

Excerpt from *Leaving Campus and Going to Work*

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When I was still relatively new to the working world, I became very close with a senior manager who had many years with the company and was approaching a point where it made more financial sense for him to retire than keep working. His pension service was maxed out, he was approaching the full retirement age, and he had more than enough resources to sustain a very comfortable lifestyle for the rest of his life. He would ask me various questions about his retirement options, and I would joke with him by saying that he had decisions to make that I could not wait to have – when to retire and start enjoying life!

During one of our conversations I mentioned that again, and he stopped and said, “You know, this job is all I have. If I retire, I don’t know what I will do. This company has been everything I am. I have worked so much that I really do not have many friends outside of work, and my wife and I are not that close any more. I don’t know how I will fill my days.”

Driving home that evening, our conversation re-played itself over and over in my mind. I was both haunted by his comments and confused by his view, a frustrating combination to a young mind. As a relatively inexperienced employee, it was inconceivable to me that retirement, with all its opportunities, would not be attractive to someone. As years went by, however, I started to see the trap he had found himself in, the slow migration into an unbalanced life that is so easy to find yourself living.

I began to notice people who once had driving ambition begin to stagger under the weight of its demands. There was no joy or fire to their lives anymore, and for most, work was all they had. Years of working long hours and weekends, ignoring family and friends for meager increases to support a lifestyle beyond their means left them with no identity. Their jobs were it. As their jobs faded away from cost-cutting and layoffs, I would watch them also fade away with nothing to mark their passing but a dusty keyboard and a worn-out telephone. Gone...as if they were never there.

As years passed, I began to realize I was one of them. One of the corporate animals who was willing and ready to jump through that next little hoop, only to find that the size of the hoop kept changing...if there was even a hoop there at all. I started to feel disconnected and lost, seeing myself doing and producing things but feeling strangely empty. When I started working, I held the hope that as years went by, I would always see and appreciate the richness that life holds, both professionally and personally. But I was beginning to see I was not building that life. That was a sad realization for me...the person I wanted to be, and the person I was becoming, were not the same.