

*Jacqui Burger  
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The Happy  
Ladder



**WORK**

**WORK, THE PHYSICAL OR MENTAL ACTIVITY TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING,** has a different meaning for everyone. It may be working for someone else, for yourself, looking after your family, volunteering, or a combination of all or any of these.

**THE WORK-WHY**

What we do is only a small part of the story, why we do it tells us much more about ourselves. This is where we find what motivates us. It's easy to have a knee jerk response to this and say "because it pays me", but even this has a reason behind it. Is it to

*What we do is only a small part of the story,  
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provide security for our family, fund our passion outside of work and write that novel, or save up for the future?



Is the work we do our passion?  
Are we proud of what we do? Do  
we contribute to others? Do we  
learn from our work?

Knowing our work-why, what  
motivates us, why our work mat-  
ters, and what our work means to  
others, gives greater value to the  
work we do.

*Work too much and relationships can suffer, our health can be damaged, and self-care falls by the wayside.*

We often introduce ourselves by mentioning what we do and sometimes we feel judged by others for this. While our work is important because we spend a lot of time doing it, we are not our job title. How we feel personally and the meaning we get from our work is vastly more important than what (you think) other people think. On the other hand, work should not be the only thing that gives our life meaning, we usually live a much longer life than our working one.



### **FINDING BALANCE**

A good work-life balance, where we have time and energy for our friends and family, to exercise and enjoy life, is important for our health and overall wellbeing. Research shows it makes us more resilient to stress and more productive. And if we take care of our body and mind, it will improve the quality of our work too.

Just like we need to recuperate after exercise, our mind also needs to rest after brain work. Studies show that disconnecting and disengaging from work makes us more focused and more engaged and lets us experience more joy in life.

Technology has made a lot of things easier, but makes it harder to separate our working, social and private lives. We are accessible through email and messaging for our friends and family while we are at work and for our colleagues when we are on holiday.

*We are much more than the title of our job.*

Work too much and relationships can suffer, our health can be damaged, and self-care falls by the wayside. To avoid this, we need to set boundaries in the times we work, the amount we take on and behaviours that we will or won't accept. Boundaries work best when we are clear about them and share them. For example, if Sunday is a family day, we can tell others, but if we want others to respect it, we also have to stick to it and not check our work mail on that day.



*If we take care of our body and mind, it will improve the quality of our work.*

Working over 48 hours a week is generally bad for most people. Working overtime to finish a project or to cover for a colleague occasionally is no problem, but working long hours week after week makes us tired and stressed, and we are more likely to make mistakes. Especially when our job requires a lot of brain-work; experts say that after 4 hours we are wasting our efforts. Regular breaks, like taking a walk if you have a sitting job, stretching if your job requires lifting, or even a sing-along after extensive budget planning, make us more productive.

#### FINDING OUR PURPOSE

The Japanese use the word *ikigai* to describe doing the thing that makes life worthwhile. It literally means “a reason for being”. Some of us find our purpose in meaningful, satisfying work. People who like what they are doing, and feel they are contributing to the world around them, tend to be happier and healthier. And companies with motivated employees perform better too.

But work is not the only place where we can find our passion. Volunteering at an animal shelter, training the kids soccer team, taking care of a relative, growing tropical plants – it can be anything that gives our life meaning and contributes to our happiness. And even if we love our job, it is good to have interests outside the workplace.



