

---

CHAPTER

1

**You Don't Have to Wait  
for Your Dream Career  
to Be Happy**

---

*The grass is always greener where you water it.*

—Unknown

*Success is liking what you do and liking how you do it.*

—Maya Angelou

One of the first questions I ask my clients is, “If you could have any job, what would be your dream job, your perfect career?” Hearing their answers is always one of the best parts of my day. Let me share a few of their responses:

Client 1: I would travel Europe for a year.

Me: That's not a job, that's a vacation. Try again.

Client 2: I would own a business that I could live anywhere and only have to work three hours a day from a beach.

Me: Very few people I know can make a living working three hours a day from the beach to support their spouse and three kids with the same lifestyle they currently have. Plus you would get skin cancer.

Client 3: I want any job that pays me double the salary I make right now.

Me: *Brilliant!* Except according to employee market values, you already make 15 percent more than you should right now.

Client 4: I'm going to win the lottery so I don't have to answer your dumb questions.

Me: How long have you been playing the lottery?

Client: Twenty years.

Me: How much have you won?

Client: Fifty dollars.

Me: Excellent! You're on track to quit your job and start your perfect career when you are 2,500 years old. Why don't we start over and let's get you that dream job in the next year without the lottery. (This is where I restate my original question.)

Client 5: Any job but the one I have now. It's bad, Dr. Bray.

Me: (Silence) and an "uh, oh" (This comment usually means an emotional breakdown is on its way in the next 30 seconds.)

Talking about your perfect career is difficult because it focuses on what you don't have now and everything that is going wrong with your current career. So let's take this in two steps. The first step is to debunk the myth of a perfect career. The second step is to discuss career happiness and fulfillment.

## Your Dream Job May Not Be What You Expect

You may have an idea of what your perfect career looks like, but until you have worked that job for at least six months, you may be surprised that your perfect career is anything but perfect! More clients than I would care to count have come to me wanting to discuss their "perfect" careers.

*"It wasn't what I thought it would be."*

*"It didn't give me the feeling I thought it would give me."*

*"I didn't make as much money as I had hoped I would make."*

*"I got bored of it so quickly, it didn't provide the challenge I thought it would."*

*"It turned out to be just as mundane as my previous job."*

Do you notice some key words in their comments? It didn't give me the thought, feeling, money, challenge, or friendships I *thought* it would. Keyword being *thought*! It is hard to define a perfect dream job when you haven't worked at it for a significant period of time. Running a bed and breakfast along the beaches of Costa Rica may sound like a perfect job until you realize that you have to change sheets, clean toilets, and deal with grumpy sun-burned tourists every day. Not to mention you don't get to surf and paddleboard four hours a day like you *dreamed* you would. Doesn't sound like a dream career to me.

Another aspect of your perfect dream career is to realize that in most instances there isn't such a thing. The road to a

perfect, fulfilling, and meaningful career is exactly that: a journey. I have learned from years of experience, education, and working with clients that your dream career isn't a final destination; it is a continuous road that you take throughout your life. As much as you and I would love to arrive at your dream career destination (as early in life as possible, please!) and set up shop for the next 20 to 30 years and enjoy job bliss, life doesn't work that way. Why not? Because your brain wants to continue to develop, progress, and take on new challenges, even if the rest of you want to remain in a steady state of no change. Once you have reached a goal, it quickly begins to lose its luster and you wonder what other things you might accomplish. Just ask Natalie, who landed her dream job three years ago.

It had been a while since I had worked with Natalie, so I was surprised when I received an email asking me for some time to discuss issues with her current position. I had worked with Natalie a few years earlier helping her find her "perfect" career, and in just under four months, she had done it! Natalie was promoted to her desired position and was headed to the West Coast. She was happy with her job promotion, as she enjoyed the organization she worked in, she made a good salary, and worked with dependable and competent people who liked their jobs. She found her job to be challenging and very rewarding. Sounds perfect, right? It was, except she was beginning to feel restless and ready for her next promotion, project, or "something different," as she put it.

After catching up with Natalie, she jumped right into what was bothering her. "I thought I had found my dream job. Now why can't I relax instead of looking for what is next?"

Natalie explained that when she got promoted to management and moved to her dream city on the West Coast, she thought this would be the last stop on her career journey. She

had made it! This was the position she had always wanted, in a city that she loved, and now all she had to do was work hard, enjoy her great job, the warm weather, friends, and the beach. Except it didn't happen that way. ("Why can't life be more like the movies?")

The first two years on the job Natalie and her team won the top sales award and in year three she far surpassed her sales quota. During her management tenure, Natalie had promoted one of her team members, and because of restructuring, had hired and trained two other new employees. It was year four and Natalie's dream job was becoming not so dreamy anymore.

"I can't believe I am saying this, but I am not as excited about this position as I used to be. I feel like I can do more, and take on more responsibility. I have accomplished my goals. My team and I have won the top sales award, we have added some big accounts, and I find myself looking for what is next." She continued, "This isn't my dream job anymore. I can't imagine myself doing this for another 20 years. I would have to find another job. I need to find my *next* dream job!"

She couldn't have said it more perfectly! Many of my clients have experienced the feeling of attaining their dream job only to find that in a few years they were ready for something newer, more exciting, and more challenging. When you reach your dream job, you are going to discover that it is *exactly* that: a *dream* job—but only for a while! After you have experienced all that your current job has to offer, you may be surprised by what comes next. You are going to find yourself thinking of the next job and what the remaining years of your career have in store for you.

