

# Praise for *F\*\*k Work, Let's Play*

‘A compelling 10-step escape from corporate life that could spell a rash of resignation letters’

**The Sunday Times**

‘Get paid to play? What a promise! But John Williams delivers. He teaches you the secrets of truly loving your work. Revolutionary!’

**Suzy Walker**, Editor-in-Chief, *Psychologies*

‘Inspiring, actionable, and a lot of fun to read, John Williams’s book takes you step by step from discovering the work you’d really enjoy doing to getting paid well for it.’

**Daniel H. Pink**, author of *When*, *Drive*, and *To Sell is Human*

‘John Williams has an inspiring, actionable book that will show you how to start your own business, create your ideal job, or launch a movement to change the world.’

**Nir Eyal**, bestselling author of *Hooked* and *Indistractable*

‘Brilliant! A much healthier and more fun approach to work that we all need now, with concrete steps to make the change. I’m gifting this to my friends that have lost the plot.’

**Derek Sivers**, author of *Anything You Want*

‘I read the first edition of this book when it was published in 2010. John Williams was way ahead in showing readers how they could create their own businesses in small, manageable steps, based on whatever they love to do. Ten years later, I’m delighted to see that a new edition has been published. So much has changed in that time. Thanks to technology and the coronavirus pandemic, there are now yoga teachers earning more online than they ever did in a physical yoga studio. The most unlikely people now have global person brands,

earning money in the most unlikely ways. *Fuck Work, Let's Play* will help you to let go of your preconceptions and social conditioning. It will show you how to turn what may seem like crazy ideas into a viable business.

**John Purkiss**, co-author of *Brand You* and author of *The Power of Letting Go*

'If ever there was a time to back yourself, your ideas and your ambitions, you're slap bang in the middle of that time right now. If ever there was a book proven to maximise your chances of success it's this one.'

**Richard Newton**, author of *The Little Book of Thinking Big*

# F\*\*\*k Work, Let's Play

Do what you love and get paid for it

Second edition

JOHN WILLIAMS



Pearson

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Harlow, England • London • New York • Boston • San Francisco • Toronto • Sydney  
Dubai • Singapore • Hong Kong • Tokyo • Seoul • Taipei • New Delhi  
Cape Town • São Paulo • Mexico City • Madrid • Amsterdam • Munich • Paris • Milan

To my father,  
Edward Glyn Williams,  
for five months of play

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## About the author

John Williams is founder of The Ideas Lab, the company that has helped thousands of people to find something they love, get it started, and make a living out of it.

John started his career in creative technology as a developer on pioneering special effects software (including on-site work at Disney Feature Animation, LA) and broadcast automation. He became Digital Media CTO at a European start-up incubator before moving to head up a media technology consultancy team at Deloitte. He left to consult independently to the BBC and other broadcasters around the world before finally founding The Ideas Lab and writing his first best-selling book *Screw Work, Let's Play*, now translated into ten languages (and which led to this new revised and updated book).

John is also the author of *Screw Work Break Free: How to launch your own money-making idea in 30 days*, published by Vermilion. *Screw Work Break Free* goes into further detail on finding the right business or product idea to pursue and how to get it up and running in just 30 days by drawing on the latest methods of famous creatives and billion-dollar start-ups.

Read more about John, his books and The Ideas Lab at [theideaslab.org](http://theideaslab.org)

## Author's acknowledgements

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And finally to you for reading this book. I hope you'll go out and recruit more people to the play cause. You can find all my social media links and how to contact me at [fworkletsplay.com](http://fworkletsplay.com) or tweet me to say hello on @johnsw

## About this book (and why ‘F\*\*k Work’?)

This book will show you step by step how to get paid to play by turning the things you love doing into a living. Whether you’re currently feeling trapped in a job you don’t enjoy or you’re slogging away at your own business that’s never quite taken off, you’ll find both the life-changing concepts and the practical strategies you need to transform your working life.

This is not about just having fun and hoping the money will magically fall out of the sky. I will show you the key to getting paid for doing what feels like play to you (regardless of the state of the economy), how to win your first ‘playcheque’, and then how to scale it up to making a living – and maybe even get rich (whatever that means for you). And if you still have no idea what you want to do with your life, I’ll show you how to get clear on that first.

Whether you want to launch your own business, take your work online, get into consulting, become a digital nomad, create your ideal job from scratch, write a bestseller, get famous for your creative work, make millions, or change the world, this book will help you. I can’t show you how to “get rich quick”. I haven’t found anything yet that does that (let me know if you do). If anything, it’s about how to get *happy* quick. The fact is, whatever you want your life to be, you can create some taste of your ideal right now in the present. Doing this will make you happier and, as you will see, happiness helps you get to success and wealth.

## A new book for a new decade

Ten years ago, I could see multiple factors converging to change the world of work forever – automation, outsourcing, the global marketplace for skills, and a thousand free and affordable online tools to enable us to start something we love, get known and get paid for. But it seemed that much of this had not entered the daily conversation in the media and in conventional careers and business advice. This is why I wrote *Screw Work, Let's Play*, the original incarnation of this book. It was a cult hit and was featured in *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, and many other newspapers and magazines. It has since been translated into ten languages.

