



CHERRY BOMBS

A SUPPLEMENTAL KIT TO
RADICAL CAREERING

by Sally Hogshead |

18.01 INTRODUCTION

CHERRY BOMBS: A SUPPLEMENTAL KIT TO RADICAL CAREERING

You know the feeling. You're in a meeting, or a company, or even a profession, and suddenly you realize ... uh-oh, this has gone on way too long. Things were humming along fine, but at some point the energy just sort of faded away. It's quiet. Too quiet. Uncomfortably quiet.

But what to do?


Pick up a cherry bomb, and lob that sucker as hard as you can.

Voila! Suddenly, no one's snoring.

Cherry bombs are quick but explosive ideas that startle a situation out of paralysis. Bursts of thinking to create change within you, or around you. Toss one wherever you want a flash of action.

This kit contains cherry bombs for different occasions. Each page speaks individually, as a manifesto-ette. Cherry bombs are not meant to give definitive answers, but rather, to raise better questions.

Tip:

To print a page, click on this  icon at the bottom of the page.

As you read through, certain pages might set off a salvo in your head. When that happens, stop.

Print that page.

Then post it somewhere you want to blast complacency. Like a brainstorming session. The office lunchroom. Customer service at the local DMV.

The point is, instead of ME talking at YOU, these pages allow YOU to start the conversation with OTHERS.

Tip:

Click on the red hyperlinks to visit that website.

I started that conversation with myself a few years ago, when I needed a firecracker under my own butt. It led me to write a book that was just released, *Radical Careering: 100 Truths to Jumpstart Your Job, Your Career, and Your Life*. It's an untraditional career guide, a handbook for creating a career worth loving. You can check it out all kinds of tools and goodies at <http://radicalcareer.com>.

This manifesto doesn't replicate the Truths in the book. It does spring from its research, "The Radical 1000," conducted with strategic firm Deputy Consulting. For the past year we've been examining exactly how and why people succeed right now, amidst the insanity of today's workplace. The results were pretty surprising, and you can read more about them by clicking [here](#). Overall, there were three very simple and consistent trends among professionals (see next page).

Nº 1 | Most of us **DO NOT** love our career right now.

Nº 2 | We definitely **WANT** to love our career.

Nº 3 | We don't know exactly **HOW**.

So statistically speaking, your current attitude about work ranges from a nagging dissatisfaction to full-blown Tourette's. You're ready for some sort of change, but don't know exactly what that change is. You want to move forward, and are willing to sacrifice to do so, but are unsure how to overcome personal or organizational paralysis.

Ergo, the cherry bomb!

You won't find "the answers" listed in a cherry bomb. Their purpose isn't to provide ready-made answers, but to provoke more interesting questions.

Before reading the following cherry bombs, however, please note the disclaimer (fig.a).

If any of the profiles describes you, please shut down this PDF and walk away. Management assumes no responsibility for uncomfortable reality checks or bruised egos. There are many notable exceptions to this rule of thumb, so in the interest of brevity, please feel free to consider yourself one of them.

Ready? Grab some matches for the professional pyrotechnics.

fig A

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The information herein is highly flammable. Please be advised it is not intended for use by any of the following:

- SLACKERS
- BUREAUCRATS
- CYNICS
- WHINERS

CHERRY BOMB . *01*

PASSION IS NOT A LUXURY. IT'S AN IMPERATIVE.

There's an insidious myth about work. It says that a meaningful career is a luxury. Loving your job is nice in theory, sure, but unattainable for most of us. Passion is only the frosting on top.

First of all, that's a crock.

And second, it's just plain sad.

A career worth loving is not an indulgence, a privilege, or a fluke.

Passion is an imperative.

Meaning is an imperative.

Joy is an imperative.

Loving your career is a non-negotiable necessity for breaking through client and consumer skepticism. And for reaching your own greatest potential. And for making any kind of difference in this world.

We wouldn't stand for inferior food in a restaurant, or mediocre service in a hotel. No way. We value our time and experiences too highly. Yet many of us feel forced to accept an ordinary career — a career unworthy of loving — when we deserve so much more. It's learned helplessness. We send cold soup back to the kitchen, but choke down the lukewarm career.

Glazed by PowerPoints and numbed by conference calls, we can forget we have a choice in how we engage with work. But we do have a choice. A daily choice. And to forget that choice is, by default, to surrender it.

And while you're not automatically entitled to a seat atop the professional food chain, you do have an inviolable right to pursue a career on your own terms. No one can take that away from you, unless you give it away.

To settle for anything less, and then wake up one day to look back upon a lifetime of meaningless effort ... ohh. Tragic.

