

Individual and Market Freedom in the Workplace

Matra Majmundar is many things: a mother, a wife, a professional, a volunteer, a daughter and a friend. For the last twelve years, she has also been a yoga teacher with her own private practice in Palo Alto, California.

Majmundar operates out of a small, two-room cottage in the back of her house that she has converted into a yoga studio. The hardwood floor is covered with mats and yoga posters, some even featuring Majmundar, adorn the walls. Majmundar specializes in the Alexander technique, an extremely structured method of breathing, as well as pre and post-natal exercises. According to a 1999 study in the *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing*, women gave birth to healthier babies and usually had full-term pregnancies when they practiced yoga during their pregnancy. Yoga exercises open the pelvic muscles, which reduces pressure on ligaments and relieves some lower back pain, as well as providing the baby with added endorphins and oxygen.¹

Majmundar has been working for over twenty-five years, only twelve of them as a yoga teacher. Before she opened her studio, she received her bachelor's degree in biology and worked as an occupational and physical therapist at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto, California. As a therapist, she dealt mainly with arthritis patients or other older patients who had suffered extreme physical injuries and aided them in recovering their strength.

However, Majmundar was also extremely active in a local Indo-American community center, a mother of two girls and a devoted wife. In addition, she was responsible for her ailing parents, who lived with her. In 1990, she quit her job at Stanford Hospital to open her own studio in order to give her the flexibility she needed.

¹ Fishman, Jennifer Barrot. "Yoga in Pregnancy; Countless Benefits." *Yoga Chicago* magazine. www.yogachicago.com

"I had so many other priorities," Majmundar said. "I needed to be able to work when I wanted to." Yoga had always been a vital part of Majmundar's routine, giving her the strength and energy she needed to get through her hectic life. This combined with her extensive training in occupational and physical therapy made her a perfect candidate for becoming a yoga teacher.

Majmundar greatly values her freedom to choose her own hours, clientele and terms. Because she does not work for a studio, the techniques and methods she teaches are entirely up to her discretion.

Majmundar charges \$75 for every forty-five minutes she teaches, yet her paycheck isn't nearly as much as she used to receive as an occupational therapist. "That's the price I have to pay for being my own boss and doing what I love," Majmundar said.

Money, while a nice benefit, isn't the main reason for Majmundar's studio. Majmundar's husband is the Chief Operating Officer of TibCo Systems, a computer company in the Silicon Valley. The family income almost entirely comes from his paycheck. More than anything, Majmundar is working for her own pleasure and to keep busy. When she quit the Stanford Hospital, her daughters were six and twelve. Now they are eighteen and twenty-three; neither of them even lives at home.

Yoga is an extremely relaxing and rejuvenating process, as well as a spreading trend. Celebrities, such as Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow, have enthusiastically jumped on the bandwagon, making the market for yoga teachers better than ever.

The benefits of yoga do not stop there. "Yoga opens my mind and keeps me stress-free and balanced," Majmundar said. "I am able to control other aspects in my busy life without feeling overwhelmed." For Majmundar, teaching yoga helps her almost as much as it does her patients.

Not only does it help her keep calm; it allows her to enjoy fundamental liberties. Majmundar's private practice ensures her both individual and market freedom.

Majmundar's individual freedom is a product of the intensely personal relationship she has with her work. Yoga is already known as an extremely relaxing and spiritual activity. Yet the true source of Majmundar's individual power comes from her dedication to her teaching and the nature of work itself. Although she is paid for her lessons, Majmundar is not working for economic gain. She is already fully supported by her husband, whose salary almost quadruples her own. Rather, Majmundar teaches yoga to provide herself with an escape from the hustle-bustle of her life.

Majmundar is a premier example of Hochschild's view of the changing definitions of work and home. "We are used to thinking that home is where most people feel the most appreciated, the most truly "themselves," the most secure, the most relaxed" (Hochschild, 51). Yet work is where Majmundar is in full control; At home she is pinned down by numerous mundane responsibilities: picking up dry cleaning, cooking dinner, and taking care of her parents. Work is where her personal and creative freedom shines, especially since she is her own boss. Additionally, Majmundar is not totally bound by economic need, allowing her almost unlimited freedom to teach whatever techniques she chooses. She also uses her own research to develop these techniques, which serve as staples in her program. Majmundar does not follow anyone else's curriculum or have to be approved by any higher power, besides the consumer. Especially with her children gone and a husband who often travels, some of Majmundar's most spiritual experiences are at work. She too has discovered the "great male secret — work can be an escape from the pressures of home, pressures that the changing nature of work is only intensifying" (Hochschild, 55). The specific flexibility of Majmundar's work embodies this notion.

Majmundar also makes use of "commercial substitutes" (Hochschild, 53), making her job at home even less satisfying. Her children have traded in home for college, her husband is often whisking around the country, and even her parents make frequent use

As a senior community center as a substitute for a traditional family life. Because these substitutes are so readily available, “the sense of belonging to a geographical community grows less and less secure” (Hochschild, 53). It is no wonder the significances of work and home have traded places. It is the creative and individualized nature of work that reinforces Majmundar’s individual freedom.

Majmundar’s studio is a private practice, which also allows her to play a vital role in ensuring her own economic freedom. As her own boss, she makes decisions on what to teach and how to teach it. Every client she has ^{voluntarily} voluntary enters an exchange with her, ultimately choosing her goods and services over others. This reinforces Friedman’s notion of a free private enterprise exchange economy or competitive capitalism (Friedman, 8).

Majmundar’s work is specialized; the techniques she teaches are often based on her own research. This adds more variety to the market, which in turn leads to more competition. Competition is one of the most fundamental parts of the market system and reinforces Friedman’s “central feature of the market organization of economic activity” (Friedman, 9): the freedom of individuals to choose between competitors. “The consumer is protected from coercion by the seller because of the presence of other sellers with whom he can deal” (Friedman, 9). Only then is the quality of the goods maintained. Even more, competition ensures greater quality because there is an undeniable need to be better than the other products in order for one’s service to sustain itself. By entering into competition with other yoga institutions, Majmundar is dedicating herself to uphold the quality of her service and the notion of market freedom.

Competition is prevalent in Majmundar’s small town of Palo Alto, which is fraught with yoga schools, especially since yoga’s popularity has shot up over the last few years. One of these is the Yoga Center, a large yoga school with over 50 teachers. Although Majmundar received a job offer from the Yoga Center, she preferred to have

her own practice so that she would not have to deal with the coercive power of a set curriculum. In this market, the strict guidelines a union imposes often serve as a political force. Since Majmundar's practice is free from the regulation of a big school or union, it in turn helps regulate the quality of the Yoga Center's, and other yoga institutions', curriculum.

How does
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to Friedman
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This system serves as one of checks and balances. Majmundar and all the other yoga institutions constantly keep each other "in check"; the presence of competition ensures that they all uphold high standards and strive for better ones. Consequently, it regulates the market and "enables economic strength to be a check to political power rather than a reinforcement" (Friedman, 9). Majmundar's role in the market solidifies her own economic freedom and protects the freedom of the consumer.

OK, good.

Majmundar's dedication to her work reinforces the values of individual and market freedom. Both freedoms are a result of the other; market freedom ensures individual freedom, which in turn ensures market freedom. By having the power to make her own decisions about her business, she is fulfilled both on a personal level and the broader market level.

(A)

Noora, this is well-done. you present
- a clear picture of your subject &
relate it well to the texts.