

Soulful Songs and Stories

With a song and your stories, we co-create a soft place for hard conversations and a brave space for personal and spiritual growth. Then **magic** happens.



#16: The Soul-Destroying Fictions of Work

Hi Soulful Song Lovers and Story Tellers,

“Our Life Is More Than Our Work,” Charlie King

<https://youtu.be/iaIcMV8J5OI> 3:03

You know that our life is more than our work
And our work is more than our jobs

Full lyrics: <http://towncommonsongs.org/songs/ourlifeismore.html>

“The institution cannot love you.” –Tressie McMillan Cottom

I can't remember where I first said this phrase but I have believed it for many years. So many of us—especially Black women and femmes—want the institutions that we sacrificed so much to join to love us in measures equal to our effort. They cannot. Not “will not” but CANNOT. Love is a people problem and solving it begins with choosing yourself. Here is what I believe. Those people who say “love your job and you'll never work a day in your life” are full of shit. We can and should fight for protections for ourselves and then fight for others. But you cannot do either if you are sacrificing love for accommodation. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZi9ZMTOAIQ>

I honor the many many people who work to make institutions more humane.

But you, alone, can not do that. **And you cannot do it, ever, by killing yourself.**

<https://twitter.com/tressiemcphd/status/1226953483296763904>

Tressie McMillan Cottom is an American writer, sociologist, and an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2020, McMillan Cottom was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship (aka the “Genius Grant”) in recognition of her work “at the confluence of race, gender, education, and digital technology.” <https://tressiemc.com>



For excerpts below marked with a ★, you are encouraged to read the full article.

It's time, at long, long last, to return to our depressing, dimly lit cubicles and get back to work tossing the hours and days and weeks of our precious lives into the wastebasket. Many companies, however, have recognized the dismal prospect of returning full-time to a soulless office and are endeavoring to make it a more pleasant, downright homey space. —**“Fresh Hell,” *The Baffler*, Mar 29, 2022**

“Bread and Roses,” James Oppenheim, Mimi Fariña/

Women of the World <https://youtu.be/94mSln34ZwA> 3:57

Our days shall not be sweated from birth until life closes,
Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread, but give us roses.

Full lyrics: <http://unionsong.com/ui59.html>

If your self-worth comes from an external source (a person, work, religion), then, when you are abused, betrayed, abandoned, or are no longer sustained by that source, you are left with nothing.

Something great is alive in you, and something more than this surface reality is intended for your life. Beyond your circumstances lies a different destiny.

—**Paula D'Arcy** <https://cac.org/a-stirring-of-the-soul-2022-03-01>

No longer is “burnout” a specialized term describing a state of depletion among workers in certain strenuous human-services professions. Is burnout really a form of depression? Or is it a mark of disillusionment with the fictions propping up our world of work? Jonathan Malesic's intelligent and careful study, *The End of Burnout*, brings clarity to a muddled discussion. He casts a critical eye on burnout discourse, in which the term is used loosely and self-flatteringly. A scholar of religion, he diagnoses burnout as an ailment of the soul. It arises, he contends, from a gap between our ideals about work and our reality of work. **Dignity is intrinsic to all human beings, and in designing a work regime rigged for the profit of the few and the exhaustion of the many, we have failed to honor one another's humanity.**

Charlie Tyson, *The Baffler*, Mar 15, 2022 ★

<https://thebaffler.com/latest/the-new-neurasthenia-tyson>

Don't Forget To Love Yourself, Joe Alterman, Les McCann/

Joe Alterman <https://youtu.be/MmnUOHrQpoE> 3:14

Institutions are inherently conservative. One way that institutions last is by diffusing threats to the status quo across org charts, rules, forms, email chains, and meetings. Lots and lots of meetings. That is why it is ridiculous to expect college [and religious] institutions to be radical. —**Tressie McMillan Cottom**

<https://tressiemc.com/uncategorized/everything-but-the-burden-publics-public-scholarship-and-institutions>

“Brevity,” Tapani Rinne, tenor sax;

Juha Mäki-Patola, keyboards <https://youtu.be/BxoaoaADFJs> 4:26

“Notes on Work,” Weike Wang, *New Yorker*, Feb 1, 2022

I had a poor work-life balance before, it was shocking to see how much worse I could let it get. It was shocking and also pleasing. Workaholics are addicted to the solace they find in extreme fatigue; it’s like the high that a marathon runner might get in her last mile. I can be utterly depleted yet energized by that depletion. **There’s a masochistic pride to overworking. How heavy a workload can I truly handle? How many plates can I keep in the air?** When I get to the end of a particularly overloaded day, my voice hoarse from teaching, my mind buzzing from far too many e-mails, questions, and deadlines, I vow never to let that happen again, knowing full well that, as soon as I’ve achieved a new level of exhaustion, my id will push me to try to exceed it.

