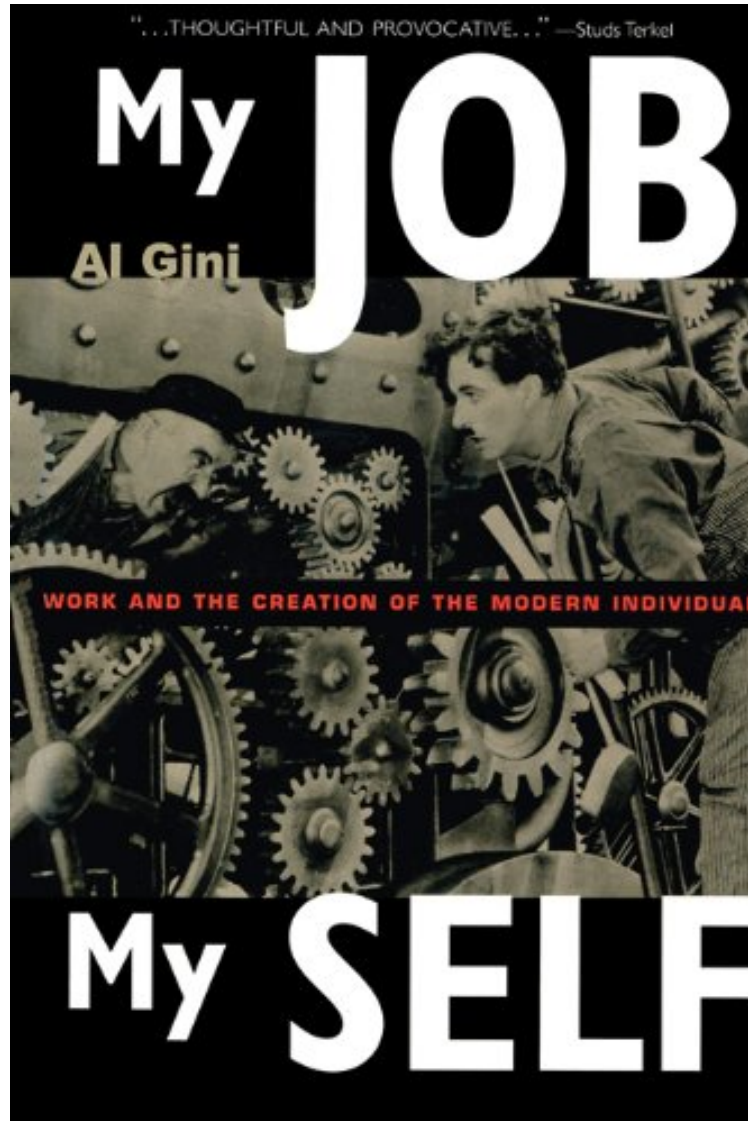


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My Job, My Self: Work and the Creation of the Modern Individual

Al Gini

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Al Gini : My Job, My Self: Work and the Creation of the Modern Individual before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised My Job, My Self: Work and the Creation of the Modern Individual:

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Thorough, Data-Filled, Academic Treatment of Modern WorkBy CustomerAfter finishing this book, all I can say is "wow." Mr. Gini is clearly one of the more knowledgeable people on the subject of work and its changing role in modern society. This book is masterfully well written and demonstrates a sound knowledge of the subject matter, which is presented in a very well thought out and logically presented manner. The scope of the subject matter being very broad, the author's ability to envelope it and treat so many aspects