A career isn't to be tolerated. It's to be savored, devoured, marrow sucked and fingers smacked.

**Passion isn't the frosting on top.
It's the whole damn entrée.**

CHERRY BOMB . 02

OPTIMISM AIN'T FOR WUSSIES.

Optimism sounds so warm 'n fuzzy. “Hey, things are great! The sun is shining! The Krispy Kremes are still warm!”

But don't be fooled. Beneath its rah-rah exterior lies a steely core. Optimism is serious work.

Sure, it's easy to be optimistic when everything skips merrily along. But what about when the feedback stings, or the project dies, or you're kicked in the emotional solar plexus? What then? Suddenly, pessimism is a cakewalk.

Why is it so much harder to stay optimistic when life tries to convince you otherwise? Think back to high school science class, and the concept of entropy. Here's a little refresher:

ENTROPY: The inevitable and steady deterioration of a system or society.

Entropy explains why hot water cools to room temperature, or why a teenager's room inevitably gets messy. Attitudes are the same way. When life doesn't present the desired result, it takes far more energy to stay true to your goals. Pessimism is attitudinal entropy.

But there's a reason to resist nature. Optimism, while requiring more effort, gives you power. It allows you to stand for something bigger than the existing state of affairs. Sustaining any sort of vision -- from raising venture capital to raising children -- requires almost irrational amounts of optimism.

That's why optimism is so annoying. It asks you to take responsibility for your attitude and your actions, rather than throwing up your hands and blaming circumstances.

The next time you're feeling pessimistic, remember:

**When life gives you lemons,
cleanse your palate with lemon sorbet.**

CHERRY BOMB . 03

RUIN THE BELL CURVE.

Remember in college exams, when one killjoy would score so high on a test that everyone else's scores were proportionately lowered? That overachiever (damn him!) ruined everyone else's bell curve.

Same goes for the workplace. It's only natural to base our performance on the performances of those around us. If we're doing better than most, well by golly, then we're doing okay. But if someone seriously outplays us, we look bad by comparison.

This feeling isn't just in your head. Ever heard of the "tall poppy syndrome"? It's an Australian expression, referring to the tendency to cut down those who rise above the rest of the field. By subverting achievers, the rest of the group places a ceiling on performance expectations.

If you aim high, you've probably experienced a weed-whacker or two. <begin pull quote> Achievers make the rest of the crop bad by comparison <end pull quote>. Certain high school peer groups form tacit levels of achievement, and anyone who goes above that is ostracized. Even Henry Ford's factory workers, acting in unison along assembly lines, had agreements for how quickly they'd operate.

When competing parties collectively hold back, rather than push each other forward, it's "reverse competition." We even see reverse competition in the marketplace, when companies agree to fix prices at a certain level, or to make products that require replacement after a designated amount of use.

The danger for a company or individual is measuring success by the collective average, rather than by your own maximum potential.

Are you in a company with a tacit bell curve? Are promotions and raises dictated by performance, or something else? Do politics guide many of the organization's HR decisions? Clustering in the middle of the bell curve makes perfect sense if performance isn't rewarded, or if higher effort makes no measurable difference for the individual. That's when morale plummets.

Instead of just trying to out-do the guy down the hall, or the company across town, or any other comparison.

...out-do yourself.

Create your own personal bell curve.

Defy comparisons.

Refuse to settle for someone else's average.

CHERRY BOMB . 04

YOUR JOB IS DIFFICULT AND YOU ARE BUSY. **GET OVER IT.**

If you're like most people, things have been busy at work lately. And by "lately," I mean the past few years. We've had every bit of our scheduling fat stripped away. Conversations with friends become comparisons of how busy we are:

"Hey, how are you?"

"Busy. You?"

"Busy."

"I'd ask about it but I'm too busy right now."

Sound familiar? "Busy" is the new "fine."

With companies running so lean, it can feel impossible to get out from underneath a crushing to-do list. But your career shouldn't be a frantic scramble of catch-up, with zero time to stop and breathe. A career is a process, not a destination.

The reality is that we spend roughly 60 - 70% of our waking hours doing work. That's way too much time to spend doing anything that doesn't deserve your time and talents. Three declarations to keep in mind if you're feeling too busy (and let's face it, who's not):

DECLARATION **WORK SHOULD REWARD IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO ITS DEMANDS.**

Nº
1

Work can be very hard, no question. That's precisely why we must demand as much in return. The harder you work, the greater your right to love what you do.

