

The journey to purpose: Navigating career and calling

By **Acharya Prashant** - March 16, 2025



Young adults, ready to begin a career after college, often face a dilemma regarding the right work and its financial implications. Society tells them to fulfill their social responsibilities. If the youth talk of purpose, they are typically advised to first earn money and then – after they have accumulated enough wealth – pursue abstractions like purpose and fulfillment. Though today’s youth are more informed and resourceful than previous generations, yet many experience an inherent fear of falling behind their peers if they follow their calling rather than traditional career paths. This raises a critical question: How can one remain committed to a meaningful pursuit while also navigating financial and professional growth?

The traditional view of first securing financial stability and later pursuing one’s calling overlooks something very important: the evolving nature of the self. The underlying assumption is that one’s mindset and decisions will remain unchanged over time. But the self is not static; it is constantly changing, deeply influenced by experiences, environment, and the passage of time. Are your values and ambitions today the same as they were a decade back? If not, why do we assume they will remain constant for another 20 years?

Our experiences constantly reshape us, making it risky to postpone our purpose for too long. Many long-term plans go unfulfilled for this reason. An aspiring writer who postpones his craft till the age of sixty might find that at sixty, their passion has faded or that circumstances no longer support such pursuits. The longer we delay our true calling, the more we risk losing our connection to it.

Also, once you indulge in any work, it’s not just your financial status that changes—your identity and aspirations evolve as well. Many believe they can work in an organization temporarily to gain experience, earn money, and then exit unscathed to pursue their true

purpose. However, this interaction goes both ways. While individuals seek professional growth, companies, in turn, shape and change their employees' priorities, perspectives, and sense of purpose. A few months into a job, one may find their initial vision shifting, either due to workplace culture, financial incentives, or changing personal circumstances. The assumption that one can simply 'play the system' without being influenced by it is misleading. This reality necessitates a careful evaluation of whether the career paths we choose align with our deeper aspirations.

Life does offer us moments to explore and experiment with our interests, but social conditioning often takes over, causing us to miss these opportunities. For example, students often choose elective courses based on resume value rather than personal interest, despite universities offering a wide range of subjects— from literature and arts to history, communication, and strategy.

A young person must ask herself: If the course had no impact on my resume, which subject would I genuinely want to study? Practical knowledge—such as management and technical skills—is essential, but true satisfaction stems from commitment to one's calling rather than mere expertise in a particular field. Further these skills should serve as instruments of empowerment, enabling individuals to execute their vision rather than dictating what that vision should be.

Moreover, while pursuing one's aspirations, a major challenge young adults face is the pressure of comparison. Many struggle to remain committed to their calling when peers seem to be excelling financially. The key to overcoming this is immersion—deep involvement in clarity-driven meaningful work can absorb one so completely that external distractions fade in significance. The measure of success shifts from financial status to the intrinsic value of one's work and its impact.

To discover one's true calling, it is essential to develop a deep understanding of the self. External conditions will always remain uncertain, but cultivating self-awareness and clarity can provide the strength needed to stay the course.

What is work? Exploring its true purpose

More than just a means of generating wealth or fulfilling deep inspirations, work serves a deeper purpose. If we reflect deeply, we'll realize that work is something we do to heal ourselves. Had we been truly at peace, there would be no need for work. Had you been completely alright, there would have been no need for work. Then, we could have just said that all our activity is simply play—play with no purpose at all. And that purposeless play would have been very beautiful, because nothing would need to be done. But look at our situation: we need to do a lot because we are not alright.

That's how you have to make your choice of work— not necessarily something that gives you the maximum money. In the process of healing you, work gives you money as well, money still cannot be the central thing. It can be an enabler, or it can be a by-product. Money is not a human being's central problem; therefore, money cannot be his central motive either. You have to know your central problem, and that will decide the work you do.

Also, we need to be aware that we neither live a life that tries to escape work, nor do we live a life that uses work as a medium for psychological aggrandizement.

Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita is precluding both possibilities. He is saying, "It is not possible for you to not fight. And the second thing is, if you think that you have a right to the fruit of your fight, then you are again mistaken."

So, through the process of self-observation, just pick the right cause for yourself. And fight! Fight hard and do not worry about the result. Just say, "I did what I had to."

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