



Poet, activist, novelist and playwright Langston Hughes said, “I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go.” For a jazz poet and innovator like Hughes, there were surely any number of places he wished to go, and went. He invites us to go, also. The key phrase being, “... if you really want to go.”

Wanting to go further – in a career, in a relationship, in any ambition – is common. Who doesn’t want to improve? Who doesn’t want to tackle new challenges and grasp the satisfaction of hard work rewarded? And yet, people remain in want mode and only in hindsight recognize the opportunities they’ve let slide by.

I was on a road trip with a friend last weekend. She mentioned that she had to fire an employee. This was particularly unpleasant because he was not cheating or stealing or coming late to work; he was meeting his goals, but just barely. Simply, he was not outstanding. Sounds like a tough organization, if Exceptional is the minimum expectation.

My friend explained, In order to improve the company we need to hire people who excel. If he’s not outstanding, he is a blocker, she said. If you’re not standing out, you’re in the way. Makes sense.

Can he be trained? I wondered, always cheering for the underdog. We’ve tried, she said, but he doesn’t seem to want to change.

Aha. We all have our reasons: But I’m busy. But I can’t afford the education. But I’m needed here. But my team is uninspiring. But it’s too risky. But it might not pan out. But it could backfire. Underneath every genuine excuse, the loud and clear message bubbling up is, “I don’t really want to.” If you wanted to, you would.

When you want to and you do, you cannot help but excel. Studies show that when a person works from their strengths and personal interests, when their heart is really into what they are doing, they consistently will work harder, achieve more and feel energized while working. The

Career Planning: From here to outstanding

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opposite phenomenon occurs when someone is just going through the motions; he works hard, accomplishes little and leaves work feeling drained and unsatisfied.

Career planning involves sorting the shoulds from the want-to's. If you have a career goals bucket list (if not, start now), cross off all but the most burning ideas. Disregard the easy money, the title your mate admires and the profession your parents pushed you into. What do you really want? Where do you really want to go? Aim for that star, and keep in mind another great line from Mr. Hughes, "I will not take but for an answer."

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