

## Seeker

**For Andrew Harrison, life was going great - by everyone else's standard. Here's the remarkable story of walking away from money and the "good life" to search for meaning.**

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“You’re doing what?” my boss asked incredulously as I told him I was resigning from my well-paying sales job.

I explained that I was unfulfilled, lacking passion for what I was doing. I was quitting to try to find a sense of purpose. My plan: to travel the country interviewing people who are inspired.

He took a step back and stared out the window. Turing back, he urged me to stay, drilling me about problems with co-workers, suggesting a promotion and a raise. I had to explain again that those things weren't the issue. It was lack of inspiration. He reminded me about the money I was leaving on the table. Finally, he asked in wonder, "Are you really sure this is what you want to do?" After months of wrestling with the idea, I knew it was. “Yes,” I said firmly.

Up to that point I had followed what could be called a traditional path. I graduated high school in Rochester, N.Y., headed to college at Arkansas Little Rock, finished grad school at South Carolina and then went into the working world. At 28, my life in Charlotte, N.C., was a good one. I was the area salesperson for Weiser Security Services, A New Orleans-based company that provided regional security guard service to businesses. It was a good company to work for and I was good at what I did. I worked out of my downtown apartment that looked up to the city skyline. I was healthy, had family nearby and a meaningful circle of friends. My sales figures pointed to a six-figure income for the year. My life was on the path I had imagined it would be.

But as time went on, questions and lack of purpose began to creep into my mind. “What difference am I making? Is this how work is supposed to feel?” The attention to detail in my work was slipping. I hit the snooze button more often (literally and figuratively). My effort was not where I wanted it, but the results grew and so did the money. Even though I kept pushing the doubts down, the questions kept gnawing: “Will it be like this for the next 30 years?” “Isn't there more to life than this?”

It is a strange and unnerving feeling when you reach the goals you have set but are unfulfilled by the results. I tried not to listen to the questions, but they grew more insistent. I knew I was uninspired, but felt wrong for needing to feel inspired. I had a life most people wanted, but I was not satisfied. “What is wrong with me?” I wondered.

I sat down and did the math. If I retired around age 60, I had 33 years of work x 50 weeks x 40 hours left. In other words, 66,000 hours of my life at work. Divide that by 8 hours in a day and I would be at work for another 8,250 days of my life. That is every day straight for 22.6 years. The facts hit me in the gut: “If I have to spend 8,250 days of my life doing something, I have to be passionate about it.”

I knew people who were fervent and excited about what they did. I wanted what they had: Passion! I decided I was not going to wait for the answers to fall from the sky. I had to listen to my gut.

Following very frank discussions with my boss, our head of HR, and COO, as well as some time with an industrial psychologist (for motivational purposes, not sanity), I found myself in spring 2004 staring at the Send button the email that ultimately resigned me from my job. My last day of work was April 1, 2004.

Where was I headed? In trying to figure out the right job for me, I realized I couldn't get 100 jobs and see which one I liked best. Instead, my plan was to talk with as many people as I could about their career path, life experiences and what advice they'd have for people who were searching like me. I would seek out people who liked what they did or worked in a field that interested me. I would become...a Seeker.

I should note that most of my friends didn't share my vision. In our late 20's, we were at the stage of acquiring life responsibilities. This meant job promotions, spouses, kids, new homes in the suburbs and new "toys." Leading up to that email, I'd tell them about my plan to resign, travel and interview. They'd get a blank look and tell me as convincingly as possible how "interesting" that sounded. After a couple to minutes they'd lean in and whisper, "Man, I wish I had your job. Are you sure?" This compounded my "what is wrong with me?" feeling.

My parents were confused - to say the least. I first told my family in December 2003 when I was home in Rochester and, while we previously had talked about my job questions, they clearly weren't ready for this. My dad retired from Kodak after 32 years and stability was part of his path. He looked at me as if I were speaking another language. "Let me get this straight," he said, with obvious anxiety. "You want to leave your sales job to travel and interview people?" We didn't talk much more about it that night.

I told my superstar salesman brother and MBA sister the next day. Their doubts centered on the basics, from losing my steady paycheck and health benefits to me getting mugged on the road.

A few weeks later, during our Sunday call, my parents told me they were going to join me for a week while I was on the road: My mom in San Antonio and my dad in Washington state. This display of confidence was a major turning point and boosted my trust in the vision. "Maybe I can do this..." I smiled to myself.

I left Charlotte on April 6 and embarked on a cross-country life journey. It was a sad morning as I left so many people behind, but once I hit the open road my energy was at an all-time high. I was back! I felt like an explorer going into uncharted waters. In the back of my SUV were boxes of new business cards: Andrew Harrison. Seeker.

