

2ND DRAFT

"Let management take care of this," he interjected.

The internal rumblings to quit, similar to grumblings on an empty stomach, began shortly after an unsatisfying talk with my manager regarding the lack of innovation on our service.

"If you need to worry about something, worry about your promotion," he continued.

He consistently used my impending promotion as an ongoing basis of encouragement- our meetings largely revolved around getting him enough data points to submit a promotion proposal. "We're so close," he said, "I can see it happening next quarter."

My work was regularly interrupted by my manager's constant push to insert myself in places where people could see me say or do things that would help someone up the ladder approve my promotion.

If someone had an idea for how to improve our DevOps pipeline, I should try to come up with a better one that required an overhaul of my own resources.

If there was a meeting being held that I thought didn't relate to my work, I should show up and pretend to be involved anyway.

When there was a lack of opinions around the room because the answer was obvious, I was asked to obviously state it.

I constantly needed to show myself around the room to display reach and take part in a pageant of trivial opinion and redundant discourse.

Meanwhile, I was pushing back on leadership to focus on improving the core technology to expand beyond our current services but they were caught up in small wins against the confines dictated by our, ironically, internal competitor.

We were constantly being cut at the knees on the losing end of this internal battle until an external competitor out of nowhere entered the ring and leadership triggered an overhaul of resources to invest in what I had been pushing for all year. When you focus too much on winning the battle, you forget about the war.

So I quit. What do I have to lose? I no longer have to take part in the pageantry.

In the midst of my contemplation, I visited an old friend who had also been having thoughts on leaving her company, but for the last three years. "I don't wanna just leave to leave. I like my job enough," she told me in an illuminating discussion. Inevitably, she chose to remain for another busy season to "think it over".

She cited imposter syndrome to be the culprit behind her decision to stay throughout the years. I often found these feelings as a consequence of pursuing growth within the confines of the corporate ladder, similar to the way we pursue prestige within the education system.

If you aren't good enough to stand out and accelerate above the crowd of your peers, you're like every other gummy bear on the conveyor belt. Only few earn distinction to accelerate forward and outward; these occasions are rare in such structured environments where space is limited to forge your own path. You end up, for quite a few years, sitting at a job you've outgrown long ago. The usual way many compensate for this is by hopping roles quickly between companies like a pinball.

"Most people live in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole organism, should get into a habit of using and moving only his little finger."

William James

I found myself in a system where I couldn't find a unique, better-fitted role for myself. I was constantly plagued with feeling my skills and experience could only be matched to similarly good enough roles. I struggled against these feelings of inferiority and stagnation in a competition-driven workplace, but comforted myself by putting in the hours for the competitive salary. At least in compensation, I was winning.

Pursuing good enough returns such as compensation enabled me to will myself into complacency. Getting more money is like an urge for nicotine. You don't really need it, but you want it to get out of the rat race all the more quicker. For all the crap you have to go through at work, you are entitled to see that deposit amount in your bank account at the end of each month.

And if you could squeeze more out of your employer, or even from another potential employer, and then pit them against each other to fight for your well-oiled limbs, wads of stressed hair, and broken spirit, even better.

These seemingly big wins are irresistible, like a kid at the discount candy store with rotting teeth. But similar to quitting smoking, your brain needs to get used to not having this monetary consolation (the nicotine) around entirely. You have to deconstruct these routines around money as the main motivation and define a new reward to structure your rituals around.

And so, during the months before quitting my job, I had to ask myself, "What about my job am I addicted to? What does it provide me that I feel I can't live without?" The answer was obvious: a steady income, unvested stocks, and an impending promotion.

I had the financial means saved to not worry about an income for half the year at least. My unvested stocks were bribes to keep me at the company for at least three more years. Pain is

inevitable but how much suffering was my choice. The impending promotion was the constant lure to work harder but the margin of utility with every step had dissipated with my sense of mission. The conclusion? I had options. I chose to put all my energy into finding something better to do.

To get myself out of my limiting environment, I began to talk to many people who were in places I only dreamt of for myself: startup founders, solopreneurs, writers, creators, artists. I learned you can't be an imposter if you are trying to make a living completely being yourself. You can't be worried about being an imposter if the mission is so much more important than what you think of yourself or what you can put on your resume. We grow by making small bets on ourselves to make bigger bets on meaningful intentions. Often times, these are not actions to confirm conformity, but actions in an adjacent space no one else has thought of. In these spaces, there's no one you can imitate. Is there anyone who can be me... better than me?

So I quit. What do I have to lose? I no longer had to conform to feel imposter syndrome.

Removing myself from the 9 to 5 rat race provided natural clarity- good enough is not an option. Sure, there is a gamble for what I want to do next, but I wasn't stuck on the proverbial hamster wheel. I took a bet on myself to find something better fitting for me through trial and error. I chose to surround myself with people whose mindsets were inspiring to me and aspiring for me. This enabled the work to naturally be playful from the start. I embrace and pursue the odds against me because they are natural obstacles I must face for being myself.