Now, ten years later, the ideas in that book are ready for the mainstream. So many more of us could be getting paid to play if we only had access to the strategies to do so. *Screw Work, Let's Play* was written in the aftermath of the banking crisis. When I started this new edition of the book the world was once again in a period of some political and economic uncertainty – and then the coronavirus pandemic hit us. Millions lost their jobs. Many were furloughed. More people than ever have been reassessing their work and realising that they need to take charge of their own careers.

Whatever the state of the world is at the point you are reading this, I guarantee that you will be better off leaving behind the fixed thinking of the obedient worker and adopting the creative and entrepreneurial approach of the 'player' laid out here.

The principles of the original book have never been more relevant, but it was in need of an update. Online marketing and social media in particular have changed dramatically. And the stories of some of the people I interviewed have moved on in remarkable ways.

So it's time for a new edition of the book. And for a new title too. When I was wrestling with what to call my first book a creative

mentor of mine said “This is a book with a strong and important message; surely it’s got to be ‘Fuck Work’?” In the end I pulled my punches a little by choosing *Screw Work, Let’s Play*.

Today I know that everything I wrote about has not only been shown to be true but even more relevant than it was then. And we have a hundred times the opportunities now for making a living doing something we love. Plus when I got in touch with some of the people I’d interviewed for the original book for an update, I found that they had grown their early playful projects into incredibly cool international businesses using exactly the kind of creative approaches I had written about. So it’s time for a title as strong as the message – *F\*\*k Work, Let’s Play!*

What you’re holding in your hands now is a new, updated and expanded book. There are updates and additions to the advice, remarkable updates to the entrepreneurial stories, complete new case studies, countless tweaks and improvements, and new advice from my experience of the last ten years helping people get paid to play in the form of ‘Power-Ups’. Those are strategies to sidestep the pitfalls I’ve seen many fall into and accelerate your journey to getting paid to play.

Here’s how the book works.

## The ten secrets

The book is arranged as ten secrets to getting paid to play. These are not secrets that anyone is wilfully withholding from you and yet it’s remarkable how few of us know them. We’re certainly not taught them in school or college. They sometimes run counter to commonly held wisdom we hear every day and, until you know them, you are likely to be trapped forever in unsatisfying work.

The secrets are arranged in sequence to take you all the way from having no idea what work you would enjoy to making a full-time living doing something you love. It's therefore best to read each Secret in sequence as each one builds on the last.

This is what you will discover in each Secret.

Secret one: How to work out what you really really want

If you know you want to do something different but can't for the life of you work out what it is, this will finally help you. And if you're already on the way to doing what you want, don't skip this Secret because it will show just how important choosing the right work is to becoming a success.

Secret two: How to choose what to do next

How to find the sweet spot between what you love doing and what people will pay for. How to choose which avenue to pursue even when you feel completely stuck – either because you have no idea what you want or because you have so many ideas you can't make up your mind. Oh, and the scientifically proven formula for happiness.

Secret three: How to get started right now

How to escape the trap of endless research and get started right away on your new life. Why you don't need elaborate plans or even necessarily to set goals. How to start even the grandest project in a scaled-down form without quitting your current work.

Secret four: How to guarantee your success

It can be a rocky ride on the way to getting paid to play. Read this Secret to find out how you can become indestructible and guarantee you can make it whatever may happen along the way.



Secret five: How to play for profit and purpose

Worried that doing what you really enjoy will land you in poverty? This Secret will show you how to do things that are fun for you in a way that provides real value to people – and so get paid for it.

Secret six: How to play the fame game and win

How to get known, or even famous, for what you do so that you attract the opportunities you want. How to use digital marketing and social media to help you launch yourself on to the world at little or no cost.

Secret seven: How to create an irresistible offer

How to offer something people really want and choose the best way to deliver it, from selling a service to creating something online that makes you money while you sleep.

Secret eight: How to win your first playcheque

How to earn your very first piece of income for something that feels like play to you – without having to quit your current work.

Secret nine: How to play full time

How to scale up your first experiments to something you can get paid for full time whether in self-employment, your own business, a portfolio career, or in what I call ‘Job 2.0’ – the customised job. Plus, how to make it happen quicker than you might expect.

Secret ten: How to play your way to the rich life

This Secret will show you how to get clear what a rich life looks like to you. Is it financial riches, the freedom to travel the planet, having plenty of free time, or the power to change the world? Discover the five keys to get you there including the PRICE strategy to charge what you’re really worth.

## The 21 myths of work

I've worked with thousands of clients over the past 15 years, and over and over again I see the same mistaken beliefs that stop people from doing what they want. These are often beliefs inherited from a previous generation that had far fewer choices about their work than we do now. I've boiled these down to 21 myths. You'll find them peppered throughout the book and you will see each one being dismantled. You can also read the full list at the end of the book. How many of them are you currently holding as the truth? They may well be what's holding you back. Are you ready to open your mind to some new ideas about work?

I think of the 21 myths like this: imagine an old prop plane sitting on the runway with its engine running. If you release the brakes and remove the chocks, it's inevitable that it's going to start rolling – but you're still going to need to apply some gas in order to take off. If I can just take away all the myths you believe about work, it is inevitable you will start moving towards what you want. Of course, you'll still need to apply some gas to take flight and get where you want to go.

## Expert interviews

I've met many successful 'players' through my work running The Ideas Lab and you can read their advice and stories throughout this book. Some of them have created, run and sold million-pound businesses. Some are clients I've helped start from nothing and some are shining examples of the new possibilities of work that I've met through my events and The Ideas Lab podcast.

