

Do What You Love, Love What You Do



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During our Zoom Family Meeting on Valentine's Day, I made my siblings and parents laugh out loud when I told them that I was spending the day with my one true love... my job! Since we are obsessive Life360 members who track each other's comings and goings, they already knew that on this particular Sunday, I was, no surprise, at the office!

After she finished laughing, my sister Terri said, "Most people have good days and bad days at work; most people except Melanie, who loves her work like no one else on the planet!"

The average person will spend approximately 90,000 hours at work – just shy of 25% of their entire life. And yet, I recognize that few individuals have formed such ardor as I have for the jobs we return to day after day. Too many people settle for uninspired drudgery or develop a roller-coaster love/hate relationship with their positions. So, *is it* possible to change a job you *like* doing some days but dread others? Can people learn to truly "love the job you're with"? (Apologies to Stephen Stills for my twisted take on his tune, "Love The One You're With.") Is it possible for nonprofit leaders to inspire team members to have a more profound affection for the organization's work? My incurably optimistic nature says YES. Below are a few ideas from two vantage points

Sculpt a Job You Enjoy Into One You Love

Some team members may feel that their job joy is entirely controlled by someone else, often a miserable supervisor or always complaining co-workers. And you've no doubt heard the expression, "people don't quit their jobs; they quit their supervisors." On occasion, after hearing me excitedly describe my work week or boast about how I can't wait for Monday, my sister Terri tells me that "you love your job because you're the boss!"

There is truth in the connection between feeling in control (being the boss) and feeling safe or confident. If you're a confident driver but a nervous passenger, you're familiar with the confidence that being in control inspires. And there's also truth in the fact that being surrounded by mean or miserable people certainly increases the risk of job dissatisfaction. Yet, I believe there are steps we can all take to cultivate positivity about the job we're in. For example:

Stop and celebrate. Before leaving your workplace or home office at the end of a week, take 10 minutes to reflect on and celebrate the week's big win. Consider pairing with a colleague for an end-of-the-week check-in chat to share your 'win' and learn about theirs. Not only will your week's end celebrations be a positive close to

the week, but the camaraderie with your co-workers will give you an added social boost. Keep a running list of your 'wins' and accomplishments, and use them as a reminder on days that are less than perfectly lovely.

Begin each week (each day!) with ONE thing. A common frustration of busy professionals is feeling buried and overwhelmed by a never-ending 'to do' list. In his book, *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results*, Gary Keller writes that "extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus." Keller reminds readers of the tyranny of a lengthy list, adding that "A to-do list is simply the things you think you need to do; the first thing on your list is just the first thing you thought of... Allow what matters most to drive your day." When you learn to focus weekly, or daily, on 'one thing,' you begin to break free from the self-doubt and negativity associated with that long, endless list.

Invest in true friendships at work. Author Shasta Nelson dispels the pervasive, joy-sucking myth about mixing work and friendship in her terrific book, *The Business of Friendship*. Referring to the falsehood that it's too risky to be friends with colleagues, she writes that "It's like we don't really believe all the studies that show that liking whom we work with is one of the most significant predictors for our engagement, retention... safety, and productivity." She goes on to explain that all friendships begin with positivity. These initial bonds usually form with someone saying something nice to you or about you and vice versa. Once those first seeds are sown, friendships grow with continuity and vulnerability. As you build camaraderie with a colleague, remember that you need regular contact to nurture it. And to reach the apex of the friendship triangle, you need to be vulnerable. "I think I messed up. I could really use some advice."

Inspire Others to Love Their Jobs (Too!)

I believe that it's true that more often than not, people quit their bosses. With that in mind, each of us who is privileged to be a boss has a duty to do better. Here are a few thoughts inspired by some of the books I've been reading recently.

Connect roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the mission. In many nonprofits, team members feel disconnected from the professional pride that comes from serving people, a community, or making our world a better place. The need to connect the dots is especially true in nonprofits where operations or 'back office' teams are kept far from the love and appreciation that development and service delivery teams experience out in the community.

