



7 Principles to Upgrade Your Work and Life | Rana Florida

Many of us get caught up in the linear path of life. We are told we must go to college, some of us onto graduate school, then get a career, and start a family.

This path, however, keeps many of us on the hedonic treadmill of unfulfilling work, suffering through long commutes and living from paycheck to paycheck.

When we look around, we see that our friends' lives have been upgraded. They are raking it in as iPad DJs or launching profitable start-ups in their garages, driving electric cars and riding expensive carbon fiber bikes, and going off on exotic safaris through Africa, jungle adventures in Costa Rica, or party weekends in Reykjavik whenever they want without having to seek approval for the time off from a boss. It can drive us crazy.

“Why isn't that my life?” we ask. As a funny man once joked: “What's worse than not getting what you want? Someone else getting it!” Maybe you did everything right. You went to school, got great grades, and got a good job. But the American dream has shifted seemingly overnight. It seems the rug was pulled out from under us.

While you put in late hours at the office to slowly climb the ranks, you look around and see others rolling out of bed whenever they want, buying front-row tickets to the Jay-Z concert, Yankee or Miami Heat games, working from the comfort of their homes or the fun of the local coffee shop on their state-of-the-art Apple device. They are constantly buying the latest pumped-up kicks, the season's \$1,500 designer bag, the newest \$750 red-soled shoe, or the coolest \$250 pair of new skinny jeans. They have access to a network of top professionals, including celebrity doctors, architects, and designers.

Worse yet, our popular culture rewards those who are willing to make spectacles of themselves with multimillion-dollar book deals, high appearance fees, and reality shows.

Whether it is Snooki from Jersey Shore urinating on herself on the dance floor, someone who actually calls himself Mike the Situation spending all his time at the tanning salon or pumping iron at the gym, or the Real Housewives of any city getting into hair-pulling, name-calling, table-turning drama, this is the type of freak show our society rewards—not the doctors making breakthroughs in cancer research, not the schoolteachers who spend countless and often thankless hours educating our children every day while struggling to make ends meet, and not the midlevel manager putting in 60 hour work weeks.

The rapper 50 cent, who has been shot nine times, saw this same struggle. His mother was a drug dealer so he was sent to live with his grandparents. He noticed that his mother had financial freedom while his grandparents struggled to make ends meet by making an honest living. So he decided to start dealing drugs, too... until he was fortunate enough to discover his passion for music. He went on to sell 32 million records. In 2004 he invested in Vitamin Water, and when Coca-Cola bought it he made an estimated \$60 million from the deal.

But most of us are not destined to be reality TV stars, drug dealers turned-rappers-turned-multimillionaire business execs. Many of us are enslaved within a mind-numbing system of constant drudgery, while others are living the new global dream.

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“If they don’t have a reality show, they must have had a trust fund,” you tell yourself. “It would be selfish and reckless of me to try to break out of my box; I have a family to support, massive student loans to pay off. I can’t afford to take that risk.” But still, you want in. You want a piece of the new creative economy, the happiness economy, or the purpose-driven career path. You want to make a difference, set a vision, set a course for your life.

The whole paradigm of work is changing, and many of us are still stuck under the thumb of the boss in our life when what we want is to be the boss of our own life. We crave the freedom to manage our own time, to be valued for who we are. We want a career that encourages risk and excitement, growth and personal development, learning and exploration.

Do you really have to stifle your inner child, who is dying to come out and play in this dynamic new world? Is stultification the price of security? Is it asking too much of your family to risk trying for more?

Our parents went to work every day too, but when they looked around, everyone was in the same box, following the same well-worn paths. Now there are those who pave their own paths and create their own futures—and those who are bound by the old system with its old rules.

As massive as the shift from my father's world was, it was easy to understand and accept; what was startling to me was that in just the short span of time between the rise of Gen X and the advent of the Millennials, our work styles and lifestyles changed even more. Whereas I was taught to go to graduate school, fit in, excel, and get a corporate job, wearing a suit every day except on casual Fridays, people just a few years younger than I was were seeking jobs at tech firms not because all of a sudden they had an interest in technology but because those firms were worlds away from typical formal corporations. They let workers be themselves and offered work environments that were less rigid, more open, and more creative and innovative.

