

THE 
PORTFOLIO
LIFE
WITH
JEFF GOINS

PODCAST

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3 MYTHS WE BELIEVE ABOUT FINDING A CALLING

Jeff: But, really, it's behind every successful man or woman, there's a bunch of people. There's a community of people. There's an old African proverb that says, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Andy: Welcome to *The Portfolio Life* with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub. And this is the show that helps you pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. Even the name *Calling* implies that it just happens, that a calling is effortless, that we can't control it, that it comes to us one day, and we receive it, along with a clear set of directions on how to execute it. But in researching his latest book, *The Art of Work*, Jeff discovered more than one myth about finding your calling. And in this episode we explore what they are. Here's Jeff Goins.

Andy: Jeff, as you were writing *The Art of Work*, your most recent book, you were doing quite a bit of research on people pursuing their calling. You were reading other books about calling. And I'm assuming you found quite a bit of overlap in things that people thought were true about calling. What was just one or two of the things that people thought were true about calling but you consistently saw that weren't true after your research for *The Art of Work*?

Jeff: Yeah, well, I felt like I had come through this process. I had a dream. I worked really hard to accomplish that dream. And, then, years later got to do what I loved for a living and felt like I was living out my calling. So, when I was ready to write the book I was like, "I got this. I know what this is about." And when I started interviewing people, then more honestly remembering my own experiences, I realized what I thought about the way this works is not actually the way this works.

And an example of one of those ways in which I was surprised, one of the surprises was that you just know, allusion, the idea that you know what your dream is. You just need to go chase it. And I

hear people say this. And I think it's true for some people. But for a lot of people, I don't think it is true. I think you have some sort of vague notion or idea. But you don't just know what you're supposed to do. It takes some time and awareness to figure that out.

Andy: So, it's almost like people have a belief that it will show up in like an epiphany, or they will have this moment, this moment of miracle, where you will either sit up in bed, or you're stuck in traffic, or you read a line in a book and, then, boom! It's a trigger. And suddenly you just know. Is that the myth?

Jeff: Yeah, I think so. I thought that. I thought – I mean when you use the word *calling* I think there is certain, sometimes, spiritual connotations or just kind of mysterious esoteric ideas that at some point a line is going to shine down from heaven. I'm going to have some dream. I'm just going to go, "Oh, my gosh. I need to be a truck driver."

Andy: Right.

Jeff: "I need to be a writer." You know, whatever. And the reality is when I interviewed these people who are living out their life's work I said, "When did you just know? When did you know this thing was *The Thing*? And you got to – I mean, I think you've got to do multiple interviews as I did with people that really get to the heart of the story and get past sometimes clichés and things that we say that don't really mean anything. But when I got down to it, people kept telling me, "I really didn't know. I just"—

Andy: I just kept going.

Jeff: "I just kept going," yeah. And to be honest, that was true for me, too. When some people go, "How did you know you were supposed to be a writer?" Well, like, I've done it my whole life. I never really took it seriously. And, then, I had a conversation with my friend, Paul. And he asked me what my dream was. And I said, "I was to be a writer, I guess." And he said, "You don't have to want to be a writer. You are a writer." After that I started calling myself a writer.

But it was this gradual realization of something that was—

Andy: Right.

Jeff: —deep within me. And the more I did it, the more resonance that came. And I've said this before, and I write about it in the book, but there's this line that I repeat throughout the book; because I think it's really true. And it, hopefully, gives people permission to not know. And it's this: Clarity comes with action. The more you do, the more you discover. You gain clarity as you take action and you create momentum. You learn things along the way.

Andy: So, you just know happens to some people. But it's almost like it's bad advice, you would say, to say, "You'll just know"?

Jeff: Well, I think it sets people up for disillusionment.

Andy: So, we set ourselves up, though, right?

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy Because there are people out there listening around that say, “I should just know.” Like I can’t wait until I just know.

Jeff: Right.

Andy: So, they are missing the process, that it is a process.

