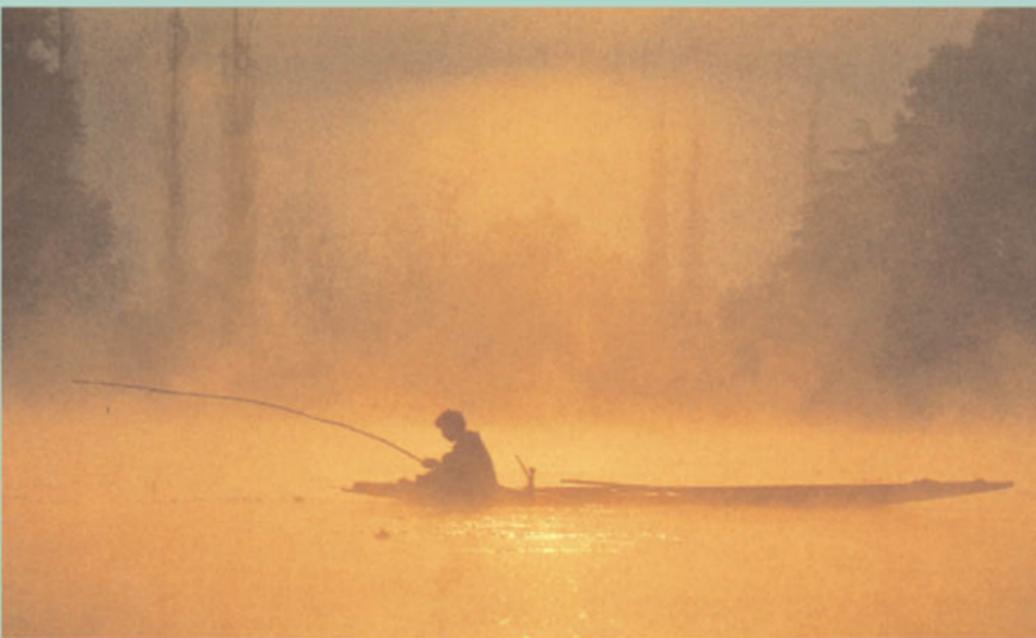


DOWNSHIFTING



HOW TO WORK LESS AND ENJOY LIFE MORE

John D. Drake

an excerpt from

***Downshifting:
How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More***

by John D. Drake

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P R E F A C E

This book is for you if you are

- fed up with the 12-hour work day and want to cut back.
- scared about the risks that come with working less.
- looking for more satisfaction in life.
- making a good income, but wondering if the price is worth it.
- questioning “Is this all there is?”
- wanting more time for your family or yourself, but uncertain about the best ways to achieve it.

Downshifting is all about getting off the merry-go-round. It is written to help you move from the fast track to a more satisfying, less work-focused lifestyle.

You will not find *Downshifting* to be pie-in-the-sky. Most of us need to work to earn a living. We recognize, too, that work can be a

positive experience—it can provide us with a sense of self-worth, pride of achievement, and even an identity. But, as with most things in life, dependence on just one source for fulfilling our psychological needs narrows the opportunities for personal satisfaction. This book helps you to expand the possibilities.

In *Downshifting* you will learn ways to cut back and still make a good living. I will show you how to convince your organization that the changes you want to make will be good for the organization. You will even learn how to cope with the scared feelings that you're likely to experience. This book will guide you through all you need to know, and do, to find more free time—not only for yourself, but those you care most about.

I've written this book because I want to share my experiences in becoming a happier, more balanced person. As a workaholic I knew it would be difficult to work less and as a psychologist I knew why, but I learned how to do it—peacefully and profitably. I've never had the desire to go back.

Chapter 1 begins our adventure. Shall we start?

*John D. Drake, Ph.D.
Kennebunkport, Maine*

IS THIS ANY WAY TO LIVE?

There's more to life than work.