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/notes-on-work>

“Sonatine Transatlantique: No. 2, Spiritual and Blues”

Alexandre Tansman/Daniel Blumenthal <https://youtu.be/emOa-j5S8kY> 5:23

Jonathan Malesic might seem like an improbable mouthpiece for burnout:

to all appearances, he had the perfect job. He was a tenured professor teaching in fields he loved: religion, ethics, and theology. His colleagues were intelligent and friendly, and his salary and benefits more than satisfactory. Secretly, he was a shell of his former self. He would barely make it to class in the afternoons. His sullen and indifferent students, prone to boredom and plagiarism, had broken his spirit. After quitting his job, Malesic resolved to figure out what happened to him. It wasn’t depression, not quite. Talk therapy and antidepressants didn’t help him. Leaving his job did. His ailment, he decided, was burnout....

Aided by deregulation and the decline of union power, businesses pulled off a massive risk shift from capital to labor. Meanwhile, the growing domination of the service sector put new emotional demands on workers. In service jobs, our personalities and emotions are “the chief means of production”—they are what employers rent and exert control over. In this context, a new moral code for work took hold: what the sociologist Allison Pugh calls a **“one-way honor system” between employers and employees. Employees must devote themselves wholeheartedly to their work if they expect to get (or keep) a job—all while knowing that their employers feel no obligation to reciprocate.** One fact bears repeating: since 1974, labor productivity has kept increasing, but real wages have stayed flat. We are working harder and getting nothing for it. —**Charlie Tyson**

Leading UK ferry operator P&O sparked chaos and outrage

after firing its entire 800 members of crew, with cheaper agency labor lined up to replace them. P&O Ferries told its crews on Thursday morning, March 17, 2022, to return to port and await a “major announcement.” Once the boats arrived, the crew was informed they had been laid off through a pre-recorded Zoom message at 11 AM.

—**The Maritime Executive, The Guardian, WaPo**

“Someone You Loved,” Lewis Capaldi <https://youtu.be/FGGo8LFmbjs> 3:02

Karolina Protsenko (violin) <https://youtu.be/bd7MLSchGdo> 3:01

The Piano Guys (piano, cello, & dancers) <https://youtu.be/qMGiBXo8Asg> 3:35

I let my guard down and then you pulled the rug / I was getting kinda used to being someone you loved

“The US is the Most Overworked Developed Nation in the World.”

◆ The US is the only country in the Americas without a national paid parental leave benefit. The average is over 12 weeks of paid leave anywhere other than Europe, and over 20 weeks in Europe. ◆ No industrialized nations are without a mandatory option for new parents to take parental leave, except for the United States. ◆ At least 134 countries have laws setting the maximum length of the work week; the US does not. ◆ According to OECD stats, US workers work an average of 1,767 hours per year. This is 435 more hours per year than workers in Germany, 400 more than in the United Kingdom, 365 more than in France, and 169 more than in Japan. ◆ The US remains the only industrialized country in the world that has no legally mandated annual leave.

Looking at the data, I’m convinced that the “Great Resignation” of historical record numbers of Americans leaving their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be a response of too many workers working too many hours for too little pay. And if all of this data tells anything, it’s that we are the outliers, not the norm.

G.E. Miller, 20SomethingFinance, Jan 30, 2022 ★

<https://20somethingfinance.com/american-hours-worked-productivity-vacation>

US labor shortage due to systemic failure to value workers. <https://qz.com/2147818>
[Veteran’s Day is a Federal and State Holiday. UUCSR employees do not have the day off.]

When a workplace becomes toxic, its poison spreads beyond its walls and into the lives of its workers and their families.

—**Gary Chapman**, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*

“Loreta and Desireé’s Bouquet—Part 1,” George Winston

<https://youtu.be/iDjKCuPy6Co> 4:04

I often tell people something that was said to me and probably saved my life in graduate school: “This place was f*cked up when you got here, it will be f*cked up when you leave here. All you can control is how much you let it f*ck you up in the process.”

