



Get a Life, by Anna Quindlen

There are thousands of people out there with the same degree you have; when you get a job, there will be thousands of people doing what you want to do for a living. But you are the only person alive who has sole custody of your life. Your particular life. Your entire life. Not just your life at a desk, or your life on the bus, or in the car, or at the computer. Not just the life of your mind, but the life of your heart. Not just your bank account, but your soul.

People don't talk about the soul very much anymore. It's so much easier to write a rsum than to craft a spirit. But a rsum is cold comfort on a winter night, or when you're sad, or broke, or lonely, or when you've gotten back the chest X ray and it doesn't look so good, or when the doctor writes "prognosis, poor."

You cannot be really first-rate at your work if your work is all you are.

So I suppose the best piece of advice I could give anyone is pretty simple: get a life. A real life, not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, the bigger paycheck, the larger house. Do you think you'd care so very much about those things if you developed an aneurysm one afternoon, or found a lump in your breast while in the shower?

Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water pushing itself on a breeze over the dunes, a life in which you stop and watch how a red-tailed hawk circles over a pond and a stand of pines. Get a life in which you pay attention to the baby as she scowls with concentration when she tries to pick up a Cheerio with her thumb and first finger.

Turn off your cell phone. Turn off your regular phone, for that matter. Keep still. Be present.

Get a life in which you are not alone. Find people you love, and who love you. And remember that love is not leisure, it is work.

Get a life in which you are generous. Look around at the azaleas making fuchsia star bursts in spring; look at a full moon hanging silver in a black sky on a cold night. And realize that life is glorious, and that you have no business taking it for granted. Care so deeply about its goodness that you want to spread it around. Take the money you would have spent on beers in a bar and give it to charity. Work in a soup kitchen. Tutor a seventh-grader.

All of us want to do well. But if we do not do good, too, then doing well will never be enough.

