

SECOND EDITION

# We Are All Self-Employed

CLIFF HAKIM

**How to  
Take Control  
of Your Career**

**Survive and Thrive in a Changed Work World**

An Excerpt From

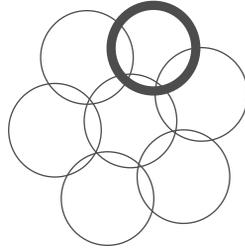
***We Are All Self-Employed:  
How to Take Control of Your Career***

by Cliff Hakim

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

# Contents

Preface .....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	xv
Introduction.....	1
<i>Burning the Grass</i>	
1. Deepen Your “Self-Employed” Attitude .....	9
<i>Ready yourself for a new era</i>	
2. Beginning the Process of Change with Yourself.....	29
<i>Start with your own personal growth</i>	
3. Facing the Dragon—Your Worklife Fears.....	73
<i>Replace fear with passion and purpose</i>	
4. Integrating Independence and Interdependence.....	107
<i>Be yourself and collaborate with, and contribute to, others</i>	
5. Working With, Not For, Your Organization and Customers .....	141
<i>Do work and build relationships based on respect, equality, and competence</i>	
6. Committing to Continuous Learning.....	179
<i>View your worklife as an ongoing journey</i>	
7. Creating Meaningful Worklife .....	229
<i>Work and live, believing that the world needs you and that you can make a contribution</i>	
Bibliography .....	251
Index .....	253
About the Author .....	263



# INTRODUCTION

## *Burning the Grass*

Way back when, in the late summers or early falls, my grandfather would set his lawn on fire. We called it burning the grass, and he believed it fertilized the soil and made the lawn come back greener. The neighbors called it crazy and eventually the fire department put a stop to it. As a child of seven or eight, I was curious and sometimes confused. I wasn't sure whether to believe my grandfather or the neighbors. As the years passed I began to accept my grandfather's ritual as a means of producing something better. Even though others saw it as chaos, I learned that my grandfather knew what he was doing. The grass always felt thicker, a better surface for play!

What looks like chaos can actually be, and is often, a vital part of change and growth: learning a new profession, taking a new job, or starting a new company. The process requires moving through the chaos and darkness—the anxiety, confusion, resistance, and solitude—to eventually assemble the many disjointed, misunderstood, and often unrecognizable pieces. It is a time of reaching inward and learning about yourself. It is a time of reflection, faith, observation, idea

generation, resolve, and reform. It is a time central to all those who examine their “employed” attitude and choose to learn or deepen their “self-employed” attitude.

As my grandfather burned the grass I learned not to judge what I saw even if others did. I stood back, watched, and appreciated that something was going on even though I didn’t understand what. I knew that with patience and perspective I would notice something valuable. Now I look back at burning the grass as a metaphor for his life and possibly many of ours. My grandfather’s message to me was this: Look back through the years; you can learn from them. You don’t have to repeat them, but you can borrow from them. Pause, reflect, and understand what you want. Appreciate the process, then respect your wisdom—do what you think is right. You can make a difference.

If we are open to history, learning, and our own wisdom can be great teachers. Many of our forebears—farmers, poets and writers, and sales people—were “self-employed.” They burned the grass: raising crops to feed a growing nation, writing prose to record our history, composing poetry to inspire innovation, and selling new products and services to shape our lifestyles. Workers eventually came to believe that those who owned their own companies were self-employed and those who worked for organizations were entitled to their job, benefits, and perks. They were not, however, self-employed. The urgent message of *We Are All Self-Employed* remains, and particularly of this second edition, is that the “employed” attitude no longer exists. A “self-employed” attitude has emerged as the central belief for fueling your worklife. Will you burn the grass, fight for and follow your path? Will you respect the organic nature of being and contributing yourself? Or, will you settle for Astro Turf? You’re the boss.

## **Who's the Boss?**

Over the past dozen years I have set myself free. I have recreated myself from executive search consultant to author, speaker, and career and executive counselor. During the 10 years I spent in executive search, I worked diligently carving out an organizational niche, developing a steady client base, and earning amply. But, I didn't like who I was becoming in this role and what I was doing on a daily basis. My spirit was too tightly packaged up—ossifying, locked into a stultifying routine. Although “search” was a means to learn about the business world, build relationships, and make money—all of which I am grateful—my heart was under-nourished and my hands were under-utilized. I longed to express my own beliefs and personality. I missed stretching and asserting my imagination, being unbound from decaying personal beliefs and constricting organizational rules. I missed putting my creativity to work for others.