—**Tressie McMillan Cottom**

<https://twitter.com/tressiemcphd/status/1226953219802161152>

Your job isn’t to change the institution, the job is to not let it change you.
<https://futuresinitiative.org/blog/2020/10/21/food-for-thought>

“I Want to Break Free,” Queen <https://youtu.be/f4Mc-NYPHaQ> 4:31

Shana Blackwell quit her job at Walmart via intercom

“Finally quit my toxic job that was making me absolutely miserable for a year and seven months.” *Article and link to Twitter-posted video; strong language in both:*

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/11/walmart-intercom-stocker-bosses-quit>

Video only: <https://twitter.com/shanablackwell/status/1322347499454083076> 1:02

“Take this Job and Shove It,” David Allan Coe

<https://youtu.be/mUOVv99CZqA> 2:24

Working for a religious entity, a non-profit, or an NGO does not protect you from the slings and arrows of capitalism or the workaday world. Seeing work through rose colored glasses usually conjures up mellifluous words, such as God, calling, holy, serving, fulfilling, rewarding, happiness, esteem, identity, community. But work does not happen in Nirvana, but with real people in **businesses whose bottom line is money, and in institutions whose highest goal is self-preservation.**

Sexual harassment went unchecked for 12 years at Christianity Today.
Slate, March 23, 2022 www.j.mp/CTharassment

The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior
the leaders are willing to tolerate. —**Ben Brearley**
<https://www.thoughtfulleader.com/toxic-workplace>

Decency: we export it, we sell it, but we don't use it.
—**General Hoyt (Nick Searcy), *The Shape of Water***

Justice: we promote it, we fund it, but we don't practice it.
—**Said at/of UUCSR**

“Waking up on a Picnic Blanket,” Lullatone
<https://youtu.be/gtLpUDEqAdM> 2:42

Every person remembers some moment in their life where they witnessed some injustice, big or small, and looked away because the consequences of intervening seemed too intimidating. But there's a limit to the amount of incivility and inequality and inhumanity that each individual can tolerate. —**Edward Snowden**

Mission Statements, Vision Statements, By-laws, & Covenants

These grandiloquent pieces of prose, whether by city agencies, corporations, or churches, are primarily for public consumption, for the self-righteous to feel good, and to impose uniformity on a diverse constituency. When “it” hits the fan, we often lament people failing to honor what was assumed to be a “commitment” to act with “civility,” when more likely it was neglect or unwillingness of those in charge to stop bad behavior. Or, as **Karl Popper** said, “If we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_of_tolerance

David Hayward, aka “The Naked Pastor,” was in church ministry for 30 years. Here are his views on vision statements:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nakedpastor/2011/01/how-to-be-visionless>

“(Glory Glory,) Since I've Laid My Burdens Down,” Traditional/ Mississippi John Hurt <https://youtu.be/KXEtNknolKY> 2:44

Dr John <https://youtu.be/hzyoAQWtGkU> 4:32

Sandra Stephens & Chris Falson https://youtu.be/D_SivFW3fwE?t=17 2:30

As we seek salvation through our frantic productivity and accomplishments, we squander the teachings that may be present in this very moment, in the richness of this particular breath. Unpracticed in the art of quiet, we hope to find our safety, our belonging, and our healing by increasing levels of accomplishment. But our frantic busyness actually makes us deaf to what is healing and sacred, both in ourselves and one another. —**Wayne Muller, *Legacy of the Heart*** (quoted in *Spiritual Literacy*)

After The Rain, John Coltrane

Joel Ross <https://youtu.be/spq3gGU4cHg> 5:20

Pharoah Sanders and John Hicks https://youtu.be/Mk_laphkAXY?t=5 6:46

Rules for Radicals, Saul D. Alinsky, 1971

1. **Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have.** Power is derived from 2 main sources—money and people. “Have-Nots” must build power from flesh and blood.
2. **Never go outside the expertise of your people.** It results in confusion, fear and retreat. Feeling secure adds to the backbone of anyone.
3. **Whenever possible, go outside the expertise of the enemy.** Look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty.
4. **Make the enemy live up to its own book of rules.** If the rule is that every letter gets a reply, send 30,000 letters. **You can kill them with this because no one can possibly obey all of their own rules.**
5. **Ridicule is your most potent weapon.** There is no defense. It’s irrational. It’s infuriating. It also works as a key pressure point to force the enemy into concessions.
6. **A good tactic is one your people enjoy.** They’ll keep doing it without urging and come back to do more. They’re doing their thing, and will even suggest better ones.
7. **A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.** Don’t become old news.
8. **Keep the pressure on. Never let up.** Keep trying new things to keep the opposition off balance. As the opposition masters one approach, hit them from the flank with something new.
9. **The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.** Imagination and ego can dream up many more consequences than any activist.
10. **The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition.** It is this unceasing pressure that results in the reactions from the opposition that are essential for the success of the campaign.
11. **If you push a negative hard enough, it will push through and become a positive.** Violence from the other side can win the public to your side because the public sympathizes with the underdog.
12. **The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative.** Never let the enemy score points because you’re caught without a solution to the problem.
13. **Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.** Cut off the support network and isolate the target from sympathy. **Go after people and not institutions; people hurt faster than institutions.**

