

How Will You Measure Your Life?¹

Reviewed by Major Edward L. Westfall*

And he was rich—yes—richer than a king. And admirably schooled in every grace: In fine we thought he was everything. To make us wish that we were in his place. So on we worked and waited for the light, and went without the meat and cursed the bread; and Richard Cory, one calm summer night, went home and put a bullet to his head.²

I. Introduction

While brutal, there is no better illustration of the maxim “money can’t buy happiness” than the poem and tale of Mr. Richard Cory.³ Professionals can find enormous financial success and often end up with a shallow job and nonexistent personal lives. In the book, *How Will You Measure Your Life*, Professor Clayton Christensen of Harvard Business School (along with James Allworth and Karen Dillon) argues that these unseen fissures result from a systemic misbalance of personal and professional satisfaction.⁴ His inspiration is based primarily on the dissonance between financial success and personal happiness that he witnessed in his students and business colleagues.⁵ The book is a noble attempt to apply several leading business theories to one’s personal life. The book succeeds in some areas, and falls short in others.

The author is at his strongest when applying these principles to charting a course for genuine *professional* satisfaction. The analysis becomes strained, however, when applying these same principles to common facets of *personal* life, such as marital relationships and child rearing. This review will examine the two primary sections of the book that apply business theories to professional and personal satisfaction, respectively, as well as discuss some, but not all, of the applied theories, evaluate their effectiveness, and highlight any use they may have to the career or personal life of a military professional.

Of note, the author does not provide any formal references or sources, which is an overall issue with the composition of the book. When it was possible to glean enough reference information concerning a specific theory,

the primary source of the theory was consulted and referenced in this review if appropriate. However, the lack of references makes it difficult to truly scrutinize some concepts the author discusses. Many theories appear to be derived from several academic articles published over several years. Furthermore, in one case, the author’s cited support is not found within the referenced source.⁶ While there are obvious problems, this book still contains some insights of value to a military officer.

II. A Better Title: How to Chart Your Career

For two reasons, a more apt title for this book would be *How to Chart your Career*. First, this title highlights the most effective part of the author’s work. As analyzed below, the author makes several strong points, deftly explained in simple terms, on ways any professional can approach career planning with greater ease. Second, the crux of the author’s analysis is really how to navigate the important decisions of life, not measure them.

The first section of the book makes four primary points. First, the author makes an argument (that is echoed throughout both sections) for the value of sound theory versus anecdote.⁷ Second, he discusses three main business theories that can help any professional in making decisions throughout a career. These concepts vary from valuing more than just your annual salary when making job decisions, being open to unforeseen opportunities, and lastly, understanding the importance of applying one’s resources to the right priorities.⁸

As argued by Professor Christensen, in its most basic form, a theory attempts to describe the true reasons for a certain phenomenon while an anecdote merely represents a story of how one thing worked at one time.⁹ While quite simple, this is one of the more valuable lessons of the book. In attempting to learn from the past successes of any business or individual, you must give more weight to the theory or process that was used, not the specific facts of any given success story. One should always try to replicate *how*

* Judge Advocate, U.S. Army. Student, 63rd Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate Gen.’s Legal Ctr. & Sch., U.S. Army, Charlottesville, VA.

¹ CLAYTON M. CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *HOW WILL YOU MEASURE YOUR LIFE* (2012). See also *HOW WILL YOU MEASURE YOUR LIFE?*, www.measureyourlife.com/authors (last visited July 29, 2015).

² EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON, *RICHARD CORY* (Magill’s Survey of American Literature Revised Edition, William Sheick ed., Salem Press 2007) (1897).

³ *Id.*

⁴ CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 3-4.

⁵ *Id.* at 7.

⁶ See *infra* note 30.

⁷ *Id.* at 12.

⁸ *Id.* at 21-75.

⁹ *Id.* at 12.

an organization or individual tackled a problem and not simply mimic *what* they did to tackle the problem.¹⁰

A. Motivation/Hygiene Theory

The first theory discussed for charting a satisfying professional life is the Motivation/Hygiene Theory.¹¹ The author uses this theory to counter the prevailing belief that a higher salary equals higher job satisfaction—otherwise known as the Incentive Theory.¹² In contrast to Incentive Theory, the Motivation/Hygiene Theory attempts a more nuanced and complex calculus of what can truly lead to professional satisfaction.¹³