Fortunately, I listened carefully. I heard the ping: a personal calling to self-leadership. Have you heard the ping? Ping...I think I'm dissatisfied, but I'm not sure. Ping...Work is okay, but maybe that's not good enough. Ping...People say the company won't look after my career, but I doubt that will happen here. Does the ping, as you scuttle about, come and go? What is your experience? Open your heart and listen. Does the ping fade while the message that you can take charge and do something that is more distinctively you in the world sounds? Doing who and what is you, I've learned, is the only sustainable work. It's impossible to follow the dreams and trends of others for very long. They are short lived.

The first step toward taking charge of your worklife is to know that the process begins with YOU. Shh. Hear the ping in your heart. You

may expect an in-your-face awakening but rarely is there a sledge hammer bang. Usually the messenger is subtler. Ping!

At some point in their transitions, most of my clients ask, “If I follow my heart, how will I make money?” Using myself as an example, I respond, “I override my fear that I won’t make much money writing by stimulating my heart. I ask myself, ‘What do I love, even if I may not be the best at it? What do I most want to do—even if the learning curve is long, steep, and uncertain?’ I sit with these questions and my answer usually emerges. ‘Expressing myself and sharing my wisdom through writing, speaking, and counseling so that others can borrow my example and ideas to express themselves and trust and use their own wisdom is my passion.’” I can’t ignore; I must respect and live my truth. My answer—a purposeful, spirited mantra—propels me forward in my life journey. And yet, as it is so for you, I know there are no guarantees: the writing of this book, a project, is temporary. And, ultimately, you the customer will judge its worth. Is there an answer—some relief from the natural churn of worklife and the common feelings—fear, anxiety, confusion—associated with change and risk? Yes, there is an answer. You can replace fear with the belief that you are the boss.

### **Who’s the Boss? You Are.**

I thought for too long that life should be easy. You may believe that life should be easy. For me, though, digesting this belief eventually led to indigestion. I’d begin a project, become impatient when the going got tough, and quit. Writing this book, for example, would have been impossible guided by my old life should be easy belief. “Life is difficult.” That first sentence in Scott Peck’s bestseller, *The Road Less Traveled*, was the catalyst that most reoriented my thinking. He continues, “Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand

and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.” I first read these words in 1978 and they continue to fortify my thoughts and guide my actions today.

I know in my gut, after much personal and professional growth, a decade of global flux, and developing my practice and nurturing a family, that I am fully responsible for my worklife. Of course, I’m not only independent, attending solely to my heart’s calling and choices. I’m interdependent, too, collaborating with and contributing to others. Combining the two, I am a self-leader—the onus, still, is on me to imagine, plan, explore, and create the worklife that I want. In any economy, I’m the boss of my worklife. You are, too, whether you work inside or outside of an organization. Who’s the boss? You are the boss. You’re in charge of your worklife. This is the message of this book.

You’re the boss of discovering and acting on what’s in your heart. You’re the boss of managing the feelings and tensions that naturally arise when navigating uncharted territory. You’re the boss, knowing that you will sometimes clash with your tired belief that someone else is the boss. You’re the boss, making the choice to struggle and go beyond your struggle to a “self-employed” attitude. And, you’re the boss—the one in charge—of asking for support, or asking to be left alone, when risking change.

If someone pointed the finger at me and said, “You’re the boss of your worklife” I might be skeptical, possibly scared, and a bit excited. Right now, you might be experiencing one, or all three, of these feelings. If you are, bear with me. You need not make your I-am-the-boss decision now. All I ask is for your curiosity, that you question your “employed” attitude and remain open to summoning and shaping your “self-employed” attitude.

## Why Read This Book?

**To self-lead:  
understand and do what is in your heart,  
overcome your fear of change,  
reawaken and free your spirit,  
and become more productive than ever.**

Read this book if you are interested in feeling healthier at work and in your life. Without a clear sense of self, working with others lacks health, conviction, and joy.

Read this book if you want to inspire your children. Frequently, Gabriella, my eight-year-old, asks, “Dad, will you tell me about your work? What do you say to your clients? What are you writing now...the same book?” She and her peers discuss what their parents do and Gabriella wants to be ready to share with her friends. She also wants to learn how I handle what may one day be in store for her when she enters the workplace. Gabriella and her friends are learning ways to use their ideas, skills, heart, and energy to become productive, to promote and manage change, and to enjoy their work.

Read this book if you want to live a fuller life and feel good about every stage while continuing to contribute to the lives of others.

