

CAREERGASM

→ *Find Your Way*

TO FEEL-GOOD

WORK

*Bullsh*t-Free
Advice to
Help you
Get After It*

SARAH VERMUNT

➤ MORE PRAISE FOR *CAREERGASM* ➤

“Passionate, honest, and funny, Sarah Vermunt will take you from having no freaking idea what to do to being super jazzed and running down the path towards work that feels good. There *might* even be rainbows. There are so many YES! moments, so many nuggets of smarts and wisdom in this book. Each one is a little nudge; add them all up and you’ll find yourself down the path of a fun and fulfilling career and, just maybe, actually liking Mondays.”

Marc Johns, artist

“A fun, energizing, useful tool for the person who wants more from their work than a way to pay bills. Prepare to engage deeply and transform your work!”

○ ○ ○ Pamela Slim,
author of *Escape from Cubicle Nation* and *Body of Work*

“For those looking to throw their careers in the air and start fresh, *Careergasm* gives you a fun, friendly, and fierce approach of exactly how to do that. You’ll find yourself reading and laughing your way to your boss’s office to quit. Filled with both comedic and motivational punches, *Careergasm* will help you see there is more to life than a nine to five that makes you roll your eyes every Monday morning.”

Jen Glantz, author of
Always a Bridesmaid (For Hire)

“With trademark wit and wisdom, Sarah Vermunt’s *Careergasm* calls out our passion and marries it to practicality to help us produce the kind of career we’ve all been dreaming of.”

Christina Crook, author of
The Joy of Missing Out: Finding Balance in a Wired World

“A bible for anyone of any age who wants to take a career leap. My copy is lovingly filled with dog-eared pages so that I can come back to Sarah’s wisdom over and over.”

Tiffany Pratt,
designer and author of *This Can Be Beautiful*

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Published by ECW Press
665 Gerrard Street East
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4M 1Y2
416-694-3348 / info@ecwpress.com

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Early versions of some of these chapters were published at *Forbes, Inc., Entrepreneur,* and the *Huffington Post*.

The publication of *Careergasm* has been generously supported by the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund. *Ce livre est financé en partie par le gouvernement du Canada.* We also acknowledge the contribution of the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit and the Ontario Media Development Corporation.



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Canada

PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA

PRINTING: Marquis 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA
CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Vermunt, Sarah, 1980–, author
Careergasm : find your way to feel-good work /
Sarah Vermunt.

Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN 978-1-77041-371-9 (paperback)
ALSO ISSUED AS: 978-1-77090-988-5 (pdf)
978-1-77090-987-8 (epub)

1. Career changes. I. Title.

HF5384.V47 2017 650.14 C2016-
906345-3 C2016-906346-1

Editor for the press: Jen Knoch
Cover design: David A. Gee
Author photo: Anushila Shaw

for
anyone
who
dreads
Monday
morning

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WHAT IS A CAREERGASM?

What is a Careergasm? Does it feel as good as it sounds?

You bet your ass it does. A careergasm happens when your work feels good. Like, *really* good. Like a groovin' Marvin Gaye song. Like you and your work *belong* together. It happens when you feel connected to your work — when you choose it, and it chooses you — and when you want to keep coming back for more.

When you're on the right career path, it feels like a vocation, a calling. You feel like you're doing exactly what you're meant to do and what comes naturally to you. Your work leaves you feeling happy and satisfied and full — not every day, but most of the time.

A careergasm happens when you want the one you're with. You've got a hot date every Monday morning, and you show up over and over and over again because it just feels right.

It's hard to describe a careergasm to someone who has never had one. All you can do is smile knowingly and say, "Just you wait. It's amazing. And worth every bit of effort it takes to get there." Because it *does* take effort. Like anything good, you have to work at it. This book will help you do the work you need to do to get there.

Maybe you've had a careergasm before, but things have fizzled out. You've lost that lovin' feelin'. If your work used to be hot, and now it's not, it's either time to spice things up or time to move on. Some things aren't meant to stay in our lives forever. That includes old passions that have burned out. Maybe it's time to let go and move in another direction.

But how do you get your mojo back when you're in a passionless relationship with your work? One step at a time, baby. Every day there are people all over the world doing just that — letting go and taking a bold step in a new direction. I'm here to help you take yours. It's time to feel good again.

I QUIT

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I had a breakdown in the middle of a crowded Starbucks.