# IKIGAI

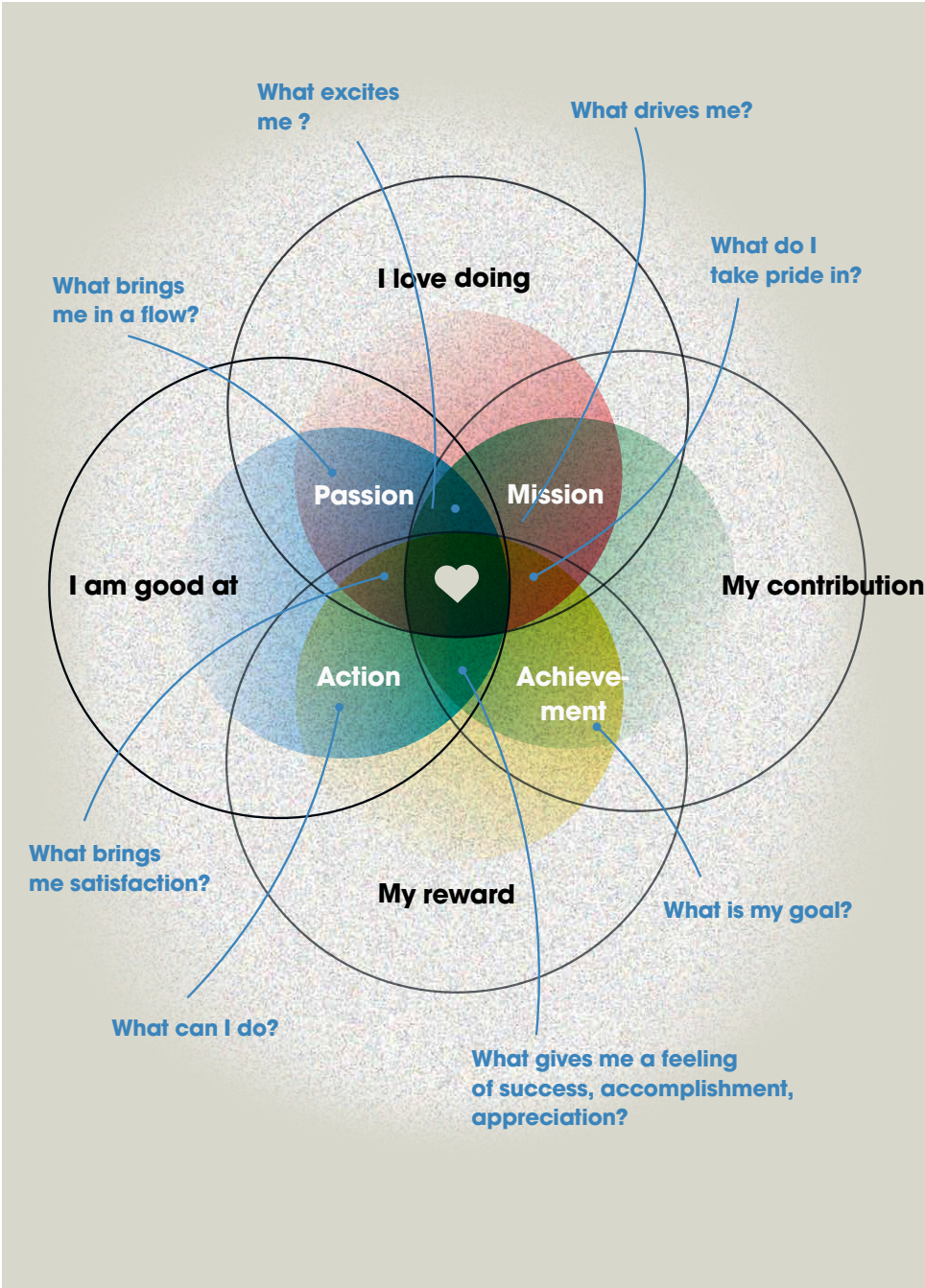
PURPOSE BRINGS JOY AND GIVES OUR LIFE MEANING. THE JAPANESE CALL IT IKIGAI, AND BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR A HAPPY LIFE. THE FRENCH CALL IT RAISON D'ETRE, THE REASON WE ARE IN THIS WORLD.

**THE RUSSIANS TALK ABOUT THE SPARK OF LIFE** – the creative inspiration that keeps our hearts beating. Our ikigai is something we really enjoy doing, that we want to practice and be good at, maybe contributes to the world we live in and we get rewarded for. This is not necessarily money, we can find our reward in fulfillment or the appreciation of others too. Our ikigai doesn't need to be big and world conquering, as long as it makes us feel happy and valued, adds joy to our life and gives us the sense that life is worth living.

The questions in the flower diagram opposite can help us find our ikigai. The goal is to find the overlaps and move towards the heart of the flower. It is an opportunity to (re)discover things that spark your life. If nothing comes to mind, think about when you were younger or things you see others do that inspire you.

Just knowing what would get us out of bed in the morning is not enough, we need to practice it too.

*On page 116, you'll find an exercise to explore your own Ikigai.*





# JOURNAL PROMPTS

JOURNALING HELPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CREATIVITY.  
HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU START WRITING.

1. WHAT DOES MY WORK MEAN TO ME?
2. HOW WOULD I RATE MY WORK/LIFE BALANCE?
3. HOW DOES MY WORK ALIGN WITH MY VALUES?
4. WHAT IS ONE THING I COULD DO TO MAKE WORK BETTER?
5. IF I DIDN'T NEED TO WORK FOR FINANCIAL REASONS, WOULD I STILL WORK? WHAT WOULD I DO?
6. WHAT CHANGES AM I READY AND WILLING TO MAKE TO MOVE TOWARDS THIS IDEAL?

FOR MORE SUGGESTIONS GO TO [THEHAPPYLADDER.ORG](http://THEHAPPYLADDER.ORG) OR WRITE WHAT COMES TO MIND.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dashed lines.

USE WHAT TALENTS YOU POSSESS; THE WOODS WOULD BE VERY SILENT IF NO BIRDS SANG THERE EXCEPT THOSE THAT SANG BEST. - HENRY VAN DYKE



# Life Balance WORK

A large rectangular area defined by a dashed blue border, intended for writing or drawing.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dashed lines.

