

DISSATISFIED AT WORK? PERHAPS IT'S YOU

[by Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D](#)

Just about every month, there's a new research report detailing the seemingly higher and higher degree of worker dissatisfaction. Whether it's a Gallup poll or a Conference Board report, the results are strikingly similar — workers are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their work.

While the majority of "reasons" for dissatisfaction usually point to elements of the workplace itself such as: management style, task design, work role, environmental conditions or opportunities for growth, few if any, of these reports ever point to the possibility that the employee himself or herself may be a major contributing factor to their own dissatisfaction.

LOOKING CLOSER TO HOME

In many instances of worker dissatisfaction, it's a question of "physician, heal thyself." In a culture of blame and victim consciousness, many dissatisfied and disgruntled workers should first look inside, rather than outside, for the root causes of their dissatisfaction. Here's why.

First, I would echo Karl Marx, and paraphrase something he said: "Where the economy creates a class of losers, where wealth gravitates easily into the hands of the haves, the fortunes of the have-nots become more desperate."

For me this translates into: in our culture, most everyone operates from an insidious and incessant need to be "somebody".

Thus, for me, the dissatisfaction I read about in workplace satisfaction studies such as the Gallup Polls and Conference Board Report is an aspect of this desperation.

My take on the dissatisfaction pointed to in such reports is that often one's perspective of dissatisfaction is largely a philosophical one. Meaning? Many of the folks who are expressing and experiencing "dissatisfaction" have a misplaced worldview, or perspective, that dictates how they view themselves and their life at work, and the meaning of work.

And relatedly, along with the rise in dissatisfaction, is a related rise in stress, boredom, burnout and rustout. Rustout is a lack or deficiency not of energy, but of passion

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Many folks are "making a living" but, at the same time, lack a sense of significance, a "meaning" in what they do. At the end of the day, many will admit they're in it for the wrong reason.

In many instances, rather than exploring the nature of the dissatisfaction by going "inside" and looking at the real reasons for their dissatisfaction, many workers seem to find fault with, blame, and criticize the externals: the education and training programs, the health and pension programs (albeit, today quite justifiable), management, and environmental conditions etc.

At the end of the day, however, many folks burn out without ever having been on fire. In order to be "somebody", they allow themselves to be devoured by "the corporation" and spend relentless amounts of energy and time (a lifetime, for many), scratching and clawing their way up the corporate ladder to achieve corporate success, but at what cost? To be "somebody?"

For many dissatisfied workers, they have set aside their dreams (once, real dreams) and instead tailored their lives and personalities to what the market demands, for example, down to the art and sciences of "power dressing", power lunching, having/creating "winning personalities," etc., ...all the while seeped in state of emptiness, lack and deficiency. Thus, leading to dissatisfaction. It's not about the "work".

Again, initially, resistant and not wanting to go "inside" to explore one's discontent, dis-ease and dissatisfaction, many seek the easy way "out" and blame externals as the excuses for their dissatisfaction. So, many dissatisfied workers live in an outer-directed culture, in which they remain strangers to themselves, disconnected from themselves, have no sense of their own intuitions and feelings and "real wants and needs." Thus, leading to dissatisfaction. It's not about the "work."

POVERTY ENRICHED SPIRITS

So, in our current workplace culture, many folks are driving themselves to their own "spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical" poorhouse, in new automobiles, eating calorie-free foods, watching plasma TVs, etc., all the while bemoaning the reality of increased stress, decreased productivity in an environment polluted by our industry. Thus, leading to dissatisfaction.

It's not the "work."

It would be curious to know if many of these dissatisfied folks would, in fact, be dissatisfied if they lived a life in which their work fit them like a skintight suit, if their work were their purpose in life, if their work were who they were.

In what, in this country, is a relentless struggle for so many to "be somebody" at the expense of others being "nobodies," many have lost sight of the true and real values that support one's mental, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being, especially at work. Thus, leading to dissatisfaction.

It's not the "work."

So many are sacrificing their health, on every level, in order to be counted among the "have" folks. For what? So-called "happiness"?

BUT THE JONESES ARE BURNT OUT, TOO

In the January 17, 2005 Special Issue of Time Magazine, reference is made to the somebody-nobody experience as "reference anxiety", that is, "keeping up with the Joneses", constantly comparing one's self and one's "stuff" with someone else's and much of this takes place in our work environments and is characteristic of many of our workplace cultures. Thus, leading to dissatisfaction.

It's not the "work."

This "reference anxiety" syndrome also accounts for the widening gap in income distribution. The Time article states: "...Paradoxically, it is the very increase in money...that triggers dissatisfaction..." and, this is part of the dissatisfaction that folks bring to work with them, in addition to the dissatisfaction that folks say they experience due to the work itself. In other words, many are taking out their deep feelings of lack and deficiency by blaming their work by often blaming their workplace in some way, shape or form. Thus, leading to dissatisfaction.

It's not the "work."