## What’s New

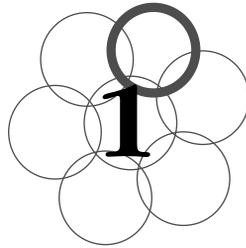
This revision emanates from my soul. I’ve updated *We Are All Self-Employed* because I know I’m the boss. I know that you’re the boss, too. The economy, job marketplace, and our zeal for personal growth are constant reminders. What’s new in this edition includes a refined Worklife Creed; many fresh, supportive, and diverse, worklife examples; stimulating and thoughtful quotations; an emphasis on the freedom

and vitality of the heart—purpose and passion in worklife; and a Who’s the Boss? Check-In section, consisting of five summary and thought/action questions at the end of the first six chapters. On page 162 you’ll find the Ten Commandments for Winning Interviews. The last chapter shares several meaningful-work steps, plus an inspiring meaningful-work interview.

### **How This Book is Organized**

The first chapter of this book assumes that you have some familiarity with, and in some instances that you have experienced the virtues of, the “self-employed” attitude. To refresh, there’s a comparison between an “employed” and a “self-employed” attitude on page 13. The comparison presents and clarifies the minimum critical requirements for you to develop, deepen, and/or sustain a self-employed attitude. Individually, the subsequent six chapters form the essential dynamic building blocks for assimilating and constructing a “self-employed” attitude. Collectively, they are a powerful transformational system for living this attitude. The checklists and exercises in each chapter will deepen your understanding of a “self-employed” attitude. Starting on page 14 the chapters are united into six beliefs that constitute a worklife creed.

Even though I’ve used the widely accepted term “career” in the subtitle (How to Take Control of Your Career), throughout *We Are All Self-Employed* I’ll generously use the term “worklife” instead. This is because, in conversations with my clients, they share work and life issues and dreams. In addition, as you mature, healthy work and career decisions can only be made when you consider and integrate other aspects of life: relationship, children, parents, housing, education, recreation, community, world and financial affairs, health and longevity, and your spirit.



# **DEEPEN YOUR “SELF-EMPLOYED” ATTITUDE**

*Ready yourself for a new era*

Congratulations for coming this far. You have found a personal anchor rather than relying on external moorings. You have confirmed in your heart and mind that blind loyalty—someone else will take care of me—is dead. You have struggled with old beliefs and have updated your loyalty to “conscious” loyalty or a self-employed attitude. Yes, full responsibility for your worklife is only proper, not selfish, in our unpredictable and demanding world.

Are you ready to deepen your “self-employed” attitude? Reflect for a moment about a time when you felt forced or coerced into making a change. Did you actually change? Or, did you wait until no one was looking and then fall back into a familiar pattern? What price did you and your organization pay for this misalignment: Lost time? Disgruntled customers? Low morale? I promise that I won’t make you, in any way, adopt a “self-employed” attitude. Instead, you can feel and explore your readiness.

Whether I'm delivering a seminar on rethinking work or talking one on one with an individual about their development, I repeatedly notice that people go beyond the intellectual conversation to actually engage in renewal only when they are ready. Even for the most conscious, recognizing personal readiness can be an illusive challenge. Fear, crowded schedules, and impatience can thwart insight into your needs and your best intentions. I've heard clients say, for example, "I don't know what happened. In the past three or four years my company has changed, but I haven't!" The following is a list of questions that have emerged from my counseling practice. You can use them to assess, measure, and affirm your readiness. If you check three or more, you likely are ready to learn more about and create your self-employed attitude.

## **Personal Readiness Questions**

*Do you want to...*

- ≡ make more worthwhile contributions?
- ≡ take charge of your attitude?
- ≡ reawaken your spirit?
- ≡ fully express your passion?
- ≡ overcome your work fears?
- ≡ stay in your current job and grow there?
- ≡ take control of your worklife?
- ≡ better align with customers' needs?
- ≡ maintain a clear sense of self while you work with others?
- ≡ establish a new work attitude?
- ≡ set a leadership example?
- ≡ approach work with grace?
- ≡ inspire others?

Consider your answers to these questions. Change exists everywhere—inside and outside of you—and there is never a perfect time to learn and grow. I’ll bet that you’ve already experienced the value of a self-employed attitude. And, and if you’ve read this far, you’re ready or getting ready to advance your attitude.