Machiavelli's Advice For Nice Guys

<https://youtu.be/GTQlnmWCPgA?t=8> 5:08

**“Crazy He Calls Me,” Bob Russell & Carl Sigman/
Julieta Eugenio Trio** https://youtu.be/x-Cp2wLR_Fg 3:43

At a time when religious-affiliation rates are at the lowest they've been in the past 73 years, we worship work—meaning we sacrifice for and surrender to it—because it gives us identity, belonging, and meaning, not to mention that it puts food on our tables. If the American theocracy of work is to be dismantled, it won't happen by just changing jobs or attitudes. It will require a fundamental transformation in the social system that dictates which institutions we derive fulfillment from. —**Carolyn Chen, *The Atlantic*, Mar 22, 2022**

“Ain't Life Sweet,” Penny Lang (1942–2016)

<https://youtu.be/IN7kWjCr5qo> 3:37

We are ending *On Being's* run as a weekly public radio show in the US at the end of June. In October, we will begin a new rhythm of production of the show as a seasonal podcast. For me personally, this is an energizing and necessary transition. I happily turned 60 in 2020. After living on the deadlines involved in hosting and executive producing 52 weeks of programming a year for close to 20 years, it is time for me to create a more sustainable flow of life and work, and to be differently present to this moment in the life of the world.
—**Krista Tippett, Newsletter, *On Being*, Mar 24, 2022**

“À Chloris in D,” Reynaldo Hahn (1913)/

Eunae Ko Han, Piano <https://youtu.be/QwPBEaOcTOW?t=5> 3:07

Pumeza Matshikiza, Soprano <https://youtu.be/oiwTEIsM9UI> 2:54

Text by Théophile de Viau.

“Air on a G String,” J.S. Bach/Gor Ghasabyan, alto saxophone;

George Ghasabyan, piano <https://youtu.be/C-7AA-VvIDs?t=9> 3:01

“A Chloris” has a repeated figure in the bass quoting J.S. Bach’s “Air on the G String.”

Life beats down and crushes the soul and art reminds you that you have one. —**Stella Adler**

