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Is there such a thing as a dream job?

WE SPEND decades at work, so we might as well enjoy it. But what is the secret to finding the perfect career? Tonight, the Midtown Big Ideas Exchange will hear from a panel who love what they do in a bid to find out.

The series of events will showcase some of the smartest and most efficient organisations, including Google, Yahoo, Mindshar, Mitsubishi Corporation and Mishcon de Reya, and is featuring a series of talks on thought-provoking subjects. Work – which is so fundamental to our identity – is probably one of the most intriguing subjects of them all.

This is what five “dream-jobbers”, who will be speaking at the event, think about the idea of an ideal job.

‘UNDERSTAND YOURSELF’

As director of career consulting firm Integral, Gwendolyn Parkin, 55, says that it is finding the right career, rather than a job, that is the key – and it might take some time, as it requires you to understand yourself.

“When I was a child, I was fascinated with literature – with characters and stories,” says Parkin. “But it was only when I was working in consulting that I really understood what engaged me.”

“I wanted to analyse characters and their stories – as I had done when I was a child – but to help people move on to a career that works for them. And following a master’s degree in psychotherapy, that is what I do now.”

“Finding the career that works for you starts with early life interests and values, rather than skill sets.”

Parkin says that your ideal role should be a good fit with who you are. You also need to be flexible and not fixated on a title or industry – instead, focus on your transferable skills. She adds that the role also has to enable you to flourish.

‘LOOK FOR DOORS HALF-OPEN’

Oily Mann, 34, an LBC presenter and podcaster, says: “I was always interested in radio, but it is a very difficult industry to get into. So I spent a few years working as a researcher in TV and it was only after doing a play in Edinburgh, when I was interviewed in a beer garden by a podcaster with a cheap microphone and a mini-disc, that I realised I could do that, too.”

Along with Helen Zalzman, Mann began presenting a weekly comedy podcast, Answer Me This, which led to them becoming the UK’s first podcasters to be given their own radio show. Mann now regularly appears on TV and radio and his latest venture is @themodernmann.

If you’re still trying to find that perfect role, or pursuing an elusive ideal, you may be setting yourself up to fail. Today, a panel will discuss if it is possible to have a job that ticks all the boxes.

By Niki Chesworth

“Finding a dream job is not an either/or – it does not have to be a case of doing something you are interested in or having a career,” he says. “You can create your own. Just identify what you want to do, find which doors are half-open and then push them. So if you want to make films, put them on YouTube. If you want to be a writer or journalist, then write blogs, and if you want to get into radio, do podcasting. Do not let fear – which is basically procrastination – hold you back.”

‘ASPIRE TO BEING HAPPY’

“I wanted to be a modern day Indiana Jones and if you had asked me when I was 12 what I wanted to do, I would have said an archaeologist,” says Adam Rawlings Smith, 39, head of European talent acquisition at AECOM.

“After university, I had my ‘dream job’, but when I discovered what it was really like in winter, standing in front of a CB, sinking into the mud and freezing cold, I quickly realised it was not for me. Having an idealistic view of the future, and then realising the reality, did not help my self-esteem. Then I fell into recruitment, which I would never have dreamed of.”

“However, I wanted to work with people and to help them. That is why I love what I do, as it fits in with my beliefs and ethics. So from my experience, a ‘dream job’ is a bit of a misnomer. If we all had a dream job, we would all stay put, companies would be stagnant and other jobs simply would not get done. I would say that being fulfilled, happy and satisfied is what we should aspire to.”

‘FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE IS KEY’

Lacy Johnston, 36, author of Digital Handmade, has a background in global consumer trend analysis and brand strategy spanning 15 years. She says:

Multitasking author Lucy Johnston



Self-awareness: Julia Runagall, from The Moment, says understanding what you want is the first step towards finding a dream career

“At different times of your life, you will have different responsibilities, and so your dream job will change.”

“Also, we are likely to have many different jobs in our lives, so there may not be one dream job. Or, like me, you can have about five or six at any one time. I have written my first book this year, but I am also a curator, producing exhibitions. I spend time researching trends, working on pop-ups and helping clients with their brand.”

“But I think that having a dream work/life balance is more important. I have set up my work so that I can be flexible about what I get out of the ‘life’ part – taking the dog for a walk in the afternoon, avoiding rush hour or going to an art gallery mid-morning to avoid the crush.”

She admits her own “dream” may not be ideal for everyone. “Working for yourself can be a bit of a rollercoaster,” she says. “When I was working as a global trends analyst, I

travelled a lot, which might be a dream job for many. But while I loved it, working to someone else’s deadlines and schedules and without the freedom to say ‘yes’ to new things led me to giving it up. It was a gamble to walk away, but I wanted more freedom.”

‘IDENTIFY YOUR PASSION’

Julia Runagall, 45, from The Moment – a collective of more than 100 diverse professionals who create award-winning content for major brands and broadcasters – says a job today is about more than just putting a crust on the table. “Everyone is obsessed with finding something that makes them feel fulfilled, that offers them variety and makes them happy,” she says.

“I am probably unusual in that I have been in the same company for 22 years. In TV, that is unheard of, but to experience the growth and see the changes over those years has been an exciting journey. It has given me variety and enabled me to shape my career and those are the key reasons why this is the dream job for me. Also, I am still incredibly excited by what I do. However, I don’t know if it is for every-

one. I have been working on a science and technology series for the BBC, which takes me all over the world, and I am away three or four weeks at a time, living cheek-by-jowl with colleagues from breakfast until late at night. Some people might hate that.”

So what is her advice to others? “Understand yourself and what makes you happy, rather than what everyone else thinks is a dream job. I knew I did not want to go to university and, instead, wanted to make things. It was instinctive. Once you feel that burning passion, then you know what it is you want to do.”

So it seems there is no one dream job. Like the would-be Indiana Jones who ended up in recruitment, perhaps it is time to give up on the dream and instead look for what else you want from work – whether that is freedom, flexibility, variety or satisfaction – and more importantly, to find what you are passionate about. The one thing the panellists all agree on is that loving your job is the ideal – not finding the ideal job.

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Evening Standard
24.11.2015
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