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: Like if my kids say, “Dad we want to go back and visit Sioux Falls. Can we just go?” And same, my eldest will say, “I just want” – or we’ll be driving in the car. If we get to Sioux Falls, we’ll be driving – that’s 1,000 miles away. We’ll be driving eight blocks. “I just want to be home right now.” And I go, “Buddy, I just want to be home, too.” But there is a process, right? There is a process. And, so, what happens, Jeff, for those who are listening who are struggling and say, “I just wish I knew”? What will happen if they can have a shift in their thinking and really, really believe, “I’m not going to just know, but I’m actually closer today than I was yesterday”? What happens to us emotionally, mentally, and with our work when we stop thinking, “I’m just going to know,” and actually acknowledge, “I’m finding out right now”?

Jeff: Uh-huh (yes).

Andy: By listening to this podcast. Not jokingly, by listening to this show, I’m getting closer to my calling.

Jeff: Well, I think it makes it makes it a little bit easier to take the next step. When I say, “Well, I just knew, Andy, and it was great.”

Andy: [Laughing].

Jeff: Then you’re like sitting on the coach, eating your cheese puffs, because that’s what I would be doing right now.

Andy: Yep.

Jeff: And you’re going, “Well, gosh, I feel lost. I don’t just know. And what am I supposed to do until then?” I just think it’s an unfair setup for somebody who doesn’t know what to do. One of the reasons I wrote *The Art of Work* was because I wanted to encourage people, you’re already on your way. You’re already on the path towards your calling. You just need to know, where am I really? And kind of setting out the seven stages of a calling as I do in the book, and describing it as a path.

If you have a map, or something, you’re at the mall and it says, “You are here.” All of a sudden, you get your bearings. And you look behind you, and you go, “Oh, yeah, like I did do those things.”

Andy: Yeah.

Jeff: “And I do want to do those other things. And I’m right here, and now I know what the next step to take is.” I think it makes it much easier to know what the next step to take is, and to actually take it.

Andy: I love that mall analogy. It’s like, “I want to go to the food court, and I have no idea where I am.”

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: And you find that you-are-here spot. It’s, “Oh, OK. Now I have a frame of reference.”

Jeff: Yeah. And the reality is, you could start walking and eventually find it. But I don’t go to the mall very often, but when I do I kind of have that male egotism where, “I know how to get things. I don’t need a map.”

Andy: But the mall’s too big here. I use that sign now.

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: I go straight to the sign, you know? Because I don’t want to wander anymore. But the kind of people that read *The Art of Work*, Jeff, I want to encourage if you are reading a book like *The Art of Work*, you’re on your way to finding your calling. Because people who aren’t reading that book are not as close to finding their calling. And we’ve seen this. You’ve put something out on Twitter just the other day. And you said, “Another one bites the dust.”

Jeff: [Laughing]

Andy: And it was somebody who had left their job, you know, do not show on Jeff’s door with your suitcase and say, “I quit my job because of your book. I need a place to live.” But there is this progress that happens when people are taking action. And they’re in the process, right? They’re reading books like that.

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: And others.

Jeff: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, going back to the mall thing. You could spend enough time finding your way, but wouldn’t it be easier if you just had the humility – which I don’t always have – to stop and look at the map and go, “Oh. Now I know where to go”?

Andy: Well, it’s better than stopping by the help desk and asking the volunteer.

Jeff: Yeah, yeah.

Andy: That’s right. By the way, who volunteers at a mall to like help people find? – that’s a servant.

Jeff: Those people are volunteers? No.

Andy: Yeah.

Jeff: They get paid.

Andy: I've seen some volunteers. But I don't know. Anyway. So, that's the first lie of calling, one of the first is, "You just know." And, "I'll just know." Another you had shared was that you don't have to practice. Like it's our natural talent. Like we'll just sort of stumble upon it.

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: Like the kids with the closet in Narnia. They'll just open it and, boom, it will be there. Like where is your calling? Just look in the back of your closet. It will appear. Right?

Jeff: Right.

Andy: You'll be equipped to time, right? So, what is the truth? If the lie is that we will stumble upon our calling, and we will just know at some point, what is the truth about calling as it relates to getting better at something?

Jeff: Yeah, so, I think that it does take practice. I mean, I think that the assumption is, if it's not easy, then I'm not supposed to do it. And I don't think that's true. I think that's living out your life's work is going to take a lot of work. It's going to take a lot of practice. And you're not going to be that great at it. There might be some sort of natural proclivity to it, or like me, maybe you realized that you had spent a bunch of years practicing without realizing it. But even then once you become more aware of your calling, you're going to have to sit down and get to work.