I was working on my dissertation. I hated it. I had hated it for a long time, but on that day something in me just broke. I was miserable, and my capacity for faking interest — even *mild* interest — in something I hated was exhausted. I couldn't do it anymore. Not for another second. I don't know why it happened at that particular time on that particular day. I didn't see it coming. Maybe I should have, but I didn't.

I felt myself start to unravel. My stomach twisted, and I felt an icy hot flash of panic pulse through my body. To my horror, I made a scene. I cried. We're not talking a quiet, single-tear cry. We're talking the fast and furious

flood kind, with a snotty nose and choppy, heaving breaths. I was shaking so hard I nearly spilled my coffee all over my laptop. I rushed to gather my things so I could leave and save myself the public embarrassment, but it was too late. I watched the whole affair unfold from up above, outside of my own body. I thought, *So this is what a breakdown looks like*. It was awful. And exactly what I needed.

The next day I walked into my Ph.D. supervisor's office and told him I was quitting, four years into my Ph.D. and 93 pages into my dissertation. I'd keep my teaching job until the end of the year, but I was leaving. A career as a professor was not for me.

I was afraid of what people would think. I was afraid I'd look like a failure. I was afraid I'd lose everything I'd worked for. I was afraid it would kill me.

But I did it anyway. I listened to the little voice.

I am so proud of that decision. It's the hardest decision I've ever made, and one of the best. Quitting was a gift I finally found the guts to give myself.

That happened four years ago, and since then I've devoted my life to helping people quit jobs they hate, to helping them get the hell out of Dodge when they just can't take it anymore. I took all of that experience from teaching at a business school and spun it into something new, something that feels *way* better. That broken-down woman at Starbucks is now a career coach, helping other people to take their power back and choose something better.

If you're lost or struggling or unhappy in your work, know that I know what that feels like. So do a lot of people. *Gallup*, *Forbes*, and the *New York Times* report that more than half of Americans are unhappy and disengaged in their work. What most of us don't realize is that your breaking point is actually freedom calling.

In the following pages, it's my hope to help you find the strength to turn away from work you hate and the courage to move toward work you love. I'm going to help you ask the right questions, dig deep, and figure out what you actually want. I'm also going to help you address your fear and resistance so you can say, *Fuck it. Yes, I'm terrified, but it's worth it. Let's do this.*

xo

Sarah

P.S. I changed the names and identifying details of pretty much everyone in this book. Because I'm not an asshole. May their stories, and my own, give you the loving kick in the pants you need to find your way to feel-good work.



LOOKING FOR CLUES



YOU'LL NEVER FIND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR
IF YOU KEEP LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACE.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT



People say one of the hardest things to do in the pursuit of a happy career is figure out what kind of work you actually want to do. I agree with that.

Kind of.

In fact, I'd say it's something more like this: One of the hardest things to do in the pursuit of a happy career is *admitting to yourself* what kind of work you actually want to do. There's a big difference between not knowing what you want and not admitting what you want.

Most of the people who come to me for career coaching feel lost. They don't know what they want. At least, they *think* they don't know what they want. But more than half of

the time — hell, *most* of the time — the problem has nothing to do with knowing; it's the fear associated with desire.

There's nothing more terrifying than admitting what you actually want — especially if you think you can't have it.

For most, the problem isn't that you don't know what you want. It's that you're scared shitless to want it. Admitting that you want something means doing something about it. It means you're either going to be on the hook for making it happen, or going to knowingly let yourself down. And I don't even have to tell you which of those two outcomes is tougher on you in the long run.

There's nothing more terrifying
than admitting what you actually
want — especially if you think
you can't have it.

Saying you don't know what you want is easier because it makes you the poor schmuck who's in the dark. *But I would tooooooally pursue my passion if only I knew what it was.* Is that really true? I'd be willing to bet that on some level, there is a very wise part of you that knows exactly what you want.

Some people live their whole lives trying to hide from their own truth. Don't go through life willingly playing the part of the poor schmuck.

Here's what I'm talking about:

BANKER: I've got to get out of this god-forsaken profession, but I don't know what I want to do.

ME: What kind of work do you think would make you happy?

BANKER: I don't know.

ME: [*activating stern librarian glare*] Is that really true? You have no idea what would make you happy?

BANKER: Yes. I don't know.

