

Don't Sell Out to Fit In

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A Parable

by [Alan Cohen](#)

A fellow once went to Zumbach the tailor to be fitted for a new suit of clothes. After Zumbach altered the suit, the man stood in front of the mirror to check the fit. At first glance he noticed that the suit jacket's right arm sleeve was rather short, and too much of his wrist was showing. "Say, Zumbach," the fellow noted, "This sleeve looks a little short. Would you please lengthen it?"

"The sleeve is not too short," replied the tailor. "Your arm is too long...Just pull your arm back a few inches and you will see that the sleeve fits perfectly."

The man withdrew his arm a bit, and the sleeve was matched with his wrist. But this movement rumpled the upper portion of the jacket. "Now the nape of the collar is several inches above my neck," he protested.

"There's nothing wrong with the collar," Zumbach insisted. "Your neck is too low. Lift the back of your neck and the jacket will fit well."

The customer raised his neck a few inches, and sure enough the collar rounded it where it was supposed to. But now there was another problem: the bottom of the jacket rested high above his seat. "Now my whole rear end is sticking out!" the man complained.

"No problem," Zumbach returned. "Just lift up your rear end so that it fits under the jacket."

Again the customer complied, which left his body in a very contorted posture. But Zumbach had convinced him that the problem was not with the suit, but him. So he paid the tailor for the suit and walked out of the shop in a most awkward position, struggling to keep all parts of the suit in their right places.

On the street he encountered two women who were walking in the opposite direction. After they had passed, one woman turned to the other and commented, "That poor man is really crippled!"

"He sure is," the other replied. "But that suit looks fabulous on him."

Our families, friends, schools, religions, and society prescribe many suits for us to wear. Some of them fit and many don't. If a job, relationship, living situation, or spiritual path does not match you, others may try to convince you that you have a problem. A good, strong, wise, devoted, or mature person, they tell you, should be able to stay in this position and even enjoy it. Yet if such an arrangement does not bring you happiness, you only cripple yourself by trying to stuff yourself into it. Your problem is not that you cannot live up to the standard you have chosen; your problem is that you cannot live up to a standard others have chosen for you. You will never walk comfortably in an ill-fitting suit prescribed by a shortsighted tailor. Your inability to adapt is not a sign of your weakness, but the strength of your inner guidance to remind you where your passion lives. So what you thought was wrong with you may be what's actually right with you.

When Dave Barry was in junior high school, he was the class clown and often got into trouble for cracking jokes during lessons. Dave's teacher scolded him, "You'd better get to work, Dave Barry – you can't joke your way through life, you know."

Now, forty years later, Dave Barry is the most successful

humor writer in America. With many popular books to his credit, he writes the most widely syndicated humor column in American newspapers. Oh, yes – along the way he won the Pulitzer Prize.

The junior high school teacher was way off the mark. Dave Barry is joking his way through life, and doing quite well at it. He is bringing laughter to millions of people, helping them lighten up about their difficulties, and earning a hefty income. What he was told was very wrong with him was very right indeed.

No one knows your passion and purpose better than you do, and no one has to live with the results of your choices more than you do. That is why you must be very honest about what fits you and what doesn't. Seminar participants often ask me, "How can I find out what is my life purpose or passion?" I tell them, "Begin to tell the impeccable truth about how everything you do feels. Is it a fit or is it not? Be true to your inclinations on the little decisions, such as where you go to dinner and with whom. When your daily decisions reflect your intentions, you will discover the big picture for your life."

Robert Louis Stevenson noted, "To know what you prefer instead of humbly saying, 'Amen' to what the world tells that you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive." Keep your soul alive, and you will be amazed at how easily and naturally your body, relationships, prosperity, career, and entire life follow.