Some interviewees are very wealthy, while others are living on a more modest income but have succeeded in structuring their lives around freedom, creativity and variety. Some are on a mission to change the world. They are all living rich lives in the broadest sense of the word.

You can listen to or watch many of the full interviews with the players at [fworkletsplay.com](http://fworkletsplay.com).

## The website

Throughout the book and at the end of each Secret, I have pointed you to further information, tools and resources on the accompanying minisite: [fworkletsplay.com](http://fworkletsplay.com) Go there now to listen to and watch interviews, download worksheets and read updates to the book as they become available.

# Join the play revolution

*For the first time in the human experience, we have a chance to shape our work to suit the way we live instead of our lives to fit our work . . . We would be mad to miss the chance.*

**Charles Handy, management expert and author**

We're lucky. We've reached a remarkable point in the history of work. Today, it's possible to make a living out of pretty much anything. In fact, scratch that, you can make a living out of *absolutely* anything. Seriously, whatever you can think of, someone somewhere in the world is making a career of it.

During the course of my research for this book I've met remarkable examples like Sam Bompas and Harry Parr, who turned their quirky food experiments in architectural jellies and breathable cocktails into an international flavour studio; Adam Wilder who creates unique experiences from silent dating to breaking the world record for the number of people spooning; Petra Barran who grew her love for street food into an organisation that changed food culture forever; David Crane who used his passion for psychology to create the world's #1 stop smoking app.

These people are part of a growing tribe around the world who are not content just to make a wage to pay the rent, but want their lives to be about something larger. Creating something unique, saying something important, trying new experiences, having some fun, taking a few risks, and daring to fall flat on their faces – or win big and strike it rich. They want freedom, variety, challenge and excitement. They want to stretch themselves, and to keep evolving every day.

What we're witnessing is no less than a revolution in what work can be. The word 'job' is irrelevant. Even the word 'work' seems a

poor choice for the lifestyles this new tribe have crafted for themselves. Musician turned entrepreneur, Derek Sivers, who sold his business for \$22 million says, “This isn’t work, it’s play.”

Our vocabulary is out of date. You could call some of these people entrepreneurs or business people, but the old image of someone dressed in a sober suit spouting management speak just doesn’t fit. The player’s uniform is just as likely to be jeans and T-Shirt or, for those working at home, pyjamas.

Previous generations had little choice about their working lives. A job for life was standard, and the alternative of starting a business often required expensive premises, a team of staff and huge advertising costs. The business world was littered with gatekeepers who got to choose who could come in based on background, race, gender or any other arbitrary parameter. Now, no one can stop you crafting your work life exactly as you would like it.

The internet and mobile technology have freed us all to work however, wherever, whenever we want. Old restrictive boundaries are dissolving between local and global, employee and entrepreneur, professional and amateur, consumer and producer, home and office, work and play. Our options are now so much broader than just employee or business owner. What does all this mean? It means that there really is no reason left to suffer boring, unfulfilling work.

We no longer need to be driven by the old work ethic. We have entered the era of what author Pat Kane calls ‘The Play Ethic’.

*This is ‘play’ as the great philosophers understood it: the experience of being an active, creative and fully autonomous person. The play ethic is about having the confidence to be spontaneous, creative and empathetic across every area of your life . . . It’s about placing yourself, your passions and enthusiasms at the centre of your world.*

**Pat Kane, author of *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living*,  
taken from [www.theplayethic.com](http://www.theplayethic.com)**

Does 'play' sound selfish to you? It's actually the opposite. Players are often as interested in what they can give to the world as what they can get from it. Outdoor clothing company Patagonia grew out of a passion for rock climbing but is now worth a billion dollars. The company is an outspoken defender of the environment, repairs their clothing for free, and donated their recent \$10 million tax cut from the US government to groups committed to environmental causes.

Online eyewear retailer Warby Parker arose out of an idea formed between business school students in a bar. The company is now valued at \$1.75 billion and they provide a free pair of glasses to someone in need in the developing world for every pair of Warby Parker glasses purchased. The company has now distributed more than 5 million pairs of free glasses.

Campaigner Tristram Stuart fed 5,000 people in London's Trafalgar Square from misshapen food that would normally go to waste. Now he's created beer brand Toast to make use of the 44% of bread that is thrown away every day. Toast Ale is an award-winning beer brewed with unsold bread from bakeries and sandwich-makers. And Toast Ale gives 100% of its profits to Feed-back, an environmental charity campaigning to end food waste.

So are you ready to play? Perhaps you're currently stuck in a job that's reducing you to tears. Or you're worried that your job is under threat. Or you're slogging away at a business that's never quite taken off. In all likelihood you've been doing a lot of thinking about this, going round and round in circles trying to discover the way out. Well, it's time to end all that. Let's begin your transformation from worker to player. This book will show you the way: how to have fun and get paid for it; how to design a life big enough to hold everything that you are; how to explore and indulge your every interest; how to embrace a new world of uncertainty and enjoy the ride; how to get the results you never dared dream of with a lot less struggle; and how to stop waiting and get started on all this right now.

