

## Living in More Than One World: Peter Drucker on Work/Life

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**By:** [Bruce Rosenstein](#)

In a legendary 70-year career, Peter Drucker, “the father of modern management,” revolutionized modern business practices, transforming management theory into a serious discipline.

His influence was far-reaching, extending to developments that included decentralization, privatization, and empowerment. He was among the first to address the emergence of the information society and, in 1959 he coined the term “knowledge worker.”

Yet most people don't know that Drucker's teachings on personal growth—or *self*-management—are as profound as his views on organizational management. This wisdom, while a recurring theme in Drucker's work, has remained scattered throughout his myriad writings—until now.

### Creating a Total Life

Drucker personified the value of creating and living a “total life” with diverse interests, relationships, and pursuits; what he called “living in more than one world.” The idea is that when you have a setback in one area—suffering or surviving a layoff, for instance—you can soften the blow by developing other areas of strength and support. You can also add new meaning and dimensions to your life and, by getting involved with activities such as volunteer work, make a difference in the lives of others.

**So, how do you create a total life? Consider the following five key elements as exemplified by Drucker himself:**

#### 1. Practice self-development

Self-development is a major theme throughout Drucker's writings and teachings. “What matters,” he said, “is that the knowledge worker, by the time he or she reaches middle age, has developed and nourished a human being rather than a tax accountant or a hydraulic engineer.” Think about your life, both as it is now and where you'd like to be. Consider not just your work, but also your family, friends, interests, activities, and pursuits. Assess what's working, what's not, and what you might want to add or subtract to create more satisfaction and fulfillment.

#### 2. Identify and develop your unique strengths

The concept of core competencies may have been created for organizations, but today it applies to individuals as well. Drucker urged people to consciously articulate their own strengths. Consider what's unique about what you do, and in what areas you excel and contribute the most, both at work and outside of work. Focus on those strengths—your own core competencies—and find new ways to value and cultivate them. Odds are you can apply them to a variety of jobs, volunteer positions, and more.

#### 3. Create a parallel or second career

Drucker said, “The purpose of the work on making the future is not to decide what should be done tomorrow, but what should be done today to have a tomorrow.” One unique idea he advocated was creating a “parallel career” in areas such as teaching, writing, or working in nonprofit organizations. He also encouraged developing a second career, often by doing similar work in a significantly different setting—a lawyer, for instance, might move from a traditional law firm to a legal nonprofit dedicated to a personally meaningful cause. While still in your main job, start thinking about your own possibilities for a parallel or second career. Consider how to match your values, experience, and education, and what shifts you might need to make in your life to support such changes.

#### 4. Exercise your generosity

An essential part of living in more than one world, Drucker believed, is displaying a sense of generosity. Here, he said, “...everybody is a leader, everybody is responsible, everybody acts.” Sharing your time and talents by getting involved in volunteerism, social entrepreneurship, and mentoring not only provide opportunities to contribute, but also offer personal benefits, from broadening and deepening your life experience to expanding your circle of friends and colleagues. Think about what happens outside your workplace—in other industries, professions, and walks of life—and consider ways you can exercise your own generosity.

## **5. Teach and learn**

Education plays a key role in Drucker's vision of a strong, functioning society. He believed that knowledge workers should never stop learning. However, it's up to them, he said, to incorporate continuous learning as a natural part of daily life—deciding what and how they'd like to learn and determining how they'll build in the time. Consider your own priorities for learning, as well as how you learn best—taking classes, reading articles and books, asking or observing others, etc. You might also want to teach. As Drucker acknowledged, “No one learns as much as the person who must teach his subject.”

## **Start Where You Are**

Drucker's tenets can help you create a more satisfying and meaningful personal life and career. Here are seven tips for getting started:

### **1. Focus on achievement—not money**

Drucker drew an important distinction between achievement and money. He suggested focusing on achievement and paying attention to how your successes, on and off the job, benefit both you and others. That doesn't mean you shouldn't or won't make money, but that the pursuit of money ought to play a subordinate role.

### **2. Make time for thinking**

Thinking is hard work, and in our fast-paced society, said Drucker, it is sorely devalued. The point, he urged, is to break from the daily grind and think about where you are and where you're going. You might not have the desire or means

for Drucker's suggested “week in the wilderness,” but surely you can carve out an hour now and then for self-reflection. Take a walk, practice yoga or meditation, or enjoy nature.

### **3. Practice “systematic abandonment”**

“People are effective because they say no...because they say, ‘This isn't for me,’” declared Drucker. Practice what he called “systematic abandonment”—stepping back, at regular intervals, to determine which of your present activities can be scaled back or eliminated. Only then can you make way for something more fruitful, such as teaching, learning, or volunteering.

### **4. Volunteer your time and talent**

Drucker saw volunteerism as essential to the smooth functioning of society, as well as a satisfying way of ensuring that work doesn't consume your life. Today, there are hundreds of volunteering opportunities to choose from. Drucker's recommendation was simple: Find an organization and cause you believe in—and get to work!

### **5. Become a mentor**

Mentorship may be broader than just showing someone the ropes in a group or organization. It can include wide-ranging career and life advice, and as Drucker said, provide big benefits not only to the “mentee” but also to the mentor. If you've been guided by mentors of your own, pay it forward by mentoring others. If not, look for opportunities to both mentor and be mentored.

### **6. Learn the art of leisure**

Drucker observed that “loafing” is easy, but “leisure” is difficult. As important as work is, avoid allowing it to be your only source of fulfillment. Find some outside interests; focus on things that may bring you pleasure, satisfaction, and a heightened sense of self-worth.

### **7. Be the CEO of your own life**

Drucker saw self-management as an ongoing discipline, requiring self-knowledge, introspection, and personal responsibility. “In effect,” he said, “managing oneself demands that each knowledge worker think and behave like a chief executive officer.” Start now to think of yourself as the CEO of your own life and career. Take accountability for your decisions and actions. Know who you are, what is important to you, and how you will contribute at work and in the world.

Finally, take a deep breath and don't expect everything to happen at once. Start where you are and move towards *your* total life, one step at a time.

## About the Author(s)

### **Bruce Rosenstein**

Bruce Rosenstein is the author of *Living in More Than One World: How Peter Drucker's Wisdom Can Inspire and Transform Your Life* (Berrett-Koehler, 2009). A former business writer and librarian at *USA Today*, he has studied, interviewed, and written about Peter Drucker for more than two decades. For more information, visit [www.brucerosenstein.com](http://www.brucerosenstein.com)