

Battle Burnout

Addressing the six motivators for enjoying work.

Gloria wasn't happy at work. It wasn't that she hated her job or anything like that. Her co-workers were fine and she didn't mind the type of work she did. In fact, she thought she did it pretty well. Of course, she wanted more money, but who didn't? No, something else was bothering her. At some basic level, she simply didn't enjoy coming to work. Whatever excitement or sense of accomplishment she used to get had been replaced by a lack of motivation.

Gloria's issue was a common one. Employees around the world sometimes lose sight of what makes their work worthwhile. They get run-down, burnt out and de-motivated. At times like these it can be difficult for anyone to enjoy work and find the old levels of motivation and energy.

To help Gloria and the millions like her, it is necessary to look at the underlying causes. Why do any of us enjoy work? And can we re-ignite those causes in our own work environment? The answer is yes, there are at least six different reasons why we enjoy work -- ignoring money, of course.

Inner Accomplishment

The remarkable time and energy some people put in to their work can only be understood as an "inner drive" - they simply want to achieve that goal. Seeking a personal sense of accomplishment is natural and can be harnessed everyday by millions of workers and employers. It can be described as "taking pride in one's work" or a sense that "this is what I was meant to do." Whether the objectives are short-term or long-term, making progress toward a goal makes all of us feel good.

NOTES:

The Greater Good

Many of us are also motivated by a sense of community. The feeling that we are part of something larger and that life isn't just about our own individual needs and wants. This particular joy and peace is experienced by millions as they volunteer for church or service club tasks, but it can also be encouraged in the workplace. For example, it is claimed many Asian/Eastern companies reinforce this message. Clearly many Americans are also motivated by community considerations. Perhaps Gloria could be encouraged to reframe her circumstances and see how she is contributing to the greater good.

Personal Relationships

Many get enjoyment from the individual relationships they experience at work. It helps them look forward to each day. The laughter, the camaraderie, the forgiveness and even the occasional stress are all something they enjoy and know they wouldn't want to live without. But not everyone is the same, and certainly we're not all our best self every single day. Enlightened managers respect this basic human need to connect with others and allow it, if not encourage it, in their workplace. Has Gloria's manager given her the opportunity to connect with others? Has he diagnosed that this is something important to her?

Sense of Team

Similarly, some people enjoy a special sense of completeness and wholeness by experiencing team. In the workplace, many employers work hard to encourage this shared identity by conducting internal PR and messaging campaigns. For quieter teammates, a sense of camaraderie might provide an extremely important opportunity to connect and feel like they belong. Does Gloria feel she's part of a team? How much team spirit has her boss created?

Physical Exertion

For some, a special sense of joy comes from physical exertion, and the absence of it makes

any job less appealing. It just doesn't feel like work if they aren't breaking a sweat or doing battle with the weather. This is partly a product of socialization and might be tied up with what "work" means to them. Modern day psychology re-affirms the benefits from physical labor. We all know how endorphins can give us a slight high and everyone knows about the stress-management benefits from working out? Is getting physical a way for Gloria to battle her lack of motivation? If her job is sedentary, does her employer even offer a "get in shape" program?

Mental Challenges

Finally, a great many of us enjoy the special mental feeling that comes from exercising our creativity or satisfying our curiosity. The small euphoria that comes from developing something new or conquering a complex problem can be for a big part of enjoying work for some. Does Gloria's boss know whether she's incredibly bored or frustrated by her tasks? Is it time for a promotion, or perhaps a little job engineering to offer a chance at being creative?

"Why" is the Answer to "How"

So, what can be done more generally to help employees enjoy their work? Or what can Gloria or any employee do themselves? The answer is simple: treat the cause, not the symptoms. Instead of worrying about symptoms like aggressive behavior or poor attitude, employees and employers can create a more enjoyable work environment by directly addressing one or more of these common denominators. Why not casually interview Gloria about whether she feels connected to her fellow co-workers? Does she have any friends at work? Why not ask "is this job challenging enough?" or "would you like the opportunity to be more creative?" Stepping back and reflecting on each of these six motivators can guide any manager or employee toward a more enjoyable work place. There is hope for Gloria in the application of modern day psychology to the workplace.

Erick Lauber is an applied psychologist and faculty at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He speaks and consults on leadership, personal growth and development, and taking charge of our own life stories.