Where I find purpose and my self align, I find space for all my strengths to be highly desirable. I didn't need to keep resharpening my pencil for the prospects of "later on". My pencil is actually constantly dull because I use it so much right now in experimenting with my purpose. It is ever changing and shifting.

Perhaps the question I keep asking myself all along isn't, "What did I have to lose?", but rather "What did I choose to lose?"

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1ST DRAFT

The internal rumblings to quit, similar to grumblings on an empty stomach, began shortly after an unsatisfyingly short talk with my manager on my concerns regarding the lack of innovation on our service. I was trying to push for a change of focus on what our core product should be but leadership was

Audiobook voiceovers and audiobooks generated from text offer the same service to the same group of audiobook listeners. But see that audiobooks generated from text not as the product, but rather the consequence of the true gem, the text-to-speech technology. The core technology is the real product that scales and engages in a different playing field altogether- it could potentially express more types of long-form text with voice. Creating more voiceovers doesn't. The text-to-speech technology has more room for technological innovation, diverse business use cases, and easily transcends the original customer market, thereby eliminating our original competitor. I was far more interested in the evolution of the product and pushing for technological growth rather than my singular personal advancement. Competition somehow limited the vision to innovate.

"Karen," my manager interjected, "if you need to worry about something, worry about your promotion. Let management take care of this." This was an ongoing rehash of encouragement- our meetings largely revolved around getting him data points to submit a promotion proposal for me. "We're so close," he said, "I can see it next quarter."

I was hardly inspired. I constantly pushed for innovation in our pipeline while the team celebrated small wins within the confines dictated by our, ironically, internal competitor. What was more illuminating to me was that my mission to make our services more accessible and innovative was interrupted by his constant push to insert myself in unnecessary places where people could see me say or do things that would help some higher being in the company approve another digit added to my job title and a raise. I needed to compete and show up in certain ways to earn a promotion.

Competition is on the basis of equal comparison, where all competing figures are running along in adjacent lanes on a race track. However, I was far more interested in running on a different track at another meet with different hurdles.

In the midst of my contemplation, I visited an old friend who had also been thinking of leaving her company. "The ultimate goal for my career is obviously to become CTO," she told me in an illuminating discussion. "I don't wanna just leave to leave. I like my job enough." Inevitably, she chose to stay for another busy season at her company.

Much of my peers' thoughts on taking the next step in their career have died repeatedly at the hands of imposter syndrome. I postulate that this is the consequence of pursuing growth within the confines of the corporate ladder, similar to the way we pursue prestige within the education system. If you aren't good enough to stand out and accelerate above the crowd of your peers,

you're dispensable like every other cog in the machine. If you successfully stand out, you were a very special cog that could ask to be fitted somewhere more exclusive, thereby elevating your status and growth. However, those occasions are rare in such structured environments. In systems where individuals cannot pursue unique, better-fitted roles for themselves, they are constantly plagued with feeling their skills can only be matched to similarly, good enough roles. They struggle against these feelings of inferiority and stagnation in a competition-driven workplace, but comfort themselves by putting in the hours for the money.

"Most people live in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole organism, should get into a habit of using and moving only his little finger."

William James

Pursuing good enough wins in this competitive environment begets a false sense of progress and willing complacency, like the urge for nicotine. Similar to quitting smoking, your brain needs to get used to not having nicotine around completely. You have to deconstruct routines around your job as the main motivation and define your new goal to structure your rituals around. And so, during the months before quitting my job, I asked myself, "What about my job am I addicted to? What does it provide me that I feel I can't live without?" The answer was a steady income, unvested stocks, and an impending promotion.

I had the financial means saved to not worry about an income for half the year at least. My unvested stocks were bribes to keep me at the company for at least three more years. Pain is inevitable but how much suffering was my choice. The impending promotion was the constant lure to work harder but the margin of utility with every step had dissipated with my sense of mission. The conclusion? I had options. I chose to put all my energy into finding something better to do. I chose to find visionary people I wanted to learn from and surround myself with.

Strength requires movement and intention with your whole being. Removing myself from the rat race provided natural clarity- good enough is not an option. Sure, there is a gamble for what I want to do next, but I wasn't stuck on the proverbial hamster wheel. I could throw my whole body afresh into finding something meaningful and enable the work required to naturally be playful from the start. I made it easier for myself to pursue the odds against me- and I found playing smarter was the better answer to working harder. Where I found the purpose to be worthwhile, I found all my strengths to be highly matched and desirable for the position. I didn't need to keep sharpening my pencil for the prospects of "later on". Perhaps the question many ask me should not be, "Why did you quit?", but rather "What did you choose to lose?"