of it in such depth was really remarkable. There is an amazing amount of information presented within the book, a plethora of footnotes, and yet the book is not imposing - it is in fact rewarding because of all it. While the entire book was fascinating, I thought that there were four chapters in particular that were outstanding. Chapter 7 "Women in the Workplace", Chapter 8 "Squeezing Time", Chapter 10 "Work Spend and Debt Syndrome", and Chapter 12 "The End of Work, is Rifkin Right?" all cover enough detail to be books of their own. Mr. Gini references many other books which do just that. "Women in the Workplace" explores the many remarkable facets of how the increasing penetration of women into the workforce has changed our society, and how society has driven those changes. "Squeezing Time" talks of the incredible shrinking of free time in modern society compared to those of years gone by. The author sees this as a natural extension of the Industrial Revolution, and has the data to back up this view. "Work Spend and Debt Syndrome" talks about the shift in society to one of people with lives to one of people as consumers. The similarities between this and "Bobos in Paradise" by Brooks is startling. Mr. Gini demonstrates qualitatively and quantitatively how we have become a consumer society, and shows us what exactly that means. "The End of Work, is Rifkin Right?" is an amazing chapter (partly because I agree with his points very strongly) in which the author looks at the some of the questions posed by Mr. Jeremy Rifkin and Mr. Robert Heilbroner in their 1996 book. Their main point had been that the increase in productivity caused by the personal computer had yet to fully ripple through the workplace, and that as it did so we would see waves of greater and greater unemployment. Mr. Gini takes a look at this view four years later, and is cautious to not deliver an aggressive verdict. One of the more interesting things I found about this book, other than the points that the author brought forth and the views of society that he projected, was that it almost had a self-help aspect to it. There is an amazing amount of comfort behind statistics in which "85% of all workers felt ___", especially when the blank is filled in with something you feel as well. In that manner, there were parts of this book that evoked similar themes to "A Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl, something that completely surprised me. This is by no means a central tenement to the text, but its effect was certainly worth noting, and really added strongly to the value of the book. I couldn't recommend this book anymore strongly. It would be of great value to anyone who is working, trying to figure out what they should be doing with their lives, or is looking to do research on the changing role of work within society. This is an outstanding book. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Sum, ergo laboro ("I am, therefore I [must] work") By Christopher Nelson For most of us work as a means to an end (namely, consumerism) has displaced the notion of work as a pleasure. Etymologically, the words "work", "job", or "labor" denote pain, sorrow, or heavy, burdensome tasks. Thus, in "My Job, My Self" Al Gini wonders: "So why, given our poverty of time and the burdens of work, haven't we traded our prosperity for leisure?" (p. 141). One answer provided by Gini in this thorough expose on everything "job/work", is that most of us no longer work out of a sense of duty, necessity, or utilitarian pleasure; nor hunger or the satisfactions of craftsmanship or pleasures of a job well done. Sadly, we no longer seem capable of knowing what exactly to do with our free-time, and find ourselves more often than naught, bored, wanting, and desiring things only more money can buy. We have become a nation of culture consumers: "Emo, ergo sum"/"I shop, therefore I am", (p. 140). The main thrust of "My Job, My Self" is not to propose some vague utopian elimination of work altogether, but rather to acknowledge the importance that modern society places on work, and to show how we have come to identify ourselves through our jobs. If our jobs are so vital to who we are, then we really ought to pay more attention to what exactly we're getting out of them. Gini admits that, "Work will never be completely free of disappointment, drudgery, and toil, but all work should, at least, offer the possibility of purpose and hope" (p.224). "My Job, My Self" is an enlightening journey through a subject many readers read books to escape from in the first place! Yet, our jobs consume so much of our time and lives that only a straight-forward examination of what we do, and why we do it, can be therapeutic - and quite possibly life-changing. "My Job, My Self" is rounded off with insightful chapters on subjects such as race, women in the workplace, time and stress issues related to workaholism, and the importance of ethics and leadership. In general, it contains sound socio-economic discussion related to the nature of work itself, and the worker's relation to it in an increasingly technologically driven economy. Read, reflect, and arm yourself with your new-found revelations, for "without love, work is servitude" (p.224). 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Understanding the origins of work inner dimension... By Paterni Riccardo Why do we work? What we do expect from work? What do we get from work? Is the nature of work changing along with the economic and social changes affecting all of us? The topic is relevant to anyone and the perspective taken by Al Gini (member of the Department of Philosophy and the Institute of Human Resources and Industrial Relations at Loyola University Chicago) is at the same time academic and wide ranging for the general reader referencing from subjects such as psychology, history, popular literature and economics. This book stimulates the reader to reflect upon the 'way that we make a living' while gaining a sense of perspective and insight upon what we really value about our own work. The exercise is at the same time challenging and enlightening and it helps us also to find ways that could improve the way we experience and perceive work itself. From necessity to self-realization: identity First of all, why do we work? OK, the first answer is a given: 'we work to make a living'. But there is much more than that and too often we fail to consider and value it. Gini puts it quite clearly: "Renegade; Descartes was wrong. It isn't 'Cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am), but rather 'Labora, ergo sum' (I work therefore, I am). We need work, and as adults we find identity in and are identified by the work we do. Our work tells us who we are. If