## Join the revolution

*It is my opinion that the 21st century will be the century of play.*

Brian Sutton-Smith, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and prominent play theorist

American author Daniel Pink is a leading thinker on the changing world of work. In his classic book *A Whole New Mind* he suggests we have reached a new era requiring very different skills if we want to stay in the game. Back in the 19th century, the industrial revolution gave us massive factories and efficient assembly lines. The factory worker needed physical strength and manual skills to thrive. The 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in the information age with the knowledge worker who needed analytical and logical skills. Today in the 21st century we find ourselves in the Conceptual Age.

The skills we need now, Pink says, are what you might call right-brain functions (even if that isn't neurologically accurate) such as design, empathy, meaning and play. Those of us showing inventiveness, empathy and big picture capabilities – players – will be the ones to excel. The industrial revolution, paired with the Protestant work ethic, gave us the *worker*. Today's digital revolution has given us the *player*.

This is not a shift you can sit back and opt out of. Logical information age skills are still necessary but they will no longer be sufficient. Work that can be easily defined and reproduced is likely to be either automated or outsourced. New forms of automation are now affecting this generation's white-collar workers in similar ways as it did the last generation's blue-collar workers.

According to a 2019 Brookings Institution report, a quarter of jobs in the US alone will be severely disrupted by AI and automation. And in a 2018 PwC survey of 10,029 people in China, Germany, India, the UK and the US, 37% said they were worried

about the impact of automation on jobs. AI alone is expected to have a \$15.7 trillion economic impact by 2030.

While this disruption has started with less skilled roles like shop workers, drivers and clerical roles, it has started to impact those in sales, customer service, IT, science and engineering, healthcare and law. As an example, law firms are already using AI to perform due diligence, conduct research and bill hours, and it's predicted AI will eliminate most paralegal and legal research positions within the next decade. To survive, you must develop skills that computers can't do better, faster, or cheaper.

What can't be automated may be outsourced to equally capable but cheaper staff in other countries. This has already extended from IT to financial analysis, editorial work and completing tax returns.

## But the economy!

Just as I was finishing this book, the coronavirus pandemic hit us and most of the world went into lockdown. Some experts are now predicting a deep recession. Other experts are predicting a boom as we are allowed out of our homes again.

Whatever the state of the world at the point you are reading this, don't be one of those that use the economy as an excuse to put off making a change. Too many people tell me they're not thinking about their career right now because there's a recession on (or on the way) so they should just keep their head down, stay put and play safe.

Burying your head in the sand is the last thing you should be doing in a time of change and uncertainty. Firstly, it's in times of flux that you are most likely to lose your job. If your boss calls you in this Friday and says it's your last day, wouldn't you rather have done the thinking already on what to do next than have to rush to start from scratch the following Monday? Secondly, the people who survive setbacks and crises the best are those who bring the kind



of creative thinking you'll be learning over the next few chapters. Thirdly, when you create a business that is entirely under your control you can quickly adapt to whatever the world throws at you. Finally, it's in the times of greatest change that the most exciting opportunities emerge. More people became millionaires during the Great Depression than in any other time in American history because start-up costs are so much lower in a downturn.

This book will show you how to test out your new line of work without quitting what you do now so that by the time you do leave you know you can generate income. And if you're reading this book because you've been made redundant, don't waste this chance to rethink your work and move towards play.

## It pays to have fun

*I never went into business to make money – but I have found that, if I have fun, the money will come.*

Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin

Having fun is at the heart of the idea of playing. And fun makes good financial sense too. The world's richest and most successful people, including billionaires Richard Branson, Warren Buffett and Oprah Winfrey, say they do what they do because it's fun. They clearly don't continue working because they need the money.

Apple's Steve Jobs famously advised the following:

*Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle.*

If you're currently chasing success and money in an attempt to make yourself happy you may have got things the wrong way

round. Research by Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California revealed that happiness, in many cases, leads to successful outcomes, rather than merely following from them.

After reviewing 225 relevant studies, her results show that happier people are more creative and productive, more likely to attempt new challenges, and to push themselves to strive for fresh goals. They are also more likely to be liked by their peers, and thus recruited to better jobs and promoted to higher positions. As a result of all this, happy people accrue more money.

So how do we become happier? Choosing the right work is a good start. The evidence demonstrates that people who have jobs distinguished by autonomy, meaning and variety are significantly happier than those who don't. As the good professor explains:

*When it comes to work life, we can create our own so-called 'upward spirals'. The more successful we are at our jobs, the higher income we make, and the better work environment we have, the happier we will be. This increased happiness will foster greater success, more money, and an improved work environment, which will further enhance happiness, and so on and so on and so on.*

This book will show you how to begin this upward spiral by choosing the right work and by creating a happier, more enjoyable life in the present.

*When you find yourself in love with something you're good at, you never really work again.*

**Sir Ken Robinson, British author and expert on creativity and education**

The key to getting paid for playing is to choose the right things to play. And the right things are those that you are naturally good at. Your aim must be to get into 'flow' – building a working life around the things you enjoy doing and have a natural talent for. But to do this, you need to widen your perception of what constitutes a talent far beyond the limited concept of 'transferable skills'.

It's important to understand the distinction between talent and skill. Talent appears early in life. Using our talents feels good so we do it a lot. Skill comes later as a result of practising that talent. We are musical before we ever pick up an instrument. People who are great communicators have usually been chatting to anyone who would listen since they formed their first words. Writers often start reading early. Great salespeople have been influencing and negotiating since they started school. Success is so much easier and more enjoyable when we build our work around our natural talents and developed skills.

