

EXCERPT



The Spiritual Art of Business
Connecting the Daily with the Divine

September 5, 2023 | \$18, 176 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0762-4

How do we bring meaning to our work, instead of being defined by what we do? “Corporate mystic” Barry Rowan invites us to see our work as a chance to serve God by contributing to a better society. With forty short chapters, this book beckons us into a connection with God that will infuse our lives, our offices, and our world with meaning.

A Purposeful Life Brings Meaning to Our Work

When I was a few weeks shy of my twenty-ninth birthday, fissures deep within me were exposed in a dramatic eruption. I’d climbed up to a red rock outcropping above a camp in Colorado and was sitting alone, absorbing the warmth of the afternoon sun. It was late summer and the landscape stretched out before me, a thousand feet down the shoulder of the mountain, across the Arkansas River Valley, and on to the glowing foothills and expansive plains beyond. The world was at peace. I was not.

Perhaps it was the harmony of nature exposing the disharmony within me, but without warning or explanation, I exploded in tears. Within moments the tears inexplicably accelerated into convulsive sobs of raw emotion. My soul was in anguish, and my body was shaking. *Where is this emotion coming from? And why now?*

I had good reasons for asking myself those questions. I was young. I was healthy. I was blessed with a joyous, life-giving marriage, and an abundance of friends. My career was off to a strong start. So what was stirring this cauldron of emotion?

Even then, I knew the ache of the outburst was not born in that instant. A steely will and a deep longing for God had lived under a fragile treaty within me since my earliest years. And a shadowy confusion had been my companion since my college days as I wrestled with what major and career to pursue. Over time, the confusion had only deepened. In the agony on that rock, the questions were now screaming at me: *Why am I alive? Will I live a successful life? What is a successful life? Why am I working so hard? By what measure will I judge the success of my life?* The divide within me was laid bare that day in the Colorado mountains—a crisis over meaning in work had come to a head.

After that day, I could no longer ignore the questions burning within me. Over the next eight years, I read dozens of books and attended multiple workshops. I spent untold hours in the Scriptures, prayed and talked with people, wrote hundreds of pages in my journal, and listened and looked for God through the fog—all with the hope of understanding how to approach my work in a way that matters.

For starters, I realized this was actually about something much bigger than *meaning in work*. It was about *purpose in life*. The God who I was no longer sure existed, had to provide clarity about purpose in life as a context for understanding meaning in work. He had to strip away my beliefs built over thirty years of sitting in the pews, taking me down to the bedrock of my being.

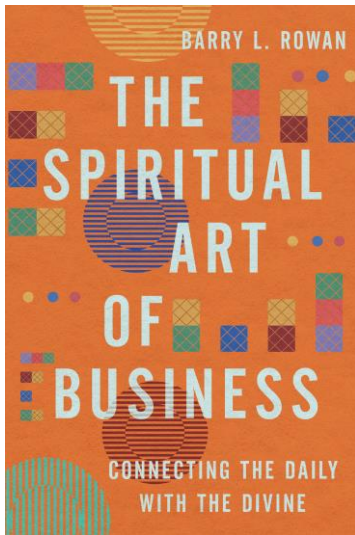


Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



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*"Every Christian faces the dilemma of just how their faith should find expression in their work and career. Some compartmentalize, check their faith at the door, and have little kingdom impact. Others wade in too eagerly as evangelists and do more harm than good. Barry Rowan has written a book about a third way. *The Spiritual Art of Business* can transform the way you think about your faith in the context of your work." — Richard Stearns, president emeritus of World Vision US and author of *Lead Like It Matters to God**

After six months of reading and pondering, and many middle-of-the-night scribbles in my journal, I was able to take the key step toward addressing the question of purpose in life. I chose to believe in God based, as the lawyers would say, on the preponderance of the evidence and would give up everything I have to follow Jesus.

In the end, what I learned about the question of meaning in work was that I'd had it backward: We don't derive meaning from our work; we bring meaning to our work. And God's perspective of our work is the source of its ultimate meaning. There is no true meaning in our lives or in our work apart from God. As I have surrendered my life to him, he has lovingly led me, and is making me into the shape that seems best to him. As the clay of my soul has softened and become more supple in his hands, God is able to use me more effectively for his purposes, including the work I've been given to do. I began to see that my work was no longer in one part of my life and my faith in another. The divide had been bridged. As a person called to business, I experience God's work within my work. It's an ongoing metamorphosis that begins not in me, but in God, and radiates outward from him through me and into the world.

This new perspective on work has animated my work life for the last thirty years. I've spent my career in senior leadership positions, building or turning around eight businesses, including serving as the CEO, president, and division manager for three of them, as well as CFO for four public companies. God has been there with me throughout the highs and the lows, teaching me, growing me, and asking me to serve as an instrument of his will.

As the people who have known me for decades can attest, I'm a different person than I was in the early years of my career: Peaceful when I used to easily become fearful. Still setting high standards, but no longer driven to prove myself. Seeing my work as an expression of who I am rather than letting it define who I am. Freer and less constrained. And increasingly filled with a sustaining joy. I am deeply grateful for these changes that have been wrought in me, knowing it is the work of God; and he who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion.

Most of us who are reflective about our work sooner or later face a common problem: We live in fear of living a meaningless life. We want the hundred thousand hours we will work in our lifetime to matter. We want to live a life of significance. Perhaps this is something you're wrestling with too. I can tell you out of my own experience that this issue will eat us alive over time if we don't commit to resolving it.

The good news is that God has a perspective of our work, and if we live within the divine design, we will live a life of deep, profound meaning. If we allow him to, God *will* transform us, so that he might transform the world through us. Is there any greater joy than being used by the Creator of the universe as an instrument of his will?

—adapted from the preface



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"Barry Rowan's short and practical chapters reflect his own deep wrestling with God about the meaning of his work and all the accompanying trials and rewards. He launches us into our own 'archaeological dig' into the feelings, beliefs, and habits that so often encumber our experience of work. . . . allow yourself to be drawn deeper into the freedom and adventure available through a life of following Christ."

—**Katherine Leary Alsdorf**, founding director of Redeemer City to City's Center for Faith and Work and consultant for faith and work ministry development

Harvard Business Graduate with a C-Suite Career

Barry Rowan is a Harvard Business School graduate who spent his entire career serving in C-Suite roles. He has been instrumental in building and transforming eight businesses, primarily in the technology and communication space, with one selling for \$10 billion. His leadership experience spans both private and public companies, including Gogo (the inflight connectivity company), Vonage, Nextel Partners, and Fluke Corporation.

Based on his belief in giving back, Barry serves on both for-profit and non-profit boards, mentors young leaders, and leads international study trips. His non-profit boards have included InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Seattle Pacific University, Gordon College, the Gonzaga University Entrepreneurial Leadership Program, and advisory boards for Harvard Business School. He also served as president of Bellevue Christian School.

Deeply immersed in Scripture and the classic spiritual writers, Barry is whole-heartedly committed to contemplation and prayer which led him to complete a month-long silent retreat immediately following his retirement from a full-time executive career. His friends have dubbed him a "corporate mystic."

Barry is married to Linda, his wife of over forty-two years, and they have two adult sons. Together they are now engaged in multiple lines of service including walking with the poor and investing in the next generation of leaders. Their commitment to the poor has taken them to Central America over twenty times. They are members of the National Leadership Council of World Vision and support local organizations breaking the poverty cycle through sustainable programs.



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