



Die Empty, by Todd Henry

I remember a meeting in which a friend asked a strange and unexpected question: “What do you think is the most valuable land in the world?”

Several people threw out guesses, such as Manhattan, the oil fields of the Middle East, and the gold mines of South Africa, before our friend indicated that we were way off track. He paused for a moment, and said, “You’re all wrong. The most valuable land in the world is the graveyard. In the graveyard are buried all of the unwritten novels, never-launched businesses, unreconciled relationships, and all of the other things that people thought, “I’ll get around to that tomorrow.” One day, however, their tomorrows ran out.

That day I went back to my office and I wrote down two words in my notebook and on the wall of my office that have been my primary operating ethic for the last several years: Die Empty.

I want to know that if I lay my head down tonight and don’t wake up tomorrow, I have emptied myself of whatever creativity is lingering inside, with minimal regrets about how I spent my focus, time, and energy. This doesn’t happen by accident; it takes intentional and sustained effort. But I can say with confidence from my own experience and the experiences of others I’ve worked with that the effort is well worth it.

You’ve probably heard “No one ever lay on their deathbed wishing for another day of work.” I think this saying is wrong, and perhaps a little dangerous because of what it implies. First, I believe a great many people do regret not having treated their life with more purpose, and would give anything to have one more chance to approach it with the kind of intention and conviction that imminent death makes palpable. They know that they consistently ignored small twinges of intuition, inspiration, and insight. They recall how they cowered away from risk in favor of comfort. They spent their days regretting their past decisions rather than taking aggressive steps to redirect their life in a more hopeful direction.

Second, this saying presupposes that work is an inherently miserable act that people engage in against their will, or that it’s something that necessarily pulls us away from the people and activities we really care about. But work encompasses much more than just how we make a living. Any value we create that requires us to spend our time, focus, and energy—whether in the context of occupation, relationships, or parenting—is work. Humans, it seems, are wired to

find satisfaction by adding value through toil. Thus, for centuries work has been a deeply ingrained part of our identity and our understanding of our place in the world. I believe that the more you apply self-knowledge to how you engage your labor, the more satisfaction you will find in the very act of work, and thus the more joy you will find in life.

I hope we all can find a focused understanding of whatâ€™s really important and make a commitment to chase after it with gusto rather than simply settling in for the ride.

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