So if we understand this, why aren't we all getting paid to have fun? First, a lot of people are simply doing the wrong work. Most of us have made gross compromises in our choice of work, driven by the principles of a previous generation who didn't have the options we do today. We have never dared to be selective enough about what we do so that we can spend the majority of the time in flow. As a result, we haven't mined that rich seam of gold among the masses of grey rock.

Some people think it's nonsense to make a living out of what you love because they've never experienced it. The school system sets us up for this when it encourages us to work on our weaknesses. But you'd be better off to work on your strengths and work *around* your weaknesses.

Of course, in a conventional job it can be difficult to say 'I don't do presentations, I only do research' or 'I don't do research, I only do presentations'. We're supposed to be great all-rounders – good at being creative, organising our time, working in a team, creating thorough reports, presenting our findings, and dotting the Is and crossing the Ts. In reality, no one can excel at all these things, and trying to do so guarantees mediocrity. The result is that work becomes a struggle and we lose sight of just how talented we are.

When you finally work *with* your personality and strengths, and avoid the ill-fitting work that drags you down, the effect is like dropping into a jetstream. You will see not just an incremental improvement in your results but a dramatic multiplication.

This is one reason why people are increasingly attracted to various forms of self-employment.

## Get the autonomy you crave

Given the limitations of conventional jobs, it's not surprising so many people would like an alternative. More people than ever are going self-employed – in the US it's a third of the entire workforce. And studies place the number wanting to move into self-employment as high as 70%. Too many are still held back by the myths of what it takes to work for yourself (we'll be dismantling every one of these myths later in the book).

A common belief is that the natural alternative to a job is to launch a business with all the risk and complexities of premises, staff and funding. But there are now so many different ways to make an income without a job. These constitute a third way – between jobs and the traditional business – and include consulting, freelancing, online business, portfolio career, and creating a personal brand around your expertise.

The line between employed and self-employed is blurred and it is no longer necessary to jump straight from one to another. Now we can test out our ideas, prove that they work and earn our first paycheck before we quit – or we can just keep it as a nice sideline to our employment. We can even reinvent the humble job to create the 'customised job', moulded to suit our personality, and our preferred working structure and location.

Whatever its form, the difference is primarily one of attitude. It's a shift in responsibility from passive employee to active creator.

It's a 180-degree about-turn, from looking outward for someone else to define our work to looking inward and creating the working life we really want. This is the shift from worker to player.

We are in a new era of work. The industrial revolution gave us mass production – treating employees as interchangeable components in a machine, creating generic products, and selling them to a mass market of undifferentiated consumers. Nearly two centuries later, today's digital revolution is changing the face of work all over again, but this time it's about a shift towards individuals and micro-businesses creating innovative products for niche markets, and attracting fans who market the products they like to each other.

## The world is your office

Thanks to laptop computers, mobile phones and WiFi, we are now freed from the tyranny of the office cubicle. A 2017 Gallup survey of 15,000 adults found that 43% of employed Americans, for instance, already spend at least some time working remotely. The pandemic has massively accelerated this shift with millions realising they can work at home just as effectively (or perhaps more) than at the office,

If your work is portable, you are free to choose where you work and who with. Join the new mobile workers now found in parks, cafés and even sitting beside the swimming pool in exotic locations. According to 2019 research by MBO Partners, 16 million Americans plan on working as 'digital nomads' over the next two to three years, while another 41 million Americans are considering it.

If you want freedom without losing a sense of community, you can become a member of one of the 15,000+ shared workspaces around the world that provide desk space by the hour, day or month. The original version of this book was mostly written in

a workspace for social entrepreneurs called Impact Hub. Now with over 100 branches in 50 countries, it's a workspace, meeting space, café and social community. The members are people who want to build businesses and organisations where making a difference is as important as making a profit. Similar spaces are appearing for artists, media professionals and tech start-ups.

Once you're free of the office, the next step is to realise that you may also be free of the country you live in. Here's how one couple transitioned to being digital nomads.

## Speed-dating cities

Taylor Croonquist and Camille Holden live in Bali where they run Nuts & Bolts Speed Training, providing advanced online training courses for PowerPoint users. I met Taylor in Ubud, Bali, and he told me the story of how they found their favourite place to live while setting up the business:

*We were living in China when we quit our jobs six years ago. And we wanted to find the next best place to live in the world because we thought China was the best place until the pollution went off the charts. We came up with this idea that we should speed-date cities around the world for two years, spending two to three months in each city so we could get a feel for the place and the people. And then to finance that we decided to launch this venture creating and selling online training courses. In the beginning it was pretty low key. We weren't trying make it a career, just make enough to buy aeroplane tickets and food and housing. We thought we could find enough clients along the way who we can teach PowerPoint to fund ourselves.*

*Because we weren't making any money at the beginning we started searching house-sitting and pet-sitting websites and we*

*lucked out with a two-month house-sitting gig by the beach in Fiji. That's where we built and launched our website and started selling our first online training course.*

*We stayed in nine places over the next couple of years. One highlight was Jimena de la Frontera in Spain. It had a nice small town feel but we felt it would be too small for us in the long term. Kiev was at the other end of the scale and was a wonderful surprise. The food was amazing, the people were really friendly, and for \$800 a month we were able to rent a big apartment in one of the swankiest neighbourhoods that had all of the best restaurants and activities.*