OLD ADAGE

WORKING LIKE CRAZY

“I should have left an hour ago.” “Between my job and my family, I haven’t got a minute for myself.” “The money is great, but there’s got to be more to life than this.” Do these statements have a familiar ring? Maybe you’ve uttered the same words yourself. If so, you’re not alone. *U.S. News and World Report*¹ found that 49 percent of Americans say our society puts too much emphasis on work and not enough on leisure. For many, the idea of leisure is a joke. Gates McKibbin, a former organization effectiveness consultant with McKinsey & Company, put it this way:

The prevailing work ethic in the United States right now demands that people succumb to absurdly escalated expectations of the time and energy that one must invest in work-related activities. The fast pace and pressure to be plugged-in at all times, made

possible by the omnipresent cell phones, voicemail, e-mail, laptops, and faxes, fuel the expectation that employees should quite literally be available to deal with work issues 24 hours a day—wherever they are, whatever they are doing.²

The lead article in a recent *Barron's*³ magazine stated that “Glutted with goods, Americans increasingly want ‘feel-goods’—cruises, makeovers, golf lessons, and the biggest luxury of all, free time.”

The good news is that, in the effort to attain more free time, you’re a step ahead of most people. Selecting this book suggests that you’ve probably been thinking for some time about cutting back at work. You have already crossed an important psychological barrier!

In reading *Downshifting*, you are also making a great start toward living a more fulfilling life—a goal sought by many, but all too seldom achieved. This book is designed to guide you through the steps necessary for converting your fondest lifestyle dreams into reality.

WORKPLACE ENJOYMENT ROBBERS

Today a variety of forces converge on us at work, resulting in increased pressure and incredible demands on our time. Some of these forces are subtle, others overpowering. It is difficult to escape them. I think of these pressures as enjoyment robbers and we are going to explore some of them in this chapter. Quite likely, their presence in your organization accounts for your desire to downshift.

The Competitive Pressures

One reason we are enjoying our jobs less arises from the impact of the global economy. Competitive pressures bring more mergers and downsizing, and with them a double whammy: the fear of job loss

on the one hand and increased work burdens on the other. Margie's story is a case in point:

Margie is a single mom with two children, ages 7 and 10. She works for a medium-sized insurance company that was recently acquired by an insurance giant. Within one month of the acquisition, two departments were relocated some 800 miles away at the giant's headquarters. While her department of thirty-five was kept in its original location, it was reorganized, and in the process eight jobs were eliminated.

Of course, the term *reorganization* was a euphemism. In reality, the staff was reduced by eight and the work redistributed among the remaining employees. Margie's workload now increased significantly, making it impossible for her to leave each evening in time to cook dinner.

Margie feels afraid that if she doesn't keep up with the new workload she might be terminated. She feels frustrated, too, when working late leaves the children to fend for themselves. She needs the income and is good at what she does, but there's no indication that things will improve. She wonders if she should start "looking."

In a nutshell, competitive pressure forces management to get more productivity from fewer people. While such efforts enhance profits, they also make for long, strenuous workdays that can drive conscientious workers into the ground. "I work half-days—12 hours!" is a jest heard in many offices.

How bad is it for you? Check out "Signs of Overwork" for a list of symptoms characteristic of overworked individuals. Put a checkmark before any of those that describe you. If you checked five or more of these items, you're probably overworked—more than likely, your life is out of balance. It can be dangerous for your health and your close relationships, good reasons to examine downshifting possibilities.

SIGNS OF OVERWORK

- _____ My family complains about my absence at many evening meals.
 - _____ I bring work home almost every weekend.
 - _____ I have uncomfortable feelings about my strong work focus.
 - _____ At work, I experience frustration about never seeming to get caught up.
 - _____ I often feel best when I'm busy, whether it's at work or home.
 - _____ I call into work at least twice while away on vacation.
 - _____ I postponed or changed my vacation dates at least once during the past year.
 - _____ I've been quietly harboring a desire to work less and get off the treadmill.
 - _____ I feel angry about all that my employer expects of me.
 - _____ Those close to me often express displeasure about my being away so much on business trips.
 - _____ I feel guilty when I leave work on time.
-

The Corporate Culture

The subtle influences that impact negatively on how we work are often unspoken. These stem from the corporate culture reflected in the example set by those above us. If, for instance, our boss comes in each Saturday morning, or works until seven every evening, these work patterns soon become the unspoken norm. No one in authority says that you must stay late or be present on Saturday morning, but you feel the pressure to do so. In some organizations, leaving early on the eve of a holiday is frowned upon. Whatever the unspoken pressures are in your organization, they will almost always reduce your freedom and increase the burden of your job.

