Gamify Your Work

Get more done in good cheer

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Workers in a better mood do better work

Making hard work into a good time only takes a **shift in perspective**. When you make your work enjoyable, you increase your **capacity**, **curiosity**, and **creativity**, which improves your performance.
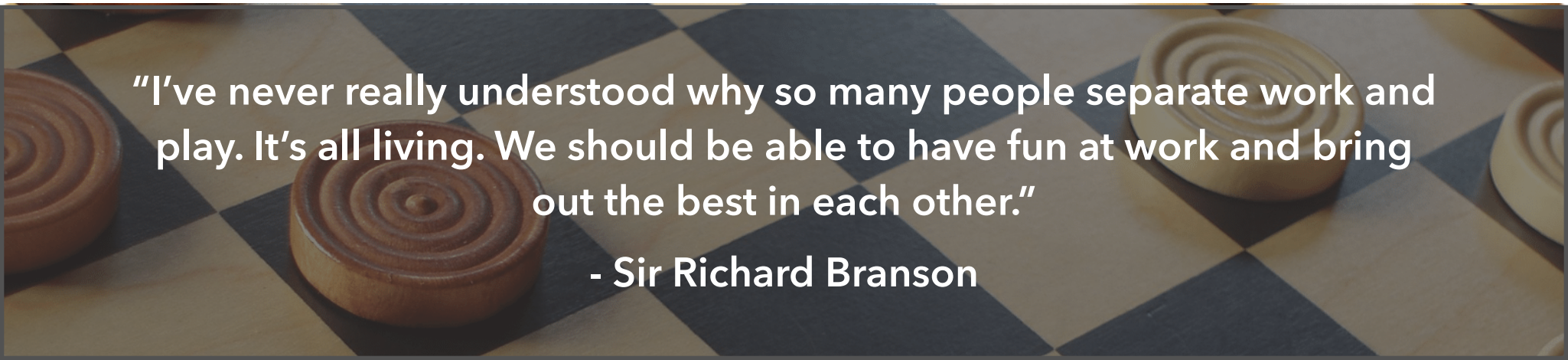
We labor under the false impression that our work should be toil. By default, we expect drudgery of employment rather than enjoyment. The industrial revolution conditioned us to think of work as the price we pay for leisure time, and play as something we earn only after our labors are complete.

But what if play was not an **escape** from work? What if bringing play into our work is how we **accomplish more**, and **perform better** at what we do?

Nobody has to convince you to play a game that you like. If you can turn your work into a fun game, your resistance to the task will be lower, your enthusiasm for accomplishment will be higher, and you will achieve more than if you treated your work like a chore to be done resentfully.

Think of the seven dwarves, toiling in the mines; whistling while they work. **Play makes the hard work go by faster**, and it infuses our work with a dash of joy.

Play with your work, especially if it's boring. **Fun requires less effort.** When you can stay entertained with your work, you will feel less internal friction, and the hard work will go by faster.

"I've never really understood why so many people separate work and play. It's all living. We should be able to have fun at work and bring out the best in each other."

- Sir Richard Branson

Hard work vs easy play

ADP Research Institute conducted a 50,000-person survey of random samples of working populations from 17 countries. There were 3 factors that reliably predicted retention, performance, engagement, resilience, and inclusion.

These predictors did not include pay level, or liking one's colleagues, or the work location, or even a strong belief in the mission of the organization.

All these mattered, but none were as significant as these three items:

