

**F\*\*k  
Work  
LET'S  
PLAY**

**Do What You Love  
and Get Paid for It**

JOHN WILLIAMS

# 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,

**Strengths:** Co-operative, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens and averts friction.

**Allowable weaknesses:** Can be indecisive in crunch situations and tends to avoid confrontation.

**Don't be surprised to find that:** They might be hesitant to make unpopular decisions.

### **Shaper**

Provides the necessary drive to ensure that the organisation or team keeps moving and does not lose focus or momentum.

**Strengths:** Challenging, dynamic. Thrives on pressure. Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.

**Allowable weaknesses:** Can be prone to provocation, and may sometimes offend people's feelings.

**Don't be surprised to find that:** They could risk becoming aggressive and bad-humoured in their attempts to get things done.

### **Specialist**

Brings in-depth knowledge of a key area to the organisation or project.

**Strengths:** Single-minded, self-starting and dedicated. Provides specialist knowledge and skills.

**Allowable weaknesses:** Tends to contribute on a narrow front and can dwell on the technicalities.

**Don't be surprised to find that:** They overload you with information.

Read more about Belbin team roles at [belbin.com](http://belbin.com)

You should have recognised yourself in one of more of the team roles (see [fworkletsplay.com](http://fworkletsplay.com) for more information).

Hopefully, this has illustrated that the source of your value is far, far broader than the transferable skills you picked up in your last job. Your talents might include inspiring people, identifying the right people to hire or collaborate with, spotting mistakes, connecting people to the right information, fine-tuning things, automating, generating ideas. And it also shows that you should stop trying to be an all-rounder once and for all. Work on your strengths, work *around* your weaknesses.

Your mission must be to get into flow. Start doing more of those things that you're naturally good at – which are also the things you find most enjoyable. In addition, you will need to *stop* doing those things that are out of flow for you – by delegating them, outsourcing them or swapping skills with complementary people. Few people dare to do this and so most of us never really experience flow. We push and struggle in our work for mediocre results. Imagine only doing the things that you are great at doing and working with others who are great at the things you hate. How much more effective would you be?

Note that there is a world of difference between what you *can* do and what you're naturally great at. We have all become pretty good at a number of things through our careers and life experiences (sometimes simply through necessity), but what we are interested in here are those things that you are really *great* at and enjoy. Build a life around those and you'll be many times more successful than if you base your work on what you're simply OK at.

Write in your playbook which roles you think represent you and which strengths and weaknesses you recognise in yourself from the list above. Also write down one thing you currently do in your work that clearly feels *out of flow* for you, something that really grates with you. How could you minimise or remove this activity altogether from your work?

## Find your foil

Charlie Thuillier is creator of the world's first healthy ice cream, Oppo, now stocked in thousands of stores around Europe (read the remarkable story in Secret eight).

But when he set out on his mission, he decided very quickly he needed his brother Harry to join him to make it work because as Charlie told me, "He's fantastic at what I'm bad at – we're total foils of each other."

In Belbin team roles, Charlie is primarily a Shaper and Resource investigator, which is great for someone trying to bring an innovation to the market. In his own words, "I am enthusiastic, challenging and thrive on pressure. However I can be impatient, over-optimistic, and can get bored once a project moves to the fine-tuning stage. Harry is the finisher, the optimiser. He has the perfectionist's eye on details."

Harry is primarily a Co-ordinator in Belbin terms, using his tact, insight and control to set goals and find the right people to execute them. Charlie explains, "I tend to run new pitches (and swiftly hand them over once won) and longer-term ideas for growth, while Harry looks after the team, structure, processes and makes the idea happen. Although we both run Oppo jointly we don't end up treading on each other's toes."

If you are starting a business you might well be working on your own initially, but you can hire people on a task-by-task basis as your foil. For example, a coach to help you set goals and hold you accountable, a bookkeeper to keep your accounts in order, or a project manager to help you organise a complex project. If you choose to start your business with a friend or colleague, beware making the common mistake of choosing someone exactly like you. Look instead for your foil.