Pressure to Make the Numbers

In many companies work becomes less tolerable because there is constant pressure to "make the numbers." In these organizations,

the implied threat is to make them *or else*. So everyone works hard to look good *now*. Never mind what negative implications current actions may have for the future. If you don't look good now, you may have no future. As one plant manager said to me, "It's phony and degrading—a helluva way to have to work."

As consultant to a major food corporation, I can vividly recall stories about salespeople persuading friendly customers: "Order a carload now. You can cancel the order next week." In this way, many sales managers met their regional quotas. But it was a house of cards, and there came a day some years later when it came tumbling down. The company's stock value plummeted and another firm acquired them.

Pressure to Serve More Customers

e-Mail now makes it possible for workers to be in touch with far more people than ever before. In addition, with this instantaneous new tool each of your customers or contacts expects a more rapid response than in the days of typewriters and copy machines. Communicating with more people, each of whom expects an instant response, often leads to to-do lists that couldn't be completed in an 80-hour workweek.

Rapid Change

We have all heard about the exponential speed with which life around us is changing. This often translates into increased workplace pressure. Because change occurs so rapidly, we feel the need to be on top of things. This manifests itself in the need to be almost constantly in touch. Even when we choose not to check in, others take advantage of our accessibility and call us! You know the pressure to keep in touch has to be strong when golfers carry phones in their golf bags or when work-related calls are made or received during a family night out. As getting away from the job becomes more difficult, our freedom ebbs away.

Symptomatic of today's go-go business world is the growing

effort of advertisers to convince consumers that their products will help bring simplicity back to their lives. The Associated Press⁴ put it this way: "Use of the word *simple* in advertising may not be new, but marketers say it is becoming more prominent as Americans try to restore some calm to frenetic lifestyles."

Overwhelming Work Burdens

Many individuals, especially those who work in corporate staff assignments or in the helping professions, find themselves in job situations in which an overwhelming number of tasks confront them. In most cases, they have no control over the workflow; it just keeps coming. Trying harder to keep up seems to attract more work, negating any progress they've made. Often, when extra effort is extended, no appreciation is expressed. If you are in a job such as this, you're in a classic burnout situation. One seminar participant put it this way: "John, I'm so busy that I don't have time even to *think about*, much less plan for, downshifting."

All of these pressures, added to personal ones, can make life frenetic. We work faster, log more hours, eat at our desks, take work home, call in while on vacation, and still fear for our job. Are you angry about it? So are lots of others. You have a right to be upset. And anger isn't the only consequence of work pressures. Fatigue, loneliness, and diminished intimacy with loved ones are also prices we pay. It doesn't have to be that way.

That you want to make a change to get more enjoyment out of your personal life and work is natural and normal. Why wouldn't anyone want more personal freedom to build closer family relationships, improve on health, reach out to others, and pursue activities they enjoy? Sound appealing? If so, come along and I'll show you how to get off this crazy merry-go-round and live a little!

WHERE WE'VE BEEN / WHERE WE'RE GOING

This chapter discusses the many workplace forces that reduce our personal freedom and are beyond our control. It is unlikely they

will go away. For this reason, it makes sense to take greater charge of your life. You can alter the work demands that rob you of time and energy for family and friends, or for pursuing non-work activities. Given today's work environment, it is altogether reasonable to seek some relief.

In the next two chapters, we're going to explore some forces that could hinder your downshifting. It is important to understand these pressures so that you can identify the most constructive ways for overcoming them. After that, we're on our way to taking some action steps!

Questions for Reflection

1. What bothers me most about my current job and/or work climate?
2. If I imagine myself, at 65 or 70, reflecting on my life, what would have been important and what would not? What do my conclusions tell me about planning my life, starting now?
3. Have I shared my dissatisfactions about my current job situation with those I care about (and who care about me)? If not, why not? If yes, how did they react to my concerns? What does their reaction tell me about proceeding further?
4. If I had more personal time available, what is one way I would spend it?
5. How do I stop myself from setting limits on my work?