✦ Was I excited to work every day last week?
✦ Did I have a chance to use my strengths every day?
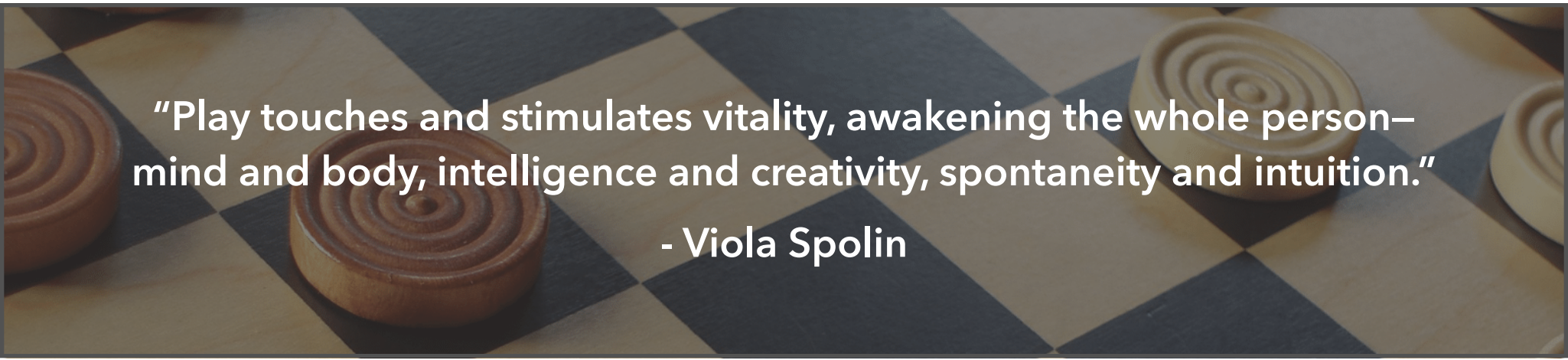✦ At work do I get a chance to do what I'm good at and something I love?

Think about answering these questions when asked about what you enjoy. Your answers will reveal a side of yourself that is authentic and engaged.

Are these the same answers you would give, when asked about your work?

"These findings suggest," wrote Marcus Buckingham in the Harvard Business Review, "that only when a company **intelligently links what people love to their actual activities** will it achieve higher performance, higher engagement and resilience, and lower turnover."

How can you link what you love to your actual activities?

Answer this question to discover a practical method to gamify your work.

"Play touches and stimulates vitality, awakening the whole person—mind and body, intelligence and creativity, spontaneity and intuition."

- Viola Spolin

Every project is a game

In his book *The Game Changer*, Dr Jason Fox says that a game is anything that has **goals**, **rules**, and **feedback**. A good game balances all three of these against one another, to make an experience that is so compelling that it can be addicting.

Work is often the opposite of this. Unclear goals, arbitrary rules, and confusing feedback (if there is any feedback, at all) can lead us to resent our work, procrastinate doing it, or contribute only the minimal effort required to stay on the job.
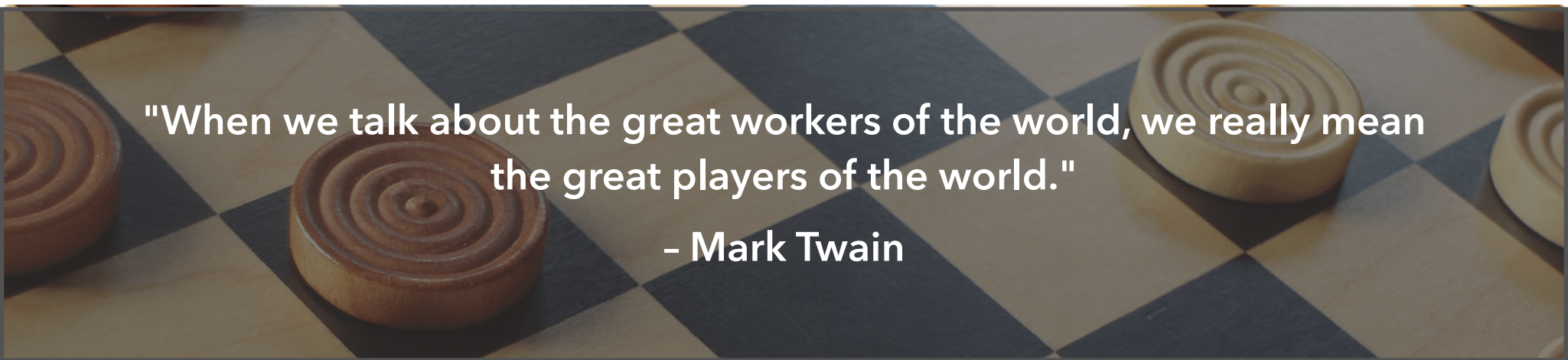
But work doesn't have to be that way. You don't play games that way. If you can gamify your work, there are a myriad of personal and professional benefits.

