

Sachin Sashti

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Review - The Pathless Path

A powerful personal story of self-discovery, a shattering of conventional work beliefs, and an exploration of what matters. Follow Paul's journey as he quits his job, faces his money fears head-on, travels abroad without a plan, falls in love, and finds a portal to a new way of being.

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The title of this book is amazingly similar to the content, which is somewhat rare among the books I've read. The book details two "paths", generally post-education. The first (and most common) path is "the default path". Simplified, on the default path, you get a good job, work up in your career to earn more pay, and eventually retire with the nest egg you've built. On the contrary, the pathless path inherently has little to no structure. Instead of trading your dollars for hours for most of your life, one is free to explore one's passions and interest. The author, Millerd, comes from a background on the default path, consulting at McKinsey and going to MIT for his MBA. He discusses how these "milestone achievements" on the default path never lived up to what he thought they would be. This disconnect led to unfulfillment in his life, and with the onset of health complications, he decided to find something more meaningful to him.

This book was, in many ways, tough to read. Personally, for almost all my life I've had goals charted out that I would like to achieve to be "successful". I truly believe these goals are intrinsically motivated and I want them. However, Millerd details "chasing prestige" in which one continually seeks to improve their social or professional status, often chasing something that can never be caught and will lead to dissatisfaction and resentment building up. This made reading difficult as it forced me to question the deepest motives behind my goals and actions. Is what I am doing now for myself, or do I believe in a dream that isn't truly mine? These questions of how the environment shapes beliefs and goals are at the heart of my passion for studying philosophy. Millerd continues to emphasize how Eastern traditions function on "*make as much money as you need, then pursue personal passion.*" Whereas Western culture dictates to "*make*

as much money as possible” Within my own life, I’ve seen myself find the most fulfillment and purpose in unexpected places, so it’s hard to determine how accurate my internal compass for purpose is. I want to believe that many of my goals are driven by purpose (and happen to come with fame), but recently I was asked, “What is your biggest fear, and how does that guide the decisions you make?” With no right or wrong answer I was at a loss for whether or not fear-driven decisions were healthy. Fear is a driving factor in much of what everyone does, for good evolutionary reason, but the world we live in now is so different from the one our great ancestors evolved from—so is it still healthy to have fear drive decision-making? These are the kinds of questions the book makes you ponder. It questions the fabric of reality that much of Western culture is built on and it forces the reader to contemplate abstract life concepts, most of which are unanswerable.

What I especially loved about the book was that Millerd was not chastising the default path—he recognized it as a catalyst for innovation. However, he simply suggested that it’s not the path for everyone, and other options exist. These options often have less rigidity, but one must overcome societal and internal pressures/sentiments to take the first step. A common theme I have seen with many of these books (books speaking about finding a deeper meaning/ sense of self) implores the reader to create. Creating in any capacity stimulates the brain in so many abstract ways and introduces divergent trains of thought. Whether it’s an online blog that no one reads, or a neighborhood cooking competition, creating can look like many things. This gets to the deeper idea of being creative. The book emphasizes how creativity is not “a quality few are born with”, but rather something more ubiquitous and unique to each individual. I loved this section of the book because I feel that our current environment tends to think about creativity in

a specific way. However, being creative can be anything, and this is why the author urges the readers to create. In my opinion, being creative is not just a skill to leverage in a job interview, but it's a tool to help find a deeper sense of purpose and meaning. Creativity is a skill like any other that improves with consistency and repetition. The single most important message in this book is as follows: You don't have to quit your job and change your lifestyle to embrace aspects of the pathless path; just begin creating to build connection with others and deepen your sense of self.