Why was this happening? What did I need to know? I wanted to understand this new paradigm. I set out to interview not just traditional business leaders, Fortune 100 executives, managers, and CEOs but also a rocket scientist, a eminent neurologist, a famous graffiti artist, politicians, fashion designers, filmmakers, a Grammy Award-winning musician, a star athlete, philanthropists, celebrity chefs, starchitects, bestselling authors, and media personalities. I wanted a diverse set of inputs. How do they do it? What makes some businesses or individuals or leaders succeed and others fail? Why do so many people hate their jobs while others love what they do? What new sets of skills are needed for this new way of working and living? Where do they find their inspiration? How do they lead, motivate and collaborate? What I found was that their perspectives were remarkably similar and that the principles that guide them apply to everyone's life.

Despite their vastly different backgrounds and skills, my research concluded that there are seven key principles to achieving your business and life goals.

ENVISION YOUR FUTURE | Have you asked yourself lately, what it is you want to do with your life? Now is the time to stop and think about it, then set a course to get there. Push forward despite the objections of naysayers and the inevitable setbacks along the way. Stop living in a state of managed dissatisfaction. It's never too late to start living your upgraded life.

FIND YOUR PASSION | There are two camps here. A few lucky people actually get paid to do the things for which they have a great passion. Then there are the rest of us, who need to do something else to earn our paychecks. Either way, it's essential that you identify what makes you happy and find a way to incorporate it into your life through your career or your free time. This gives your life purpose and meaning.

GET CREATIVE | No longer is it acceptable to go along with the status quo. Creativity drives our economy forward. Successful leaders understand that creativity requires diversity and bring together people who represent a wide range of perspectives and ways of doing things. Find your inner creativity and unleash it.

PROTECT YOUR TIME | Time is more important than money and possessions. It's the one thing you can never get back and something you can't buy, barter, or borrow. Once it's gone, it's gone for good. Those who succeed protect their time fiercely and selfishly.

COLLABORATE | No one can do it all. Successful people know their own strengths and accept their weaknesses. Finding partners or teammates who can compliment your skills maximizes results.

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TAKE RISKS | Most successful leaders, thinkers, and innovators are not afraid to take risks. Facebook's motto is “Move fast and break things.” Curiosity is stifled in a risk free environment. Many new discoveries and breakthroughs are realized through trial and error. Our society needs to encourage more risk-taking.

EMBRACE FAILURE | Successful people embrace failure as part of the learning process. Be it at work or school, we need to create environments where people feel safe to fail. Treat failure as a time to grow, reflect, reinvent, and ultimately push forward in new directions. Sometimes failure is just the beginning, not the end.

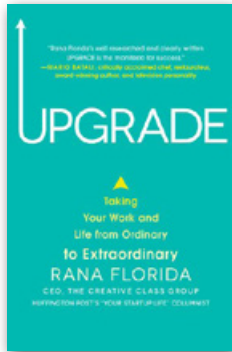
Unfortunately, this is exactly what the majority of us don't do. Instead of developing a real strategy to upgrade and optimize our lives too many of us just slog through life in a state of "managed dissatisfaction." We are doing okay; we are managing to get by but with an underlying tinge of unhappiness. Certain peaks, like an annual vacation, a new car, or a slight promotion at work, lift our spirits for a while, and we ride the peak. But before we know it, the wave has crashed and we are washed up on shore, longing for the next big wave to come through.

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My notion of managed dissatisfaction is inspired by Herbert Simon's classic theory of satisficing. A Nobel Prize-winning economist and a pioneer in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology who taught at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh for more than half a century, Simon was one of the world's foremost theorists on decision making. He introduced the concept of satisficing (a combination of "satisfy" and "suffice") in 1956 to describe how human beings actually make decisions. Where most economists imply that people make decisions rationally to maximize outcomes, Simon recognized that this is impossible in most circumstances. Most of our decisions, he said, are circumscribed by what he called "bounded rationality." We have limited information and cannot possibly consider every option and alternative; plus, we are influenced by emotion and by our peers. We choose the first solution that works, that satisfices, thus sacrificing the best for what's "good enough."

Well, it is never too late to envision an entirely different future—or to actively upgrade your life. It's not about finding more time, money or resources. **Anyone can do it.** 📖

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Rana Florida writes the Huffington Post column “Your Startup Life” and is a regular HGTV contributor. CEO of Creative Class Group, a consulting firm serving such clients as BMW, Starwood, IBM, Philips, Zappos, and Johnson & Johnson, she has appeared on *The Today Show* and in *The New York Times*. Florida previously served as Senior Director of Communications and Marketing at HMSHost (Host Marriott Services), a \$2 billion dollar international organization in the travel industry working with hundreds of brands, such as Starbucks, Tumi, and Kenneth Cole. She was also Vice President of Corporate Communications for the world’s largest producer of live family entertainment, Feld Entertainment, which owns Disney on Ice, Disney Live, the Doodlebops, and many other brands.

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