According to research by Dr Paulette Guitard, play helps adults:

✦ Find original solutions to problems
✦ Confront difficulties
✦ Accept failure
✦ Develop and enhance their ability to perform occupations

Playing games is seen as the enemy of diligent work, when this is not actually the case.

"People don't play games to avoid work," Dr Fox says. "People play games to engage in well-designed work."

"When we talk about the great workers of the world, we really mean the great players of the world."
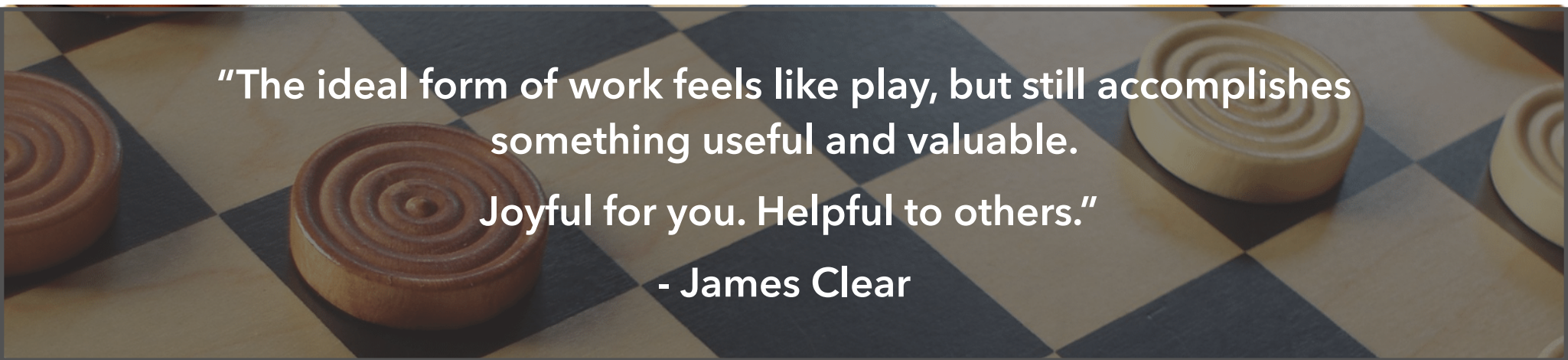
– Mark Twain

Goals

Defining your goals for the day (or the week, month, quarter, or year) will create a map for you to follow. This map helps orient you to your current location, and provides direction when you get lost. Instead of embarking on a journey of a thousand miles, goals divide an epic journey into a series of short, achievable trips.

A Stanford study by Szu-Chi Huang demonstrated that by providing sub-goals early in an experience, it creates a strong source of motivation. The study concluded that smaller goals provided at the beginning can increase completion rates, by making each smaller task seem more achievable.

If you create an outline of your goals, and include small sub-goals that are easy to achieve, this will define easy wins that you can celebrate and enjoy as you progress.

Have you ever had the satisfaction of adding something onto your to-do list just so you could check it off? This is an extra dose of oxytocin that makes you happy. Don't skip the small steps when you are making plans and reviewing progress - give yourself credit for the small accomplishments, and you will create momentum that pushes you towards progress.

According to Dr Gail Matthews of Dominican University, studies show that we have a 42% higher likelihood of achieving goals that are written down. The simplest games can be the most effective. Writing down your **3 biggest goals for the day** can guide your priorities, and help redirect you when you go off track.

"The ideal form of work feels like play, but still accomplishes something useful and valuable.

Joyful for you. Helpful to others."