As a leader, one of your most important roles is to help everyone who reports to you understand that their work is vital, valued, and *truly meaningful* to your organization's mission. Whenever possible, let your staff know how their service contributes to the overall goals and mission of the organization. In your next meeting, consider saying things like "Without the finance team's detailed-oriented members, we couldn't possibly show our funders that every penny is being spent wisely to bring our mission to life." and "Without the meticulous and safety-conscious members of the facilities team, it wouldn't be safe or appropriate to welcome clients to our premises and programs." Don't assume that team members are connecting the dots on their own.

Encourage, nurture and celebrate friendships at work. In *The Business of Friendship*, Shasta Nelson writes that "We need supervisors who micromanage less and friendship facilitate more." And what about the 'risks' of friendships in the workplace—favoritism, jealousy, and the fear of being honest? Nelson writes, "The irony, of course, is that those risks are already real in our workplace whether we're friends or not. We could be against friendship and have no friends, but that doesn't protect us from jealousy, gossip, drama, or feeling left out. Our boss could have no friends and it still won't stop our suspicions of favoritism or make firing someone faster and easier." Enough said!

Adopt an "infinite" mindset and welcome everyone on the journey to be better. In *The Infinite Game*, Simon Sinek writes that "Infinite minded leaders understand that "best" is not a permanent state. Instead, they strive to be "better." "Better" suggests a journey of constant improvement and makes us feel like we are being invited to contribute our talents and energies to make progress in that journey." Are you guiding and supporting your team in this journey? Are your actions a model for your personal commitment to be better and do better every day?

Stop treating people like towels and start recognizing individual talents. Sinek says that leaders

sometimes ask: “How do I get the most out of my people?” He characterizes this question as deplorably flawed and explains why. “It’s not a question about how to help our people grow stronger, it’s about extracting more output from them. People are not like wet towels to be wrung out... A better question to ask is: “How do I create an environment in which my people can work to their natural best?”

Learn, know, and recognize the individual talents and work preferences of your team members. By playing to their strengths and being empathetic to how they best complete projects and assignments, you build a team who feels supported, enjoys their work and their work environment, and feels seen and heard as the valuable individuals they truly are.

Be vulnerable. During the past year, I’ve read a handful of articles that urge readers to dispense with the dated profile of a strong leader—someone who is confident and decisive—in favor of a modern sketch of leadership traits that motivate and inspire teams in good times and bad. In *Measure What Matters*, John Doerr recounts a conversation with business philosopher Dov Seidman, who used the term “active transparency” to describe: “a powerful cultural force... where human beings are opening up, sharing the truth, bringing others in, being vulnerable.”

Exemplify what duty to others means. Great leaders aren’t people who have a multitude of minions to boss around. The authors of *What Philosophy Can Teach You About Being a Better Leader* write: “...we build on Hobbes’ argument with the help of 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant to show that leadership is about opening up space in which individuals can act autonomously, bound by a duty to others. Here, your role as leader is to exemplify what duty to others means in the context of your organization’s purpose. Remember: authority is a gift bestowed on you by others. It can be taken away, leaving you with only an impressive business card.”

Learn and share. In *What Philosophy Can Teach You About Being a Better Leader*, the authors remind us of the inextricable nexus between *learning* and *humility*. They write, “Learning is more important than agreement. People contribute with conviction but in the full knowledge they could be wrong, that others could be right, and we could all be wrong. We are fallible.” Their practical tips and reminders include the admonition to leaders to *regularly* and *enthusiastically* share:

- What you observe, how you are feeling, what you are thinking
- What you’re doing
- What excites you and what frightens you
- What you would like to happen, and
- Ask others to share the same.

Enjoyment and engagement at work are positively contributing factors that make or break an organization’s mission advancing work. When your mission is at stake, can you risk *not* forming a loving relationship with the work you do? Simon Sinek describes the concept of a “Just Cause” in his book, *The Infinite Game*. He writes that “A Just Cause is a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist; a future state so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision.” Vow to commit yourself to sculpt your position into one that you cherish and to inspire those around you to do the same.