To summarize this theory, job satisfaction is based on two factors: hygiene factors and motivation factors. The hygiene factors are those which closely parallel the factors discussed by Incentive Theory such as salary, prestige, the size of one's office, etc.¹⁴ This theory, however, departs from Incentive Theory when it argues that satisfaction is also made up of "motivation factors."¹⁵ These factors include the perceived importance of someone's work, the intrinsic value of being challenged, and the opportunity to solve new problems.¹⁶ This theory poses that these motivation factors may or may not always equate with higher hygiene factors such as increased salary.¹⁷ As the proponent of the theory, Frederick Herzberg argues that a lack of hygiene factors can obviously promote job dissatisfaction but high hygiene factors do not necessarily cause high job satisfaction.¹⁸ In essence, you need the basics of a decent wage and working conditions to ensure an employee is not dissatisfied. However, a job needs to provide the intrinsic values of achievement, recognition, advancement, and personal

growth in order to move that employee from just being "not dissatisfied" to truly satisfied.¹⁹

The author's application of this theory is a strong argument that should ring true for any military professional. For anyone in the military, the fact that your paycheck comes on time and is enough to support you and your family's basic needs is obviously important. However there are plenty of judge advocates and other military officers who are paid on time every month and would still say that they are not satisfied with their job. Specific research on this issue is well beyond the scope of this review, but it is a logical assumption that the definition of true satisfaction for any judge advocate can come, at least in part, from their perceived value to their office, their ability to be trusted with more responsibility, and the opportunity to tackle new problem sets.

This theory can help a judge advocate in assessing both himself and in leading other Soldiers. In deciding a career path, any officer would be wise to consider how a new position may personally challenge them and give them increased levels of responsibility. In the supervision of other Soldiers, judge advocates should take this theory into account when trying to motivate subordinates to accomplish the mission. You can always order a Soldier to do something and he will most likely do it. But if you can craft a work environment that allows for personal growth, increased responsibility, and new challenges, he just may *want* to do it.

B. Knowing When to Plan and Knowing When to Improvise

"Only a few lucky companies start off with the strategy that ultimately leads to success."²⁰ Professor Christensen argues that one must apply both emergent and deliberate strategies when trying to chart your career. The key to making the right decision when faced with a fork in the road along your career path is understanding the difference between "deliberate strategy" and "emergent strategy." A deliberate strategy is one that is well thought out in advance and encompasses a longer time horizon of a year to several years. For many professionals, this would be your five year plan. An emergent strategy is a plan based upon new and unexpected information or opportunities that disrupt your initial deliberate strategy. The author illustrates this dilemma with the challenges Honda faced in the 1990s while attempting to enter the U.S. motorcycle market.²¹

This application also represents one of the more valuable portions of the book that is also directly relatable to career choices faced by judge advocates. The true value of this theory does not lie in the advice that you should be open

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.* at 29.

¹² Michael Jensen and William Meckling, *Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behavior, Agency Costs and Ownership Structure*, *Journal of Financial Economics*, October, 1976, V. 3, No. 4, pp. 305-60. Incentive theory as proposed by Jensen and Meckling is that a business runs best when the personal profit interests of management are aligned with those of the shareholders hence the concept of stock options, among other compensation packages. According to the author of *How to Measure Your Life*, this has become a dominant school of thought for corporations and executive compensation. *Supra* note 1, at 30.

¹³ CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 29-34.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 31.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* at 32.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Frederick Herzberg, *One More Time: How do you Motivate Employees?*, *Harvard Business Review*, September-October 1987, Reprint Number 87507, pp 6-8.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 60.

²¹ *Id.* at 42.

to unforeseen opportunities. That would be a rather severe case of stating the obvious. The true value is in the business decision mechanism the author provides for knowing when to stick to your original plan and when to take advantage of what you did not see coming. This mechanism is known as “discovery driven planning.”²² Its essence is simple: when deciding upon a new course of action that may disrupt your primary long term strategy, you should identify which assumptions you have made that must be true in order for you to have a realistic chance of success.²³ While it sounds like common sense, Professor Christensen details several business decisions over the past 30 years where large and sophisticated corporations failed to do this and lost billions of dollars.²⁴

This principle should not sound unfamiliar to a military officer. Assumptions and their associated risks are a primary focus of the military decision making process.²⁵ Moreover, the iterative review process for emergent and deliberate strategies discussed by the author mirror the “detect-deliver-assess” procedures ingrained into the targeting process of any Army unit’s planning cell.²⁶ While this is a familiar concept, it is valuable for a judge advocate to see it illustrated and applied outside of the military context. This reveals a tool that can help a judge advocate decide between the option of an unforeseen job opportunity (that random phone call from the Personnel, Plans and Training Office) and sticking to a career plan forged several years ago.

III. The Tenuous Application of Business Theory to Family Life

The second section of the book presents additional theories, similar to those discussed above, in an attempt to draw lessons that can be applied to the challenges of marital relationships and raising children. Each theory’s description and business anecdotal illustrations are just as enlightening as those discussed in the first section. However, the author haphazardly applies them to common personal life challenges without the same clarity he used in the previous half of the book.