When Steve Piersanti, President of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, called me to ask if I’d consider a revision of *We Are All Self-Employed*, he said, “Two years ago you never gave me an answer.” I paused and asked, “An answer to what?” “Two years ago,” Steve responded, “I asked if you’d like to update *We Are All Self-Employed*. It’s still a great title, and the market is hungrier than ever for the concept. You’ve already sold thousands of copies.” I responded, “Back then I wasn’t ready. Let me think about this for a few weeks and I promise I’ll get back to you.”

It took me just a few days to respond. My “yes” was aided by three of the Personal Readiness Questions listed above: Do you want to make more worthwhile contributions? Do you want to reawaken your spirit? Do you want to set a leadership example?

I answered Steve with this e-mail:

Your call to me was timely. After rolling around some thoughts and searching my heart, I’m ready to commit to a revision of *We Are All Self-Employed*. Several people, including yourself, have said that the concept is more alive today than ever. Increasingly, my clients are accepting this belief as their truth and are showing their willingness and ability to take greater responsibility for their work-life. In addition, when I mention the concept more casually, at a party or school event, people nod as if to say, ‘Of course, we are all self-employed!’

## **How You Work and Live**

Whatever your work situation or career stage—company worker, business owner, part-time worker, unchallenged worker, laid-off worker, or new worker—this book shows you how to manifest a “self-employed” attitude. The following comparison highlights the minimum requirements for and distinguishes between the “employed” and “self-employed” attitudes. Attitude implies that each of us has the ability to learn and make choices about how we work and live. If you choose to live a self-employed attitude you will feel shaky at times, maneuvering through past and present internal obstacles and external barriers. However, your diligence and curiosity will lead you to inner security, your goals, and the opportunity to contribute the best parts of yourself in an unpredictable, formidable world.

Separately, the six self-employed beliefs are the individual subjects of each chapter; each is talked about and illustrated in detail. Collectively they form a strong spine, supple and supportive, for leaving the mindset of dependence—the black hole—behind. Like the human spine, if one vertebra is out of alignment we feel pain and our posture suffers. As you read this book, you will refer to the six “self-employed” beliefs at different times and make it your goal to work toward their ultimate alignment—the you’re-the-boss attitude. The following chart compares the practical applications of the employed and self-employed attitudes.



<b>“Employed” Attitude</b>	<b>Practical Application</b>	<b>“Self-Employed” Attitude</b>	<b>Practical Application</b>
My employer or customers should change in ways that will benefit me. They are to blame if things don't work out.	My boss is all wrong. My customers don't know what is good for them. They'll eventually see things as I do.	I will begin the process of change with myself. Worklife development/management is my responsibility.	With a career counselor's help I am able to assess my strengths and focus on my work priorities.
If I just put my head down and work harder I'll be safe. I can ignore my fears of knowing myself, losing my job, or understanding my passion.	After all I've done for them, they can't fire me.	I will face the dragon—my work fears—and replace it with passion. I will share my ideas; identify my skills, values, and desires; and ask questions to clarify my focus both for myself and my company.	I'll talk with trusted colleagues to clarify company goals and determine where best to focus my energy.
I am dependent on the company/customer. They know my skills and what is best for me. They will take care of <i>me</i> .	Whatever job offer I get, I'll take.	I will integrate independence and interdependence. I will strive to be myself and collaborate with and contribute to others.	When I interview, I'll present what I have to offer, ask about what they need, and assess if the job is a good partnership for me.
I am enmeshed with the company/customer. I work for them. Whether I agree or not, I do what is expected of me.	I sit attentively listening to what my boss or the group needs and do it.	I will join, not work for, my organization and customers. I provide a service based on equality and competence, whether I work in or outside the organization.	In a meeting, I listen and contribute my thoughts.
I can hold on to my successes and be satisfied. If I can only get what I want—position, title, benefits—then I can rest on my past accomplishments.	I know the politics enough to stay safe.	I will commit to continuous learning, personal growth, and gaining new perspectives. My career is a lifetime endeavor. My mistakes and successes lead to expanded thinking and further contribution.	I ask questions to determine my customers' needs and make the necessary adjustments in our service.

*continued*



<b>“Employed” Attitude</b>	<b>Practical Application</b>	<b>“Self-Employed” Attitude</b>	<b>Practical Application</b>
What I do doesn't really matter. This is just a job. I bring my body to work and leave my spirit behind.	My job is boring; there is nothing new to learn.	I will create meaningful work. I am resourceful and able to give value to my work—market my skills and negotiate for my needs—and make a contribution regardless of my job or level.	I ask questions, take in feedback, sell my ideas, and try to meet a tangible goal when possible.

The following pages explore why the six beliefs that comprise a self-employed attitude are critical to your worklife.

