



LOVE WHAT YOU DO

Early in my career, I learned the difference between simply working and truly loving the work you do. Coaching sports was my first passion. While pacing the sidelines, I felt a sense of purpose and energy that the players found contagious. I wasn't just sharing knowledge or drawing up plays; I was helping young women discover their potential, often before they saw it in themselves. That spark—the moment when an athlete realized they were capable of more than they imagined—fueled me.

Later, as I transitioned into leadership and eventually into human resources, I carried that same philosophy forward: work should not only be about results, it should also light you up. When leaders love what they do, it shows. Their energy inspires others, builds trust, and creates environments where people thrive. That's where the seeds of *TGIM: Thank God It's Monday* were planted for me—in the belief that work can be something you look forward to, not dread.

Here's the truth: you don't have to quit your job, move across the country, or reinvent your life to start loving Mondays again. You just have to start aligning what you do with who you are. This chapter will show you how to find that alignment—your “sweet spot”—and begin building a career that fuels you instead of depletes you.

A mentor once told me, “The three keys to happiness are simple: love what you do, love where you live, and love who you love.” At the time, I was in a career that looked great on paper but drained me in reality. I didn't realize just how profoundly true those words were until that season. That single conversation sparked a journey that transformed my work and the entire trajectory of my life.

In this chapter, I want to share how the first key—love what you do—came alive for me, and how finding it can open doors for you, too. Because when you love what you do, you don't just change your Monday—you change your life. And when organizations create space for that kind of passion, they do more than just retain people; they ignite them.

When passion, talent, and values intersect, Mondays stop being dreadful and start feeling purposeful. Loving what you do is the first key to happiness.

My Story: Find Your Sweet Spot

Have you ever felt that pit in your stomach on Sunday night, knowing Monday was coming? It happened to me every week, and on Mondays, I would wake up feeling anxious and full of dread. Let's set the stage: It was my first day as a high school teacher. I assumed the nerves would fade after a few weeks. They didn't. Mondays quickly became the hardest part of my week, and the dread crept in every Sunday

afternoon. I later learned there was a name for it: the “Sunday Scaries.”

Don’t get me wrong, I loved kids. But I didn’t love teaching high school. Growing up, I’d played basketball through high school and college, and I loved the idea of teaching and coaching. But once I stepped into the classroom, reality hit. I loved coaching, but teaching students drained me.

My best friend Rachel, also a teacher, was born for the classroom. She couldn’t wait to wake up on Monday mornings. She radiated passion and confidence whenever she spoke about her job. I, on the other hand, cared about the kids and worked hard to be a good teacher, but I couldn’t fake the passion I didn’t feel.

I pushed through my first year, convincing myself it would get better. By the second year, I knew the truth: this wasn’t something I could do long term. The hardest part was admitting it to myself, my best friend, and my family. I had invested four years of college, uprooted my life, and now I dreaded the very thing I’d worked so hard to attain.

The shame and embarrassment were heavy.

During a performance review, my vice principal, Bruce, asked me a simple question: “Are you happy?” I answered honestly: “No. I’m not happy. I love coaching basketball, but I can’t get excited about the teaching part.” Saying it out loud felt like failure.

💡 **Melisa’s Message**

Sometimes the hardest truth to admit, “I’m not happy,” is the one that sets you free. Owning your truth is the first step toward finding your sweet spot.

Bruce didn't judge me. Instead, he shared a perspective: "The three keys to happiness are love what you do, love where you live, and love who you love." Then he recommended I read *Good to Great*¹ by Jim Collins to reflect more deeply on that first key: love what you do.

After school, I drove to Barnes & Noble and bought the book. That decision became a defining moment. It was the start of a new way of thinking about happiness, purpose, and work.

That single conversation with Bruce shifted everything. For the first time, I admitted I wasn't happy and began asking deeper questions about how to build a life where work wasn't a burden but a calling.

But here's something I've learned since then: loving what you do doesn't *always* mean changing what you do. Sometimes it means changing how you see it. Not everyone is in a season where they can pursue their dream job right now—and that's okay. Sometimes, the wisest and most mature choice is to stay, learn, and grow where you are planted.

It's always easier to find a job when you already have one, and sometimes the path to joy isn't a new title—it's a renewed perspective. Our three adult kids often remind me of this. They have big dreams and creative passions, but right now they also have rent and bills to pay. And that's life. Sometimes loving what you do means learning to find contentment, purpose, and pride in the current role you're in—because that role is shaping your character, resilience, and work ethic in ways you can't yet see.

Before we run from a job, a relationship, or a community, we have to ask whether we've developed good "happiness hygiene." Are we showing up with gratitude? Are we looking

for small wins? Are we contributing or just consuming? You can't outrun discontent if it lives inside you.