Seekers don't earn much, and in this case my journey was self financed: I cashed in my savings and had some small, ongoing contract income as a marketer for my old company (they kept me in arms' reach for when I'd "snap out of it"). I packed most of my belongings into a 10' by 10' storage shed and crammed the rest into my SUV. A friend built me a website, [www.iamontheroad.com](http://www.iamontheroad.com), which allowed friends and family to keep track.

It didn't take long for me to start meeting just the kind of people I had hoped. In Little Rock, I sat in on a day of the Arkansas Supreme Court and interviewed the state's first female Chief Justice, Betty Dickey. We talked about her path and how life responsibilities played a

major part in it. Her first career was raising a family, so she didn't go to law school until she was 40. "Life is what happens while you're planning your life," said. Her advice: "If you don't see a problem that needs to be fixed or a cause that's worth taking up or an adventure worth taking, you're going to look back and be unhappy."

In Memphis, I met with Geoff Calkins, the Commercial Appeal's sports columnist. His path had taken him to a degree from Harvard Law School and a quick rise at a law firm, but it didn't fit. "I had to gut myself to do it every day. I was truly struggling." He went back to school and worked his way up in the journalism field. "If I won Power Ball, I'd show up for work the next day. That's the measurement."

Outside of Miami, I spent a night talking with a husband and wife team, Joey and Teresita Wardlow, who are living an inspired life by working with young people. While she was growing up, Teresita imagined being a teacher but she wound up becoming a computer programmer. The money was good, but the passion was nowhere to be found. Her path eventually led her back to teaching, but she had to go back to school. During her initial classes she asked herself, "Why didn't I do this from the beginning?" The right match had taken some time, but she finally had it. Now an assistant principal, she crows, "I don't just have a job. It's my vocation. It's who I am. It's what I do."

In Rochester, N.Y., I had lunch with Brad Van Auken, the former head of marketing of Hallmark and now a consultant/branding expert. He had some help along the way that I did not. "The best class I ever took at Harvard Business School was Self-Assessment and Career Development, figuring out what motivates me and what doesn't," he told me. If Harvard is teaching their students how to find passion, there must be something to it.

Word of mouth spread about my journey. I realized that I was doing what so many people had dreamed of and considered an indulgence: hitting the road to find meaning. When emails from strangers started coming in, I knew there was much more to my seeking than just me. People began living vicariously through me via my website. This freaked me out, but also gave me another sense of purpose.

As I drove from city to city, my quest morphed into something far beyond my imagination. By the time you read this, I will have eclipsed 30,000 miles and completed 100 interviews. Along with some amazing travel experiences, I've been able to learn from some incredible people.

It's funny; some people still don't get what I'm doing. I still get emails from friends with job links and questions of when I'm going back to work. (Note to friends and others: I am working, just not in your paradigm.) My parents, though, now give out my business cards to people we know and say, "Andrew is doing good, he's On the Road."

On a deeper level, I've found my calling in seeking. The exploration, the interviews and the advice sharing still get me amped up. People need to know that passion is out there, it is attainable and learn how others did it. What am I doing with all this information? Writing and talking. A book chronicling my travels and interviews will be done shortly. I've spoken to groups and at colleges. I'm discussing with some corporate sponsors and there have been some mumblings about a documentary or Charles Kuralt-like TV show.

There is no question I have found my inspiration. It's been well over a year. My contract work for Weiser Security is over. The traveling, writing and speaking haven't brought me

financial freedom yet. I've had to give up my fancy dinners, new clothes and golf vacations. Now it's car payment, gas and health insurance. I might not be able to buy what I used to, but I wouldn't trade my knowledge and experiences for anything.

### **Lessons From The Road**

#### **What Andrew Harrison has learned in his 18 months seeking career passion**

**Passion can be had:** When I wrestled with leaving my job, I heard a lot of "no one likes what they do." This is said by people who don't like what they do or don't know what is out there.

**Passion is allowable:** For months before I resigned, I wondered what was wrong with me. As great as I had it, I was miserable with what I was doing. I had to demand more.

**Live your one path:** I've met people who have known since age 5 and others who had five careers by age 35. There is not equation to follow. Try to live your own path, wherever it leads...

**Titles don't lead to inspiration:** It doesn't matter if you are called CEO, custodian or seeker. It's not about what you do; it's whether you are passionate about doing it. Maybe the Ancient Greeks had it right. At funerals, it was only asked, "Did they have passion?"

**People want to help:** I never thought I could learn so much from other people. All I had to do was pick up the phone or send an email. The worst that happens is they say no.

**It doesn't happen overnight:** More than a year has passed and I still fight the "how bad do you want it?" question. I started over in a totally different field. My bank account looks much different than it use to. For now, I've had to decide between material things and a passionate lifestyle.

**It's on me:** I have a coach. I've read books. I've met hundreds of people. It still comes down to me. I've had a lot of help along the way, but at the core, I create my own passion opportunities.

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