

Unhappy staff want more from work

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Fulfilling your potential, developing your inner self, unity with others and being of service is how to find satisfaction at work.



Lani Morris Photo: urfrey

Managers want an office that hums and employees want to do work they believe in: so why is there such a disconnect in the modern workplace?

Lani Morris, co-author of *The Map of Meaning: A guide to sustaining our humanity in the world of work*, says people know what they want but they don't have a clear way of working out how to achieve that.

"Everyone wants to excel. It's true for managers; it's true for workers. We want to do great work, that's what makes work meaningful to us. We are driven to do work that has meaning, we don't want to waste our lives," says Morris, who has been researching the area of meaningful work for a decade with New Zealand's University of Canterbury academic Marjolein Lips-Wiersma.

But despite these inherent drivers, Morris says it is disheartening to see the level of disengagement in workplaces, with under-motivated and unhappy staff. "This happens because they've lost meaning," she says.

Morris says it is a lack of understanding by managers about how to motivate people that can have far-reaching negative consequences.

"No manager says, 'I want to go out and destroy meaning today', they just don't understand it. Everyone wants the workplace humming," Morris says.

"The reason they're destroying meaning is simple: because they don't see it, they don't recognise it, and they don't recognise that it's important, and even if they did they would find it hard to know what to do with it."

In response to this lack of understanding, and after undertaking years of research, Morris and Lips-Wiersma have created a Map of Meaning model. At its core is inspiration, and it contains four key elements: expressing full potential, developing the inner self, having unity with others and giving service to others.

“We share these drivers together: we all want to make a difference, we all want to do work that’s worthwhile and meaningful, we all want a sense of belonging, to do our best work and be inspired,” Morris says.

Morris says there are many way leaders destroy meaning, including restructuring and constant change, moving goal posts, short-term contracts, endless time pressures, the squeeze for money, power struggles, hierarchy used for personal gain and different world views but no acknowledgement of them. These factors make it hard for staff to form any sense of community within work.

Compromised company ethics are also a problem. "You’ve got the value statements up on the wall, but people are saying, ‘Sorry we don’t have time to worry about that’. It makes it worse because they are up on the wall: people see the gap between inspiration and reality and they get more critical and more cynical.”

Morris says an important step for bringing meaning into the workplace is for business owners and staff to become clear on what is important to them.

FIVE WAYS TO BRING MORE MEANING TO YOUR WORKPLACE

Reduce bureaucracy

It’s clear lots of meetings, reports and measures constantly take people away from what is meaningful. What managers need to say is: “Do I really need this? Can I simplify it?”

Keep change and restructuring to the absolute minimum

Be aware as the world becomes more and more stressful constant change is unproductive. The more people have stability in their workplace, the more meaningful their work is likely to be.

Sit and listen to each other and share what’s important

Stop and listen to your staff. Be with workers, sit down beside them, have a chat and ask good questions. How do you think we’re doing? What makes work worthwhile for you? What would make the most difference to your working day? Listening can also solve so many problems. It is about finding the time, popping down to the pub or the café and making time for relaxed conversation.

Keep your own sense of inspiration alive

The most powerful thing a leader can do is stay inspired. You don’t even really have to talk about it much, people will get it, and that helps them stay inspired; it’s catching. It is useful to take a day on your own, with a coach, or with your partner, and ask: Why am I in this? Why am I doing this? Reconnect with inspiration, rather than just the drama of thinking 'I’ve got to keep going'.

It’s important to relax

Your people are already motivated. There’s been so much emphasis on charismatic leadership and motivation and engagement coming from the top, but actually people are motivated, you don’t have to provide it all. What is important is providing a context where people can get on with their own work and that you trust them.

Lani Morris will be facilitating an intensive master class on the Map of Meaning in Brisbane on 12th and 13th October, 2013: <http://www.holisticdevelopment.org.nz>

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/small-business/unhappy-staff-want-more-from-work-20130320-2gea5.html#ixzz2Xx5h4v00>