DOUBT KILLS MORE DREAMS THAN FEAR EVER WILL. - SUZY KASSEM



# Life Balance WORK

## MY IKIGAI

Explore your ikigai by answering these questions. Not all questions need an answer and there are no wrong answers. Look at page 110 and 111 for more explanation.



WHAT DO I LOVE DOING?

WHAT BRINGS ME IN A FLOW/MAKES ME FORGET TIME?

WHAT EXCITES ME?

WHAT AM I GOOD AT?

WHAT CAN I DO?

WHAT IS MY REWARD?





**WHAT BRINGS ME SATISFACTION?**

**WHAT GIVES ME A FEELING OF SUCCESS/ACHIEVEMENT/  
ACCOMPLISHMENT/APPRECIATION?**

**WHAT IS MY GOAL?**

**WHAT DOES IT CONTRIBUTE TO?**


**WHAT DO I TAKE PRIDE IN?**

**WHAT DRIVES ME?**

**I AM ALWAYS DOING THINGS I CAN'T DO. THAT IS HOW I GET TO DO THEM. - PABLO PICASSO**



# Life Balance WORK



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dashed blue lines.



# Life Balance WORK

A series of 20 horizontal dashed lines for writing.



THE 40 HOUR WORK WEEK WAS INTRODUCED BY HENRY FORD IN 1914.  
HE INCREASED HIS WORKERS' PAY AND REDUCED THEIR HOURS.

**Over 300 billion emails were sent  
and received every day in 2020.**

IN 2010, IRAN BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE  
WORLD TO INTRODUCE A NATIONAL BASIC INCOME.

**Working more than  
55 hours a week is  
counterproductive.**

THE IDEAL TEAM SIZE IS BETWEEN 4 AND 9.

A TEAM OF THIS SIZE CAN MOVE QUICKLY, MAKE  
DECISIONS RAPIDLY, AND GET STUFF DONE.

**Holding stand up meetings reduces  
meeting length by at least a third.**

DURING THE MIDDLE AGES, BEING A BAD MUSICIAN WAS A  
PUBLIC OFFENSE AND LOUSY MUSICIANS WERE TORTURED.

**Sewer Swimmer is considered  
the worst job in the world.**

CARE-WORKERS AND HAIRDRESSERS REPORT  
BEING THE HAPPIEST AT WORK; ESTATE AGENTS  
REPORT THE LOWEST JOB SATISFACTION.

Life Balance **WORK**



*Photo: Bente Maria Hilkens*

# DIMITRI YOCARINI (38) IS CEO AND OWNER OF OLYMPIA, ONE OF THE LARGEST EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES IN THE NETHERLANDS.

**DIMITRI IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK** and what Olympia stands for: “To lead the societal transition towards meaningful work.”

He is effusive that giving work meaning creates its own energy. As someone who has worked his way up through the company since starting as a temporary worker, aged 17, Dimitri’s personal values align closely with that of the company. “We see a future where work is a set of meaningful activities that leads to individual fulfilment as well as collective wellbeing.”

At 14, his step-father explained the difference between being successful and meaningful. He told him that meaning is what drives you and what really matters to you, and this is what determines your direction. This has become his guiding principle in life.

## Life Balance WORK

He believes that finding meaning in work is possible for everyone. “Purpose at work is important to wellbeing as we spend a lot of time at work. And meaningful work doesn’t always have to be big or disruptive.”

“Take someone working in waste-collection. It is easy to view it as ‘do work, get paid’. But viewed through a lens of ‘It is important that the city is clean so people can live safely’ it provides clarity that the work matters.”

*“Purpose at work is important to wellbeing as we spend a lot of time at work.”*

Olympia doesn’t conduct ‘interviews’, they have ‘meaningful conversations’. These include questions such as ‘who has the job of your dreams?’ and ‘what makes you get out of bed in the morning?’. They create different and more insightful discussions as attitude and skills are much more important than a resumé. As a result, he says, they recruit for culture and purpose.

He is also very aware of how work interrelates with other areas of life and can’t be viewed in a vacuum. “We found that many of our temporary staff had debt issues and we used to address it in the traditional way of money being deducted from them at source. But we’ve now changed this so that we have financial advisors to help people stop getting into debt in the first place.”

This improves overall wellbeing.

Asked about his own personal life balance, he says it's pretty good. "I work from my own personal purpose to balance my priorities. With three small boys and my lovely fiancée, family is a priority and it requires constant communication and attention."

*"The footsteps I leave behind matter to me. Work is a very powerful instrument to achieve this."*

He says he only eats healthily, takes part in sport, and works to be open and reflective, and manages his energy. One key element he credits is surrounding himself with people he learns from, and being an avid reader.