*After two years of traveling and running our business we were covering our costs plus saving a little bit of money, so we said let's do a third year. The business got even better but we wanted to stop moving at that point so we didn't have to keep living out of our suitcase.*

*We started asking travellers out of all the places they had been where would they move back to for six months? Where would they be super happy? And after the fourth pretty cool couple said they'd move back to Ubud, Bali, in a heartbeat we decided to just give it a shot and bought one-way tickets. We thought, worst case, if we don't like it two months in, we'll just go somewhere else. In fact, we never left.*

*We've been here in Bali for three years now. And it's about six years since we had the idea to travel around the world and find a way to finance it. The biggest learning curve for us was learning how to market our products online and how to create a website that generates traffic on its own. Last year, we had 1.5 million visitors to our website, and we are now getting about 200,000 visitors a month, so we are still growing. Today, Nuts and Bolts Speed Training is our full-time gig that we can take anywhere in the world with us.*

Find out more about Taylor & Camille's business at  
[nutsandboltsspeedtraining.com](http://nutsandboltsspeedtraining.com)

Now that the world is your office, you can live and work wherever you choose. Where would you like to go?

I now base myself in East London with occasional one or two month-long trips to Asia. This new edition of the book you are holding in your hands was written on the island of Koh Lanta in Thailand between cafés on the beach and a friendly co-working space called KoHub.

You'll find more advice on how to become a digital nomad in Secret ten.

## From worker to player

*To call yourself a 'player', rather than a 'worker', is to immediately widen your conception of who you are and what you might be capable of doing. It is to dedicate yourself to realising your full human potential; to be active, not passive.*

Pat Kane, [ThePlayEthic.com](http://ThePlayEthic.com)

What we're seeing is a new generation of people with a very different attitude to work. They are not workers but players. What exactly does that mean? Here are nine traits of players that this book will help you to understand and adopt.

### 1. Players put creativity, fun and fulfilment first

The worker expects work to be a chore. As players, we place what really matters to us at the centre of our worlds and we fill our lives with whatever we find most exciting, enjoyable, challenging, rewarding and fulfilling. We want to indulge every aspect of ourselves. We want to play all day and get paid for it. The player's ultimate career goal is often 'to get paid for being me'.

### 2. Players are multifaceted

Workers take a restricted version of themselves to the office, putting on a mask for the corporate environment. Players bring all of



themselves. Players are not one-dimensional beings (no human being is). Players are musicians who are also start-up founders, travellers who are also bloggers, consultants who are also songwriters, comedians who are also psychotherapists, finance administrators who are also campaigners. Now we can be all of who we are.

### 3. Players respond to the world around them

The worker thinks that play is frittering away time. But playing isn't about sitting in a corner all day daydreaming, nor is it sitting on a beach drinking cocktails for the rest of your life (that's the dream of a worker not a player). Look at what children do when they play – they are interacting with the physical world around them, testing it and experimenting with it, and they are also interacting with others and learning about relationships. Play is exploratory and responsive. To be *in play* is to be actively engaged in the world.

A player therefore is not ignoring the real world – far from it. We are being more responsive than the worker who simply does what they're told or the business owner who follows whatever money-making strategy the latest expert recommends. Players make their lives a laboratory and learn from their own experience.

### 4. Players respond to their inner world

The worker is directed by external expectations and values. As players, we recognise what is happening inside of us, accept it, acknowledge it and use it – long before others are even aware of it. The musician, music producer and artist Brian Eno said that the question that has occupied much of his life is 'What is it I really like?' By accepting what he discovers years before it is fashionable to do so, he has become a thought leader who created an entire genre of music (now known as ambient). He has gone on to work with some of the biggest bands in the world including U2 and Coldplay.

## 5. Players are mavericks

Workers stick to the conventions of their industry or specialism. As players we indulge all our interests no matter how whimsical or disparate they may seem – sometimes resulting in misunderstanding and ridicule from others. And later we emerge with genre-smashing creative works and rule-breaking businesses. Players change the game for everyone else.

*The truly great advances of this generation will be made by those who can make outrageous connections, and only a mind which knows how to play can do that.*

**Nagle Jackson, theatre director and award-winning playwright**

Players don't know when to stop. We get obsessive about things that others barely notice. We follow paths that lead us through seemingly unrelated topics and sometimes end up in some controversial area of art, politics or religion. In our free exploration we tread on others' taboos. We are broader than most, more whole. We are political beings, emotional beings, sexual beings and we know how to employ all of what we are to the greatest effect.

## 6. Players never stop exploring, never stop learning

When children play, there is often no predetermined outcome in mind: they are simply going where they are drawn in the moment. The play maps the growing edge of their human organism. Tomorrow's play will never be exactly the same as today. And then we reach adulthood and most people just stop.

The worker will attend the standard company training programmes and learn some new skills for their job but they rarely re-enter that process of following their growing edge wherever it leads them. Players, however, remain ever curious and are hungry to learn new things. We are still willing to experiment and follow the drive in us to expand. We're engaged in a lifelong process of learning and exploring.

Many of us are 'scanners', as careers expert Barbara Sher would call us, always moving on to the next new thing. We go where we feel instinctively drawn rather than following conventional rules of success and wealth. And that path leads to true originality. In a time of information overload, we add to the signal, not to the noise.