ME: [*radio silence + raised eyebrow (the facial equivalent of calling double bullshit)*]

BANKER: Okay. I've actually always wanted to be a brewmaster, but I can't do *that*!

BINGO.

If this resonates with you, then, honey, your problem is not that you don't know what you want. It's that you're afraid to want it. And those are two very different things.

Think the banker-turned-brewmaster example is far-fetched? Think again. A client of mine made that exact transition. And he did it several years into his profession, and while raising two young boys. He even took a crappy minimum wage job at a brewery one summer, so he could

learn the industry. He was paying the nanny more per hour to watch the kids than he was making. If you're afraid to let yourself want what you want because you think you can't have it, just remember the banker-turned-brewmaster.

Consider the following question, and answer it honestly:

*Are you really as lost as you think you are,
or are you just afraid?*

Maybe that question feels like a relief to you. Maybe you're thinking, *OMG, deep down I DO know what I want, but I don't know how to get it. I'm terrified!*

Or maybe that question really pisses you off. Maybe you're thinking, *Listen, lady, you have no idea how much I've struggled with this. I really DON'T know what I want, and I'm trying really fucking hard to figure it out.* If this is you, hang in there. I'm going to help you return to the part of yourself that knows.

If you truly don't know what you want, chances are you lost touch with your desire somewhere along the way. At some point in time, you pushed that desire waaaaay down to a place where you're now able to tell yourself, convincingly, that you don't know what you want. Maybe you did this after college, or when you started a family. Maybe earlier. Maybe you pushed that desire down when you were an anxious teenager worried about your future, or when you were an obedient child trying your best to

show your parents love and gratitude, no matter the cost. You may have pushed that desire down so long ago that you don't even know how to access it anymore.

But it's there. And if you're willing, I can help you find it.

AND THE SURVEY SAYS . . .



Have you ever taken one of those aptitude inventories that tells you what you should be when you grow up? You know the kind. *Based on this 10-minute survey, you're destined to be either an accountant or a lion tamer!*

These types of assessments can be comforting and are sometimes a good starting point, but without some more introspection they're also often the reason why people get stuck in the wrong career. When it comes time to make a career decision, many people take the easy road and do what an assessment tells them to do, with little further inquiry.

Maybe you took that road, too. Maybe you picked your career based on what you were told to do by a career inventory, or an aptitude test, or a personality assessment . . .

or a guidance counselor, friend, parent, spouse, teacher, or mentor. These people all probably had the best of intentions, but they had no real way of knowing what's best for *you*. Only you know that.

On the one hand, that's awesome! As Glinda the Good Witch would say, "You had the power all along!" On the other hand, *Holy pressure, Batman*. That's why so many people cave to someone else's career advice: It *seems* easier. But sometimes the easy road actually gets you lost, even when you follow directions and do everything "right."

Have you ever done that? Followed someone else's directions only to get lost? It's infuriating. You probably could have done your own navigation and been just fine, but it seemed safer, more prudent, to get directions from someone else, just to make sure you're going the right way. Then when you get lost, you think, *WTF?! I thought these directions were supposed to get me where I wanted to go!*

Sometimes you take direction from others and get exactly where you were supposed to go — only when you get there, it looks nothing like you thought it would. You think, *This is it? THIS is the place I've been working so hard to get to? What a letdown*. You want to get the hell out of there, but you have no idea which way to turn. You've "arrived," but you're also lost.

If you're feeling lost in your career, chances are you'll have to dig a little deeper to see which path is best for you.

Sometimes
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When a highway is about to be resurfaced, first the road has to be milled — you have to dig beneath the surface and expose what’s underneath to make a foundation so the new road will actually stick. The milled road is kind of bumpy and corrugated, like corduroy. The old road has to be ground away before the new one can be laid.

It’s the same for buildings. You have to dig beneath the surface to build a foundation. This is the most important step. If you get the foundation wrong, you can’t properly support what you build.

What do roads and buildings have to do with your career? On the off chance that you’re in construction, lots. On the more likely chance that you’re not, this: *If you want to build something that will last, you’re going to have to dig deep first.*

You need to get in touch with what you actually want. What you want will be different from what I want, and what your mother wants, and what your best friend wants. That’s why following someone else’s advice (whether it’s dispensed by your dad or a guidance counselor or a

If you want to build something
that will last, you’re going
to have to dig deep first.

sophisticated career assessment) doesn't always work. You are unique: Nobody but *you* can get it right.

