Introduction

In my last corporate job, as the CEO of cloud-based call center LiveOps, I was hired to scale a start-up company to become a mature, fast-growing, operationally excellent technology company, but something else unexpected happened. I began to see how big of a problem work has become for most of us, and how much we could change to make it better. I learned about how many people were unhappy and unfulfilled and was eager for an alternative way that would give them more control over their lives.

This dissatisfaction was widespread—and alarming. One survey found that less than half of Americans (just 47 percent) are satisfied with their work.[1] (When the Conference Board's first survey was conducted in 1987, most workers—61 percent—said they were happy in their job.)

As an employer, I know that this decline in job satisfaction is unacceptable and dangerous. Another survey by consulting firm Mercer found that the most discontented are young employees; 44 percent of those ages sixteen to twenty-four and 40 percent of the twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds say they "seriously are considering leaving" their jobs.[2]

That too is a big problem. Working adults spend more of their waking hours at work than anywhere else. Work should be a place of inspiration and innovation; it should not—it cannot—be unfulfilling. But for all too many, it is. The degree to which work adversely affects our lives, and how much we come to regret it later, is disconcerting. Bronnie Ware, an Australian palliative care nurse, who worked with patients in the last twelve weeks of their lives, shared their thoughts in a blog called *Inspiration and Chai*, which she later turned into a book called *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. She found common themes in what people regretted and what we could learn from them. The top two lessons: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me," and "I wish I hadn't worked so hard."[3] When people realize that their life is almost over and look back on it, they see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honored even a half of their dreams due to choices they had or had not made.

That's upsetting, but what gets me most agitated is that it does not have to be this way. The things that people don't like about work—toiling away so many hours in office buildings, spending too much time in cars commuting to work, and ceding control to a company—no longer have to be facts of work life. Technology has evolved to the point that many of our practices and methods around work could change radically. Advances in cloud services, Internet telephony, wireless technology, and mobile computing can be applied to change work and make it better pretty quickly, and pretty easily. Social technologies, which enable us to know exactly what our long-lost friends are doing in their spare time, can help us better understand what is happening in our businesses. As an investor in start-up companies and someone who meets young, gifted entrepreneurs who dream about the future every

day, I gain insight and access into other new technologies that can help us revolutionize work even further. There are so many new services and apps and ideas that make work easier, more engaging, and more rewarding. There are so many ways to take out the pain points and allow the soul food to be put back in.

Although technology is a path to a better and brighter future, it is only an enabler. After all, *technology* is a word that describes the concepts, techniques, and methods having to do with how to accomplish a task. Before we implement methods and plans and action items, though, we need to take a step back. We need to change the way we think about work. If we want to change it, we need to look back and study how we got here, then determine how we can forge ahead.

I wrote this book to investigate how the current work crisis came about, and to help individuals understand that it is within their power to end it and move on to careers that can provide both fulfillment and financial security. In addition to advocating for the personal joy that comes with being fulfilled, I also come at this with the perspective of an executive and manager and strongly believe that companies achieve far more with motivated and happy people.

Rebooting Work explores the emerging technologies and techniques that can enable every individual to make this shift to take charge of his or her own career. It's not just a better way—it's essential for the new era we live in, which is defined by an entrepreneurial spirit. The old ways of working, which may have led previous generations to success, no longer guarantee the same results. We are seeing new trends increasingly change work. Online freelance job postings have skyrocketed over the last few years, and companies increasingly outsource work. The shift under way to an information economy is as important as the

last great shift, when we transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy nearly one hundred years ago.[4]

Meritocracy Versus Entitlement and the Age of Entrepreneurship

Each year more than 1.1 million American high school students play football. The best of them, the star quarterbacks, running backs, linebackers, and linemen, dream of scoring scholarships to play college ball, but only twenty thousand—just 6 percent of seniors on the team—will play their freshman year of college. By their final year, that number dwindles to fifteen thousand athletes. Only 255 of those elite players are drafted to the NFL. The chance of making it to the pros if you play in high school? A very small number: a mere 0.08 percent.[5]

And if you think that once players make it to the pros they can take a rest, think again. Every player in the NFL must get revoted on to the team every year. No one can buy his way on to the team. It's a model of ruthless efficiency that ensures that every player brings his A-game every time he steps onto the field. It's a system that makes football an incredible game to watch.

I've always been inspired by sports, and throughout my career have taken the lessons I learned playing football and baseball growing up, as well as what I've witnessed through following professional sports, into the work world. Team dynamics and the importance of learning to win—and lose—gracefully were invaluable lessons to me in building my career. Further, the need to get voted on to the team every day inspired me to demand the most from myself and my teams. I have found that being transparent about performance—a tactic learned from studying

baseball stats—let people know where they stood and inspired a continuous quest for improvement.

What I'm talking about is meritocracy: a system that rewards individuals based on performance and results. It's an idea that carries weight for employees in the workplace. There also are benefits for companies that operate on this principle by committing to being open and transparent about their performance. (For example, a website should publish real-time information about its availability and system performance time, as eBay does with its announcement board or as salesforce.com does with its Trust Site.)