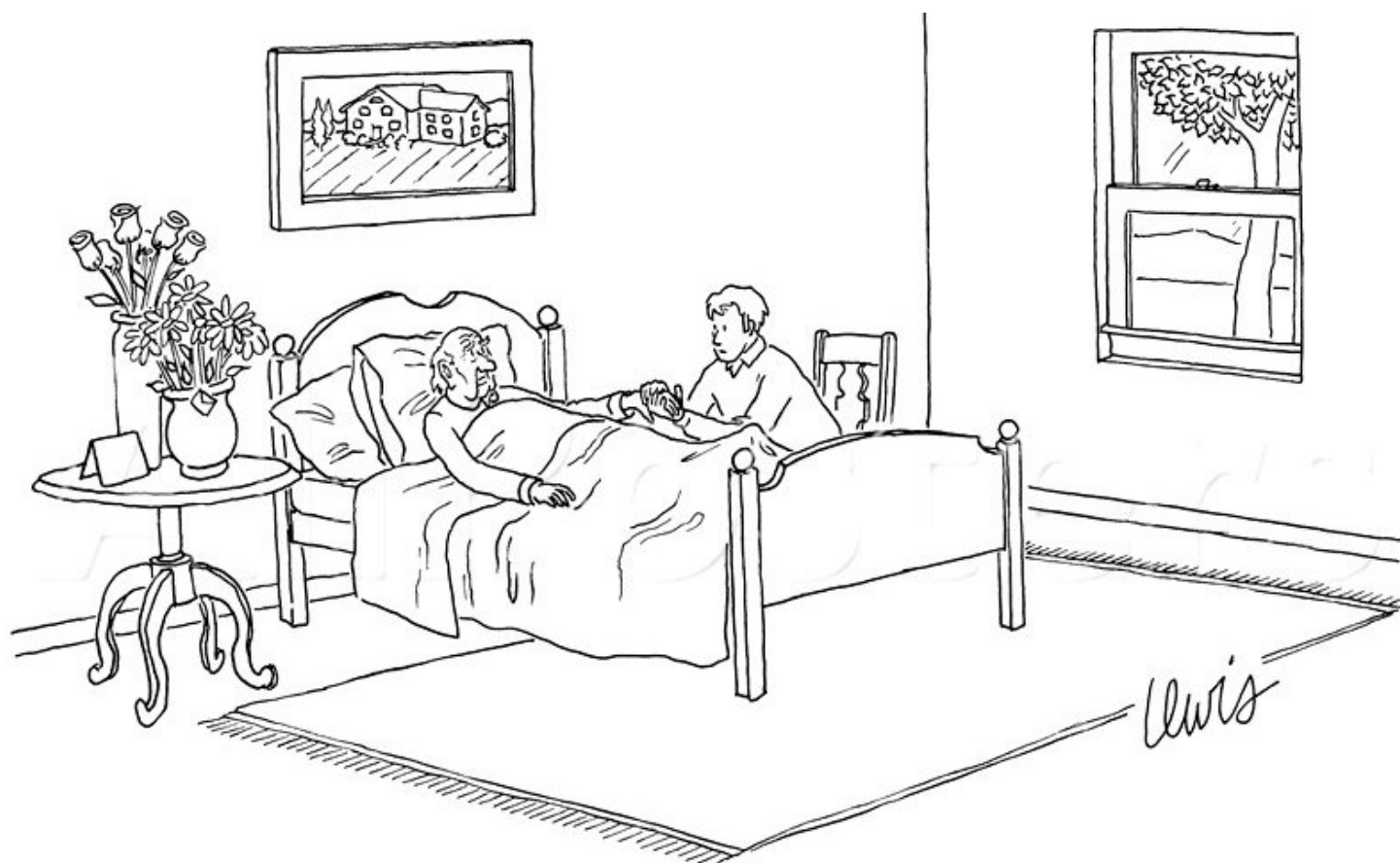
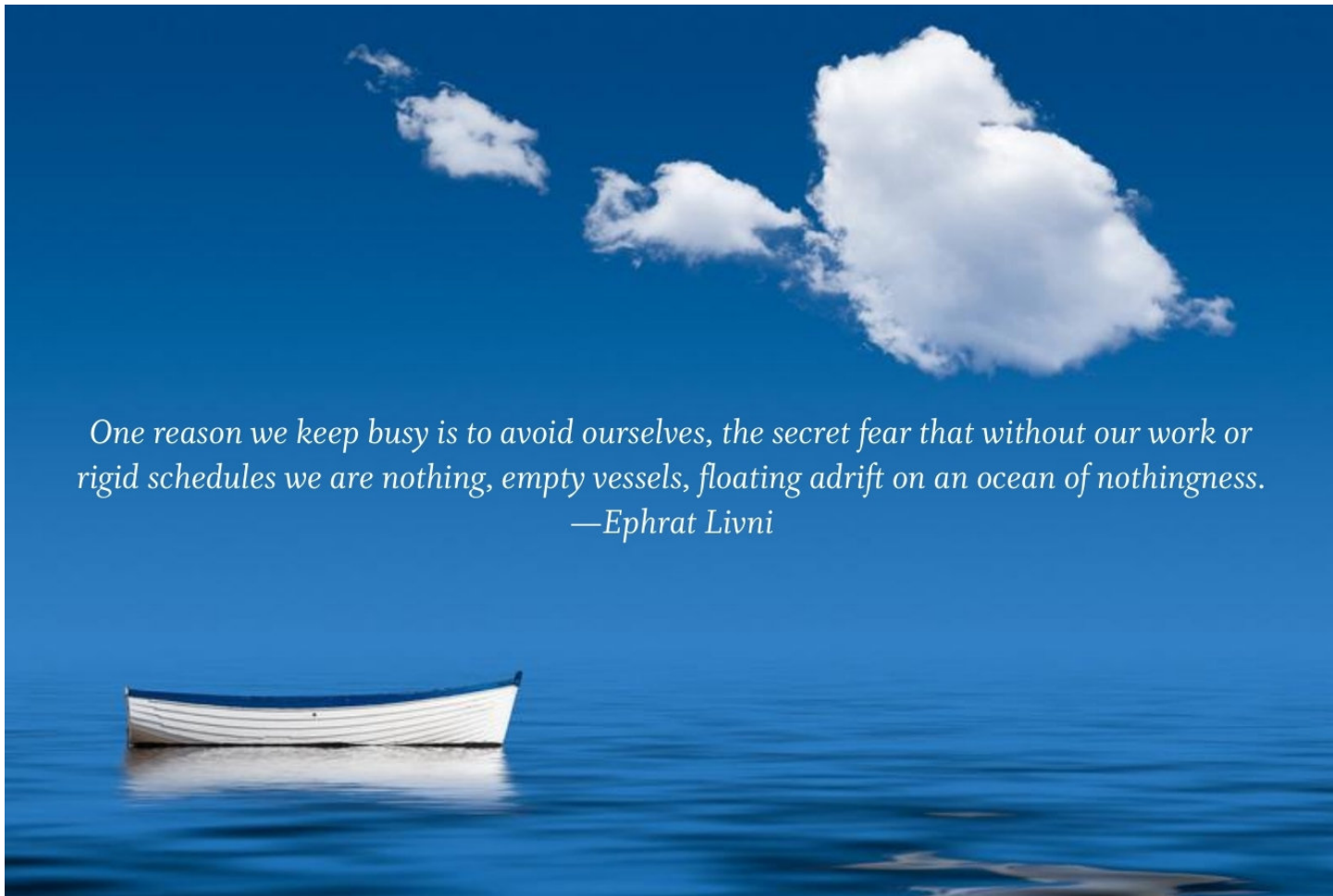
Human beings are so made that the ones who do the crushing feel nothing; it is the person crushed who feels what is happening. Unless one has placed oneself on the side of the oppressed, to feel with them, one cannot understand. —**Simone Weil**