## 7. Players are not naive

Players are not new-age dreamers. We play with capitalism, we notice what our market needs and we see providing value and making money as part of the game. Players understand that money makes play sustainable. And players often make *more* money than workers because we love what we do (and that passion is attractive), we are thought leaders creating original solutions, we focus on creating genuine value (not just making a quick buck), and we solve real-world problems.

## 8. Players surf the big waves that others are drowned by

We need to be responsive, flexible and playful today because the world is changing so fast. Whether it's political shifts, economic shocks or unexpected crises like the global pandemic, the world seems a less stable place than it once was. At the time of writing, the global economy is more uncertain than at any time in the last decade. And this is on top of a longer-term shift of economic dominance from North America and Western Europe to Asia as China is set to soon become the world's largest economy (and India's economy is on track to beat even China's by 2030).

As the next wave of outsourcing takes away any work that is easily defined and repeated, creativity will be the safest pursuit as it is specific to the local culture and environment. Now, more than ever, everything is in play and only the playful will survive.

## 9. Players understand that play is not effortless

Surely there's always work required to create a successful life? Well, I have a problem with the word 'work'. There are multiple meanings for the word. One meaning refers to paid employment and it's associated with that old two-state way of living between doing the things you get paid for and doing what you really enjoy in the stolen moments outside office hours. This is why we need some new vocabulary.

Another meaning of work, however, is simply the 'exertion of effort' which is still very much relevant. Play after all is not effortless: just watch a football match, U2 playing live, or a child building a sandcastle. Even playing a video game requires attention, concentration and persistence.

Players are engaged in something larger than the word 'work' can represent. They're creating businesses around their passion, pursuing creative and artistic experiments, starting their own social movements. They're exploring the world, what they enjoy and what they can do. They are seeking the fullest expression of themselves. They're so passionate about what they're doing, they can't stop talking about it. What's work and what's leisure blur into one. It's all a form of play.

### Take a tip from the hunter-gatherers

For all of modern society's sophistication, we could still learn something from the hunter-gatherer tribes remaining in remote locations around the world. Peter Gray is a research professor of psychology at Boston College who has studied the research on hunter-gatherer cultures. He has concluded that they do not have our concept of work as a compulsory chore. He writes on [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com) that hunter-gatherers' work is simply an extension of children's play.

*Children play at hunting, gathering, hut construction, tool making, meal preparations, defense against predators, birthing, infant care, healing, negotiation, and so on and so on; and gradually, as their play becomes increasingly skilled, the activities become productive. The play becomes work, but it does not cease being play. It may even become more fun than before, because the productive quality helps the whole band and is valued by all.*

And work is always a choice:

*They deliberately avoid telling each other how to behave, in work as in any other context. [Despite this] long-term shirking apparently happens rarely if at all. It is exciting to go out hunting or gathering with the others, and it would be boring to stay in camp day after day. The fact that on any given day the work is optional and self-directed keeps it in the realm of play.*

And guess what, they do fewer hours than us too:

*Research studies suggest that hunter-gatherers work somewhere between 20 and 40 hours a week, on average, depending on just what you count as work. Moreover, they do not work according to the clock; they work when the time is ripe for the work to be done and when they feel like it.*

*It's amazing when you think about it. During the 10,000 years since the onset of agriculture and then industry, we have developed countless labor-saving devices, but we haven't reduced our labor. Today, most people spend more time working than did hunter-gatherers, and our work, on average, is less playful.*

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## Scrap your career plan

*We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.*

**Joseph Campbell, mythologist, writer and lecturer**

The world is changing very quickly. A five-year plan for your career or business is likely to be redundant within a few months. Jeff Bezos, CEO of trillion-dollar company Amazon, admits that “any business plan won’t survive its first encounter with reality”. This is even more true in the early stages of your venture – the business you start is rarely the business you end up succeeding with.

The same is true for your life as a whole. Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, named as one of the most powerful women in the world by both Fortune & Forbes says:

*There is nothing like a concrete life plan to weigh you down. Because if you always have one eye on some future goal, you stop paying attention to the job at hand, miss opportunities that might arise, and stay fixated on one path, even when a better, newer course might have opened up.*

The old habit of setting far-off goals and making gross compromises in the present to get there makes less and less sense. Throw your attention back on the present and embrace ‘life in perpetual beta’, as film-maker Melissa Pierce terms it.

Your long-term goals are not what will make you happy. Even getting rich is no guarantee. Research shows that when people win the lottery, they have a short-lived boost in happiness and then settle back to roughly the level of happiness they had before. What matters is how you choose to live today. Your aim in beginning to play is to create the positive experience you want to have in your life, starting right now even if it’s scaled down to start with.

And ironically, pursuing your genuine interests, if done right, will make you richer than chasing the money ever will. You can’t really excel at something when your heart isn’t in it, so if you do want to get rich, choose something that feels more like play than work. It makes good business sense. You can’t compete with someone who loves what they do.

My story: 'I never want another job for the rest of my life'

Many years ago when I had a job as a computer programmer, I knew I wanted something different but didn't know what it was. I realised the only way I was really going to work it out was to imagine for a moment that I could have anything I wanted.

And what I wanted was not to work.