For me, I redirected my discontent for teaching and doubled down on my passion for coaching student athletes to transition to coaching adults. My career has evolved from teacher to athletic director, principal, and Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), and eventually into senior corporate HR leadership roles, including Chief People Officer. Today, as an executive, leadership coach, and HR consultant, I get to live my "sweet spot" every day. Coaching has always been my passion, and it's the heartbeat of my TGIM outlook.

| Let's Start from the Beginning

When I was five, I experienced the most traumatic event of my life. It's one of my earliest childhood memories. I remember that my dad had gone to work early that May morning while my mom and grandma were in the kitchen baking a birthday cake for my twin sisters, who were turning three. We all shared a room then—my sisters in bunk beds, me in a twin across the room.

That morning, when my mom went to wake Crystal, she wouldn't wake up. She had passed away in the night. On her third birthday. The autopsy report cited SIDS as the cause.

At five years old, I couldn't comprehend it. My parents told me Crystal had gone to heaven, but all I knew was that I missed her. Terribly. I remember going to the funeral home with my parents. I insisted on helping pick out her tiny casket—with a pearl-white exterior and a pink satin interior (the color pink remains my favorite and signature color to this day).

The days and months that followed were filled with confusion and heartache that no child could fully understand. Emily, only three, was suddenly without her other half—her twin, and her constant companion. I remember we started sleeping in the same bed after that and holding each other close at night. I tried to comfort her when I didn't understand what had happened myself. From that loss, our bond became unbreakable; we've been each other's safe place and best friend ever since.

As a parent now, I can't imagine the pain my mom and dad endured. I lost a sister. They lost a child. Yet their resilience to grieve, stay married, and keep raising a family was nothing short of extraordinary. That moment set the trajec-

tory of my life. Even as a child, I absorbed a truth: life is fragile, and it can change in an instant.

I grew up the oldest of four children. Two years after my sister passed away, my parents had my younger sister, Rachel, followed by my brother, Eric. Ours was a working-class family. My parents

and grandparents modeled and instilled grit, hard work, and perseverance in us from a young age. I helped feed calves on my grandparents' dairy farm, moved sprinkler lines with my dad, cut asparagus, picked apples, and delivered newspapers. My siblings and I turned everything into a competition: who could work faster, better, harder. Deep down, I wanted to make Crystal proud.

💡 **Melisa's Message**
Grief reminds us to spend our days on what truly matters. Don't wait for a wake-up call to align your life with your values.

Sports became my outlet—volleyball and basketball from age seven, eventually leading me to play basketball in college. I loved everything about the game. I literally slept with a basketball in my bed through high school. Michael Jordan was my ultimate role model. His work ethic inspired me to “Be Like Mike².”

But it was my high school basketball coach, Coach Wilber, who truly shaped my path. He never called me Missy—always “Tommy,” after my maiden name, Thompson—and I can still hear his voice echoing through the gym. He was the first coach who really saw my potential and refused to let me settle for anything less. He pushed me harder than I thought possible, challenged me to believe in myself, and inspired me to chase goals that once felt out of reach. Because of his tenacity, I earned a college basketball scholarship and discovered my own desire to coach and mentor others. To this day, Coach Wilber remains an instrumental figure in my life, a constant reminder of the power of belief, discipline, and heart.

So, when it came time to choose a career, teaching and coaching basketball was a no-brainer. The game had given me so much, and I couldn’t wait to give back. Coaching was—and still is—my absolute sweet spot.

Melisa’s Message

A great mentor doesn’t just teach you—they see you. The right guidance can unlock opportunities you didn’t even know existed.

Inspiration: My Favorite Authors & Research

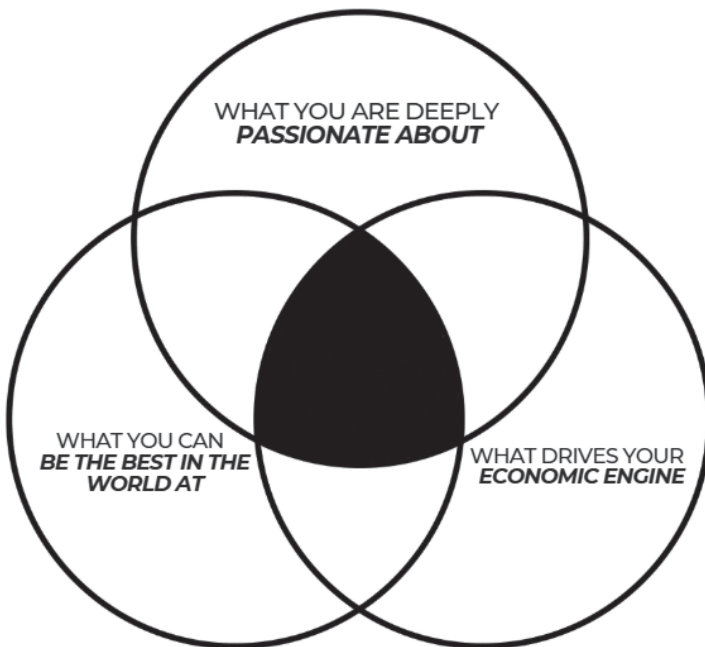
The career conversation with Bruce was an “aha” moment. I realized that loving what you do isn’t just a nice idea—it’s *essential* for a meaningful and sustainable life.