## Feeling uncomfortable?

*The story of the human race is the story of men and women selling themselves short.*

Abraham Maslow, American psychologist, 1908–70

All this talk of naming your talents and strengths might be unsettling. Perhaps this sounds like boasting to you. British culture in particular has a history of encouraging people not to sing their own praises. But unless you at least identify your talents, how can you ever get to use them? It is a generous act to know your talents and use them. Your talents are not really for you – they are for everyone else around you who benefits when you put them into action. In fact, keeping them to yourself is the selfish act.

It can be easy to overlook something you do well as a talent. It comes so naturally to you, you can't imagine not being able to do it. And you may not have noticed that other people don't have this talent. We have so bought into the idea that what we do for a living must be hard work that getting paid to do what comes naturally almost feels like cheating.

I have a friend who is an excellent flirt. He's genuinely charming and charismatic with everyone he meets. And that's a talent. I know people who make their entire living teaching other men and women how to flirt. Ask some supportive friends what talents you have that you might have missed and write them down in your playbook.

## Talents, skills and passions

The sweet spot for getting paid to play is where talent, skill and passion meet. Talent is what you're born with. Great comedians have been making people laugh since their earliest school days. But when they first step up to a mic to perform they still usually 'die'. This is because pacing, audience interaction and writing material

are skills that still have to be learned. The third factor is passion. Even if you're good at something, you won't excel at it unless you enjoy it. I happen to be talented and skilled at wiring extremely complex digital video systems together. It's easy for me and I had a lot of practice in it at a previous job but I'm not passionate about it, so there is no way I would make it a central part of my working life.

The fastest route to getting paid to play is to choose something that you are not just talented at and passionate about, but that you already have some knowledge and skills in. Your depth of experience is a large part of how other people value you and decide what to pay you. The problem of course is that when you make a leap into a new field that excites you, you may not have the same level of expertise in it that veterans have. And that can make it difficult to get paid what you would like.

If you choose your steps wisely, you can minimise the setback. The more of the skills you can use from previous work, the quicker you will be able to get paid for the new line of work. Even if you're moving into a completely different field, if you're using the great track record you have built, for example, in managing people or organising projects, you can still be very valuable.

Also think twice before you ditch your previous area of expertise entirely. If you have a talent for something, it may just be the form you use it in your current work that is unsatisfying. I assumed my decades of experience with technology would play no part at all in my new more creative career. But in fact it has become a unique selling point for me when I advise people on online marketing strategy for their business. My natural affinity for technology hasn't gone away but now I use it in a much more fun way – to create powerful online experiences and find dramatic shortcuts for people to launch their creative projects on to the world. What talents do you have that you could imagine enjoying using if you could just find a more interesting way to employ them? Write them down.

## The great love-versus-money balancing act

It's time to make a choice of how to use your mix of talents, skills and passions. If you want to get paid to play, does this mean you have to think commercially about everything you do? In your imagined year off, there are no doubt many different activities you would like to do. Some you want to do purely for love: they seem difficult to monetise or perhaps you don't want to even try. You might not want to expose your most personal creative work to the vagaries of the market – your art, music or poetry, for instance. Some of the kinds of work you could imagine doing might be very marketable but perhaps not quite as enjoyable. Which do you choose? This is the eternal love-versus-money balancing act.

The truth is that the 'work you do for money versus work you do for the love of it' dilemma never goes away. Even people who become world famous will continue to manage their careers carefully to balance their most commercial work with their personal passions. Scarlett Johansson is one of the most talented and in-demand actors of her generation. Like similarly successful actors, however, she will alternate very commercial projects like *Avengers: Endgame* (now the number one grossing film of all time) with ones that are more experimental like *JoJo Rabbit* which made a fraction of the amount at the box office but won her an Oscar nomination.

For the rest of us, it might mean that, as a writer, you write articles in between books or do commercial copywriting – both of which can be very creative and enjoyable. As a video artist, you fund yourself by shooting corporate videos or adverts. Or if you're working on your own app, you pick up the odd coding job on upwork.com or Toptal to keep yourself going.

Whatever you choose to keep you afloat while you build your more playful life, for heaven's sake make it enjoyable. Don't make the mistake so many make of taking any low-level work, no matter how ill-fitting. There are far too many players stuck in boring