

## Selected Writings from Erica Ariel Fox



In this selection of recent articles, Mobius Co-Founder and Chief Thought Leader **Erica Ariel Fox** explores what is driving the so-called Great Resignation – a widespread phenomenon in many parts of the world, where employees have quit their jobs or plan to, in search of better pay, greater flexibility and balance, and more fulfilling work. Here, she surfaces timeless wisdom about the sources of meaning and seasonality in our lives – themes that help leaders respond to the demand for better work, and which Erica will be exploring in her next book which she is currently at work on.

Erica is the author of the New York Times bestselling book, *Winning From Within: A Breakthrough Method for Leading, Living and Lasting Change*. The methodology is based on twenty years of Erica's research at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School and extensive experience as a C-suite advisor. Considered a seminal work in leadership and executive development, the book forms the basis for the proprietary Winning from Within Method® – the transformational model and methodology we teach in many of our offerings.

**Forbes**

## Work-Life Balance Is Over — The Life-Work Revolution Is Here

By Erica Ariel Fox | October 19, 2021

Work-life Balance flamed out in 2020. The life-work balance revolution blazed in its place.

Back in the day, before Covid-19, we struggled to squeeze a bit of our lives into the consuming vortex of work. We charmingly called this “work-life balance” while knowing such “balance” was a lie.

Then Covid-19 hit, and we traded our platinum miles to sleep in our own beds, care for our aging parents and reconnect with our childhood friends. We drank from the well of our cozy, messy, maddening, nourishing lives, only now realizing how thirsty we were for non-working time and experiences.

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Now that we've felt it, we're not going to give it up.

Yes, lots of us are itching to break out our work clothes or make a trip to the office to convene with colleagues around a white board. But this movement is much bigger than the work-from-home debate.

We changed the math. We looked the lie of work-life balance in the eye as we experienced its mirror equation: life-work balance.

### **What Happened in the Grand Experiment?**

The wisdom of the ages tells us we have finally arrived back where we belong.

The ancient Greeks placed the protection of home in the goddess Hestia. Her job was to safeguard the hearth at the center of life. Her fireplace was the source of safety and well-being in the home. It drew the family together for warmth, for food, for light, for celebration and for spiritual sustenance. It formed the inner core of well-being.

Whether we gather around the kitchen island for homework or around the TV to watch the big game, our modern desire for a hearth persists. We intuitively understand the sense that our home needs a “center” – a gathering place that provides comfort, warmth, and togetherness.

When we connect to this core within ourselves, we access what I call our “center of well-being.” The space of safety, warmth and wellness symbolized by the ancient hearth now radiates within us.

### **But Will the Work Get Done?**

This is the modern world — not ancient Greece. The equation must balance. If we switch the variables to life-work, will we stifle productivity?

Actually, no.

Studies over the past 18 months have found flexible work arrangements did not materially damage business productivity. This new way of working actually boosted productivity 5% as workers adopted new technology and spent less time commuting, according to a study of 30,000 Americans by researchers at the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics at the University of Chicago.

Less tangible but more fundamental than avoiding traffic and the advent of Zoom is this groundbreaking reversal to life-work balance. The opportunity to go back to our metaphorical hearth — to put life first — allows us to recalibrate and prioritize those things that keep us connected to our core of well-being.

The Great Resignation demonstrates that the life-work balance revolution is well underway. As reversing the equation becomes the norm, company cultures will need to transform to embrace it or they will watch their performance aspirations go up in flames.

The old work-life balance was a lie because there wasn't room in it for life. All was work. The new equation – life-work balance – is true. We're living it. We can have both as long as we put our lives first and our work second.

This is the life-work revolution of our time. ■

## **Forbes**

# **To Work Through The Great Resignation, Take A Cue From Nature**

By Erica Ariel Fox | October 28, 2021

The Life/Work Revolution — the reversal of priority from our jobs to our lives — is transformational because it rejects a mindset 100 years in the making that human beings can perform like machines. We are not machines — and we are done with leaders who see us or treat us as if we are.

From Henry Ford's car assembly line to Amazon's on-demand warehouse operations, businesses have developed ways of working to optimize productivity and eliminate waste. Along the way, they forgot the essential qualities and needs that separate their machines from the human beings who operate them.

Decades of hyper productivity driven by game-changing technology has severed our connection to the principles and cycles of the natural world. The Great Resignation is a revolt against the assumption that people are willing to live like machines to participate in a growth-obsessed economy.

Companies need not fear this evolution, nor should they resist it or seek to reverse it. They should learn from it and adapt with it.

How?

Many companies want to meet this moment with tactical solutions. They don't know what else to do so

they instinctually revert to conventional responses. They hope to coax employees back into the fold with hybrid work-from-home flexibility, salary incentives and work-life wellness perks. That's a "business-as-usual" response. It's not enough.