Jim Collins, in *Good to Great*, introduces the Hedgehog Concept³: “*The real question is not, ‘What are we good at?’ or ‘What do we want to do?’ The question is, ‘What can we be the best in the world at?’*”

The Hedgehog Concept is captured by three overlapping circles:

- What can you be the best in the world at?
- What are you deeply passionate about?
- What drives your economic engine?

Where those circles intersect is your “sweet spot.”



When I reflected honestly, teaching wasn't my "sweet spot." But coaching was. Time flew when I coached. My energy surged. My purpose was clear.

And the research backs it up. Gallup's *State of the Global Workplace*⁴ report shows that employees who are engaged, meaning they love what they do, are three times more likely to thrive in their overall well-being. Loving your work is about more than career satisfaction; it directly impacts your health, relationships, and sense of fulfillment.

Angela Duckworth, in *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*⁵, reminds us that talent alone doesn't guarantee success. What sets people apart is the sustained fire to keep showing up, especially when things get hard. Passion lights the match. Perseverance keeps the flame burning.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski, in *Leading with Heart*⁶, teaches that true leadership and true living require both discipline and deep care. When you commit to something you love, you don't just give your skills; you give your heart. That's why work worth loving feels less like a job and more like a calling.

Joanne Marxhausen's children's book, *If I Should Die, If I Should Live*,⁷ was given to me after Crystal's death. Its message was simple but profound: life is fragile and sacred. What you choose to pour your time into matters. If you spend your days on work that doesn't light you up, you're not just wasting time; you're forfeiting life itself.

💡 Melisa's Message

Fulfillment lives where
your gifts, passions,
and purpose overlap.
Seek the sweet spot
where all three meet.
That's where your
work will feel both
effortless and deeply
rewarding!

Together, these voices remind us that loving what you do is not a luxury. It's an act of courage, grit, and purpose—and the foundation for a life and career worth saying “Thank God It's Monday” for.

Personal Reflection: Your Turn

Take ten minutes with a journal or notepad and reflect on these questions:

- Best at. In what areas of work or life have others consistently told you, “You're gifted at this?”
- Passion. What activities make you lose track of time? What would you keep doing even if no one paid you?
- Economic engine. Where do your talent and passion intersect with something the world values and invests in?
- Perspective. If today were your last day, would you be satisfied with how you've spent your energy?

Now, draw three overlapping circles: Best At, Passion, and Economic Engine. Fill in your answers. The intersection is your sweet spot!

Practical Next Steps

This week, try one of these:

- Name your why. Write one sentence about why you do what you do. Post it where you'll see it daily.

- Audit your energy. Track a week of highs and lows. Notice when your energy soars and when it depletes. Adjust where you can.
- Invest in grit. Choose one challenge you've been avoiding. Show up for it daily this week. Small wins build momentum.
- Talk it out. Ask a mentor or colleague to reflect on when they've seen you at your best. It may point you toward your passion.

Key Takeaway

Life is short. Work takes up most of our waking hours. Loving what you do is a necessity. When you align your grit, gifts, and heart with your daily work, Mondays stop being the day you dread, and they become the day you rise.

Advice for HR, Senior Leaders, & Companies Seeking to Build a TGIM Culture

- Hire for passion, not just for skills and capabilities. Skills can be taught, but passion fuels performance. During interviews, ask candidates what energizes them, not just what they're good at. People who genuinely love their work bring contagious enthusiasm that lifts teams and cultures.
- Create pathways for purpose. Help employees connect their daily work to the organization's mission. Regularly share stories that show how their efforts make a difference. When people see the "why" behind their work, they show up with greater ownership and joy.
- Model what loving your work looks like. Leaders set the emotional tone. Show your team that it's okay to love Mondays—by being present, celebrating wins, and expressing gratitude for your work. Authentic energy from the top inspires the same from everyone else.