

Are you an app?

By Sarah Hirschorn

In a world where we can customise the smallest details of our existence, from our specific brand of coffee to our sunglasses to the layout of our Facebook pages, why is it many of us settle for dull or dissatisfying jobs that just don't allow us to be ourselves? At a time when people have 45 tailor-made iPhone apps downloaded for every moment, many of us resign ourselves to believing the most centrepiece of our lives—work-- is never quite going to fit. Ask yourself this, are you an app for your work, or should your work be an app for you?

The essential ingredient for an authentic and energising career is knowing what we're truly passionate about. This should be simple, and yet is often confusing. Part of the problem is the fact that we are used to seeing successes and strengths through the lens of what we're good at, and often stay loyal to that focus even if it means leaving other important factors like enthusiasm and engagement by the wayside.

But is 'good at' good enough?

Research in the field of positive psychology has led to a solution by redefining 'strengths' as more than areas of high performance and introducing an important extra component: energy. By identifying strengths through the two lenses of performance and energy combined, we suddenly bring into focus those specific areas that feel exciting and authentic. These are the elusive factors that will get us racing out of bed in the morning; they are the areas in which we shine.

This redefinition has led researchers to a crucial distinction between the things we're good at but find draining ('learned behaviours'), and the things we're good at and find energising ('strengths'). Studies show that by developing and deploying strengths, rather than learned behaviours, you can increase vitality, confidence and fulfilment and reduce stress even six months down the line.

Take the example of Laura. After eight successful years working in commercial banking, somehow her career left her feeling drained. Despite her finance qualifications and experience, she felt she was working against the grain. By identifying that her work required daily use of her learned behaviours of *time optimizer* and *competitive* it wasn't surprising she was exhausted. But great potential lay in her unrealised strengths: *adventure* and *mission*. Engaging with the excitement and energy of these unrealised strengths, Laura made a change and now works on international microfinance projects to alleviate poverty. With frequent travel overseas and the opportunity to help others, she now deploys her finance expertise in a way that comes naturally, and every day gives her a buzz.

To identify and work with your realised strengths and learned behaviours, you can sign up for free weekly strengths tips or take the Realise2 assessment at www.strengths2020.com.