I didn't want to sit on the sofa all day doing nothing. I wanted to play – to do whatever creative, fun stuff I love doing, and still get paid. At the time this seemed an unrealistic desire but it wasn't long after this realisation that I got exactly what I wanted. The company announced a chance for voluntary redundancies and I jumped at it. I got paid several months' salary to go and do whatever I liked. Some of my redundant colleagues bought sports cars. I didn't. I played. I created music, did some writing and I created an installation in an experimental museum. This time of play led me into the most exciting and fun job in my career. But it was still a job.

When later I had a go at stand-up comedy, I put this into my routine:

*I worry I'm in the wrong job, in fact I worry I don't suit jobs. The money's OK, it's the working I have a problem with.*

*I think my life is just too full to fit a job in. I'm too busy doing stuff that's actually fun and that work thing just gets in the way.*

*My career goal is to be paid for just being me, living my life. I'm very busy, I'm putting in the hours, I should get compensated.*

*Name of role: being John Williams.*

*I'd wake up in the morning and my boss would come in and go 'Well done John, another great week, here's your wage packet.'*

In reality, this is exactly what I want: to be able to do whatever I want to do, to play all day and get paid. To get paid to be me.

Not all jobs are terrible, of course. I've had some good ones – special effects software developer, online video expert, senior managing consultant for a global consultancy – but whatever the job, I still felt like life was somehow passing me by while I was stuck in front of a computer in a bland, open-plan office.

In 2003 I finally escaped and publicly declared, “I never want another job for the rest of my life.” I've been working for myself ever since and conducting some interesting experiments along the way: I turned a full-time job offer into a three-day-week contract paying the same money; I earned enough as a consultant to only need to work for three months of the year; and I've enjoyed creative projects such as getting my experimental music played on radio stations around the world and sharing a part of my life story in a national newspaper.

Now I run my own business called The Ideas Lab which helps people to get clear on the work they love and turn their ideas into stand-out businesses, books and brands. Over the past 15 years we've impacted the working lives of tens of thousands of people around the world – and you can read some of their stories in this book. I've learned a lot in that time about what works in my own career and those of my clients – and what holds people back.

The work of The Ideas Lab has been featured in *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Marketing Week*, *The Daily Mail*, *Elle* magazine, *Psychologies*, *Red* and *Monocle* amongst others. And I have been interviewed on BBC Radio and on national TV in Australia.

I'm constantly fine-tuning the focus of the company and my role within it to centre on my strengths and favourite activities, whether it's writing, speaking internationally, creating innovative programmes, interviewing rule-breakers and original thinkers on The Ideas Lab podcast, or finding the creative twist in clients' ideas



for businesses, books, brands and movements that makes them stand out and win instant attention. I set my own hours, choose my own co-workers and alternate my place of work between my home, my favourite café by the canal, and co-working spaces in Bali, Thailand and elsewhere.

I'm not a millionaire (yet) but my company consistently makes six figures and I've found that when I choose projects that really excite me, the company does better. My mission to get paid to play continues to evolve. It's not a project that is ever done. But it's one that I hope to convince you to start.

## Let's talk about death

It might seem strange to bring death into a book about play but in fact it is at the very heart of the topic. Here's a defining event from my life that I think will show you why.

When I was five months old, my parents took me out with my brother in the family car to show me to some relatives. Just a few minutes from our home, we were hit head-on by a young drunk driver who had lost control and was on the wrong side of the road.

Both my parents were injured. My mother made a full recovery. My father died in hospital ten days later from complications with his injuries. He was 34.

Losing my father before I was even old enough to know him has coloured my whole life. It made it abundantly and painfully clear that life can end at any moment. With this stark reality in mind, now answer this question: Do you really want to spend another few years doing some unsatisfying work in the hope that you can do what you really like later?

Here's the real message of this book:

### DON'T WASTE ANOTHER MINUTE OF YOUR LIFE

What do you really want your life to be about? This book will show you how to start it right now. If you don't know what you want, your mission is to find out. This book will tell you how. It's less important that you complete your work mission than that you're engaged in it. It's in the *being in play* that you will find salvation. When you are fully engaged in the right project, you will easily attract others around you who are inspired by the same aims. And if the worst happens and you don't get to complete your work yourself, others will pick up the reins.

Do what really matters. Start playing. Start now.

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The first step in your journey to getting paid to play is to find out what you really want. The first Secret will show you how to discover what that is.

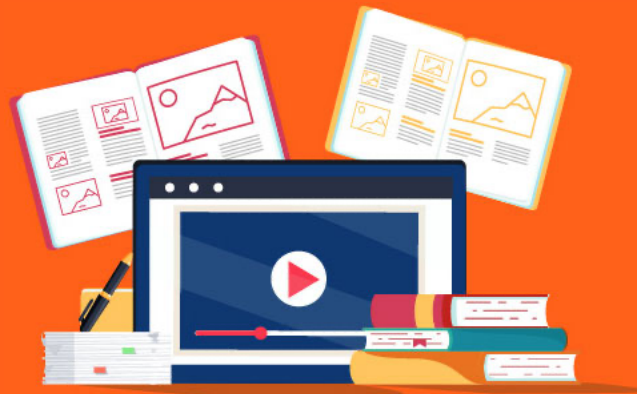
#### **On the website: [fworkletsplay.com](http://fworkletsplay.com)**

- ➡ Read, listen to and watch interviews with successful players, including Taylor Croonquist.
- ➡ Access more information and links for the people quoted.
- ➡ Connect with a global community of players.

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