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Andy: So, we know now that you won't just know. For most people, they will not have a moment of brilliant clarity, right? That you have to practice. But there is one more that I found fascinating. Because most of the time we think it's our calling, right? So, it seems like a very individual experience. But what you found in researching for *The Art of Work* and from paying attention to your own journey is that really finding our calling is that we can't do it alone, right?

Jeff: Right. Yeah. I think people say things like that, "My dream, my calling, my life's work." And one of the things that I learned from interviewing all of these people, remembering my own story, and even reading biographies of really famous, successful people who I felt had done meaningful work in the world like Mother Teresa, and Walt Disney, and so on is that every story of success, and success was just they got to do something that mattered, and it left an impact on the world in some way. Every story of success is really a story of community.

And when you look at these stories of individuals rising to the top and doing something amazing, behind those individuals, you know, we hear people still sometimes say, "Behind every successful man is a woman," or whatever. But, really, it's behind every successful man or woman, there's a bunch of people. There's a community of people.

There's an old African proverb that says, "It takes a village to raise a baby, to raise a child." And, I think, that's true with the pursuit of our calling. It takes a whole group of people that are going to come alongside you at just the right time to help you along in your journey. And it's kind of mysterious. But if you don't have the eyes to see that, if you are so focused on you, you're going to

miss that chance to learn from somebody, to let them help you, and even to be able to share some of the reward, and some of the enjoyment of the process.

And I've done both.

I've done the thing where you run a marathon, and you complete it, and there's nobody there at the end to cheer with you. And it's a lonely place to be having accomplished something amazing and having no one to celebrate it with. And I've done the

And I've done the thing where I'm trudging along with people right beside me, around me, encouraging me, and celebrating that finish line with me. And I'll take the latter over the former any day of the week even if it means I accomplished less, but I have more people to share it with.

Andy: Yeah. I don't know that we can pin down exactly where these lies come from about finding your calling. We've talked about three. One is that you would just know. Second that you don't have to practice. You were just born to do this, or you will just come out of the womb great at whatever you're calling is supposed to be. And the last one is that you don't need any help, it's really your own individual effort. And I love the point you made that, one, it's more enjoyable to have more people around you.

But the other is, for those who are listening, it doesn't put, I'd say specifically for me, I think you resonate with this as well, Jeff, is that our family is not an obstacle to our calling, right? Our spouse is not—

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: —the responsibility of caring for our children is not an obstacle. It's part of it. Right? Because what would it mean if our family was an obstacle to our calling so that when we get our calling we don't need our family anymore? That math doesn't make sense to me.

Jeff: Right.

Andy: They've got to be part of this process. They've got to be part of it. But maybe that ties back into, Jeff, the idea that it's supposed to just happen. And if we're busy caring for our children, or in marriage counseling, or whatever our situation is that we think, "Ah, I'm busy doing all this stuff. I should be focused on my calling. I'm going to miss it," like it's a train that's going to go by, right?

Instead it's all part of our story.

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: So, those are, again, we'll just know. That's a lie. That we don't have to practice. We don't really have to work at a skill. That's a lie. And the last is that you don't need help. It's really your own individual effort. You only have to pay attention to yourself. But, Jeff, every time I hear you talk about your calling, it's a story about someone else affirming it.

I don't know if you realize that.

Jeff: Yep.

Andy: It's a story about Ashley at the party saying, "It's not a matter of if but when?"

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: Right? It's a conversation with someone saying, "Dude, you are a writer," you know? If we would pay attention and surround ourselves with people like that and be open and vulnerable to people, I think that people listening to this, and even ourselves as we look for future calling in our life, that we might find them a little more easily than we have in the past.

Jeff: Yeah, I mean, you touched on this briefly. But whether you have a family, or a group of friends, whatever your community is, whatever your support community is, I think it's important to realize that at the end of the day this isn't about what you do. It's about who you are and who you are becoming. And I don't think your calling is just a job that you do. It's really the life that you live. And if you think it's something that you do, then it is possible to sacrifice everything that competes with that, or conflicts with that ultimate goal.

Andy: So, if it's a singular thing—

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: —then you can sacrifice everything else?

Jeff: Right. Yeah. But I think it's my calling to be a writer who is also, hopefully, a great dad and a good husband, and good member of my community. I mean all of these things create the portfolio, which is what this show is all about, of doing something that matters. It's not just about making a great living. It's about making a meaningful life.

