Angela Answers

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Making Room for Meaning

BY Angela Myles Beeching

Dear Angela: I'm a performer and part-time presenter who loves her work. I've always been a very ambitious person—at least up until the pandemic hit. Since then, I've felt much less driven and find myself questioning why I'm doing what I'm doing. How can I get back on track?



I HEAR YOU AND YOU'RE NOT ALONE. As individuals, we all go through phases of life that change us, along with our values and ambitions.

The two halves of life

In the first half of life, we focus on building our sense of identity, importance, and security—what Freud might call the ego self. This is natural—it's how we get ourselves established.

In this phase, our ambitions usually revolve around work and creating a supportive social life and home-life. For musicians, we want to perform and be recognized for making a valuable contribution, an impact on our communities. And as arts professionals, we all want to do work that earns us the respect of our peers.

Later, in the second half of life, we start to look for and prioritize meaning over achievement.

This can translate into a version of a mid-life crisis.

But you don't have to go out and buy a Corvette, move to Tuscany, or take up pottery. You must, however, grapple with the big questions.

As author and psychologist Sharon Blackie writes, this is "a period of existential angst, of soul-searching, as we begin to question—and ultimately to discover—who we believe we are, and just what we believe all this life is for."

Even if you weren't due for a mid-life crisis now, the uncertain times we're living in have created a collective crisis that we're all experiencing together. As a result, many of us have been reflecting on our values and the purpose of our lives.

It's perfectly normal to be questioning what you're doing and why.

This period of life is about re-conceiving ourselves, says Blackie. It's a time when we're "looking for a story to draw together the messy fragments of everything that's happened to us and defined us up until now. We need to transform the story we tell about ourselves, to find a story in which we have more agency—and more purpose."

The meaning we crave comes with knowing ourselves and what we want—and then living into that truth. This requires time for introspection and reflection. Be patient.

Working with a coach or therapist can help. With my clients, we often take an inventory of when and where they find satisfaction to reveal any changes that need to be made.

Together, we work on discovering—or re-discovering—what it is that lights you up inside. The idea is to build on what's working and to let go of what's not. That way, you can lean into a life you actually love.

The good news is that a more fulfilling life is calling to you from the other side. Keep going. In the words of Carl Jung, "the privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are."

Angela Myles Beeching is a career consultant and the author of Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music. *Angela works with individuals, ensembles, and organizations to facilitate positive change.*