Other clients say similar things. "I am happy where I am and I have a great future ahead of me. I have no desire to change *but*..." It's the *but* that is the sure indication for me that everything is not okay. Their words may tell me they are

content and happy short term, while their actions, feelings, and behaviors speak a-much different version of their long term career story. If you feel like I have just described you, hang on! I'm going to help you find your Best Job Ever through specific steps in the upcoming chapters. Get ready to begin your journey in creating your own every-evolving dream career.

## The Secret to Your Dream Career

I hate to give away too much of the “secret sauce” at the beginning of this book, but your dream career has everything to do with your emotions, happiness, and daily state of mind and not only the job itself. You chase your dream job so you can experience the feelings that you expect the dream job to provide you; feelings that you are doing something worthwhile, that you are making a difference, and choosing your own destiny. Feelings that you are doing what you love while creating income for yourself and following your passion are a few of the descriptions individuals have shared with me when I ask what they want from their dream job. Those feelings and experiences are possible to have at any point in your career. (*Let me repeat that concept because it is so important.*) You can experience the feelings of your dream job by making choices today that create the feelings you are seeking. Some of these choices include learning how to progress in your career and deciding to develop your skills in areas that *you* choose. How you do your work and the influence you have on others are also important choices that create your dream career. These decisions and others can give you the dream job feeling right now. Let me share an example to illustrate the point.

I studied the lottery when I was a graduate student. Most individuals who play the lottery realize their chances of winning the million dollars is not likely to happen. In fact, the chances of winning the Powerball jackpot are around 175.2 million to 1.

You are more likely to be struck by lightning (1 in 3 million) or have conjoined twins (1 in 200,000) than you are to win the lottery. Yet millions continue to buy lottery tickets week after week. With such a losing proposition, why do people continue to spend their money against such odds? Two reasons: if the individual is lower-income, he or she may view the lottery as one of the few ways out of poverty (especially in a recession).

The second reason people buy lottery tickets is called a rescue fantasy, or, in other terms, the “feeling of being a winner.” Yes, they are buying the feeling of having a million dollars. Every time they look at the lottery ticket, it sends messages to the brain to think about what they would do if they won the money. It is a brain party! And the party is all about the things and experiences they could purchase. When those individuals buy lottery tickets, they are paying for the thoughts and feelings of what it would be like to win.

The same goes for your career. You can create the feelings of a dream career right now by implementing the actions and decisions that will cause those feelings and experiences. You can buy that dream career feeling by the choices and actions you make today. And the result is going to be much better than an empty pocket like the guy who purchased the lottery ticket.

*(Quick Note: if you have won the lottery, please email me and let's go to a steak dinner to discuss how I am wrong. Feel free to fly me on a private plane to meet you at some beach location and I will happily give you career and life advice at 40 times my normal rate. I promise I am worth it!)*

You can choose to create the perfect career from the one you currently have by choosing to get promoted, or change departments, or you may need to step down and take an individual contributor role to get back in the game with a fresh, new start. You may need to change some aspect of your job or change aspects of yourself to create the dream career. You may decide

to move to a different organization or start something on your own. No matter what direction you decide to go in, the secret to gaining the happiness you want from your dream career is in your hands. Let me share some career change examples in which some employees stayed in their same organizations while others chose to leave and pursue other options:

1. The corporate executive whose wife recently had a baby, who, soon after the new arrival, decides that being on the road, eating fancy steak dinners, and sleeping in hotel rooms are not for him anymore. His dream job is now one in which he doesn't travel as frequently so he can be home with his family.

New dream job, same company

2. The lawyer whose dream job has turned into working 60 hours a week recently comes to the realization that she isn't happy. She does some research, talks to her contacts, and decides to become a professor and teach law school.

New dream job, new company

3. The college grad who landed her dream job right before graduation and has now been in the workforce for the last two years. She wants a new experience, new friends, and a new city. She talks to her boss, chooses the promotion path wisely, prepares for interviews, and applies for a promotion. She gets the promotion and a transfer to the new city.

New dream job, same company

4. The fast-food worker who is making minimum wage and is barely making it month to month. His dream job is

anywhere but *here!* So he bites the bullet, gets some financial assistance (it is out there!), and gets some training at the local technical college. Six months later, his salary has doubled and he is fixing refrigerators, washing machines, and dryers, on his own schedule.

New dream job, new company (his own!)

### Recap:

1. Do not expect to have one perfect dream career. This is not a Hawaiian vacation where all of your focus is on just getting to the beach. It is a journey on which you will learn more about yourself and your dream career with each step that you take. View your current career as a means to discovering what is right for you *right now*, at this point in your life. (Even after going through the steps shared in the following chapters, nearly 85 percent of my clients have stayed at and found greater success and happiness in the organization where they originally worked. You may not have to look too far to achieve what you want.)
2. You can be happy right now in your career. Don't let your happiness depend on that one next thing you expect to happen. You can create a happy, fulfilled career now by choosing to create the aspects of your dream career you want, as well as developing yourself in ways that *you* choose. Much of your career happiness and fulfillment comes from the feeling of progressing in your career.