- James Clear

Rules

Once you have a well-defined goal, decide on the rules. You can decide on a reward for the achievement of specific goals, and penalties for failure.
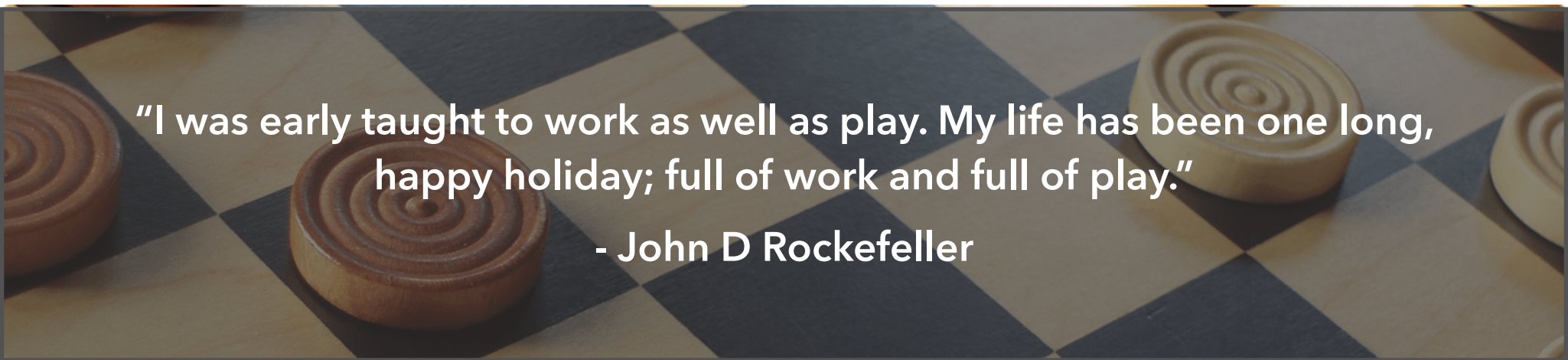
In 2008, Dr David Rock proposed the SCARF model for motivation, based on his neuroscience research. He said that we are neurologically programmed to move away from threats, and towards rewards. We want things that provide:

✦ Status
✦ Certainty
✦ Autonomy
✦ Relatedness
✦ Fairness

Attention increases with higher pressure. With higher stakes, there's higher risk, and more danger. Our biology evolved to release cortisol as a response to stress, so we can handle high-stakes situations with increased attention, alertness, and reflexes. Setting rules in your game will cause you stress, and experience is the reward of distress. You cannot grow without challenge, and the rules of the game guide us to (and through) that challenge.

What are your **rewards** and **penalties** for achieving your goals, or not? Can you make these rules team-based, or are you playing solitaire?

By using the principles of gamification, you can increase status in your group, demonstrate fairness to others, and reward autonomy for a job well done.

"I was early taught to work as well as play. My life has been one long, happy holiday; full of work and full of play."

- John D Rockefeller

Feedback

When you achieve a big goal, don't move on blindly to the next task. Celebrate your achievement. Likewise, if you fail at achieving your goal, don't skip over the feedback. Take a moment to reflect on what went wrong (and what went right) so you can do better next time, in another game.
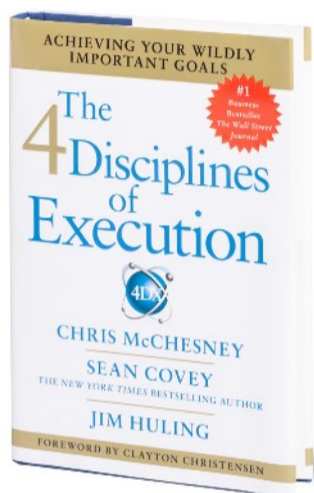
In the book *The 4 Disciplines of Execution,* which I cover in detail in my Playful Productivity training program, the 3rd discipline is to **keep a compelling scoreboard.**

The scoreboard shows your progress on the goals that matter most. By keeping this scoreboard visible - above your monitor, on your office door, or somewhere you cannot ignore it - your goals will be front and center in your attention at all times.

I like to gamify my weekly goals with a Starsheet. This can be made from any piece of paper. Draw a line down the center to divide it in half, then divide those halves in half, then once more so you have 8 equal columns. In the first row, skip one space and write the seven days of the week as headings of the columns. In the first column, write a goal in the header of each row.