²² *Id.* at 53; See also Rita McGrath and Ian MacMillan, *Discovery Driven Planning*, Harvard Business Review, July 1995.

²³ See McGrath et al., *supra*, note 23.

²⁴ CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 55-57. The author details the debacle that Disney faced after opening “Euro Disney” without testing the simple assumption that most visitors to the park would stay for three days like they did in the United States. This failure led to roughly a billion dollar lost in two years.

²⁵ U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, DOCTRINE PUB. 5-0, THE OPERATIONS PROCESS (May 2012).

²⁶ U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUEL 3-60, THE TARGETING PROCESS para 2-1 (November 2010).

For example, the author spends a great deal of time explaining the business theory of “Good and Bad Capital.”²⁷ In short, this theory poses that a new business venture should be flexible enough to try various strategies at profitability prior to devoting large amounts of capital towards one strategy.²⁸ This is good advice, despite the fact that it is not supported by the data as strongly as the author claims.²⁹ The author then attempts to tie this theory to the concept that one should not wait to invest in your family until later on in life.³⁰ This is also good advice; however, unlike the previous section, the author fails to draw the clear link between his posed theory and its application. After several re-reads of that chapter, it is still difficult to find the relationship between the family advice he proffers (essentially do not wait until your children are teenagers to become a part of their life) and the theory that new businesses should not rigidly follow their original plan if they truly want to be successful.

In other areas of this section, the author lists superficial anecdotal evidence to support his assertions. For example, another discussion of theory ends with an argument that “sacrifice deepens our commitment” to our families, friends and loved ones.³¹ Little empirical evidence is either cited (or probably even available) to support this platitude. However, the author then provides a very superficial example to prove his point that completely misses the mark. To support his notion, the author gives the example of the U.S. Marine Corps. In a matter of one paragraph he simply states that Marine training is very difficult but yet you still see a lot of “Semper Paratus” bumper stickers across the country.³²

The author then quickly moves on to a discussion of his daughter’s experience as a missionary.

While the Marines may be an example of sacrifice deepening commitment, a cursory example to quickly imply the correlation between rugged basic training and observations of bumper stickers is an unconvincing way to prove your point. This appears to be out of form for an author who does so well tying every anecdote or business

²⁷ CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 87-91.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ See *Id.* at 87. See also AMAR BHIDE, THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF NEW BUSINESS 65 (1999) (electronic copy retrieved at <http://bhide.net/>). The author of *How Will You Measure Your Life* cited Bhide’s book as stating that “93% of successful businesses had to abandon their original idea.” CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 87. Data to support this claim was not found in a review of Bhide’s book and Bhide’s studies actually show that approximately 66% of businesses had to abandon or modify their original business plan. Perhaps the author was citing to a different study by Bhide, but this illustrates the difficulty in assessing this book based on its lack of clear references.

³⁰ CHRISTENSEN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 91.

³¹ *Id.* at 116.

³² *Id.*

example to his primary arguments in the first section of the work.

The second section did have a discussion which is valuable for every judge advocate. The author discusses the importance of building a positive and ethical culture in one's family, by discussing examples of positive corporate cultures found throughout the United States.³³ He poignantly states that "[M]ake no mistake: a culture happens [in a family, business, or any organization] whether you want it or not. The only question is, 'How hard are you going to try to influence it?'"³⁴

As a lesson for setting an ethical climate within a unit or office, this could not hit closer to home for judge advocates. The author's point is that the culture of a family (or office) develops from repetitive observed behaviors. A judge advocate must realize that paralegals, civilian employees, and other officers are always watching. What is allowed once, will be hard to prohibit again; or as the author states "doing the ethical thing 100 percent of the time is easier than 98 percent of the time."³⁵

IV. Conclusion

How Will You Measure Your Life provides an approachable analysis of several business theories that many judge advocates may otherwise never encounter. As previously discussed, these theories can prove valuable when wrestling with the choices associated with a career path and the challenges of leading a team or legal office. These principles can, at the very least, assist leaders in creating an environment in which subordinates achieve professional satisfaction.

The book falls short of its promise to provide theories which can be applied to one's personal life. The analysis and support for these connections prove to be somewhat rushed and stretched to meet the author's purpose. Notwithstanding any theory, we can never be reminded too often to ensure that we devote time to both personal and professional pursuits. One can be "richer than a king" and "schooled in every grace" but still lead a joyless and empty life when it is time to go home for the night.³⁶ Professor Christensen's simple and approachable treatment of these theories is bound to open the eyes of anyone seeking a different set of tools to analyze the tough career and leadership decisions that we must all make.

³³ *Id.* at 160-66.

³⁴ *Id.* at 169.

³⁵ *Id.* at 189.

³⁶ EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON, RICHARD CORY, *supra* note 2.