DECLARATION **THE HARDER IT FEELS TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO,
THE MORE URGENT THE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ELSE.**

Nº
2

When you're already too busy to keep up, stopping to evaluate your career can feel impossible. Who has time to contemplate when there's a skyscraper of emails stacking up your inbox? Yet it's exactly when you're feeling too overwhelmed to find new options that those options must be found.

DECLARATION **THE POINT OF YOUR CAREER ISN'T TO FIND EASIER WORK.
IT'S TO FIND WORK THAT'S WORTH THE EFFORT.**

Nº
3

If you can get over the fact that work is hard, just like ice is cold and water is wet, you can get on with the important and interesting work of creating your career from the inside out.

Yes, there are probably easier jobs. Just as there are lesser results, smaller goals, and lower standards.

CHERRY BOMB . 05

EMOTION WITHOUT ACTION IS USELESS.

Say you want something. You reeeally want it. A juicy promotion, a marquis client, free weekends with the kids. Along with the hoping, remember: wanting means nothing without doing.

Hope isn't a passive act. And nowhere is this more true than in your career.

If you put a flea in a jar and tightly screw on the lid, the flea will try to jump as high as it can. But soon it accepts the limit. From that point on, even if you take the lid off, the flea will never, ever jump any higher than the perceived ceiling.

Humans work the same way. If we're continually slapped down, or if our actions seem to make no difference, we're not stupid. We stop trying. At some point, effort expended has to achieve the desired result; otherwise, effort stops. Many employees feel trapped in a jar, and as a result, morale is extremely low at their companies.

But there is no jar. And no lid. Only a question of how far you're willing to jump.

CHERRY BOMB . 06

YOU CAN'T DO **KILLER WORK** AT A **MEDIOCRE COMPANY.**

You can try, and should. But genius is fragile. Especially creative genius. Creative ideas, even if brilliantly conceived, can (and do) break down at any of a thousand points along the way.

In fact the bigger the idea, the more revolutionary, the greater its potential for dying an excruciating death at one of those points. Anything truly innovative requires ferocious, relentless, even irrational dedication to see it through to execution. The iPod would not have happened with anyone less than Steve Jobs at the helm.

Few companies can retrofit that dedication. It's inherent in the DNA. Company culture, work ethic, day-to-day operations, even the physical office space — all of it defines the quality and style of the company's thinking. Greatness is at the molecular level.

If an employer tries to hire you by saying, “We're turning this place around!” I'm not saying you shouldn't accept the job. Just don't accept it simply because they're about to start doing great things.

And if you suddenly wake up one day to find yourself in a mediocre company?

Either change your job, or change jobs.

CHERRY BOMB . 07

YOUR LIFE ISN'T MULTIPLE CHOICE. IT'S ONE LONG ESSAY QUESTION.

A generation ago, if you wanted to find out where you'd be in 10 years, you could just take a gander at the corporate staffing charts. Sure there were choices, but they were mostly the A, B, C, or D variety. You couldn't revise your answers very easily, and all the tests ended with a gold watch.

Today, you get to fill in the answers yourself. There are no cheat sheets. No Cliff Notes. No hot babe sitting next to you who'll let you copy the answers.

Like anything worth loving, your career is an ongoing do-it-yourself proposition.

Today your career is one of the few things you'll ever own that's truly yours, and yours alone. You can build your career, take it apart, fiddle and rebuild however you choose. You get to create options to move forward, or take a step back, or even exit if necessary.

Yes, you'll occasionally get off-track with a bad deal or bad luck or even a bad economy. But that's the fun of open-ended questions. You get to revise the ending as you go along.

Just remember: once you've written your life story, there is no eraser.

CHERRY BOMB . 08

REFUSE TO ALLOW YOUR CAREER TO BECOME **ONE LONG FOCUS GROUP.**

Focus groups have many fine attributes: Qualitative research. Consumer insight. Free sub sandwiches.

Their flaw, which I've observed many times through that Alice In Wonderland one-way glass, is how focus groups kill great thinking. Or worse, dumb it down to castrated jelly. People just naturally gravitate to the familiar and comfortable, rather than the uncomfortably new, so originality rarely survives a focus group.

Focus groups anoint the lowest common denominator.

Too often, our careers become a life-long focus group. Business itself is a series of subtle positive and negative reinforcement signals, and anyone smart enough to pick up on those signals can't help but be shaped by their influence.

Often this shaping process works to our benefit when we learn what works, and what doesn't. We try to avoid rejection by playing to what we know works. It's a Darwinian survival mechanism.

But just as often, we fall prey to the committee mentality. We marinate in never-ending opinion. Along the way, quirks become a liability. Square pegs become rounded.