Andy: So, if you haven't picked up *The Art of Work*, I would encourage you to do so. Because in *The Art of Work* Jeff walks you through really the progression of understanding and finding a calling, and understanding your life's purpose when it comes to what you work in. And acknowledging — I was just at an event today, Jeff, with my friend, Graham. And I said, "Where are you at?" I had met him a year ago almost to the day. And I said, "How are things going in the last year." And he said, "You know, I'm really embracing what Jeff teaches in *The Art of Work* about you don't just take a big leap, you build a bridge.

Jeff: Yeah.

Andy: And he said, "I've been building a bridge for a year."

Jeff: I love that.

Andy: The last time I saw him — and maybe he's like a lot of you listening — he felt really lost. He felt like, "I'm just wandering." And, I guess, maybe he found a spot on the map at the mall and said, "You are here." And he said, "You know what? I'm here. I'm going to get there. And it's a long way from where I want to be. But it's a journey. And I'm OK with that."

And you talk about that beautifully in *The Art of Work*, and we talk about that on other shows. And, so, we want to be an encouragement to you who are listening. Wherever you are at on your job, recognize that you're on the journey. You're not stuck. You're on the journey.

You might feel like it's slow. But you're on the journey. So, don't believe those three lies that sometime you'll just know, like an epiphany; that you don't have to practice. You do. You have to get good at your craft. And the last is that you don't need help. It's a real individual effort. No, it's a community. And all those things should take pressure off.

That's why I love these things that you teach, Jeff. Good, I don't have to just know, right? And, good, I'm not going to just get well, the practice one isn't that encouraging. That's just hard work. But that it's a process.

Jeff: Right.

Andy: But I love the last one, frankly. And I hope that there are listeners who really feel good about this, that you don't have to do it alone. And, Jeff, I know, wants to be an encouragement to you. Continue to read his writing at <http://GoinsWriter.com>, because as I read it, Jeff, I'm encouraged in my calling and my work.

Jeff: Well, thanks. And I love that you mentioned Graham. He actually just commented on my blog today.

Andy: Oh, did he?

Jeff: Yeah. So, that's fun. I think there's this idea that once you find your calling you've arrived.

Andy: Oh, boy, yeah.

Jeff: Think that's the destination. And, really, the journey is the destination. As our mutual friend, Dan Miller, would say, "The minute that I stop learning or growing, just dig a hole in the ground and push me in it. Because I'm done."

Andy: He's a country boy. He just says, "Take me out back. Just take me out back."

Jeff: [Laughing] Yeah, I think there's this idea that once I find what I'm supposed to do, then I've arrived. Then I'm there. But the truth is that it is a journey, and it does take your life. And you're not done until you're dead. So, if there are still opportunities to grow and learn, then that's good news. And one of the interesting lessons that I learned is once I kind of quit my job and built that bridge and got to where I was supposed to be, and thought, "I've done it. I'm here." Really just kind of the beginning, or maybe the middle of the journey. It wasn't the end.

Andy: Well, I want to – I'd love to end with this, and you didn't know I was going to do this. But the powerful thing about our work to me is that I know that there are people that have given it to college students who have graduated and are like, "What do I do now?" And they've read that book, and they say, "I feel so much better about what's coming," right? The future.

And I also know people that are much older than that, and they've read it. And they have felt very encouraged. Because they went, "You know, there are still things I can do in my life. I'm not done yet."

And, so, it really is a book that spans the ages if you will. I know those are all things you talk about in *The Art of Work*, and we encourage you if this episode has resonated with you at all. Let us know how it did over at <http://GoinsWriter.com>. Find this episode about the three lies that we believe about finding our calling.

So, Jeff, thank you for your time.

Jeff: Thank you.

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Andy: Did Jeff dispel some myths about calling for you today? If so, we'd love to know what they were, and what you are going to do with the truth. You can leave a comment on this episode at <http://GoinsWriter.com>. And if today's show was really helpful to you, we'd love for you to return the favor by leaving us some feedback on iTunes. I'm Andy Traub. And on behalf of Jeff Goines, thanks for spending some time with us. Now, go build your portfolio.

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Jeff: If you don't have the eyes to see that, if you are so focused on you, you're going to miss that chance to learn from somebody, to let them help you, and even to be able to share some of the reward, and some of the enjoyment of the process.