this is true, then we must be careful about what we choose to do for a living, for what we do is what we become. At its worst, work is a burden and a necessity. At its best work can be an act of personal freedom and self-realization. But either way, work is a necessary and defining ingredient in our lives". From both a psychological and social perspective the sense of identity that we get from work is a powerful one; it does shape who we are and the way we are perceived by others, yet most of all, the `rules' of our work do have a powerful impact on the way we understand and give meaning to events shaping our lives and the lives of others. Beyond the survival game? Do we work to survive or can we also gain satisfaction from work aiming at that self-realization that deep inside we all strive for? Since the Industrial Revolution the progressive spreading of material well-being (at least within the Western civilization) should have enabled workers to go beyond the threshold of `work as survival' into a dimension of work more linked to real achievement, expression of talent and inner potential. Gini writes "Unfortunately, both conventional wisdom and sociological surveys tell us that a significant portion of the workforce feels trapped in jobs that lack the possibility of `real achievement', `feelings of satisfaction' and the opportunity for the development of a `healthy and stable sense of self'. For these individuals work remains an obstacle to endure instead of an opportunity to expend one's life. Clearly, the only satisfaction to be found in some jobs lies in the necessity of getting it done when no other alternatives are available. Survival, not satisfaction, becomes the goal. (...) More and more workers feel that their jobs lack any meaning and value beyond the utilitarian function of providing them with a paycheck." Since ancient times work has been associated with a burden, a necessary unavoidable toil (on the topic Gini points out several references from ancient Greek and Roman cultural tradition and also the Bible); with time, no matter what kind of material improvements society has created overall, we have been unable to tap into the richer inner individual dimension of work and this has created serious individual and social consequences "Too many workers believe their jobs have nothing to do with their inner sense of self, at least not in a positive sense. Too often, they're right. Too often, frustration at work finds expression in addiction, depression, withdrawal or violence". Safety of the body; what about safety of the mind? Since the Industrial Revolution there is been a lot of progress within the workplace of factories and offices in terms of physical work conditions. Physically healthier and safer work environments have progressively become widespread at least within the Western world. Yet this does not seem to have proportionally contributed to increase the overall positive perception of work. As Gini puts it "Although the modern workplace goes to great lengths to protect workers' bodies, little or no attention is paid to the potential damage to their psyches and spirits". The key issue here is once again associated with the sense of meaning, the sense of vision that we stimulated to associate to our work and too often this stimulation is too little or totally not present within organizations and work environments. Gini labels this issue as `lack of vision'; first of all lack of vision on the side of organizational leadership whom fails either to develop, articulate or communicate effectively a sense of project, of contribution to a larger goal, to which workers at any level of the organization can relate to. Once again the consequences of this are widespread and have a deep impact on an individual and societal level "Because so few of us feel we are part of a larger purpose, we lose ourselves in the pay-off, the paycheck, and are driven solely by the goal of pecuniary well-being. The primary meaning of our labor is reduced to what it allows us to get or buy. We no longer work to create or contribute but only to consume". Human nature leads us to strive for meaning, to strive for achievement and since we cannot find neither meaning nor achievement within the daily nature of our work, we associate meaning and achievement not to what we create but to what we consume. Gini argues that this affects also the sources of our motivation to work and produce "The desire for goods and services, aided and abetted by advertisement and the installment plan, is the `new candid carrot', to use Bell's phrase, that keeps us at our jobs and motivates our work efforts. The new American worker has been formed not by discipline, ideology, or need by by boredom, want and desire". Once again these dynamics might contribute to ensure safety and well-being of the body, the latest and trendiest goods and services do satisfy - at least for a given amount of time - our external needs and wants; yet our internal drives for real contribution and achievement are too often pushed aside with the undesirable consequences above mentioned. Today's way to work takes care of our body and little of our mind; over two hundred years of growing material progress has done very little to change this. Tapping into the inner dimension of work: values and moral leadership Failing to take into consideration and develop the individual inner dimension of work is detrimental of the individual; nowadays it is detrimental also for organizations that have the necessity to tap into the inner individual creativity and talents in order to innovate and be competitive within a very dynamic and demanding global economy. Work with a real meaning, clearly part of a real contribution to a greater purpose is for more and more organizations no longer simply an unnecessary benefit granted to workers, it has become a requirement of effective management and leadership. Yet too often companies still fail to understand this and they miss the opportunity to truly evolve the dimension of work on both an individual and organizational level. Work has always been in search of meaning and increasingly organizations are in search of meaning in order to establish a strong sense of identity and purpose necessary to make their contribution to a fast changing economy truly recognized as unique and valuable. Meaning needs to be rooted in a real greater purpose to which we aim, as individuals and workers, on the basis of shared values and behaviors that need to be stated, articulated and respected. Meaning given by a set of principles that not only give a real greater purpose to work, they define its moral dignity. Within these dynamics leadership has a key role in coming to redefine and reshape the way we perceive and

