

## Is Everything Just Play?

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A couple weeks ago, my family got together for breakfast. After a long week, I half-jokingly said to my sister, Arden, that ‘everything is just work now.’ My mom overheard the comment and shrugged. But Arden pushed back and said:

“Maybe. But if everything is work, doesn’t that make it all kind of play?”

“What? No. I guess. Maybe sort of?” I replied.

Nothing more really came of that exchange between us, but it has stuck with me for a few weeks now. I keep returning to that question. Is everything play? Or work?

To explain my original, instinctual position, everything feels like work because in some ways it should all serve some greater purpose of personal development. That’s not to say that every action has to play into some grand scheme, in which each step is perfectly optimizing for some particular outcome or anything... But even choosing to “play” is choosing to engage in something that is healing. Without play, our lives become monotonous, tedious, and frankly, not worth living. So to decide to make room for play is to work on one’s self, in a way. My instinct is to take this idea to its extreme, and say that every decision, no matter how whimsical or spontaneous, or from the heart, is “work” that one is doing to stay healthy. And through this lens of self improvement or self maintenance, everything becomes just another form of “work.”

But through that same lens, I suppose instead the opposite may be true... or maybe simultaneously true? If every action can be viewed as in service to self improvement or self maintenance, then even “work” is just another type of play. Maybe because play keeps our lives worth living, everything we do should be viewed as such. In some ways, even “work” can be play if one approaches all things as experimental. Every action is just a sampling of something different, or a trial of a new, particular experience. But even routine things can have novelty nested within them. Your commute to your job may seem like nothing out of the ordinary, but there are always unexpected phenomena to be noticed, and new thoughts to be conjured on the journey. In this way, approaching all things as play produces an appreciation for whimsy in all aspects of life. And maybe that’s how it should be... to some extent at least.

I suppose in either case, anything can be work or play... or even some combination of the two. It may all just be dependent on your paradigm with respect to each action. Work tends to have some sort of associated success metric, whereas play leaves more room for expectations to breathe and relax. In play, the term “failure” can’t really exist. And honestly, neither can “success.” Play is void of these concepts because in true play, each decision is made simply for the sake of the personal enjoyment of engaging with it, without any ego invested in the outcome. But that’s not to say that “play” can’t be intentional. Intentionality does not equate to outcome driven, which is something I can verbally articulate, but not personally internalize. Space or time to play can be intentionally given without necessarily involving desired outcomes, which is somewhat paradoxical.

I think more people, myself included, should try to “play” more. Notice the morsels of joy that may come along with doing something you’ve done a million times. Or do something new simply for the sake of experimentation, to see how you feel after the fact... with no expectations for how you *ought* to feel. You’ll never be able to escape “work” entirely, but when everything starts to feel a bit too much like work, we might benefit from intentionally trying to alter the ratio in favor of play.