## **1. I Will Begin the Process of Change with Myself**

In the past, the company cocoon provided a secure place with income, benefits, title, advancement, identity, and stability. The cocoon protected the workers' identity while they waited for retirement or even for death.

It's a new era. Now you must follow your own worklife path. How? Step out of line. When I was 12 years old, I took a trip with my family to Scarsdale, New York to visit my friend, Mark, and his family. An exciting part of our stay included a train ride into New York City. It was a weekday. All the passengers at the station seemed so serious. I listened for laughter, looked for a smile. The year was 1963. The majority of people boarding the train were men dressed in dark suits and white shirts. “Penguins,” I thought! Each held a briefcase in one hand, with a paper, probably the Wall Street Journal, tucked underneath that arm. When the conductor shouted “ALLL aboard” I watched wide-eyed. Each was lined up, dressed alike, carried the same paper, and marched past me onto the train. This depressing image of my possible future has stuck with me for almost four decades. Was this what I had

to look forward to for my worklife? Was I expected to be the same as everyone else? I grew up in a home where individuality was fostered. My grandfather burned the grass, tilling the land and buying and selling real estate. My father, too, burned the grass as he mapped out his own strategy and carved out his sales territory. He worked at a large insurance company and said, “They never had to manage me. I focused on my goals and saw every day as one of opportunity. I earned more than the branch manager!” Now I have more words for my childhood experience. Many of these men worked for large corporations. “Corporate” beings! They had a dress code and an unspoken employee/employer agreement: Produce for us and we will guarantee you a job. Furthermore, remain loyal and we will take care of your career.

A whole different world later and people are still lined up. These people may not be wearing dark suits, but colleagues, acquaintances, and clients—men and women—have all lamented their narrow and shallow paths. They have said, “I’m bored with what I do” or “What I do pays the bills, but I’m unhappy. Work takes so much out of my hide!” or “I envy my sister—she loves her work. Somehow, she had the courage to use her aptitudes. Instead, I did what my parents expected of me.” In each situation, these people are stuck—lonely, frustrated, and restless. They are marching to someone else’s drummer, not their own.

Accepting the idea that we are all self-employed changes the way we view our entire lives. “It’s very scary to me sometimes. It takes time to assimilate,” says Jean, director of an external research program at a computer manufacturer. “Eighty percent of the time I say I want to take command. For the other 20 percent, I’m still scared. Everybody has got to come to the point of being their own change agent.”

Expecting that your employer and customers will continue to change is realistic, but expecting that they will change in ways that will

benefit you is not. Identifying and mastering your own strengths—your skills, values, purpose, passion, and aptitudes—increases your control over your job productivity and career mobility regardless of external circumstances. The dependent mindset—that is, hoping others will change and then blaming them for what doesn't work for you—gives others your power and leaves you stuck in unsatisfying situations.



**And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.**

*—Anais Nin*

## **2. I Will Face the Dragon—My Work Fears**

At a Harvard University sponsored lecture by the Association for Part-Time Workers, guest speaker Dr. Harris Sussman, strategic consultant, opened by saying, “We are all self-employed.” He reported that the fastest-growing group of workers consists of people working from home. These people, who work at all levels of diverse occupations—accounting, real estate management, financial planning, sales, and publishing—are connected to other individuals and organizations via telephone, fax, and e-mail. In 1987, Charles Handy wrote, “By some estimates, one-quarter of the working population will be working from home by the end of the century. From home is different than at home. The home is a base, not a prison.” The end of the century has passed and Mr. Handy's prediction is here. In my own neighborhood, Elles the graphic designer works part-time from home and part-time at a television station. Ben the musician works part-time from home. The rest of the time he's on stage. And Josh the programmer visits his clients to assess their needs and brings his work home, too. Sally is a program manager for a large company. She visits the home office once every

two weeks to meet with her team and customers. Via e-mail and telephone she stays connected with her staff.

We live in an era of necessary and multiple work alternatives—full-time, part-time, job sharing, and telecommuting. If you tend to be afraid because times have changed and will continue to change, it will be harder for you to see the virtue of alternatives and to take action. The majority of clients I’ve seen over the past years are working differently today. Generally, they overcame their fears of change through self-examination and deliberate, incremental action. As it is with most change, what is initially foreign and chaotic becomes accepted and routine down the road. Rarely did they know where they were headed; still, they delved into what was purposeful to them and, step by step, replaced fear with meaningful results. Ken, senior executive with a consumer goods manufacturer, said, “I had no interest in becoming a corporate executive. I got my MBA anyway 20 years ago. I recall, feeling desperate to do something with my life. I talked to no one about my choice...only observed my father. Now, thinking about following my heart is both exciting and VERY frightening, but I don’t have a choice. I know I can be happier. I owe this to myself, and my children.” Meg, a marketing manager, overcomes her fear by keeping her “ultimate goal” in mind, “to find a new job that allows the greatest expression of myself and my talents, where fun happily coexists with accomplishment.”