As days go by, give yourself a star for every daily goal achieved. You can draw a star, or get some stickers. Enjoy the dopamine, it will give you momentum to continue achieving your goals. Feedback creates self-sustaining enthusiasm.
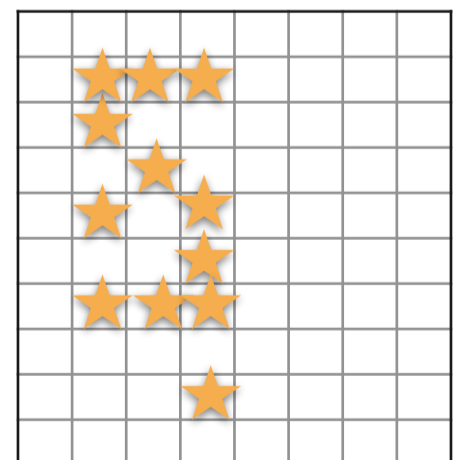
"People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing."

- Dale Carnegie

Gamifying Innovation

In the early 1980s, Intel's main business was memory chips. Cheaper Japanese competition led to dwindling profit margins, and two executives realized that they would soon be out of a job if they didn't find a solution.

What's the worst that would happen? They would be fired, and two new executives would take their place, and fix the problem. So they played a game.

Imagining they had just been fired, they walked out of the office and back in, role-playing as their own replacements. These new super-executives were smarter, faster, and better looking. How would they solve this problem?

These new executives didn't have the old baggage. They decided to get out of the memory chip business, and start designing microprocessors. This transition not only saved the company, it pivoted the entire business of Intel.

This game of make-believe worked at work for three reasons:

1. Goals - There were very clear, high-stakes goals. The executives needed to solve a specific problem.
2. Rules - They could not be themselves. They role-played new people, who did not face the same limitations.
3. Feedback - They played this game together. Not only did they get a constant influx of new ideas, but they also had someone who could provide an outside perspective to the other during reflection after the game.

Were they wasting their time in playing this game? No. They were using a principle I call Playful Productivity.

"Play is the highest form of research."

– Albert Einstein

Playful Productivity for Individuals

Play is the gateway to flow. Play increases variety & novelty, changing your mental state from boredom to alertness. By alternating mental states, you can prevent cognitive fatigue, and increase your ability to collaborate with others.

Instead of pushing against the current to do the work, you can go with the flow by making your work into a game.

Play has been scientifically proven to improve our attention, deepen our relationships with others, and develop resilience to failure. These are the very qualities that make us better at what we do.

In his book Flow: *The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi identified eight characteristics of the Flow state:
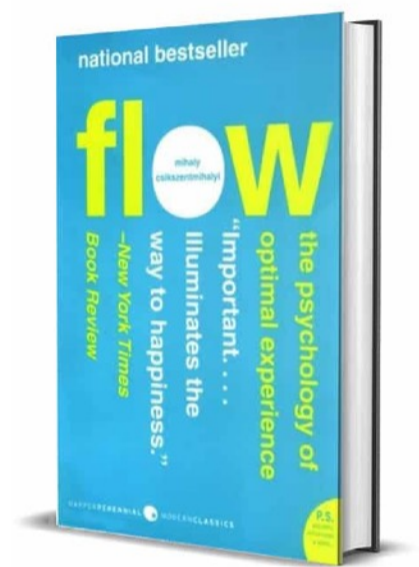
1. Complete **concentration** on the task
2. Clarity of **goals** and reward in mind and immediate **feedback**
3. Transformation of **time** (speeding up/slowing down)
4. The experience is intrinsically **rewarding**
5. Effortlessness and **ease**
6. There is a balance between **challenge** and skills
7. **Actions** and **awareness** are merged, losing self-conscious rumination
8. There is a feeling of **control** over the task

Is he describing how we do **our best work**? Or is this a **state of play**?

Bringing play into your work increases your capacity to do work well. I'm sure you've noticed this in your own life at some point: you can get more done in good cheer. Playful Productivity bypasses procrastination, invites enthusiasm, and nurtures the creativity that helps you make exponential impact.