THE WORK TRAP

Young executives experience a high as they begin their first job. The title, the secretary, lunches with the “big boys,” the sense of power, the heady feeling of associating with the affluent—there is something seductive and quickly addicting about all of this.

BARRIE GREIFF AND PRESTON MUNTER, TRADEOFFS: EXECUTIVE, FAMILY AND ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE¹

WORK TRAPPING PRESSURES

In the last chapter we saw how workplace pressures often make downshifting attractive and desirable. However, to borrow from the vernacular, cutting back “ain’t gonna be easy.” If you are like most individuals contemplating reducing your work time, anxiety over potentially reduced income is right in the forefront. It’s like cutting back on desserts—it may be the healthy thing to do, but you know that you’re going to miss the goodies.

Even if income isn’t of great concern, the potential for losing some of the positive aspects of your job also tugs at you. Will you have to give up those activities and social interactions that bring satisfaction and fulfillment?

In this chapter, we’ll explore two significant forces that conspire to trap us into working too hard and hence make downshifting difficult. They are:

- Contemporary lifestyles
- Work satisfactions

As we explore these two forces, it will be helpful to identify the ones that most strongly influence you. By cataloguing job traps, you'll be able to determine ways to minimize their impact. For my part, I'll assist by describing practical, action steps that will relieve the pressure. Let's start by examining how the world around us traps us in our work.

Buying into The Plan

Believe it or not, the world around you has a Plan for how you should live your life. The media as well as the words and actions of our contemporaries promulgate The Plan. Most of it has to do with priorities and values. We are often unaware how much our thinking and actions are influenced by outside pressures.

During a recent seminar in Kansas City, Vince, a communications firm VP, spoke with me about his desire to live out a long-cherished dream to own a small marina in the Ozarks. He was complaining that he couldn't move ahead on it. I asked him why not.

Vince: John, I still have to put two kids through college.

John: Who says?

Vince: Well, one's going to be a senior this fall, and the other is two years behind. . .

John: Who says? Who says you *have* to put your children through college? Did your parents foot all your college expenses?

Vince: Oh, I see what you mean. As a matter of fact, they didn't have the resources to help me at all.

In Vince's social milieu, almost all families provide for their children's college education. It is done without much questioning. This is how his world tells Vince to behave. Most likely, Vince never considered other options like local colleges, partial support, the availability of part-time work, and so on.

I was not, of course, attempting to dissuade him from providing for his children's education. I was simply suggesting that he examine the source of the obstacle that was holding him back from pursuing the marina purchase and to consider alternatives.

Commonplace Constraints

If you are now hesitating to downshift, part of that reluctance may originate in the world's Plan for living—a plan that may or may not be right for you. The key here is being aware of how such influences are constraining you and your decisions. Here are a few such influences:

- *More is better.* The implication is that acquiring things will bring us happiness. Therefore, it's accepted as the norm, even admirable, to seek higher and higher income, bigger houses, more job advancement, and more possessions—the more luxurious, the better. Things are valued over relationships. It is obvious, of course, that the pursuit of “more” requires plenty of money, which in turn drives us to work harder. We justify having little or no time or energy left for other important parts of life like health, family, and relationships on the basis that we need to maintain our income.
- *Buy now, pay later.* “You deserve it.” Immediate gratification is a common theme in advertisements. Credit cards make it easy. The idea of saving up for something is seen as old-fashioned. The parallels carry over to relationships. For example, if the marriage has problems, get a divorce. Many hesitate to downshift because they fear loss of ability to have it all now.
- *The customer is always right.* Total dedication is valued. The expectation is that you won't disappoint the customer, that you won't say “No, I can't” and that you don't say “I can't get it right away.” The pressure for customer satisfaction is often so strong that downshifting isn't even perceived as a possibility.
- *Look good.* One way in which this value manifests itself is the booming arena of cosmetic surgery that includes facelifts, breast enhancements, and tummy tucks. On the social scene, looking good is often tied to issues of status and prestige, such as belonging to the best clubs, owning a luxury car, living in a certain

section of town, and having an important-sounding job title or an impressive office. The list is endless. The central culprit is ego. If it is important for you to look good, then cutting back may be more difficult. Many fear that others may perceive us as unable to hack it, or even reject us because we don't share their values and choose instead to march to a different drummer.