Aligning with this world of work metamorphosis begins with reclaiming our link in the natural order. We often think of nature as a place to visit, whether for a weekend hike, a beach holiday, or family apple-picking outing, rather than as something deeply rooted in our existence.

This is a fundamental miss in how we shape our identities. Here are three principles we should embrace instead:

- Acknowledge that we belong to the natural world.
- Integrate nature's inherent wisdom into the ways we design, run and lead organizations.
- Generate return on investments by creating workplaces that treat people humanely and account for their needs.

Philosopher and renowned ecologist Gregory Bateson wrote that "the major problems in the world result from the difference between how nature works and the way people think." Companies that survive and thrive through this Life/Work Revolution will take cues from nature and its basic operating principles.

### **Integrate Natural Cycles into the Workplace**

Aligning with natural cycles is the basis for sustaining health and well-being. It is now also a guiding principle for workplaces that want to retain and attract talent.

For millennia, communities of people have embedded natural cycles into their lives. Societies have marked time with the waxing and waning lunar cycle and its four distinct phases. People act in alignment with the changing seasons. Spring plantings and summer toil bring fall harvests. In winter the fields lay fallow, giving way to restoration until spring comes again.

Workplaces don't reflect the wisdom of natural rhythms. The world of business abandoned the four-phase natural cycle and substituted the artificial quarterly report.

## **People belong to the natural, not the mechanical world.**

In our mechanistic framework, leaders face relentless, unforgiving pressure to be the best, the biggest, the first, the most. Markets and boards expect peak performance all year round — year after year.

We've even appropriated the language of machines to describe our own experience. When we need a break we talk about unplugging, getting off the grid or recharging our batteries. The Life/Work Revolution allows us a chance to transcend the artificial mindsets that deny our humanity. We can take our cues from nature instead.

Consider the tones of different seasons as a starting place for a grounded way of working for individuals, teams and organizations. Nature gives us the rhythm of preparation in spring; exertion in summer; fruition in autumn; and rest in winter. Spring represents fresh new beginnings. Summer is hot and intense. Fall is the time of harvest. Winter provides rest and renewal.

This natural rhythm represents a healthy range of pace and productivity. Each tone serves a unique and necessary purpose. Organizations would benefit from recognizing and internalizing the importance of cycles to people's health and well-being: Rest must follow exertion to deny burnout a chance to take hold.

Without different rhythms and varying intensity in our (work) lives, we feel stressed, depressed, and even lost.

We crave the chance to step back from the action to take in the big picture or reacquaint ourselves with the purpose of our endeavors. We want the resources to plan properly before we jump into action, and space to pause, reflect and adjust along the way. We need time to savor our successes when things work out and process our disappointments when they don't. All of these needs require time, energy and legitimacy that we cannot achieve if we are in the constant motion of delivering the deliverables.

This lesson of The Great Resignation is clear. We are putting life first. We are not machines. We want to regain humanity in our work.

The broken and burned out masses leading the Great Resignation will not settle for less. ■

Forbes

# Summer Of Love Defined A Generation. We Have An Autumn Of Meaning.

By Erica Ariel Fox | November 2, 2021

## Existential Dread: COVID-19 Drives A Quest For The Meaning Of Life

In 1967, a generation of young Americans emerged from the Summer of Love with a radically different view of how they wanted to live their lives. Now, 54 years later, we've arrived in the Autumn of Meaning.

Lurching toward a post-pandemic life, we find ourselves in a form of collective mid-life crisis. People of all ages are confronting questions that in normal times haunt mainly the older set whose kids have left the nest and whose lives feel half empty.

The winds carrying Covid-19 spread more than just the virus. They dispersed seeds of discontent that have taken root in our shared consciousness.

We thought life would improve once we got vaccinated. Instead we feel agitated by the ghost of Socrates who is whispering in our ears: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

It's okay if you feel rattled. The ground beneath us shifted when we contemplated the real possibility of death from an invisible threat. Fundamentals changed even more if you lost loved ones to the virus or you experienced trauma incessantly as health care workers did. We each must find our new place to stand and redefine the source of our well-being.

Many of us are unaccustomed to scrutinizing ourselves and the choices we've made. We use external markers, such as raises and promotions, as milestones to tell us whether our lives are on track. Now we

look around and wonder if those socially-sanctioned measures of success mean much to us at all.

## What is the meaning of life?

Before the pandemic, few of us lost sleep grappling with the meaning of life. Big Questions stayed in the background, popping up before big birthdays or on New Year's Eve. COVID-19 brought existential questions to the foreground. Now questions about our purpose and full promise command our attention.

For some, this newfound focus uplifts. For others, it frightens. Either way, there is no escaping the salient call for self-inquiry. We're seekers now, looking for direction, wisdom and abiding truths.