This adaptation has hyper-accelerated over the past few years. Opinions come at us fast and furious from clients, co-workers, managers, consumers, and the media. Finches on Galapagos took thousands of years to evolve, but we feel pressure to revise ourselves in one job switch.

Take fashion for example. Even in idiosyncratic environments you'll still see a procession of the same uniform: rectangular wire frames on spectacles, or carefully faded suede sneakers. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, as long as people make their choices based on what's right for them, rather than what's "right."

I see this phenomenon at both the individual and corporate level, from Fortune 500 monoliths to entrepreneurial hot shops. We're all susceptible to the lure of approval. It infiltrates business pitches as much as blind dates.

Consider the word "exceptional:" it means "the exception." The word "extraordinary" is synonymous with "bizarre." So if you want to be exceptional and extraordinary, be your truest self.

The question is, what is the occasionally imperfect, but always incomparable you? How can your career become the ultimate expression of who you are?

Don't play on anyone else's terms. You can't win on their terms, only your own.

Live at the highest common denominator.

CHERRY BOMB . 09

FIND A GOAL THAT SCARES THE SHIT OUT OF YOU.

It doesn't have to be majestic, like ending world hunger. It can be personal, like saving enough to put three kids through college.

There's only one ground rule: your goal has to expose you to a very real chance of failure. It has to be big and important enough to make you proclaim a purpose for your life. If it's comfortable, it's not big enough.

What do you stand for? What's your life about? What's your mantra statement? Once you figure that out, and then steer your life toward it, you can start to realize your true potential.

(Daunting, huh? Here, I'll go first.)

There's a tool to help you start thinking about this mega question, at mantra-statement.com. At the risk of going out on an oh-so-idealistic limb, I'll tell you my mantra statement:

MY MANTRA STATEMENT: What truly inspires me is developing ideas and tools that help people create careers worth loving.

Why?

Because when you love your career, others see your best self, and you can become even better.

Because when you love your career, everyone wins: your company, your co-workers, your clients, your community, your loved ones, yourself.

Because if everyone's career satisfaction rose, the level of poverty and drug abuse and domestic violence might go down.

Because when people recognize their innate strengths, they can truly make a difference.

And once that happens, bigger things become possible.

So I'm writing this manifesto and it's scaring the shit out of me.

Okay, your turn.

CONCLUSION

WHAT'S YOUR CHERRY BOMB?

If your cherry bomb isn't included in these pages, write your own. It doesn't matter what it is, as long as it jerks you from inertia and starts motion.

Throughout your career, there will be days that feel tough (many), stages when you'll be underpaid (very), and times that you'll feel overworked (aplenty).

During those times, when things become eerily quiet...

Rewrite the standard. Defy comparison.

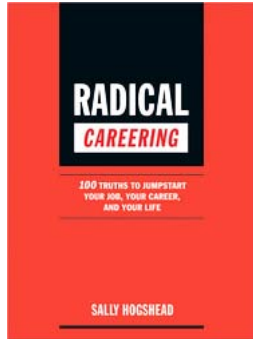
Relinquish the good. Pursue the great.

Raise eyebrows. Raise bars. Raise expectations.

Demand more. Settle for less.

...In other words, lob cherry bombs.

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**BUY THE BOOK**

For more details or to buy a copy of Sally Hogshead's book, *Radical Careering: 100 Truths to Jump-start Your Job, Your Career, And Your Life*, click here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Growing up with the last name Hogshead would give anyone an unconventional point of view. After surviving years of harassment on the playground, Sally has been described by the press as “audacious,” “intrepid,” and “the Oracle of Venice Beach.”

In her second year as an advertising writer, Sally won more awards for creativity than any other writer in the country. She founded her first ad agency at 27. Her work for clients such as Coke, MINI Cooper, Godiva, and BMW Motorcycles has been covered by *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, NBC, CBS, ABC, and CNN, and included into the permanent exhibit of The Smithsonian's Museum of American History.

Today, Sally is a keynote speaker and consultant for companies wanting to develop their ultimate competitive advantage. As a “S.W.A.T. Creative Director,” she helps turbocharge brands with PR buzz and smarter, cooler, faster ideas.

Sally lives in Los Angeles with her two young children and her husband, a stay-at-home dad. Her secret mission in life is to bring back the hogshead as a unit of popular measurement in the U.S.

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First, make sure you have the latest version of Acrobat Reader 6 which you can download from

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Reader settings. To correct the problem (for Windows), a reader, J. Hansen, suggests going to your Acrobat Reader Preferences > Options > Web browser Options. Check the "Display PDF in Browser" option. Then click on Save to Disk .

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