However, given his motivation of "having a meaningful impact on other people through the labour market", he acknowledges that his work and life purpose are so symbiotic that there can be imbalance here and he has to be mindful of his work/life balance.

"The footsteps I leave behind matter to me. Work is a very powerful instrument to achieve this, but there are also other ways. Purpose is provided through meaningful activities.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OLYMPIA ON [OLYMPIA.NL](http://OLYMPIA.NL) OR  
[LINKEDIN.COM/COMPANY/OLYMPIA-NEDERLAND](https://LINKEDIN.COM/COMPANY/OLYMPIA-NEDERLAND)



**1.** OVER 50% OF PEOPLE FEEL STRESSED AT WORK. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING OVERWHELMED, TRY BUILDING IN 2-5 MINUTES TO YOURSELF INTO YOUR MORNING ROUTINE. JUST SIT WITH A CUP OF WATER, JUICE, OR COFFEE AND DO NOTHING. IT WILL HELP YOU FEEL MORE RESTED AND INVIGORATED.

**2.** WE'VE ALL HAD IT HAPPEN: FINISH A JOB INTERVIEW OR IMPORTANT MEETING, WALK OUTSIDE, AND REALISE ALL THE BRILLIANT THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE SAID. WRITE THEM DOWN AND KEEP THEM FOR NEXT TIME. IT WILL BE REUSABLE, AND VERY VALUABLE.

**3.** THE 2-MINUTE RULE: IF YOU CAN FINISH A TASK IN 2 MINUTES (SUCH AS REPLYING TO AN EMAIL OR SENDING SOMEONE A REMINDER), THEN DO IT NOW RATHER THAN RECORDING IT FOR LATER.

**4.** OVER 40% OF PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO DISCONNECT FROM WORK. CREATE A SHUTDOWN RITUAL TO DISCONNECT FROM YOUR WORK DAY AND START THE NEXT SECTION OF YOUR DAY.

**5.** PLANNING MAKES US MORE SUCCESSFUL. AT THE END OF EACH WEEK, THINK AND PLAN WHAT'S THE ONE THING THAT WOULD MAKE NEXT WEEK A SUCCESS. BOOK IT IN AND BLOCK TWICE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU THINK YOU NEED. CONSIDER WHAT YOU NEED TO HAVE DONE TO ACHIEVE IT.

# RAMONA VAN DEN AREND

APART FROM BEING A NURSE AND MOTHER TO 4 YOUNG BOYS, SHE IS FAMOUS FOR HER PROJECTS - INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF WORK - LIKE A LOCAL CAFE FOR PARKINSON'S PATIENTS, A LITTER PICKING BRIGADE AND A BLOOMING COMMUNITY GARDEN

**SHE VOLUNTEERS AT SCHOOL**, picks up groceries for a neighbour, sees friends and games with her brother. She likes gardening. “I get in a flow and let my mind wander. I wish I had 48 hours in a day, so I wouldn’t have to worry about organizing my time.”

She shares her projects on social media, often inspiring others. “I love to get the ball rolling. I like solutions that are fun, and seeing the effect.”

“My parents were hard working social creatures, involved in community projects. My father worked as a house painter. After dinner he would go back to work. My mother gave up her job after having kids. I wanted to do things differently: I wanted time for my kids and a career outside the house.”

The nurse-education taught her about self-care. “I love sugar and coffee, but since drinking my coffee without caffeine, I sleep a lot better.”

## Life Balance WORK

Being keen on structure and routine, every day starts with a family breakfast and she usually manages to be home when the boys come in from school. “They game for half an hour and I do the laundry, perfect to unwind and shake off the day”.

She is very practical and organized. She writes everything down in a to-do-list, and plans her work week. “Client care comes first, I plan other tasks and social things around this. I aim for balance. If I have a lot of physical activities one week, I plan brainwork – writing a plan or report – in the next. This week I was too busy to run, so for next week I’ve blocked time in my diary”.

Ramona has a good support system in place. She had her first baby at age 24, in the last year of her training, and started working for Buurtzorg. “Thanks to a flexible babysitter, I could work shifts. My employer always gave me room to plan my own schedule and number of hours. Also my husband, we are complete opposites, but we encourage each other.”

Her biggest secret is...naps. “I work late and get up early. I regularly take a nap”.

**RAMONA VAN DEN AREND (36) HAS BEEN WORKING AS A PARKINSON'S NURSE FOR OVER 10 YEARS AND IS A CASE MANAGER DEMENTIA. YOU CAN FOLLOW HER ON INSTAGRAM @KIJKINDEWIJK, @KIJK\_MAMA OR KIJKINDEWIJK.NET AND RAMONA.VANDENAREND.NL.**