Notwithstanding The Great Resignation trend, we need not quit our jobs to contemplate what gives us fulfillment. On the contrary, we should make self-reflection an on-going practice, much as we do with exercise.

Introspection is a skill, and we can learn it. As with any skill, mastering the art of introspection takes time, discipline and practice. This is the time. This is the Autumn of Meaning.

The zeitgeist of this moment is a longing to examine our lives. When a new generation looks back on us decades from now, they will recognize our passionate, collective pursuit to grasp the meaning of life, and to experience each unto ourselves a life imbued with meaning. ■

**On approaching life as a voyager,  
"Your life is not *like* a quest, it *is* a quest."**

— ERICA ARIEL FOX

# Forbes

## If You're Looking For Deep Answers, Linger With Your Questions

By Erica Ariel Fox | November 9, 2021

Good questions are sometimes better than good answers.

As we ease into a post-pandemic rethink, while we contemplate the consequences of The Great Resignation of 2021 and the The Great Reshuffle, we are searching for answers for life's deepest questions. I have called this season the Autumn of Meaning.

With every possible piece of information a few clicks away, our attention span and our patience has vanished. Even a few extra milliseconds between our question and the Google answer frustrates us. For a change, at this moment we need to let our questions soak and marinate before we consider serving up answers.

In timeless stories we read as children, young characters imbued with the wonder and curiosity of youth explore meaningful life questions powered by an urgent need to understand their world — not entirely unlike how some of us feel now. They are hungry to comprehend the nature of the world and their place in it.

What is important for us to notice about and to learn from these tales is that the characters don't rush the process. They travel. They journey. They quest. They wander off the familiar road, even when it means breaking the rules and facing their fears, to find their wisdom within.

A common thread among these quests of wonder is the journey from a known, familiar, comfortable world into an unknown, unfamiliar and challenging world. Young Lucy in "The Lion, the Witch and the

Wardrobe" moves between home and Narnia through a portal in an armoire. Peter Pan leads Wendy, John and Michael Darling through an open window in the nursery to Neverland. In "The Wizard of Oz," Dorothy travels from Kansas to Oz in a mind-bending tornado.

These characters needed to leave behind the known and experience the unknown to gain new wisdom and insight into their own lives. Renowned American mythologist Joseph Campbell called this "the departure" from the "ordinary world" to discover the insights and enlightenment of these magical, enchanted worlds.

That is the journey we're on now.

Resigning workers don't want to walk back through the office door to their stagnant, ordinary world. They want passage to a different world, to lead a different way of life, in a different reality than the one they already know.

They seek a world with radically new rules, radically new expectations, and radically new measures of success. If they reach Emerald City and there is no Wizard to hand it over, they will create this new world themselves. As that story's wisdom teaches, they have had that potential and power inside them all along. Now they know it.

**"Be patient  
toward all that is  
unsolved in your  
heart and try to  
love the questions  
themselves."**

— RILKE

### **Siri and Alexa Can't Tell You The Meaning of Life**

Lingering on a question requires discipline. Search engines are great tools for accessing knowledge, but wisdom is different from knowledge. Wisdom is not about how much you know. It is about how you live,



how you love, how you lead, how you labor, how you listen, how you learn. Today's search for meaning and purpose will not be met by SEO terms and trending hashtags.

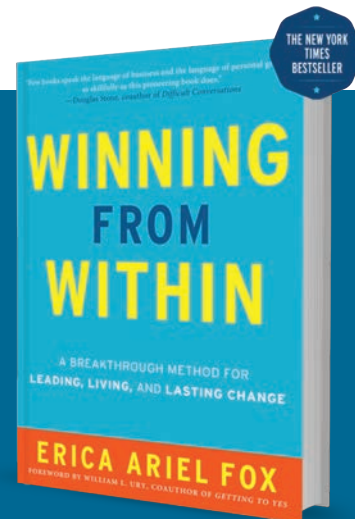
Our COVID-19 era is marked by a collective soul-searching. We need to linger in the pause between posing the question and finding the answer. We need to find energy in the engagement and savor the experience of not yet knowing, rather than shutting down the exploration for the relief of an easy or conventional answer.

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke advised a young writer in a selected set of "Letters to a Young Poet" that we should "love the questions themselves."

*"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue," he wrote. "Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now."*

Rilke understood this profound truth.

When I teach a five-day seminar for C-Suite executives, they pepper me with questions the first day. They are good questions, but I decline to answer them because there is so much benefit to lingering with such questions. Over the course of the next few days, their departure from their corporate world and their journey to unexplored realms leads them to their wisdom, not mine. They do, as Rilke says, live their way into the answers. ■



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Visit [www.ericarielfox.com](http://www.ericarielfox.com) to read a sample chapter of her bestselling book. There's also a resource section, where a companion bibliography explores each of the Big Four leadership archetypes in depth.