

Mediocrity is Not an Option



"Mediocrity is a blessing. Happiness is worth much more than success." - seems to be the new mantra being propagated by yoga gurus and lifestyle coaches as the panacea for the lifestyle related diseases and unhappiness originating out of the professional rat race. "Achievement is overrated; success or failure, you can't take anything with you when you die. So why bother? Relax, and take it easy. Reduce your expectations - focus on the quality of life."

While there is merit in the assertion that the single-minded focus on achievements or competition can cause burnout and a variety of physical and mental issues, arguing that the pursuit of excellence should be replaced by either inaction or mediocrity is not only misplaced but also dangerous. It's human nature to seek purpose in life through the pursuit of meaningful activities, and knowing that we are doing high-quality work gives us a lot of satisfaction, which enhances our self-esteem and confidence and aids well-being. If the need for rest is

confused with mediocrity, we will end up not only disappointing a lot of people who are depending on our work, but also shatter the self-esteem that defines us as people. Once self-esteem is destroyed, our existence becomes meaningless, and then our lives might drift to severe problem areas such as depression, crime or even suicide.

If too much work is causing problems, we can try to improve efficiency, change jobs, or even cut down on work - but whatever work we do, should be done at the highest level of excellence possible to ensure satisfaction. If someone has decided to quit her job to travel the world, the unintended outcome of such a decision should not be to become a vagabond, and roll from one place to another without any agenda. Traveling the world might mean only sightseeing in exotic locations for some people, while for others it might be an opportunity to learn about local cultures, languages, food, history, etc. This is not to suggest that that every activity should have lofty goals, but there should be some purpose to our actions and a commitment to excellence. Vagabondism can look appealing for a limited period of time, but soon disillusionment would set in, creating a new set of problems far worse than the ones sought to be replaced. We can find an excellent example of this problem by looking at how the hippies behaved - because they had no goals or agenda, they resorted to a life of drugs and petty crime while believing that they were following a meaningful alternate path in life.

Although the opposite of work is relaxation, it is by no means the same as the purposeless wastage of time. Real leisure has goals of rejuvenation and rest, which is extremely difficult to achieve without purpose and commitment. If we are mediocre in leisure, the restless mind craving for engagement will create more dissatisfaction in leisure than it did during hectic work.

A lot of people in this world work hard to sustain our lives - from the food on our tables, to the fuel in our cars, to the water in our toilets - everything comes because of other people's work. As responsible citizens of this world, we should be cognizant of our responsibility to do our share of high-quality work that is of some value to others. Excelling in whatever activity

or profession we decide to pursue is more important than the choice of the activity itself. Becoming a banker is not more important than becoming a homemaker - but, one should not become a homemaker just because it might be perceived to be easier and less stressful, nor should one continue in banking if there is greater purpose and excellence to be found in homemaking. Needless to add, we will all be bound by our situations in life and the limits of our ability in any activity we undertake, but nonetheless, we should try to excel within the boundaries that life has created for us.