But what I've also found is that although we have some great examples of companies that are transparent about their performance, overall, most corporations don't follow these tenets when it comes to how they evaluate or treat their employees. In fact, traditional company culture is quite the opposite of a performance-based meritocracy. Historically—meaning in the past fifty or so years—loyalty was given higher priority than achievements and results. Outside of sales organizations, goals, and ways to measure goals, were not always clear. How an individual was performing and how she stacked up against others were not often transparent.

Although one would expect the rules of the ball park to be different from the rules of the office park, I found that by ignoring what made sports so great—essentially its functioning as a meritocracy—we were missing out on an opportunity to make work *work* better. The desire for security trumped the drive to be spectacular. Everyone played it too safe. And this has stymied both employees and employers.

How come as a society we support a model that embraces meritocracy—in which the best athletes, those with the best

skills, are known and rise to the top—but we don't demand a similar model at work? Generally speaking, we accept this system in school, where grades are based on performance against one's peers, not just on showing up to class. How is it that at work we fear systems that allow us to see how we are doing compared to others, that motivate us to do better work every day, and that reward us for our meaningful contributions instead of our blind commitment? Why are both employees and employers so afraid of operating in a meritocracy, which rewards them for how well they perform, not for how long they've been performing?

At work, both employees and employers often fall into an entitlement mentality. For example, some employers do everything they can to keep the talent inside their walls hidden from everyone else, lest they be "poached." They feel as though they know what is best for the employee and must make sure that the employee knows how to be successful in their company. Employees who leave are often shunned as being disloyal. For employees, there's an expectation that they will be given a job, and as long as they are doing okay, they expect to keep it. By keeping their head down, doing a mediocre job, and not being a problem, they believe they will be rewarded.

I have always been amazed by how managers seldom actually want to have truthful discussions about how someone is performing, even when that individual is doing great. As a manager, I have often implemented informal weekly and formal quarterly check-ins in an effort to force a dialogue and prevent a big disconnect at the end of the year for many employees, when they find out they were not doing as well as their perception led them to believe. Think of all the wasted time and productivity when we give performance feedback only on a yearly basis. The world doesn't operate on this type of clock anymore. When everything

is happening in real time, even my formal quarterly meetings seem grossly inadequate. As a board member of a well-known technology company, I witnessed a once well-respected CEO lose the trust of his board and employees in less than ten days. In the current business environment, the idea of an annual review is so antiquated, it's comical. We live in a world in which countries have been toppled in months, or even days, but certainly not years. It's a world in which much is decided instantaneously, and the workplace must adapt.

Yet we are very far from this kind of culture. How can work be so out of touch with the way the rest of the world is headed?

I'm a strong proponent of meritocracy, of the value of hard work over entitlement, of talent over tenure, and of transparency over closed systems, probably because of where I came from—and because of where I am today. I believe that many executives hold these beliefs. I have gained significant freedom by embracing a mind-set of meritocracy. I've seen what it can inspire, unlock, and unleash, and I've also seen how the opposite—an organization that supports entitlement over results—can limit growth and opportunity.

Unlike the past when you got news and information from only one or two sources and a couple of times a day, today you get information in real time and from multiple sources. There is no place to hide. You can hope to keep problems in-house, but you're unlikely to succeed. Problems do not get better with time; they get far worse. They spin out of control faster today than ever before. The only way to deal with this is to be open and transparent. If you have a problem, admit it, apologize, and fix it. No one expects perfection, but they do expect honesty. Now, meritocracy over entitlement is the only way. We are in a new age—one that is more transparent thanks to the Internet and one

that is being defined by a new generation of workers who grew up with more technology and a more entrepreneurial mind-set.

My background is really in operations. I see systems not working, I am called in when they are failing, and I must determine how to fix them. Whether it's an e-commerce start-up with an unreliable website, a public company trying to implement a new systems architecture, or a legacy company trying to carve a path for the future with new leadership, I find that by asking the right questions, you can get to the root of the problem and come up with a solution. With work it's no different, and I have created a model, a framework, to impart everything you need to know about how to operate in a new world of work. This model, which we'll explore in detail in Part Two, is designed to help individuals become accountable for their own success. With that accountability comes a new and refreshing freedom—it puts you back in charge of your life, shifting control from your boss to yourself. Essentially, it allows you to become the CEO of your own destiny and to be the one in charge of your career—and your life.

The framework in this book is the culmination of years of experience in managing and mentoring, and, I hope, will serve as a template for you as you begin to rework how you think about work. It identifies four different philosophies around work: Company Man or Woman, CEO of Your Own Destiny, Disenchanted Employee, and the Aspiring Entrepreneur. It distinguishes between those who are self-motivated and those who are waiting to be discovered, those who are happy and those who are unfulfilled. It aims to give you the tools to become more self-aware and happier and to find more meaning in your career. Ultimately, it is my hope that it inspires you to aggressively chase your dreams.

Part Three allows you to take the ideas of this book and make them your own. There is a worksheet to get you started (1) assessing where you are in your career and (2) understanding the actions you need to take to make a change. I've also included my personal worksheets, which I have filled out for different stages of my life and career, to show how goals and objectives can change over time. These completed worksheets are included in Appendix C.