We've mentioned here only a few values that contemporary society promulgates. There are many more that can trap us into maintaining the status quo (with our job). I hope the four influences just mentioned will stimulate your thinking about other external pressures that are potentially undermining your desire to downshift. Discussing this issue with close friends and loved ones may also help bring these forces into perspective.

The preceding thoughts about worldly values should not be construed to mean that making more money, or having luxurious things, or getting what you want now, are inherently wrong. It's just that for many people they do not turn out to be sources of happiness. In Chapter 9 we'll review the ways that individuals achieve personal happiness and satisfaction.

Let's see now how we can cope with worldly influences.

COUNTERACTING WORLDLY INFLUENCES

If you suspect that contemporary society's plan for living plays a role in trapping you into continuing to work as you are, there are ways to counteract that pressure. A constructive first step is to identify clearly the significant influences or values that could impact your downshifting decisions.

Checking Your Own Values

Look at my "Checklist of Contemporary Values." Carefully consider each value and ask yourself "In what ways has this value impacted my actions and decisions—especially with regard to family, career, and personal life?" Check all the values that apply. This can be an interesting and meaningful exercise.

CHECKLIST OF CONTEMPORARY VALUES

Value	Has affected me		
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Some-what</i>	<i>A lot</i>
More is better—especially possessions, income, and status. “The one with the most toys wins.”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoy it all <i>now</i> . Don’t postpone gratification.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Looking good is important.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Success is rising up the ladder.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting is more important than giving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suffering is stupid. Avoid pain if you can.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The customer comes first.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus on pleasing self. “It’s got to be right if it feels good.”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career satisfaction is more important than relationships. “I can’t get involved in a marriage now or start a family; I want to establish my career first.”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting ahead is more important than staying in a job you enjoy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A man is the breadwinner in a family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other values that impact on you: _____			

If you’ve identified any contemporary values that are shaping your decision about downshifting, it can be productive to check out their validity. Here are two questions to contemplate:

- Does this value lead to decisions and behaviors that are good for me and those I love?

- How much happiness do I see among those who live out these values?

I myself don't observe much happiness in the world out there. Instead, I see failed marriages, broken homes, substance abuse, latchkey children, hostile teenagers, psychological depression, and more. For me, this picture hardly generates confidence in contemporary values as a basis for making lifestyle decisions.

Sometimes awareness of the nature and impact of these forces on your lifestyle is all that is necessary to get past their entrapping quality and get on to downshifting. Taking cognizance of your uniqueness also can help.

Looking at Your Uniqueness

There is no other person exactly like you. There is no other family exactly like yours. What is good for others is not necessarily best for you. Only you and your family can determine that. The best decision for you, and for those you love, may run counter to the world's plan or prevailing behaviors and values.

If you determine that contemporary world attitudes and values are challenging you to continue your present workload, a conscious reevaluation will be productive. What is truly important in your life? Will the pursuit of contemporary values get you there? After such a reevaluation, you may emerge with a more confident feeling about downshifting. Taking the first steps might even become a joyous experience!

COUNTERACTING THE LURE OF JOB SATISFACTIONS

Another force that can trap you into postponing downshifting is the enjoyment you receive from your job. At times, work is hard to beat. It can help you feel good about yourself and be the source of much satisfaction. When work is like that for us, its pull can be strong. Among other things, your job can:

- *Provide a sense of self-worth and importance.* Your job achievements can result in your feeling good about yourself.

- *Be a source of friends and social interaction.* There may be people at work whose company you enjoy. Jo Ann, employed 20 years as a laboratory manager for a major suburban hospital, put it this way:

My work group is like another family. Over the years, as one or another leaves, they almost always say “The hardest part (of moving) is leaving my hospital friends behind.” You know, four years ago, Andre retired to Florida and once or twice a month we’ll buy a card, all will sign it, and we send him our good wishes. We get letters from Andre, too.