We're not meant to be pigeonholed: You're one of a kind, and your career should be, too.

ACTIVATE YOUR INNER TODDLER



If you have a toddler, or know one, or were one once, you know that they are *not* shy about expressing their feelings. They can go from squeals of delight to a raging hissy fit in 10 seconds flat . . . and vice versa.

A new Spiderman action figure? Pure joy! But ask him to share it with his little sister, and you've got a miniature Godzilla on your hands.

Toddlers aren't very concerned with social norms. They wear their feelings on the outside. They're still relatively new to the planet, so they haven't picked up all of the rules yet. And is that really such a bad thing?

As adults, we play by the rules and do what's expected of us. We're polite, proper, and professional. We don't do a

happy dance in the middle of a crowded street. We don't cry and kick and scream in a vocal range audible only to dogs.

Well, aren't you a little bit sick of that? Aren't there times when you want to kick and scream and make a scene because you have to do something you hate? And aren't there times when you want to squeal with delight and do a goofy little jig, but you don't because you're afraid people will think you've flipped your lid?

When it comes to your career — and, hell, when it comes to life — I think we'd be better off if we embraced our inner toddlers a little more often.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you call your boss a poo-poo head (if you must, please line up another job first), or pout and stomp around when you don't get that promotion (okay, maybe in private). I'm simply suggesting that you *notice* what makes you want to throw a raging fit. *Notice* what makes you want to squeal with delight. These are MAJOR clues on the path to feel-good work.

A friend of mine is a business consultant with a big firm. They have lots of rules — even rules about her shoes. She's allowed to wear pointy-toed high heels, but not square-toed ones. When I hear this, I think, *OMG, kill me now*. I would never survive there. That is just too many rules for me — not to mention ridiculous.

Stupid rules make me want to throw a hissy fit. Other things on my hissy fit list include pointless meetings, mindless small talk, annoying jargon, networking events, and

boring research journals. All of these things make me want to throw myself on the ground and carry on like a toddler who's just been told it's time to leave the splash pad.

What's on your hissy fit list? Think about it. What rules do you long to stop following? What do you wish you never had to do again? What makes you want to flop around like a fish in the candy aisle of a crowded grocery store?

Go ahead and make a list. Include things from your work life that you hate, but feel free to add other things, too. Non work-related things on my hissy fit list: wine (I've tried to like it for years, but I think it's gross and I'm sick of trying to like it just because everyone else does) and messy spaces (the thought of curling up and watching Netflix in a room with yesterday's dirty dishes within sight gives me hives).

Now, let's look at the other side of the inner toddler spectrum: squeals of delight. What lights you up? What makes you feel like a kid with a bag of Skittles and a Kool-Aid-stained grin?

I'm talking about work things *and* non-work things. Some things on my squeals of delight list: bright nail polish, rivers and mountains, alone time, pretty stationery, writing, deep conversation, beautiful design, organizing, planning, nurturing others, problem solving, and working with delightful people one-on-one.

If you look at both of your lists, you'll probably notice some themes. Don't expect a specific job title to pop out at

you. We're not there yet. Just look at your lists and see if any themes emerge.

Need some help? I'll show you what I mean. Let's take a look at my own lists.

My hissy fit list tells me that I'm *reeeeally* not into shallow connections or interactions. It also tells me that I'm not into traditional corporate stuff, and that doing something just because it's conventional makes me feel like crap.

My squeals of delight list suggests that I like things that are fun and a little bit kooky. I'm also a visual person. Art and design matter to me. And space and nature make me feel good.

What makes you feel
like a kid with a bag
of Skittles and a
Kool-Aid-stained grin?

Return to your own lists and see what you can learn. It should be obvious, but I'll go ahead and say it anyway: Put some distance between yourself and the stuff on your hissy fit list, and move toward the things that feel like pure delight.

*But I can't stop doing the things I hate!
That would mean a total overhaul!*

Uh . . . yeah. Maybe that's exactly what you need.

*And I can't devote more time to stuff I love.
It's not practical! People will think I'm nuts!*

Dude. Who cares? This is your life we're talking about. You're supposed to enjoy it. It's time you took your life back. Embrace your inner toddler. Live a little. I'll meet you by the splash pad.

