London.

In a four part, Jen Lu details what it feels like to grow and work as a Gen Y professional, bringing particular light on the fact that this generation started working at the start of a major economic crisis. Although living in London for a few years now, Jen is Dutch and has Chinese roots. Asa, who lives in Iceland, was then interviewed to further discuss the generational focus on work.

In a final part, I share my experience of finding the right professional fit, enabling me to fully engage in my work. As described above, I am now back in France, my home country, after having spent a few years abroad. I then discussed my account with Greg Kuzdenyi who lives in London and has Hungarian origins.

In the Postface, we conclude with a few words to recap on what appears to come through the different narratives and interviews, and hope to open up a conversation with other young professionals, HR practitioners, business leaders and those generally interested in the topic. One of our main focuses in this initiative is to provide a starting point to exchange on what the world of work feels like today, and we would very much welcome your perspective on the matter. If you wanted to join the conversation, don't hesitate to visit our website: [www.frommillennialswithlove.com](http://www.frommillennialswithlove.com)

AVP



# **PART1:**

# **Money, Magic & Meaning**

## **In Search of Money, Magic and Meaning**

Patrizia Hoyer

*When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother:  
“What will I be? Will I be pretty? Will I be rich?”*

*Here’s what she said to me:  
“Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be.  
The future’s not ours to see, que sera sera,  
what will be, will be.”*

Ray Evans & Jay Livingston, 1956

### **A few words on Patrizia**

Patrizia is currently a post-doctoral scholar at the Research Institute of Organisational Psychology at the University of Saint Gallen, Switzerland. Her research interests include discursive and narrative approaches to identity, elite working contexts, power and resistance, local affiliations along global career paths, cosmopolitan theory, creativity and social/organisational change. Patrizia holds a PhD in Organisational Studies and Cultural Theory from the University of Saint Gallen. Prior to her doctoral work, she worked as a strategy consultant for Bain & Company in Zurich.

Patrizia bring along a diversity of cross-cultural experiences. This includes her Bangladeshi family background, her upbringing and

school education in Germany, her university studies in London, as well as her work and academic experience in Switzerland. This wealth of diverse experiences has increased her appreciation of difference and keeps her hungry for new explorations.

Some years ago I received two gifts from a fellow student of mine at the LSE, a lady in her late forties (even though you would never have guessed), who has had 25 years of work experience as an independent organizational change consultant. The first gift I received from her is one beyond price and measure, namely the gift of friendship. The second one appears to be just as long-lasting as the first, a piece of wisdom on professional life that I have ironically decided to prove wrong. By sharing with you this piece of wisdom I hope to better explain what I personally look for, both in my aspired academic career as well as in my research as organizational psychologist.

“When looking for a job”, my friend explained, “it is close to impossible to find something which combines those three components that matter most: Money, magic and meaning. If you are lucky”, she asserted, “you will find a job that gives you two. A lot of people survive on even just one.” If you do the little math, you will find this to be a simple truth. Even though I don’t want to make too simplistic a categorization of jobs, I do feel that giving examples brings life to the discussion.

Let’s start with the notion of meaning. To my understanding a job that is (above all) meaningful is one that allows you to be of help to

others, to make a change, to have an impact. Examples of these kinds of professions would be nurses, firemen or people working for NGOs. The notion of magic in professional life is probably more difficult to be put in words. Magic to me means waking up in the morning – happily – and just knowing, whilst leaving the house to go to work, that you are “on the right way”. When you have found magic in your work – and if you have please count yourself lucky – you do not consider it a service that you render to an employer, but rather your satisfaction comes from the work or its outcome itself. Working with children can for example be magical, as children, without even knowing, give so much back to the person who takes loving care. Or artists - isn't their work all about magic? Don't they get mystified, absorbed, completely carried away in their assignments?

This sounds so ideal, I would argue, that in line with some managerial literature on job motivation one could not care less about money. And indeed, most of this research on motivation focuses on the aspects of good leadership and intrinsic rewards in the realm of magic and meaning, downplaying the role of money altogether. As a proponent of extrinsic rewards, however, I would argue that this “money, no thanks!-attitude” is rather outdated. More than ever, university graduates compare remuneration packages and flock to those jobs that pay best, happily agreeing to “sell their souls”. And despite greatest moral accusations and finger pointing, managers insist on large bonuses; a behaviour that has not changed significantly even in times of financial crises.

Given the unprecedented financial crisis that we have just experienced, however, I have to admit that this entire debate around job characteristics almost feels misplaced, signifying a

'luxury problem' in times of large scale downsizing, companies filing for bankruptcy and emerging waves of suicide. And without wanting to disrespect these developments that I have been following with great concern, I would still like to hold on to my seemingly unshakable optimism with regard to the next 35 years of my prospective working life.

In my optimistic vision I will eventually end my career with a strike of perfect balance between the three ingredients for a happy life. And as I keep this grand final in mind, on my current journey I am already in negotiation with myself and my work environment to constantly search for, play around with and where possible engage in some optimizing activity regarding this money, magic and meaning triad.

To give you a very short version of the status quo: Yes, I have found magic in the work that I do...It even feels so magical sometimes that I can hardly view it as "real work" so that money (which of course I need!) simply becomes a nice add-on. I have thought for long, very naively to be fair, that money is not an issue in academia, that it is just a matter of "not too good" and "not too bad", just fine to make a happy living. Now I have learned that at universities, just like in other organizations, resources in forms of university budgets and external project-funding are limited and have to be heavily fought for. While this is not yet an issue for me personally, it is one that I am also observing with unease and alarm.

So when looking at my "money, magic, meaning"—balance I would say that money is just fine (particularly since time for writing is so scarce in academia that it is "worth more" than the extra money I could get for additional teaching), magic has exceeded all my

expectations while meaning-making will continue to be an on-going endeavour.

A former “money, magic meaning”-balance that I have encountered in my previous job marks the diametrical opposite to what I am experiencing now: In management consulting there is plenty of money, no magic in the work itself (as it is mainly number crunching, especially at the bottom of the pyramid), and the issue of meaning remains controversial, even though according to Furusten (2009<sup>1</sup>) ‘management consulting is of more use for organizations at least than management science is’ (p. 265). I will not follow up on this claim by Furusten, but instead I will give my own personal account of how I experienced these working contexts of management consulting and academia and let you decide for yourself on their potential for providing money, magic and meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> Furusten, S. (2009). Management consultants as improvising agents of stability. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 25(3), 264–274.



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Those stories touch on topics such as the challenges and opportunities of starting to work at a time of important economic turmoil; what we wish, as young professionals, to get from our work, our manager, our CEO and organisation; how do we think about what it means to work; or how do we envisage the world of work evolving tomorrow.



We do not pretend to give any general truths, but rather personal perspectives. Those narratives are very much grounded in experience. Our hope is that, in sharing our stories, we may open-up a conversation and help the advancement of our collective thinking about the world of work today.