Change can liberate people from situations—positions and titles—that no longer work or benefit them or others. The clients mentioned above overcame their central fear: If they let go of what they know, they would land in a permanent, cavernous void. Freed from their title and willing and able to grapple with their fears and fixed expectations, they tapped into their personal resources and sought work that fit their own growth and organization/customer needs.

### **3. I Will Integrate Independence and Interdependence**

This book is a result of both a combination of my thoughts and a compilation of reactions, responses, and stories that I gathered in person or by telephone from working people across the United States—people from the dot-com bust, educational institutions, large corporations, small businesses, and nonprofit associations. When I talked with people about the notion that we are all self-employed, I was thrilled to discover the numbers of people who reacted positively. Some said, “That’s it!” A few said, “Imagine if more people throughout the world could learn to think this way.” One responded, “I can’t imagine not taking control of my life. There’s no security anymore. Being dependent is death.” Another commented, “Your concept is in sync with these times.” My question obviously and invariably evoked a visceral reaction. Although some didn’t have all the words to explain their response, most understood that we are all self-employed. They wanted to continue the conversation, know more, and hear what others had to say.

I began each interview by asking, “When I say, ‘We are all self-employed,’ what does this mean to you?” Most often, the initial response was “Responsibility.” Curiosity led to inquiry. I then asked, “What does responsibility mean?” The word responsibility captures the central theme of this book. It is the ability to act independently and interdependently—to be your authentic self (purposeful and passionate), collaborate with others, and work productively. We live in a world where self-leadership—taking responsibility for knowing yourself and for engaging in deliberate and constructive thought and contribution—is increasingly a core virtue. It is a choice to go beyond survival to success and satisfaction in worklife. Dependence is a succumbing to your fears. It will always hold you back from reaching your potential. Celia,

a teacher in transition, said, “A while back I had an operation on my thyroid. For three or four days others took care of me—a necessity for a while, and a seductive one at that. Then I realized that I needed to take responsibility by not letting health concerns become an excuse for not living.” Layoffs, unchallenging work, demotion, and personal challenges are part of worklife. They won’t go away if you simply bury them.

#### **4. I Will Work *With*, Not Work For, My Organization and Customers**

Over the past decade many of my clients moved from one dot-com driven job to the next. Several were swept into the tidal fervor—naming their price and getting it. They profited. But many, those I knew and didn’t know, did not. Today, economic buoyancy is deflated. Now you are called to “partner” differently, to think and act collaboratively and in terms of working with others. You, the individual, must distinguish yourself by knowing your heart—what you are passionate about—and how your passion can add unmistakable value to the customer. Clamping on to the latest trend will not offer you security or eradicate your fear. Trends are not permanent solutions, but temporary way stations. Selling and using your skills alone is not enough either.

Ann, a designer, partners with her colleague and network of vendors to beautify her customers’ homes at a reasonable price. My wife, Amy, and I hired Ann to redesign our dining room. Initially, we focused on replacing the rug and buying chairs. Regarding the chairs, we explained, “Ideally, they would have a cushioned high back and seat, thin silhouette, and a narrow wooden ridge that horizontally framed the top of the chair. The legs would gracefully curve.” Ann listened, not once debunking our wish, and said she’d scout the antique market and let us know what she found in a month or so. Four weeks later, Ann

left a message: “I found your chairs at Antiques on Cambridge Street. Check them out and let me know what you think.” I walked into the shop, spotted the eight chairs, and without sitting in them, sought out the dealer Burt and said, “Sold.” We chose fabric and Ann’s upholsterer re-stuffed and re-covered the chairs. After seeing the finished chairs, I called Anne and said, “Is there such a thing as too perfect?”

Ann partnered with us doing what she loves. She didn’t follow some cookie cutter recipe, but listened to our request, honored our taste, and applied her expertise. If Ann had a working “for” us mentality, I don’t think she would have been as confident and free to simply tell us that we’d find our chairs at Antiques on Cambridge Street. Friends had referred her to us and we have passed Ann’s name on to others. Customers are lined up to work with Ann, despite the intrepid economy.

