



WORK WITH MEANING AND PURPOSE

BY GRETA DAVIS

Lack of engagement at work is a concerning post-pandemic trend, according to the Gallup organization, which noted that U.S. employee engagement for American workers has dropped for the first time in a decade. Similarly, a recent report from the American Psychological Association reported burnout and stress are at an all-time high; those are also factors impacting engagement at work. Unengaged workers are more likely to be absent and experience isolation, quit their jobs, report higher levels of dissatisfaction, and/or underperform at work. According to Harvard Business Review, more than two-thirds of millennial and Gen Z workers are more likely to reactively disengage at work and immediately start looking for new jobs.

Much speculation exists about the causes of workplace disengagement, including job insecurity, demands for increased productivity in the face of limited resources, lack of flexible work arrangements, and lack of appreciation from management. Another potential factor is a disconnect between work itself and the why behind work, leading to a crisis of meaning and purpose. Many individuals show up to work but are disconnected from the organization and fail to connect the relevance of their work with what matters most to them.

While leaders can make attempts to improve engagement through organizational strategies, communication, and connection with employees, employees themselves can take action by exploring what personally matters to them and reflecting on how work may be connected to their meaning and purpose.

Many individuals move through academic and career milestones and accept jobs without purposefully exploring their personal values and comparing them to an organization's values in order to find alignment. Engaging in this practice can be clarifying and can help employees reengage in their work.

PERSONAL VALUES EXPLORATION: Values often drive meaning and purpose at work. One way to jump-start values exploration is by considering times in your life when things were going well and you felt satisfied. Also, consider your greatest accomplishments. Reflect on these experiences and consider using a values checklist to help name the associated values. Take time to personally define the values you identified. Looking to the future also helps to define values. Picture yourself 10 to 15 years from now and describe where you hope to be and what you hope to accomplish by that time in your life and career. This type of reflection can help reveal underlying values and motivators that connect to meaning and purpose.

IDENTIFY ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES: After identifying your own values, research and understand the values of the organization you are a part of or considering joining. These values are often outlined in mission statements, company culture documents, or core values statements. Be careful to examine organizational and leadership actions and evaluate if the organizational operations are reflective of the values they claim.

SEEK ALIGNMENT: Compare your personal values with the values of the organization. Look for areas of alignment where your beliefs and the organization's values coincide. Identify how your personal values can contribute positively to the organizational mission and goals. According to American psychologist Wendy Ulrich, people

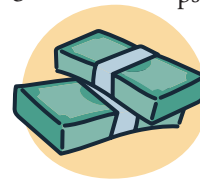
find meaning when they see a clear connection between what they highly value and what they spend time doing.

That connection is not always obvious, so it takes effort and intention to find this alignment.

Finding meaning and purpose in work is a personal journey that evolves over time. Martin

Seligman, father of positive psychology, argues that employees need to take personal accountability to be engaged and seek meaning and purpose

in work. Leaders influence employee engagement, but employees taking responsibility for their own experiences at work is essential. It's important to regularly reflect on what matters most to you and adjust as needed to align your work with a greater meaning and purpose in your life, resulting in increased motivation, engagement, and overall well-being.



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