experience work. Gini writes "I believe that Tom Peters and Bob Waterman were correct when they stated 'The real role of leadership is to manage the values of an organization'. All leadership is value-laden. All leadership is ideologically driven or motivated by a certain philosophical perspective, which upon analysis may prove to be morally acceptable. (...) Leadership is hard to define, and moral leadership is even harder. Nevertheless, I am convinced that without the 'witness' of moral leadership, standards of ethics and organizational life will not occur or be sustained. Leadership, even when defined as a collaborative experience, is this about the influence of individual character and the impact on personal mentoring. Good behavior does not always beget good behavior, but it does establish tone and offer options. Although it is mandatory that an organization as a whole make a commitment to ethical behavior to actually achieve it, the model for that commitment has to originate from the top. Or, am I wrong? Is it always about the money?" Once again, what is going to prevail about work? Its superficial material focus, based upon the outer dimension or the deep rooted meaning-laden real-contribution-driven based on the inner dimension? Global societal, technological and economic changes give us the opportunity (an opportunity increasingly shaping itself as a necessity) and the means to finally have an impact upon the nature of work, the way that we identify with it, the way that we consider it not simply as a means to survival but as a means to self-realization. Time will tell if us and our leaders have the vision and the courage to embrace this opportunity.

In *My Job My Self*, Gini plumbs a wide range of statistics, interviews with workers, surveys from employers and employees, and his own experiences and memories, to explore why we work, how our work affects us, and what we will become as a nation of workers. *My Job, My Self* speaks to every employed person who has yet to understand the costs and challenges of a lifetime of labor.

From *Publishers Weekly* In this entertaining and thoughtful meditation on the nature of work in human life, Gini (a Loyola University philosophy professor) careers between the philosophical (quoting Pope John Paul II and Pope Pius XII as well as G.K. Chesterton) and the practical (ruminating on social philosopher Jeremy Rifkin's contention that computers at the "third industrial revolution" will mean the end of work in the future). At the heart of his book is the complex relationship between human behavior, social organization and the need to practice meaningful work. In a sprightly chronology, he traces attitudes toward work throughout Western history from the Greeks, who looked down on physical labor as antithetical to philosophy, to the Protestant work ethic invented by Luther and Calvin, to the 18th-century Luddites who destroyed machines in protest against losing their jobs, and the robber barons who quoted scripture to justify inhumanly long work hours before deftly turning to contemporary U.S. attitudes. Drawing upon such diverse sources as labor statistics about women in the workplace, publications of *Workaholics Anonymous*, nationwide polls about job satisfaction and the writings of William James, Gini paints a nuanced and scholarly portrait of Americans' response to the place of work in their lives, acknowledging that as the nature and meaning of work changes, people still need "a vision that recognizes and honors the precept that, minimally, work must do two things: maintain life and add to it." (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. "...a conversation with anyone who has ever worked for a living--a refreshingly intelligent, cogent, and charming conversation." -- Terry Sullivan, Writer at Large for *GQ* and Contributing Editor for *Chicago Magazine* "...entertaining and thoughtful meditation on the nature of work in human life...." -- *Publishers Weekly* "Al Gini offers us a thoughtful and provocative book on the daunting subject of work. He has a salubrious style, so it's funny too!" -- Studs Terkel, Pulitzer-prize winning author of *Working* and *The Good War* From the Back Cover Why do we work? And why do we work so obsessively? Al Gini observes that work rules, runs, and sometimes ruins our lives. But what is intriguing is that in spite of this, many of us come to love, or at least need, that which holds us captive. In this provocative, lively, and sometimes disturbing meditation, Gini reveals that work is not only a fundamental aspect of our humanity, but also a profound reflection of our deepest selves. Peppered with real voices from workers and employers across America, and with references from psychology, history, popular literature and economics, *My Job, My Self* speaks to every employed person who has yet to understand the costs and challenges of a lifetime of labor.