

The American Dream

The American Dream. While it is a quintessentially American aspiration, each of us has a unique vision of just what it is. For some, the dream is a chance to build a successful business. For others, it's a home of their own. And for still others, it's the opportunity to shop until they drop. As alluring as all of these visions are, however, I would respectfully suggest that they are outcomes of the dream and not the dream, itself. The American Dream is actually a state of mind.

We all know, of course, that the American Dream exists because we live in a nation founded on certain extraordinary principles. Much as we take them for granted, deep down inside, every American knows that they are especially fortunate to live in a land where they are accorded an enduring right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. While most of us are very clear about what Life and Liberty mean, however, there is some confusion about the pursuit of Happiness. And it's that misunderstanding which causes us to misperceive the American Dream.

The founding fathers, themselves, inadvertently provoked this situation with their capitalization choices. They used initial caps on Life, Liberty and Happiness, when what they really meant to enshrine was a commitment to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness. In other words, what the American Dream promises is not a right to happiness, but a right to Achieve it on our own.

What does that mean for those of us in the workforce?

Over the past decade or so, social scientists have been trying to figure out just what happiness is and where it comes from. While many of us think the answers to such questions are intuitively obvious, it turns out that we may be selling ourselves short. Humans have the capacity not only to experience happiness, but to experience joy, as well. And those two states are very different.

Joy is an emotional state. It is derived from our relationships with family and friends. When those interactions engage and satisfy us, when they enable us to be the best of ourselves with the others in our Life, we experience joy—one of the human species' greatest gifts.

Happiness, on the other hand, is a cognitive state. It occurs when we are tested by meaningful challenges that stimulate us to express and experience our fullest natural potential, our talent. These challenges can occur anywhere, but they are most prevalent in the workplace. In other words, our best shot at Achieving happiness occurs when we put ourselves in a position to excel at what we love to do.

That is the essence of the American Dream. It is a personal commitment, a determination to devote our Life and exercise our Liberty to the accomplishment of two tasks:

- To discovering our natural talent or what we love to do and do best.
- and
- To working only where we can use that talent to achieve satisfying goals.

The outcome of those tasks will be unique to each of us, but the tasks themselves are the same for all of us. They represent our right to the Pursuit of happiness.

Those two tasks are also the key to a successful job search and a rewarding career. Whether we're in transition or currently employed, they enable and empower us to control our destiny, to shape it to an end that is important and fulfilling to us. It is our right, to be sure, but it is also our responsibility. For only we can take the first step, only we can decide to set off on our own personal Pursuit of happiness.

Why should we bother? Because as wonderful as the joy is in our relationships, we deserve more. We spend at least one-third of our lives at work, and that experience should offer more than frustration, anxiety and despair. It should be, it can be a source of profound fulfillment. Or what the founding fathers called Happiness.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit my blog at Weddles.com/WorkStrong

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