As I said, we like being with one another. It would be very hard for me to leave them.

- *Become a means of tapping into our talents and aptitudes.* If you’re good at selling, for example, it’s rewarding to convince an otherwise reluctant customer to buy your product.
- *Provide a sense of identity.* It is a way of establishing your importance. It says something about who you are and where you fit into this world. Persons who are retired often feel uncomfortable when someone asks “What do you do?” The response “I’m retired” doesn’t quite cut it.
- *Be a source of recognition.* A salary increase, praise for a job well done, assignment to an important task force, an important job title, and promotions are all tangible signs of acceptance and praise. They make us feel good—feel important and recognized.
- *Provide a sense of security.* Your salary, fringe benefits, and perks establish an economic base. They provide the wherewithal for your lifestyle.
- *Provide a respite from home.* When the home is not providing a peaceful and nurturing environment, the workplace can become a liberating opportunity for distraction from the pain or problems.

More than likely, you are now experiencing many of the above satisfactions that make it difficult to cut back. You may truly enjoy your work, even if it *is* taxing. If a satisfying workplace is making it difficult to downshift, here are some thoughts to help you add other satisfying activities to your life.

You Haven't Lost It All

It does not necessarily follow that by downshifting you will lose the job satisfactions you now enjoy. Some may remain the same, others diminish. But, there is a possibility that some might even be enhanced. For example, by reducing work responsibility you may feel less overwhelmed and more relaxed. You might be more fun to be around, and therefore experience an increased level of acceptance and praise—perhaps not at work, but from loved ones. But, whether at home or work, others are likely to respond favorably to your increased availability.

Here's how Janet Wittenauer experienced it. Janet is married and has two step-children in their twenties. She was director of executive development for a major medical-products firm. She described her downshifting this way:

Following a major reorganization, I was named director of executive development on the organization development team. Initially, I loved my job. I was good at designing and implementing new processes and successful in helping our organization to develop leadership talent. But, after a major acquisition, more reorganization and cost cutting, the work wasn't as satisfying. My boss and I had conflicting views and I became disillusioned with senior management.

As I approached 40, a reevaluation began. I gradually became aware that I really wanted to serve others as a coach and consultant, independent from any one corporation. After some internal soul searching, I resigned and went into business for myself—I started my own consulting firm. Of course, I experienced a big drop in income (it is still less than before), but the gain was that I got my life back. I rediscovered my family, and even became a great cook! My husband is happy to have my attention and our friendships and family relationships have deepened. Aside from coaching and consulting, I have become more actively involved in my church and with a couple of community organizations. Right now, life is more whole and enriched than it has ever been.²

Focus on the Potential Gain

Most lifestyle changes involve tradeoffs. We trade some career satisfactions in order to bring new dimensions to our life. A good example is Janet's comment about life being "more whole and enriched than it has ever been." A key question then may be: What is it you're seeking? People I know who have downshifted found that while some sacrifices were necessary, the payoff was more than worth it. It could be that way for you as well.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN / WHERE WE'RE GOING

We have been looking at how contemporary values and current job satisfactions can make downshifting more difficult. I mentioned how the world's plan encourages us to have it all now and how work satisfactions provide us with a sense of self-worth and the means to use our talents.

We pointed out the importance of identifying which worldly values and job satisfactions, if any, are influencing you, so that you can more readily find ways to minimize their impact. We suggested you question the validity of these pressures in light of your own uniqueness.

In the next chapter, we will look at how your fears can become a barrier to downshifting. And, as with this chapter, we'll show you how to surmount these deterrents. After that, we'll be on to action steps you can take to downshift and move down the path to greater life satisfaction.

Questions for Self Reflection

1. Which of the contemporary world values has been the strongest in shaping my life or lifestyle thus far? Has it led me to decisions or actions that I now regret?
2. Is the potential loss of some job satisfactions holding me back from proceeding with downshifting? Is it possible that I won't lose any job satisfactions when I downshift?

3. What is important in my life right now? To what extent will downshifting allow me to pursue it?

this material has been excerpted from

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