CHILD GENIUS



You may feel like you've lost your connection with the things you used to be passionate about. You might even forget what they were. But you can reconnect with some of your natural passions if you look back far enough into your past. Like, *waaaaay* back, to when you were eight years old. There's career navigation gold back there.

What did you love to do when you were eight?

Seriously, think about it.

When I was eight, I loved to play teacher. I loved to organize lessons and I loved to give away stickers. Okay, maybe it was mostly about the stickers. I had a pretty awesome sticker collection. My favorite one smelled like grape.

I loved taking care of animals, too. Kittens, in particular. There's a photo of me as a kid on my tricycle with a sandcastle bucket dangling from the handlebars and a kitten tucked into the bucket. That poor kitten was probably terrified, but my heart was in the right place.

I also *looooooved* to make stuff. Any stuff. Crafts were my thing. I made things with pipe cleaners and beads and brought them to craft shows with my mom. Bless the kind little old ladies who paid me a quarter for them. It made my heart soar.

What games and activities did you love as a kid? These things will have no obvious connection with your career, and that's okay. My pipe-cleaner-and-bead doohickey hobby was not exactly scalable, and as of yet I have been unable to build a viable business giving tricycle rides to kittens (still crossing my fingers, though).

Forget about the career implications for now, and just think about the stuff you used to love as a kid. Can't remember? Ask a parent or sibling. Other things on my own list include coloring, reading, writing stories and plays, sewing my own scrunchies, making collages, and looking for critters in the creek (pronounced "crick," if you want to say it the proper country girl way). Some of my clients say their favorite things were Legos, puzzles, building sandcastles, baseball, soccer, playing dress-up, making forts, painting, playing cops and robbers.

When you think about the stuff you loved as a kid, do you see any themes emerge? What are your childhood

passions trying to tell you? For example, is a lot of that stuff creative? Outdoorsy? Analytical? Nurturing? Solitary? Social?

Does it involve building? Problem solving? Logic? Using your hands? Helping people? Making something? Adventure? Imagination? You see where I'm going with this.

Themes like these are clues for finding a feel-good career. If you loved it when you were eight, chances are there's something you love about it *still*.

If you loved it when you were eight,
chances are there's something
you love about it *still*.

Also try to remember what things you were most proud of. My standout moments include a second-grade story about the Easter Bunny and a pair of Air Jordan shoes, and writing and performing in a bunch of student council skits, in which I usually cast myself as either Dr. Evil from *Austin Powers* or Brain from *Pinky and the Brain*.

Were you a star athlete? An artist? A musician? An actor? An entertainer? A builder? A leader? An advocate? A nurturer? A change-maker? A creative thinker? A communicator? A public speaker? A debater? A researcher? A

writer? A scientist? A designer? An organizer? A relationship builder? A director? A documentarian? An academic?

What exactly were you proud of, and why? Think of a few examples.

Now, I took pride in my Easter Bunny Air Jordan story and my wacky plays based on '90s characters, not because I was destined to do that forever, but because there's a connection to creativity and writing there. As it turns out, those things are really important for me in my career.

If there's a unifying theme that emerges and links some of the things you were proud of as a kid or a teenager, it *means* something — even now, all these years later.

It's possible that somewhere along the way, you convinced yourself (or more likely someone else did) that the things that make you proud and bring you fulfillment are silly. Or impractical. Or not of value.

Bullshit.

You need to invite fulfillment back into your life. It isn't silly. It's not impractical. It *does* have value. You need to find a way back to the things that fill you up — because wouldn't it be awesome if your career felt like one big playdate?

OBSSESSED

My brother Brad has an undergraduate degree in mathematics and a master's degree in biology. Right now you're probably picturing him working as a scientist and wearing a white lab coat at work every day. If so, you're wrong. Dead wrong.

He's a television writer.

For as long as I can remember, Brad has been obsessed with television. Not the "get home from work and slump in front of the tube for hours of mindless consumption" kind of thing (that's just numbing out). Brad was always, and continues to be, an engaged television enthusiast, especially television comedy.

He could (and does) watch, analyze, discuss, critique, and create television for several hours every day. He gets caught up in it and loses all track of time when he's fully immersed in it. I can't think of anything he loves to do more.

Brad probably could have had a steady gig with great pay working in the sciences after completing his master's degree. He's a smart guy with a talent for math and science, and he's even had some of his research published in scientific journals. But that's not what he wanted for his career.

