

Creative Seeds of Hope

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Commentary

A few months after graduating from college, my friend and I were in need of some cash so we took short-term jobs sweeping streets. We were hired for \$5 an hour (the equivalent of \$36 an hour in 2024). After the road crews had finished rebuilding the road, we were assigned to sweep the dirt off the roads with a hand broom. No fancy machines.

I quit after a half a day. While the work was not physically hard, I was bored to death.

How do you feel about your job? Does it bore you? Do you hate it? Or do you enjoy what you do?

For Dr. King it comes down to attitude. No matter what our job is, we should do it to the best of our ability. We should commit to being the best at what we do. It does not matter if you are a lawyer, a doctor, a garbage collector or a street sweeper. You should be proud of the work you do. A garbage collector is as important to meeting the needs of the community as a physician.

For the past thirty plus years, I have been sharing this quote by Dr. King in my speeches on leadership. I believe that work is spiritual in nature. The work we do helps to cleanse our souls and free our spirits.

Many writers and speakers tell their audiences to do what they love and the money will come. I believe we should learn to love the work we do — to find happiness where we are and the money will come.

Many people see work as a negative experience. They hate Mondays and grumble about going to work. They feel the work they do is beneath them. They are frustrated because they feel the work does not allow them to use their talents. They grumble about their bosses and their peers. For them, the glass is half empty.

Other people wish they did not have to work and dream of sleeping late and relaxing on a beach. They dream of being their own boss and not having to report to anyone. Some want the money without putting in the work — without paying their dues.

My Dream

When I graduated from college, the country was experiencing a recession and was engaged in the Vietnam war. I was an English major from a small rural town with few job prospects. I dreamed of being a famous writer and took jobs as a carpenter and as an orderly on a psychiatric ward.

I dreamed of being able to write full-time, although I did not know what I wanted to write about. I had no burning message that I wanted to deliver to the world. I had no ideas that I was passionate about.

In January of 1975 I received a call from a nursing home company asking if I was interested in interviewing for a job as a writer of policy and procedure manuals. I knew nothing about nursing homes or policy manuals. I interviewed for the job and was hired both to my surprise and delight. I was happy to have a job writing even if I was earning less money than I did working as a carpenter.

I thought I would work for a year and move on to other more lucrative writing jobs. Forty years later, I was still working in long-term care and I loved the work I did. My work was both satisfying and rewarding. I learned to have pride in what I did and that I could make a difference in people's lives.

Not everyone knows what they want to do when they grow up and that is okay. Some of us take years to figure it out. As a child I dreamed of being a baseball player, an architect and a preacher. I did not even realize that nursing homes existed, nor did I have any desire to work in health care.

Some people know from a very young age that they want to be nurses and doctors. The concept of working in the health care field never entered my mind.

Most of my career I have dreamed of being able to give up my bill-paying job and to make a living writing — of living the creative life. Fortunately, this never happened. I think I am a better person for having the discipline to get up an hour earlier than everyone and writing before going to work.

Sometimes what we wish for is not in our best interests. The bill-paying work and the creative work are both important and both have helped to make me a better person.

My dream stood in the way of my appreciating what I did have — the

opportunity to help others, to inspire others.

Unemployed

If you have ever been fired or been laid off from a job and sat idle for a few months, you appreciate the value of work. I have been fired five times in my career.

The fifth time I lost my job, I was thirty-seven years old with a wife and daughter. I was out of work for almost five months. Being unemployed was very scary because I was afraid of running out of money.

I could have fallen into the trap of sitting around and doing nothing, but I didn't. I turned job hunting into my new job. I set up an office in my home and spent my days researching companies, calling people, and sending out resumes. I put in a full eight hours a day looking for work.

Creative Work

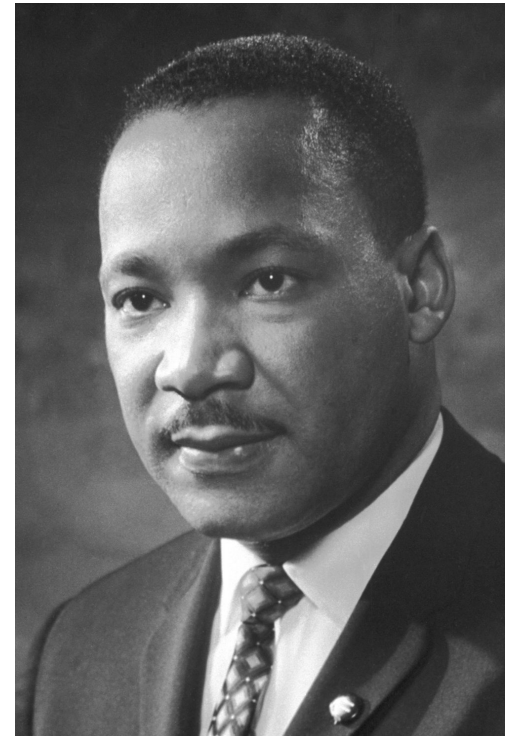
As creative leaders we have a special opportunity to share the fruit of our labor with others. I have found ways to express my creativity and my need to write within the world of business. I have written newspaper ads, video scripts, training programs and articles for trade magazines. I have designed forms, developed brochures and made decisions about graphics. I have been involved in filming training programs.

For most people, the path to success is not a straight line. Most paths have hills and valleys as well as road blocks and detours. And somewhere along that path we often discover that what we desired at eighteen may not be what we are passionate about at thirty-five. And that is okay.

So here is my simple message to people who hate their jobs and dream about being elsewhere: ***Learn to love what you do.*** Be proud of your work. Celebrate the work. Be happy with the gifts you have been given. Find reasons to appreciate the business you are in. Learn as much as you can about the work you do.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Born Michael King, Jr., January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia to Michael King, Sr. and Alberta Williams.
- Father changed his and his son's names to Martin Luther King in 1934 after a trip to Europe where he visited places identified with Martin Luther.
- Enrolled as a student at Morehouse College at the age of 15. Graduated at 19 with a B.A. in Sociology.
- Attended Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity in 1951.
- Married Coretta Scott on June 18, 1953.
- Became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954.
- Graduated in 1955 from Boston University with a PhD.
- Had a leadership role in the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-56.
- Co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957.
- Assassinated on April 4, 1968.



Source: Wikipedia

Learn to Love What You Do

Here are some action steps to take to help you learn to love what you do.

- Talk to others in your industry and discover why they love what they do. You might be surprised by what you find out.
- Learn to have pride in the work you do.
- Read about the industry in which you work. Discover the thought leaders. Connect with them on LinkedIn.
- Do not complain and gripe about your work or your company to others. Gripping will plant negative seeds in your heart and you will never like what you do. Also do not associate with those who complain and gripe. They will discourage you.
- Find positive stories that illustrate the importance of the industry in which you work and the work you do. Celebrate the work you do.
- Identify the strengths and skills that you bring to your work and celebrate them. You are unique with special talents. No one can take that away without your permission.
- Be thankful each day that you have a job that puts food on the table and pays the rent.
Learn to love the work you do — to find happiness where you are. And the rewards will come.

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