Career Path: Meet James Bellerjeau

Career Development

One day a few years ago, I had an interesting realization that jolted my life onto a completely different path.

What happened was this — I added up how many hours I had worked since graduating: First in two law firms in New York and Frankfurt, then 20 years serving as group general counsel of METTLER TOLEDO, a global S&P 500 company.

Imagine my surprise when I realized I was closing in on 80,000 hours worked. This is the number of hours the average American works in a lifetime; and I was far from traditional retirement age, just 50 at the time.

I learned a lot about what it means to lead a successful legal team and how to help develop outstanding lawyers. I will gladly share those lessons with you here.

But after my 80K-hours-worked realization, I took up with greater urgency the question I had been asking myself for a while...

What do career success and life success actually mean?

This exploration took me to interesting places: First back through my undergraduate psychology and economics studies, and eventually on to a parade of philosophers across centuries.

I became a student of the Stoic philosophers, with their focus on a key question: What does it mean to live a good life? I will also share with you here what I'm learning about this question.

I ultimately decided to put my high-powered career aside and pursue other interests. My fantastic CEO helped me see that going from 100 percent to zero all at once may not be an ideal transition.

Eventually we agreed to a gentler and gradual exit, in which I gave up the general counsel role but took on another. I ran our global sustainability program for the next two and a half years. This was also a revelation, and in a good way.

I am writing to you now free of most professional entanglements. Free of them all, in fact, except occasionally teaching and coaching. Here's what I tell people on my LinkedIn profile: I am pursuing ideas on how to live a good life, make better decisions, and achieve satisfaction.

I hope the articles in this column will help you see with fresh eyes your own career and progress in life. It is my sincere desire to help you succeed in your pursuits.

As you read on, you may come to appreciate my ending, which is simply: Be well.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.