Workers in more traditional environments also face the working “with” or “for” decisions. A large Boston law firm voted and made the wrenching decision to close its doors. Founded in the late 19th century, the firm could not be saved by its historical roots. In the best interest of their clients, the firm was dissolved in a responsible and dignified manner. Over two hundred lawyers and other employees worked for the firm. Now each would need to take stock of their personal strengths and make decisions about realigning to work with a changed job market.

As individuals and organizations are forced to reinvent themselves, so is society. Individuals are now without guarantees of “expected” job safety nets—benefits, bonuses, and promotions. Organizations have always been loyal to their own survival and success. Are you loyal to your own survival and success? Will you work with or for others? Like Ann, will you see yourself with purpose and act with the confidence to deliver?

Realistically, we temporarily supply our expertise to an organization and its customers. Engineers are ad hoc to the organization, too, whether or not they see it or believe it, by supplying their expertise in the development of state-of-the-art technology. They will have work for as long as the organization needs them or for as long as they feel their work is suited to them. Nurses, in a similar way, are ad hoc to the health care facilities in which they work. They, as well, will have work for as long as the organization needs them or for as long as their needs are being met. This arrangement has its price, but if you choose to move to another organization—customer—you too will be ad hoc to the new organization.

None of us can afford to return to a closed mentality, to parental, hierarchical thinking. Trusting our leaders, wholly, can be unwise. Not only may your immediate job be at stake, but your savings and/or retirement could suffer as well. Instead, there is opportunity to take control of your worklife. It can be daunting, but extraordinarily rewarding, and no more painful than seeing your job and your savings circle a drainpipe.

## **5. I Will Commit to Continuous Learning**

We all work two jobs—one of them is being our own worklife self-leader. Continuous learning is the central qualification of this job. Why continuous learning? Learning is your fuel for developing hope, insights, perspectives, solutions, and actions.

How can anyone work two jobs? One is demanding enough. Note the following job description. Like any job description, this one is fluid and may change as you and your organization or workplace changes. At the moment, try not to decide whether you would apply for or accept this job. First, simply read the description.



## Job Description

### *Worklife, Inc.*

**Job:** Worklife Self-Leader

**Hours:** An ongoing thought process and way of being; between two and four hours per week

**Location:** Flexible—at an office or at home, in your car, on the beach, at your favorite coffee shop, or as you walk to your next destination

**Process:** Self-paced

**Summary:** You must be able to take responsibility for your own career mobility and job productivity while making a contribution to the organization, customers, and the larger whole.

**Primary Qualifications:** Any worker at any level and from any profession can apply for this job. We encourage inquiries and your application at any time. We anticipate a continuous flow of openings, whatever economic conditions exist. The worklife self-leader position primarily requires that you take the initiative for working with others, career planning, negotiating with management for self-development needs, and recognizing ways in which you can add value to the organization and/or customer.

**You must be able to:**

- ≡ describe how things have changed in the marketplace, in your place of work, and in your job.
- ≡ discuss your concerns about loss, transition, and managing change.
- ≡ assess your individual responsibility and how much you can control in your job, with your customers, and in your organization.

- ≡ discuss the benefits of moving in multiple directions, not just up the ladder.
- ≡ feel good and confident about asking and getting the support you need.
- ≡ clarify and prioritize your values to then pinpoint the essential one.
- ≡ break down the artificial barriers between your jobs to see and harness the passion buried beneath have-to-dos, fear, and compliance.
- ≡ identify your skills and decide which are most meaningful to you and which are most marketable to others.
- ≡ develop action/results statements and learn how to use them effectively.
- ≡ examine your beliefs and determine which are barriers to growth and which are catalysts.
- ≡ develop one to three specific career goals and a professional and flexible development plan that includes a pliable timeline for meeting goals.

**Salary:** This is a permanent growth position. You may, or may not, earn approximately the same amount that you currently earn. Your earnings will fluctuate depending on your profession, your ability to negotiate, your workplace, and the marketplace conditions. Whether or not you decide to take this job, it is wise that you save as much money as possible and invest wisely in order to build a financial cushion for sustaining, renewing, and enhancing your worklife.

**Philosophical Statement:** You're the boss. We are all self-employed—inside and outside of organizations.

**Values Statement:** Working in our changing world requires authenticity—passion and purpose—collaboration, and productivity. We must know ourselves

as individuals who are emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually distinct from our “employed” identity. With this self-knowledge, we can better identify our needs and values, build a sense of mission into our worklives, and contribute more to others.