Playful Productivity for Teams

Having clear goals, well-defined rules, and iterative feedback is a relief to most workers, after spending hours trudging through unclear initiatives with no confidence their efforts are even effective. Games give us a simple, clear understanding that is often absent from our work.

Teamwork depends on collaboration. Collaboration is amplified with strong connections between team members. Strong connections are formed through shared positive experiences. When we can create shared experiences for our teams to go through together, we create an environment for nurturing a stronger culture. One clear method to provide these shared experiences is with Playful Productivity.

When you play, you do more than increase the connection between you and your team, individually. You also improve the ability to collaborate as a group. Your own capacity to do your work well will increase as you invite play into your work, because play refreshes and rejuvenates you.

Games are engaging. Play lets us interact with our team, not just as co-workers, but as people having fun. The stronger the relationships developed through play create a culture of people who support their friends.

If you think of your co-workers as teammates, what game are you playing? Who is your opponent? How will you know if you win?

How do you see your work?

• Work is a Proving Ground - managers monitor, measure, and eliminate
• Work is a Battle Ground - managers control, reprimand, and adjudicate
• Work is a Play Ground - managers encourage, coach, and referee

You get to choose. 90,000 hours of your life, on average, are spent working. Shouldn't we spend this time living well, and having fun?

How do you play?

René Proyer, PhD, from the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Germany has spent the last 12 years studying playfulness in adults. In his study to be published in the Personality and Individual Differences Journal (April 2017), Dr. Proyer identifies four basic types of adult playfulness:

✦ **Other-directed** playfulness: Playing around with friends, family, and coworkers
✦ **Light-hearted** playfulness: Regarding many aspects of life as a game
✦ **Intellectual** playfulness: Playing with different thoughts and ideas
✦ **Whimsical** playfulness: Interested in strange or unusual aspects of life, noticing small day-to-day occurrences

"When we think about being playful, we have to perhaps re-shape our thinking about what counts as play," says Dr. Proyer. "Since we are far more intellectually developed than children, we can also play in different ways."

How do you link your duties to what you love? Through play.

Charlie Hoehn, author of *Play it Away,* a book that helps people use play to ease anxiety, brought play into a sales team. They gained a 24% increase in sales after practicing improvisation techniques for 60 minutes a week. "Morale is so much higher," the manager said. 'Play put the team in a better mood."

The Opportunity

Playful Productivity improves our culture, our collaboration, and our capacity.

As we increase the amount of play, and the overlap in the center of the circles gets larger. The overlaps on the sides increase as we play, too.
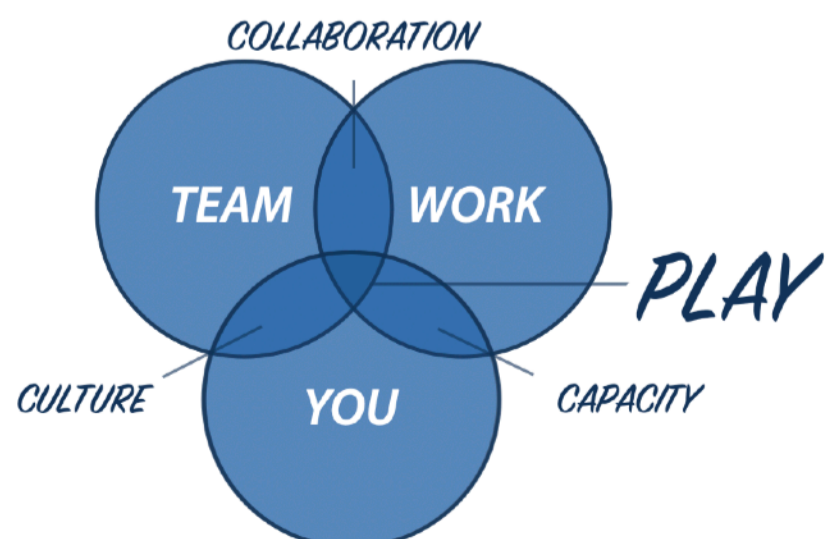
PLAYFUL PRODUCTIVITY

MOOD	CAPACITY	COLLABORATION	CULTURE	IMPACT
Playful	Flow	Innovation	Belonging	10x
Cheerful	Adept	Synergy	Friendly	5x
Neutral	Capable	Present	Uninvolved	0
Cranky	Busy	Resent	Distant	-2x
Grumpy	Overwhelm	Sabotage	Adversarial	-5x

Games are a shortcut to engagement. Play lets us interact with our team, not just as co-workers, but as people having fun. The stronger relationships developed through play create a culture of people who support their friends.