He didn't exactly hate biology, but he didn't love it either. In his spare time during his degree, he wrote scripts as a hobby. He wrote, filmed, acted in, and edited a web series and a cable-access sketch comedy series. None of this made him any money. He just loved it so much that he felt compelled to do it.

Impractical and far-fetched as it seemed, Brad decided to change course completely to try to make his television writer dream a reality. He graduated with his master's degree in biology on a Friday and began his studies in film and television writing the next Monday. He poured what little money he had into it. He lived in a shitty apartment and worked part-time as a math tutor to make it happen. It wasn't (and still isn't) glamorous or lucrative, but now he's doing what he loves and getting paid for it.

A former colleague of mine, Krissy, has long been fascinated by and obsessed with wine. And I'm not talking about popping a bottle every night to dull the ache of a

stressful day — she is a bona fide wine *nut*. She loves everything about wine — the way the wine world is always evolving, so there’s always something to learn; and how there are never really wrong answers because taste is so subjective; and how wine can transport you to another time and place, just like an old song.

Krissy used to work as a recruiter. Now she works in the wine industry. She picked up her entire life and made the 2,500-mile move from Toronto to Summerland, British Columbia, to pursue a career in wine. She reinvented her career entirely (a gutsy move!), and the life she has built with her partner and her beautiful daughter is nothing short of inspiring. I smile every time I see her happy updates pop up on Facebook and Instagram.

I know a woman who is a natural born artist. She’s *always* been an artist at heart, but while her parents appreciated art, they told her that “the artist thing is for other people, not you.” This message stayed with her for 30 years into her career as she pursued various “practical” options, most recently in academia. For her Ph.D. dissertation defense, she wanted to visually transform her research into dissolving points of light, like a disco ball (which is certainly not the norm). She is whip-smart and incredibly knowledgeable, but a traditional dissertation felt too constraining to her. It *had* to be communicated through art. It was the only way. I asked her, “Is it possible you’re an artist and not an academic?” She is now pursuing more of her art

and leaning further into the arts in her career. Finally! It only took her 30 years!

Another woman, Anushila, fell in love with photography during college, but she was convinced to study law because she believed it was a safer track — jobs were for money and passions could be hobbies. So she went to law school, kicked ass, and got an enviable gig at a big law firm in New York. But she soon realized she didn't like the life of a law firm associate. One of the things Anushila did to cope with feeling stuck in the wrong profession was to play with photography again. She didn't have much time for it, but it felt like an escape, and it brought her joy. Even while working in law, she began to pursue photography seriously. Some of her work was short-listed for *National Geographic*. *National Geographic*! The photographer's gold standard! She eventually decided to leave law and pursue photography full-time. She has her own business now, is a published fashion photographer, and is doing her master's in fashion photography in New York. I couldn't be happier for her.

Is there something in your life that you're obsessed with? Some kind of persistent fascination or curiosity?

Lean in to your
obsessions and fascinations.
Indulge your passions.

What makes you lose track of time? When have you been so completely engaged in an activity that you felt fully energized, like you could go on forever?

Those things are clues. Lean in to your obsessions and fascinations. Indulge your passions. Who knows where they might lead you?

A NOTE FROM SARAH

Howdy friend!

Thanks so much for checking out *Careergasm: Find Your Way to Feel Good Work*. There is SO much more where that came from. We're just getting started! There are more clues to collect — more inklings and whispers to help you find you way. We're going to take those inklings and whispers and spin them into career magic.

We'll also talk about fear and resistance and the age-old question *But what if I end up living in a van down by the river?!* Don't worry, babe. Not gonna happen. I've got you. We'll also talk about ambition (the bad kind and the good kind), everybody's two cents, and how to get started building a life and a career that feels really good to you.

You can order your copy of *Careergasm* right here at the links below. And I'd love your help to spread the word! You probably know a person (or two, or ten) who hates their job, who feels lost, or who's just kind of . . . stuck. Tell them about this book. Or buy them a copy and you can work through the book together. Invite me into your organization to speak. Have me on your podcast. Interview me for your newspaper or magazine or blog. Or just connect me with people who would love to do that. I'm on a mission to help people get happy at work and you can be a part of that.



Grab your copy of the book here and join the movement. Sending you oodles of good vibes as you find you way to feel-good work.

XO Sarah