A Thousand Years, Christina Perri/The Piano Guys

<https://youtu.be/QgaTQ5-XfMM> 4:30

One reason we keep busy is to avoid ourselves, the secret fear that without our work or rigid schedules we are nothing, empty vessels, floating adrift on an ocean of nothingness.

—Ephrat Livni



“No one on their deathbed ever said, ‘I wish I had spent more time working.’” —Paul Zack

Resources

You don't need to be a rocket scientist to know when you're in a toxic work environment, just as an abused person doesn't need a checklist to know when they're being abused. Still, these resources may be helpful, although advice to grin and bear it, meditate, pray, do yoga, journal, or read the bible does nothing to change a toxic situation. The bottom line, whether you leave or stay, is to protect yourself—not the institution.

Toxic work environment: how to recognize the red flags and what to do

<https://clockify.me/blog/business/toxic-work-environment>

Toxic Work Environment: Diagnosis and Treatment

<https://starred.com/?p=24734>

Signs You're in a Toxic Work Environment & How to Handle It

<https://www.topresume.com/career-advice/how-to-handle-toxic-work-environment>

8 Signs of a Toxic Work Environment

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/toxic-work-environment>

16 signs of a toxic work environment (and how to address it)

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90711675/16-signs-of-a-toxic-work-environment-and-how-to-address-it>

4 Kinds of Toxic Churches and How to Avoid Becoming One

<https://kainosproject.com/2021/07/22/toxic-churches>

6 Warning Signs Your Church Culture is Toxic

<https://careynieuwhof.com/6-signs-church-culture-toxic>

Stop Getting Your Soul Crushed at Work

www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2019/10/29/stop-getting-your-soul-crushed-at-work



For all those who escaped from, fought, are fighting, and will fight
the good fight against hypocrisy, injustice, toxic work environments,
and soul-crushing individuals and institutions, this one's for you.

“This Is Me”

Justin Paul, Benj Pasek
from *The Greatest Showman*

One Voice Children's Choir <https://youtu.be/uhzi7Shi2Ho> 3:55
Seoul Institute of the Arts <https://youtu.be/YZVphiHryAw> 5:40

I'm not a stranger to the dark
Hide away, they say
'Cause we don't want your broken parts
I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars
Run away, they say
No one will love you as you are

But I won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us
For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh

Another round of bullets hits my skin
Well, fire away 'cause today,
I won't let the shame sink in
We are bursting through the barricades
And reaching for the sun (we are warriors)
Yeah, that's what we've become

Won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us

For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
Gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh
This is me

And I know that I deserve your love
There's nothing I'm not worthy of
When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
This is brave, this is bruised
This is who I'm meant to be, this is me

Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

Whenever the words wanna cut me down
I'll send the flood to drown them out
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh
This is me