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What Should I Do With My Life: The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question

By Po Bronson



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“Brimming with stories of sacrifice, courage, commitment and, sometimes, failure, the book will support anyone pondering a major life choice or risk without force-feeding them pat solutions.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

What should I do with my life?

It’s a question many of us have pondered with frequency. Author Po Bronson was asking himself that very question when he decided to write this book—an inspiring exploration of how people transform their lives and a template for how we can answer this question for ourselves.

Bronson traveled the country in search of individuals who have struggled to find their calling, their true nature—people who made mistakes before getting it right. He encountered people of all ages and all professions—a total of fifty-five fascinating individuals trying to answer questions such as: Is a career supposed to feel like a destiny? How do I tell the difference between a curiosity and a passion? Should I make money first, to fund my dream? If I have a child, will my frustration over my work go away? Should I accept my lot, make peace with my ambition, and stop stressing out? Why do I feel guilty for thinking about this?

From their efforts to answer these questions, the universal truths in this book emerge. Each story in these pages informs the next, and the result is a journey that unfolds with cumulative power. Reading this book is like listening in on an intimate conversation among people you care about and admire. Even if you know what you should do with your life, you will find wisdom and guidance in these stories of people who found meaningful answers by daring to be honest with themselves.

Among them:

- the Pittsburgh lawyer who decided to become a trucker so he could savor the moment and be closer to his son.
- the toner-cartridge queen of Chicago, who realized that her relationships with men kept sabotaging her career choices.
- the Cuban immigrant who overcame the strong dis-approval of her parents and quit her high-paying job to pursue social-service work in Miami.

- the chemistry professor who realized, quite late in life, that he would rather practice law.
- the mother torn between an Olympic career and her adolescent daughter.
- the seventeen-year-old boy who received a letter from the Dalai Lama and was called to a life of spiritual leadership.
- the creator of *St. Elmo's Fire*, who wasn't sure he could quit his successful Hollywood life for the deeper artistic life he had always wanted to pursue.
- the author himself. Po Bronson has worked as a bus-boy, cook, janitor, sports-medicine intern, bus-lift assembly-line technician, aerobics instructor, litigation consultant, greeting-card designer, bond salesman, political-newsletter editor, high school teacher, and book publisher. Since then, he has written three books: **Bombardiers**, **The First \$20 Million Is Always the Hardest**, and **The Nudist on the Late Shift**. But none of those experiences compared to what he learned by writing this book.

"We all have passions if we choose to see them," he writes. "Most of us don't get epiphanies. We don't get clarity. Our purpose doesn't arrive neatly packaged as destiny. We only get a whisper. A blank, nonspecific urge. That's how it starts."

With humor, empathy, and insight, Po Bronson probes the depths of people who learned how to hear the whisper, who overcame fear and confusion to find a larger truth about their lives. A meditation, a journey, and a triumph of story-telling, **What Should I Do with My Life?** is a life-changing book by a writer who brilliantly tackles the big questions.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In *What Should I Do with My Life?* Po Bronson manages to create a career book that is a page-turner. His 50 vivid profiles of people searching for "their soft spot--their true calling" will engage readers because Bronson is asking himself the same question. He explores his premise, that "nothing is braver than people facing up to their own identity," as an anthropologist and autobiographer. He tackles thorny, nuanced issues about self-determination. Among them: paradoxes of money and meaning, authorship and destiny, brain candy and novelty versus soul food. Bronson's stories, limited to professional people and complete with photos, are gems. They include a Los Angeles lawyer who became a priest, a Harvard MBA catfish farmer turned biotech executive, and a Silicon Valley real estate agent who opened a leather crafts factory in Costa Rica.

Bronson is a gifted intuitive writer, the bestselling author of *The Nudist on the Late Shift*, whose thoughtful, vulnerable voice emerges as the book's greatest strength and challenge. He describes his subject's lives along with the ways they annoy, puzzle, and worry him. He frets about meddling with his questions, yet once, memorably and appropriately, he offers a talented man a top post in his publishing company. While this creates the juiciness of his portraits, it also can make Bronson the book's most memorable character and the only one whose story is not resolved. Even so, this remarkable career chronicle sets the gold standard for the worth of the examined life. --*Barbara Mackoff*

From Publishers Weekly

In this elevated career guide, Bronson (*Bombardiers*; *The Nudist on the Late Shift*) poses the titular question to an eclectic mix of "real people in the real world," compiling their experiences and insights about callings, self-acceptance, moral guilt, greed and ambition, and emotional rejuvenation. Bronson crisscrosses the country seeking out remarkable examples of successful and not-so-successful people confronting tough issues, such as differentiating between a curiosity and a passion and deciding whether or not to make money first in order to fund one's dream. Bronson frames the edited responses with witty, down-to-earth commentaries, such as those of John, an engineer whose dream of building an electric car crumbled under his personal weaknesses; and Ashley, a do-gooder burdened by the unlikely combination of self-hatred and a love for humanity. Bronson wants to understand what makes these people--among them a timid college career counselor trapped in his job, a farmer bullish on risk-taking, a financial expert grabbing an opportunity to rebuild her brokerage firm devastated by the World Trade Center tragedy and a scientist who rethinks his lifelong work and becomes a lawyer-tick. He occasionally digresses, musing on his own life too much, and frequently hammers points home longer than necessary, but neither of these drawbacks undercuts the book's potency. The "ultimate question" is a topic always in season, worthy of Bronson's skillful probing and careful anecdote selection. Brimming with stories of sacrifice, courage, commitment and, sometimes, failure, the book will support anyone pondering a major life choice or risk without force-feeding them pat solutions. Photos.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School--Some of the individuals Bronson interviewed have not found the answer to the title question, some aren't sure there is one for them, while others think their answer may be only temporary. The 55 pieces range from a woman who had wanted to be a doctor since age six but changed her mind abruptly after realizing her dream, to a Native American who wrote a 20-year plan for his future that would enable him to devise and implement ways for his people to wean themselves from government handouts. Bronson

has both bad and good jobs behind him, and his interviews include his own insightful reactions to and thoughts about his subjects' ideas and personalities. The discussions of mistakes, lessons, and hard-fought decisions on the iffy road to occupational fulfillment will be valuable for teens.

Judy McAloon, Potomac Library, Prince William County, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Harmon:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or even read a book titled What Should I Do With My Life: The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have some other opinion?

Nathaniel Thomas:

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Richard Nix:

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Geraldine Schrader:

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share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You can see that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. The book that recommended to your account is What Should I Do With My Life: The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question this publication consist a lot of the information in the condition of this world now. This specific book was represented how do the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. The writer made some study when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book ideal all of you.

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