



### Book Review

#### What Should I Do with My Life?

*The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question*  
by [Po Bronson](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer  
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*What Should I Do with My Life?* is subtitled "The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question." To research it, Po Bronson says he interviewed about 900 people. He wrote, phoned, or even visited many of these people over many months or even years, then chose about 57 of the most interesting stories to tell in this book.

Each of these stories describes someone's struggle with the question of what to do with the finite number of days we all have on earth. In many cases, the most basic decision was whether to make a sacrifice in order to follow one's dream. Generally speaking, Bronson is in favor of following one's dream (who wants to read a book called *Keep Your Day Job?*) but he doesn't underestimate the havoc that following a dream can cause, or the real possibility that one's dream may fade away, or be replaced by another dream.

Speaking to one man (who abruptly quit a \$250,000 job and later moved to Abu Dhabi) Bronson admits that he was constantly worried that he would give his readers false inspiration, but at the same time he felt responsible to the "unborn person inside" who was struggling to get out of so many people. If you don't let that person out, he says, it can haunt you, and it may eventually burst out and rip a big hole in your life.

"Or you could rip a big hole in your life in your life trying to let it out," says the other man.

"Maybe," Bronson admits.

Each story is intriguing in itself, but for me what was most intriguing was the patterns Bronson uncovered after looking at hundreds of them. For instance...

1. Very few people who tell themselves "I'll just be an investment banker for a few years, then quit and pursue my dream" actually do so. One reason is that few of them save much money. Most adjust their spending habits to match their investment-banker friends. Others find that the job changes them, and after a few years they want to be bankers more than they want to be artists, musicians, or chefs.
2. Quite a few people who made a windfall in the dot-com boom did in fact change their lives, becoming world travelers or philanthropists. But in most cases, they decided what to do in their new lives only after they got the money.
3. Very few people have an epiphany that makes them change their lives. In most cases, a dream grows gradually and someone may cultivate it for years before making a full commitment.
4. People generally need a shove in their personal lives to make a change. Divorce, bankruptcy, illness, or the death of a friend or family member may provide that shove.
5. Many people decide not to change their lives because they don't want to abandon their friends — or to be seen as abandoning their friends.

A side effect to telling so many stories was that Bronson was able to see the story of his own life more clearly. Parts of that story are interspersed through this book, and one sign of the author's humanity is the lack of distance he puts between himself and the people he writes about. *What Should I Do with My Life?* is a hopeful book but not a naive one. It can be comforting to see that others are struggling with the questions we struggle with, and bracing to see how many practical and creative solutions they come up with.

#### About the Reviewer

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of IndigoCafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at [www.geoffwisner.com](http://www.geoffwisner.com).

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