Many of you are working very hard, trying to keep up with your job or lack of one, as well as meeting family, social, and community obligations. To take on the job of worklife self-leader along with your other responsibilities may seem unrealistic. Yet, this new job is a growing, flexible, evolving commitment, not another straightjacket that restricts you to rigid hours and routines. The description is a message and guide to encourage you to take part in the learning process of who you are and the changes and opportunities in your workplace and the marketplace. You and others who take on this job will most likely rewrite the description as you grow and as external conditions warrant.

## **6. I Will Create Meaningful Work**

As a boy, I worked landscaping yards and painting houses. I worked in the glorious outdoors. I made my own schedule, found my own customers (some found me), and made my own decisions. My general goal was to improve and maintain property and develop my techniques. My commitment was quality—doing the best possible to satisfy my customers. Thus, I consciously gave meaning to my work. The more meaning I gave it, the more I felt thankful to have it. I embraced with deliberate thought and action what appeared routine to others. I learned, for example, to select the right paint or plants for particular conditions. My self-employed attitude was taking shape back then. No matter what stage of worklife, creating meaningful work develops over the years, increasing wisdom, self-esteem, and enthusiasm; attracting customers and rewards; and presenting new opportunities.

Judy, a director, cleaned houses before she joined a corporation. She reminded me, “As a director, my title and role seemed so different than my house-cleaning days. But essentially, I brought the same spirit and values. To each, I was present, worked toward efficiency, made something better, respected and supported people, and enjoyed earning results. I brought my spirit to a home and to the organization.”

No work inherently possesses meaning. You develop a self-employed attitude by using your power to give meaning to your work. Only you can give meaning to your work and only you can take it away. Deliberate thought and action create a gateway to sustaining meaning in work. No matter what you do, creating this gateway and using your creative resources to develop meaning in your work is up to you. Even in the supposedly high-status professions—medicine, law, accounting—the rumblings of change are turning into large noises. “I saw medicine very traditionally. You open up an office or join a group practice and someone else takes care of billing, paperwork, and marketing,” remarked Andy, an internist. “This is no longer true,” he continued. “Today you must master business skills, including supervising others, computer proficiency, as well as your medical skills. One has an opportunity to gain control of one’s employment destiny, leading to greater creative control and ideas. But one has to ride out social, economic, and psychological waves in order to keep one’s head above water. All of a sudden you are thrust into the business world (whole world). We must overcome our resistance and master new thinking and skills.” For many, overcoming resistance and mastering new thinking and skills is the entrance to meaningful work.



## **We Are All Self-Employed**

### *A Worklife Creed*

I will begin the process of change with myself.

*Start with my own personal growth*

I will face the dragon—my work fears.

*Replace fear with passion and purpose*

I will integrate independence and interdependence.

*Be myself and collaborate with, and contribute to, others*

I will work with, not work for, my organization and customers.

*Do work and build relationships based on respect, equality, and competence*

I will commit to continuous learning.

*View my worklife as an ongoing journey*

I will create meaningful work.

*Work and live, believing that the world needs you and that you can make a contribution*



## Who’s the Boss?

### ***Check-In: Deepen Your “Self-Employed” Attitude***

At the end of each chapter you’ll find a Who’s the Boss? Check-In like this one. The questions summarize each chapter contents and provide an opportunity for you to garner self-leadership: personal reflection, observation, planning, and action. If you and a colleague or friend is reading this book together, discuss your insights, explore and support each other’s ideas, then actively plan for and engage in next steps. You’ll intensify your independence—knowing yourself—and animate your interdependence—collaborating with and contributing to each other—a core tenant of the self-employed attitude (see Chapter Four, Integrating Independence and Interdependence).

Please remember that every question is an opportunity for understanding self, others, and the world. It’s not for judging, censoring, or faulting.

1. What changes have you seen and/or experienced in the world that have influenced you?
2. What are some signs that you are ready to deepen your “self-employed” attitude? Was there an event in your worklife that marked your shift from an “employed” to a “self-employed” attitude—taking control of your worklife?
3. Can you recall a time or two that you’ve been in chaos—overwhelmed or distraught—and found direction, a new question, or fresh possibly?

4. What have you done to reinvent yourself in the past five to seven years? What valuable lessons might you borrow from these experiences to build your confidence, innovate—put your creativity to work—and reinvent yourself?
5. After reading the job description on page 22, what qualifications do you possess to take on the job of worklife self-leader?

this material has been excerpted from

***We Are All Self-Employed:  
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by Cliff Hakim

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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