

THE WORKING YEARS

WE'VE ALL HEARD THE FAMILIAR LINE from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." This passage refers to seven stages of life and the role we typically play during those stages. But the one that profoundly shapes our adult persona is the work stage, which for most people spans over forty years. We typically begin our work stage by imagining ourselves accepting and then fulfilling a certain role in order to make a living. And although our work might change throughout our lives every job begins with a willingness to adopt a particular persona for the role we accept.

Because we spend so much of our adult lives working there is little wonder that it has such a profound effect on shaping who we are. We grow into the role we assume which is reflected in the way we conduct ourselves, the confidence we develop from the skill and experience we achieve, our daily focus, and for some even our worldview. The knowledgeable teacher speaks carefully but with confidence, the policeman has an air of authority and responsibility, the nurse is a capable and willing caregiver, and the skilled carpenter has confidence doing tasks most would find difficult or impossible. The salesman speaks smoothly and becomes professionally sociable, the Pastor dresses modestly as he develops a kind and loving demeanor, and the mechanic on an oil rig becomes hard and tough with rough hands, a leathery face and a husky voice. And while there are exceptions and personality differences, we expect people of certain professions to act in predictable ways.

What someone does for a living is a primary identifier and often the first way we describe someone. In history we learn about the blacksmith, the soldier, the farmer, the newspaper editor and the judge. It provides us an instant frame of reference to know what someone did for a living, what role they