

# Motivation, Vocation and Disillusionment



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# 1. Motivation without a vocation

# Motivation without purpose has limited use

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- Lots of books and speakers are inspirational
  - They leave you feeling motivated to do something
- Unfortunately, the motivation usually wears off after a few weeks
  - This is probably because you don't have a "vocation" (something deeply meaningful to you that you want to work on)
  - Motivation combined *with* a vocation can produce great results
  - Motivation *without* a vocation usually fades quickly
- Advice:
  - This training course may provide you with motivation
  - If you haven't yet found your vocation then reread this training course when you *have* found it

## 2. Finding your vocation

# Many people have not found a vocation

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- Many people think “I don’t know what I want to do with my life”
  - They may have a vague goal, but they don’t know how they should achieve it
- Examples:
  - Broad goal: “I want to work in computer software”
  - Possibilities: programmer, tester, manager, technical support, sales, marketing, ...
  - Broad goal: “I want to end social injustice”
  - Possibilities: Become a lawyer? Join Amnesty International? Organize protest marches? Fundraising? Lobby politicians? Plot a revolution to overthrow a dictator?...

# How to find your vocation

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- Some people passively wait for inspiration to strike them
  - This strategy is rarely productive
- A better approach is to work at (or study) *something*:
  - Preferably something that seems at least partially right for you
  - Keep analysing your area of work to determine its mismatch for you
  - This will help you to refine your ideas about what your vocation should be

## Example: Martin Luther King Jr.

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- The following example is taken from *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chapters 2–4
- Chapter 2 concerns his time in university:
  - “I always had a deep urge to serve humanity, but I didn’t start out with an interest to enter the ministry. I thought I could probably do it better as a lawyer or doctor.”
  - So, he had a broad goal (“serve humanity”) but did not know how to achieve it
  - His first inspiration for how to achieve that goal came from reading *On Civil Disobedience* by American philosopher Henry David Thoreau
  - “I was do deeply moved that I reread the work several times”



## Example: Martin Luther King Jr. (cont')

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- Chapter 3 concerns his time studying in a seminary:
  - He began “a serious intellectual quest for a method to eliminate social evil”
  - He read many philosophies, theologies and political idealisms:
    - Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hobbes, Bentham, Mill, Locke, Walter Rauschenbusch, Karl Marx, Lenin, Nietzsche, Reinhold Niebuhr
  - He found flaws with most of them, but also some good insights
- Still, he had not found a tactic for achieving his goal that was compatible with his ethics:
  - “During this period [...] I thought the only way we could solve our problem of segregation was an armed revolt.”

## Example: Martin Luther King Jr. (cont')

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- Then he heard a sermon about Gandhi:
  - “His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi’s life and works”
  - In reading about Gandhi, he “discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking”
- Chapter 4 concerns his post-graduate study for a Ph.D.:
  - He continued studying philosophies, including Personalism and Hegel
  - This continued study helped him to refine his tactics for achieving his goal
  - By the time he finished his Ph.D., he had “an intellectual understanding” of non-violent resistance, but “no firm determination to organize it in a socially effective situation”
  - It was another 18 months before he found an opportunity to start using the tactic of non-violent resistance

# Analysis

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- It took Martin Luther King Jr. more than 10 years to find and start using a tactic to achieve his goal
- He was *proactively searching* for a tactic during that time
- If he had waited passively for inspiration to strike him then:
  - He may not have found any tactic at all
  - Or perhaps he would have used a different tactic, such as armed revolt (which is unlikely to have been as successful)
- Waiting passively for inspiration is rarely productive:
  - Inspiration does not appear in a vacuum
  - Instead, you need input to feed inspiration
  - You can get that input from work (or study) plus analysis

### 3. Becoming disillusioned with a vocation

# The pain of insults and having to leave a job

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- The hurt of being insulted varies:
  - It hurts *a little* if the insult comes from a stranger or slight acquaintance
  - It hurts *a lot* if the insult comes from a friend or family member
  
- Likewise, how much it hurts to have to leave a job varies:
  - If it is “just” a job (and you can get another easily) then it hurts *a little*
  - If it is a “dream” job then it hurts *a lot*
  - If you considered the job to be your vocation then it can be *agony*

# The pain of dysfunctional organizations

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- Many people consider their career to be a vocation:
  - Examples: doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, ...
- Vocational careers are not guaranteed to be free from dysfunctional working environments:
  - A dysfunctional working environment can be agony for people who consider their careers to be a vocation
  - Some change career to escape dysfunction, thus ending their vocation
  - Some stay in the same job, but their vocational zeal gets burned out
- The same problem can happen to activists:
  - Some activist organizations have dysfunctional working environments
  - Becoming disillusioned with a not-for-profit organization can be just as much agony as becoming disillusioned with a (paying) career

# Advice

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- There are some things you encounter rarely, if ever:
  - Example: most people buy a house only once or twice in their lives
  - It can be difficult to cope with rare events because you lack experience (and most people you know also lack relevant experience)
  - Becoming disillusioned with your vocation is one of these rarely encountered events
- Do not think you are the only person to ever face the issue:
  - Because this is a rarely encountered problem, most people you know may not have experienced it, but that doesn't mean it is unique
- Do not feel you are being “too sensitive” for feeling so upset
  - It is your *vocation* so of course you feel upset
  - People who don't understand how upset you are probably don't have a vocation of their own

## Advice (cont')

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- Accept it may take a long time to put your life back on track:
  - Probably many months, possibly several years
- Try to not feel bitter:
  - Negative emotions will sap your energy
  - Rather than thinking “the other people are to blame”, think “we were not compatible so it is best to go separate ways”
- Think of ways you can adapt your vocation so you can continue it by yourself:
  - Working by yourself means you can avoid dysfunctional organizations
  - Example:
    - A teacher ends up thinking that state education is dysfunctional
    - The teacher could switch to a non-teaching career
    - Or the teacher could find an alternative way to continue teaching (such as offering private tuition)



## Relevant book

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- The following autobiography discusses an activist's disillusionment
  - *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
- Outline of story:
  - Malcolm X was a minister in the Nation of Islam; this was his vocation
  - Media exposure made him famous
  - That, combined with excellent communication skills helped him to grow the religious organization very fast
  - Other ministers in the religion became envious of his success
  - Malcolm discovered corruption at the top level of the organization; this shook his faith in his vocation
  - The Nation of Islam found an excuse to expel him

### 3. Summary

# Summary

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- Reading an inspirational book (or this training course) may motivate you for a few weeks:
  - But the motivation will wear off unless you have a purpose or vocation
  - Advice: reread this training course when you *do* have a vocation
- Finding your vocation can take a long time:
  - Don't wait passively for inspiration to strike
  - Instead, proactively work or study until you find your vocation
- You may become disillusioned with your vocation:
  - This may be due to a dysfunctional work environment
  - Such disillusionment can be agony
  - Coping with a rare event (such as vocation disillusionment) is difficult:
    - You probably lack relevant experience to cope well
    - Other people's lack of experience makes it difficult for them to understand why you are so upset