Gamify progress to achieve better outcomes

By strategically using gamification to improve attention and increase innovation, play can transform how we participate in working.

Play changes your state, gives you the resilience needed to solve hard problems, and empowers you to do better work in good cheer. Practicing how to succeed (and fail) with your team in low-stakes play will form deeper relationships that enable you to handle high-stakes difficulties together.

Work without will or wonder is just drudgery. To bring the best parts of yourselves to your work, invite the playfulness that comes out during games.

"Play matters because people matter. It reminds us of our interdependence and gives us a chance to really see other people. And in turn, to be really and truly seen."

- Jill Vialet

Positive outcomes of playfulness at work

Playful people are good at taking action quickly, following their hunches, and finding new ways to solve problems. And, of course, they elevate the mood of everyone around them, improving job satisfaction and making a better culture.

Studies show that playful people have superior results in:

✦ Coping with difficulty (Magnuson and Barnett, 2013)
✦ Innovation (Yu et al., 2007)
✦ Workplace performance (Glynn and Webster, 1992)
✦ Intrinsic motivation (Amabile et al., 1994)
✦ Virtuousness (Proyer and Ruch, 2011)
✦ Subjective well-being (Proyer, 2013, 2014a,b; Proyer et al., 2018a)

"Playfulness related positively to work outcomes, including task evaluations, perceptions, involvement, and performance, and provided **more predictive efficacy than other psychological constructs studied here**." - Glynn & Webster, 1992

Working harder is not smarter

Something I've noticed in my own life, and in the lives of my coaching clients, is that improved performance almost never correlates with an increase in effort.

Articulating clear **goals**, establishing the right **rules**, and setting up a system for dynamic **feedback** - making the work you do into a game you can play - helps you work smarter, instead.

Play improves your attention, increases innovation, and gives you the resilience needed to solve hard problems.

I'd rather enjoy what I'm doing, instead of force myself to do something I don't want to do, wouldn't you?

What's Wrong With Work And Play?

We are facing a chronic play deprivation at work in the modern world.

Projects are left undone, because we are 'too busy' to do the work that matters. Superficial relationships with distant co-workers are low-trust with poor communication. All the recent transformations in work culture have led to higher stress, without a release of that stress through deep communication or energetic collaboration.

Playing games can guide us into getting more out of limited resources of time and energy. Deeper connections within a team drive business performance. Instead of another bland and boring productivity seminar, improve your culture, collaboration, and capacity by having fun with Playful Productivity.

Programs for Individuals, Teams, and Leaders

Workshop Gamification

Custom Masterclasses
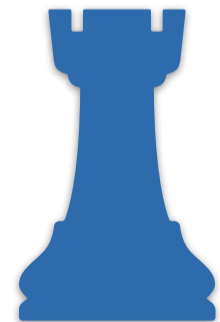
Keynote Speeches

1-1 Coaching

Experience Design

Group Coaching

Brainstorm Facilitation

Productivity Training

Work With Me

Ever since I ran away and joined the circus (true story!) I've always seen my work as a form of play. The harder the work, the harder I have to play to get through it. This mental trick - to gamify work - enables me to accomplish spectacular things.

I am an expert in gamification, productivity, marketing, and virtual events. (I also juggle flaming torches, but that's beside the point.) As a trainer, consultant, and coach, I have a decade of experience advising professionals on how to get more out of their efforts and create exceptional experiences.

Would you like to collaborate on gamifying your work?

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Book a discovery call or an interactive games session at https://caelanhuntress.com/contact

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