



The Culture Catalyst

Is work-life balance an oxymoron? Can anyone really expect to find the perfect balancing point for themselves and then be able to sustain it like magic over time? Your answer likely depends more on how much satisfaction and value you are receiving through work versus the actual time you spend at work.

The notion that work is somehow separated from life has changed forever. We are no longer surprised when 3 people on the team respond immediately to an email we just sent out at midnight. People even jump on conference calls from their vacation halfway around the world. We are at our battle stations nearly 24-7 to keep up and keep things moving. Given this state of things, how can we be engaged, enthusiastic, and passionate rather than resentful and burned-out?

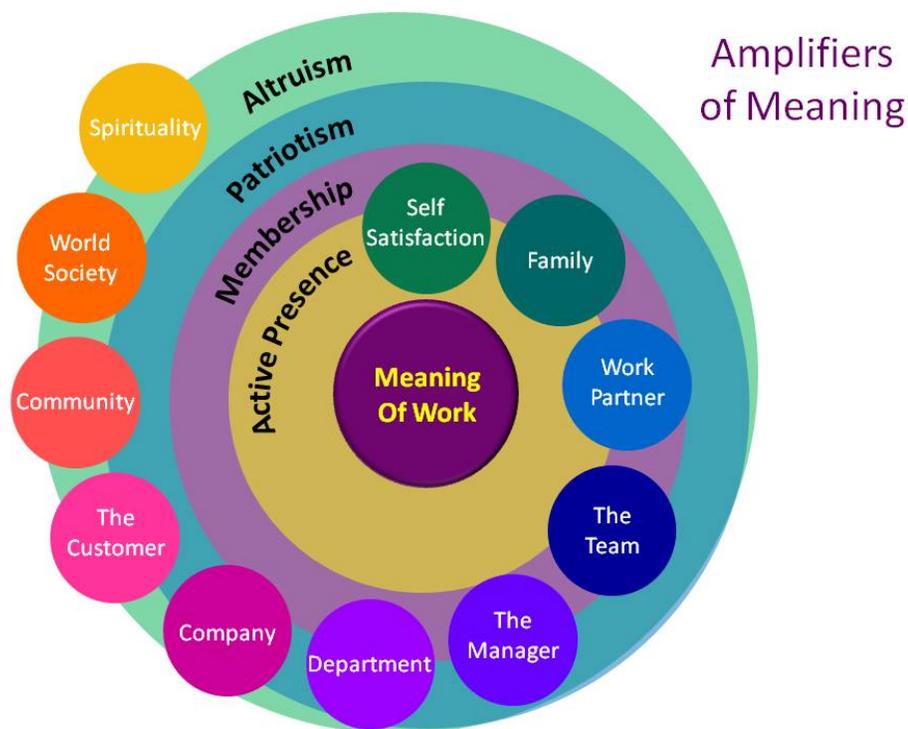
The answer has everything to do with seeing the meaning in our work. A perceived loss of satisfaction and value turns our work into an intrusion. When that happens, we feel work encroaches on our personal time because we'd rather be doing something else -- anything else -- that gives us back our sense of respect and purpose.

Managers need to be aware of how team members view the meaning of their work. How well do you know your team? A heightened awareness of the importance of meaningful work provides better choices for ideas on how to drive engagement and performance, tipping the work-life balance equation in a positive direction. Managers play a key role here in helping to articulate and reinforce the meaning of work for employees.

The model below depicts readily available sources of "meaning amplification," each of which represents an opportunity to make work more interesting and challenging for people. Closest to the core is the sense of "self-satisfaction" people derive from work. But taking pride in a job well done is not the only possible source of intrinsic motivation.

But taking pride in a job well done is not the only possible source of intrinsic motivation. Other avenues include building a direct connection between employees and customers (research from Wharton shows this can elevate engagement dramatically) and granting employees more autonomy to take on new roles or projects they would find fulfilling.

Here's the bottom line: only when people perceive that their work *matters* will they truly feel valued and engaged. In fact, their desire to stay fully in the game and feel a healthy work-life balance depends on it. There are countless ways to amplify the meaning of work for people. Which will you choose?



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Positively,

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