Finally the Time Magazine article (and countless others that speak to these issues) references the workplace: "People who love their jobs feel challenged by their work.." Notice, it's not the reverse. In reality, the "love" of the job comes first. The love of the work one does.

So, yes, many folks are dissatisfied with their work. The Time magazine article states, people who love their jobs "...find meaning in what they do." Again, the reality is countless folks simply do not, and cannot, find meaning in what they do, but they do it, and the \$10 question, "WHY?" Why do they do what they do?

LOOK INWARD, WHERE THE HEART RESTS EASY

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in the Time Magazine article, states, "...Anything can be enjoyable if the element of flow is present. Within that framework, doing a seemingly boring job can be a source of greater fulfillment than one ever thought possible." The Dalai Lama says, "I do nothing." His work and life are the same. Anything can be enjoyable. Anything.

These two folks do not say it's the manager's responsibility to make anyone happy. They don't say It's the flowers and plants that make folks happy. They don't say it's the extra percentage in the bonus, or the new training equipment, etc. that accounts for one's happiness. They simply point to what's going on, or not going on, "inside" a person that accounts for their satisfaction.

It's not the "work."

So, the question of job satisfaction starts "inside."

An important question to consider is: "What takes one out of that state of flow and presence and moves one in the direction of "dissatisfaction?"

Until and unless one gets to "root causes" of dissatisfaction and unhappiness, which are, at the end of the day, "inside" issues, more than outside issues, such job satisfaction reports can only describe the landscape surface, but certainly not explain why the landscape is barren. Again, one needs to look underneath the surface of the barrenness.

SEEKING DEEPER ANSWERS

Exploring and inquiring underneath the landscape, that is "going inside", leads to some questions:

- Why can't I forge true and real friendships and relationships at work? Really, really, true and real relationships and friendships, not surface acquaintanceships? What gets in the way of that?
- Why are trust, honesty, openness, and an emotional feeling of safety lacking in so many workplaces and within so many teams and groups?
- Why are bullying and gossiping so prevalent in our workplaces?
- Why do so few find real meaning in their work?
- Why is true and real well-being lacking in so many work environments?

Perhaps, one day, not too far off, we'll find that it's not only about 401Ks, task design, work roles, the latest and greatest training tools, cool icebreakers, plants in the atrium, and the same business and leadership models, theories and concepts in new "wine skins." Perhaps, one day, not too far off, we can look outside the box of common dissatisfaction to "new" possibilities, new answers.

Such as:

- people exploring and going after what truly brings them fulfillment in their work - remembering that even a boring job can be a fine experience when one is in touch with oneself. And thus not completely dependent for "someone out there to make satisfaction happen for me"
- people discovering their values that emanate from their true and real self, their heart and essence, from their moral compass, rather than from their ego-driven needs and materialistic "taste du jour"
- people feeling connected first, to their self, inside, their inner spirit, on an inner plane, which can then, and only then, lead to true connections, interactions, relationships and contactfulness with others
- people exploring their own internal deficiencies and feelings of lack which lead to petty jealousies and envy of others, dissatisfaction that fosters conflict, gossiping and bullying
- people who put people before work, in an honest and sincere and self-responsible manner
- people who have discovered their passion and have the strength and courage to live it through their work or to seek it out in their work, doing what they truly love to do
- people who stay physically, mentally and emotionally healthy, and spiritually strong
- people truly living a life rather than obsessed with a lifestyle

So, perhaps, the "dissatisfaction" element as it relates to work is directly intertwined with life in general; that, at the end of the day - the workday - there is no "compartmentalizing" of our lives.

what is it about one's life in general that brings one to find dissatisfaction, not only at work but in other aspects of one's life?

WE FIND WHAT WE SEEK

In the Time Magazine article, we read: "...clinical depression is 3 to 10 times as common today than two generations ago...money jangles in our wallets and purses, but we are no happier for it, and for many, more money leads to depression." And, dissatisfaction.

So, what is it, really, really, about work that leads so many to be dissatisfied?

Perhaps the dissatisfaction element lies on a much deeper level of the psyche and it's about the inner person, not about the externals.

The Time Magazine article states that "...millions of us spend more time and energy pursuing the things money can buy than engaging in activities that create real fulfillment in life..."

Thus, it's curious that of the thousands of business books that are published each year, there's hardly one chapter devoted to "friendship" (real and true friendship...not the "good-old-boys-back-slapping stuff that is a "faux" substitute) in the workplace.. Dissatisfaction.

It's not the "work."

Relationships rule the world, even the world of work. Finding meaning rules one's deeper sense of happiness, fulfillment, and well-being, even in the world of work. However, it's one's relationship, first, with one's self that must be examined to explore the true and real root causes of dissatisfaction.

When we come to life with the right values, and are grounded on a foundation of truth, honesty, sincerity and self-responsibility, in our relationship to our self, first, and then others, dissatisfaction can more easily morph into satisfaction.

The spirit of an organization begins and ends with the spirit of each individual.

So, really, really, why is satisfaction falling?

Perhaps, for some, it starts with "me," not "it," "him/her" or "them."

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