

The 2020

FORWARD THINKING SUCCESS SERIES

WHAT PEOPLE LACK AND LONG FOR



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What Do People Lack and Long For at Work?

Bill Fox

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This book is dedicated to the forward-thinking leaders who contributed their time, intellect, and wisdom to the Exploring Forward-Thinking Workplaces conversation. Thank you for being part of this journey.

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Introduction

There was always something missing.

Even in the best of companies I worked for, there was always something missing that would dampen my enthusiasm and my engagement in work.

Often it was office politics. Sometimes it was a bully. Many times it wasn't safe to share my true thoughts

Then there was the meaningless work - even in organizations with a grand purpose.

This list is just the tip of the iceberg, but I often felt like an alien in the workplace.

When I had real conversations with many of my colleagues, I learned that they felt the same way too.

But the vast majority of people really didn't seem to care or buried their true feelings deep inside.

That's why "What do people really lack and long for at work?" is one of the core questions I ask pioneering business and thought leaders in the Exploring Forward Thinking Workplaces interviews.

My intention with this question is to increase the awareness and understanding of what people really lack and long for at work, so we can do something about it.

It's one of the things few people talk about and even fewer try to address. But we can't move forward if we don't.

This book is an abridged collection of the most intriguing insights and responses to this question:

What do people really lack and long for at work?

For further reading, links are provided to each leader's complete interview.

However, please note that interviews published in my book *The Future of the Workplace* are available only in the book because of my agreement with the publisher.

I hope you enjoy reading this book and find it intriguing and valuable.

I'd like to know, so please feel free to email me at bill@billfox.co.

To your great work life & success,



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People Want to Feel Like They Matter

Alan Seale in How to More Effectively & Authentically Respond

I think not just in the workplace, but everywhere—what do people want out of life? They want to feel like they matter. They long for that sense of making a difference — that who they are and what they do mean something. They want to be able to say, “It matters that I’m here.” It matters to people that what they sense and feel and experience is heard and recognized. It matters to them that they are seen. It matters to them that they are heard.

Being Seen, Recognized and Appreciated Genuinely and Sincerely

Andrew Bennett in The Surprising Secret of Magic in Business

But respect and appreciation from leaders and peers is such an uplifting experience. The simple act of saying, “Bill, you know

what I really admire about you is the way you listen so deeply. I know that you are really with me and that we're really connected because you ask questions that reveal that you're hearing something even deeper. I feel valued by the way you listen." To have someone give you feedback like that where they see something in you and they name it and share their admiration, it's not just a generic pat on the back. It's not a certificate of achievement. It's not a gift card for dinner at a restaurant. Those things are nice, but you don't have to spend money. It's just being seen, recognized, and appreciated genuinely and sincerely. I think most people at work lack that. Many leaders are afraid to do that because they don't want to make you too full of yourself. Or they want you to have a little of fear about whether you're safe around here, so you don't slack off.

Having Real Meaning in Their Work

Andy Yen in Space to Speak Honestly Gives Us Power

The key thing that people miss is having real meaning to their work. Many people do jobs without knowing what is the purpose

or the big picture of how their work is changing the world. This is what we call a dead end or even a bullshit job.

It's important to reduce those types of jobs. Make sure that everybody has a lot of meaning in their work, so people can see the impact their work has on the world. It's management's responsibility to convey that to the workforce.

Sacrificing for Something Worth Sacrificing For

August Turak in Take Action & Make the Hero's Journey Yourself

I worked hard in my book to articulate what we want is a mission. We want our lives to be an adventure. We want something that's worth sacrificing for. At the same time, we think we don't want sacrifice, and we don't like sacrifice. We don't want to be asked to sacrifice. But if we're honest with ourselves, we are happiest when we're sacrificing for something worth sacrificing for. We are not happiest when someone gives us a million dollars and says just walk over there and amuse yourself with it. I mean that gets annoying very quickly. What we want is we think we want selfishness, but what we want is selflessness. We want something that's so magnificent, so good, so pure, so

worth doing that we can dedicate ourselves to it entirely and forget completely about ourselves. Throughout history, this is what religion did for people, but we also want it in our ordinary lives.

People Long for Self-Insight and for Getting Themselves Back

Aviv Shahar in How to Elevate Yourself, Your Conversations & Your Future

I believe there are two aspects to this. There are the interior and the exterior dimensions to consider. Whether people know it or not, they long for self-insight and for getting themselves back. When you get yourself back that's a big part of perhaps what you're looking for. Because inside it, you get to appreciate the human condition and your own conditioning too. And these insights lead to finding your strength and appreciating that inside your strength, there also may be a weakness.

And also that inside your weakness, there may be a latent strength. As you know, there are many dyslexic people who are brilliant and found ways to lead and transform to bring

tremendous innovation into a variety of spaces. It's just one example of how self-insight and how understanding your superpower, including appreciating your weakness, and how inside your weakness there may be a latent strength can be very powerful. These are mission-critical insights if you are to manifest your gifts and talent to bring forward your greatest contribution.

People Would Like to Feel Like That Don't Have to Edit Themselves When They Come to Work

Bob Gower in How to Give People Voice the Natural Way

I think we all want to bring more of our quirky selves out in the workplace than we feel comfortable doing. People are kind of messy. We're not necessarily neat. We have quirks, we have weaknesses, we have strengths. I think people would like to bring more of their authentic selves—to feel not like they have to edit themselves so much when they come to work. People want to feel like they can build authentic and real relationships with

people, and they just aren't a number hitting cog in a machine. I think we often try to give people that. For example, dress codes have obviously been relaxed over the last 20 years and the emphasis on bringing dogs to work.

Are We Taking Care of Each Other?

Bob Schatz in Exploring Forward-Thinking Workplaces with Bob Schatz

I feel that people are missing a sense of family. It used to be if you went to work for a company there was an informal agreement that you were going to take care of each other. You take care of the company, and the company will take care of you.

People Feel Trapped When There's No Sense of Security

David Marquet in Give People More Control

I believe it's control, value and purpose. When I think about the unpleasant times of my work, they were things like plenty of abuse and then you feel trapped because you feel like there's no one to talk to. If you speak up, you're going to get fired. You're not a team player. You risk social ostracism, and so it's not safe to vent at work, so you come home and you vent at home.

People Want Their Work to Mean Something

David Shedd in How Do We Get Less Command & Control Leadership?

I think a lot of people at work want their work to mean something. They want to be challenged, they want their ideas to be heard, and they want someone to truly listen to them.

Purposeful Work That Has Something to Do With Them

Dennis Wittrock in Creating a Work Environment I'd Actually Like to Work In

What people lack and long for is meaning. They long for purposeful work that has something to do with them and how they show up in the world. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” “Oh I want to be a replaceable cog in a machine,” says nobody ever! At a certain point, people want to be able to unfold their unique potentials. Before that they have the Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs to navigate. People want a secure job and they want stability in their lives. They want to be recognized by their peers but at some point, they want to self-express and do the work they are meant for.

People Want to be Excited, Happy, and Passionate About What They're Working On

Dianne Collins in How to Be a Powerful Agent in the World

And what about this idea of passion as an energy trend? As you ask, what’s important to me now – we want to be doing what we love. It’s not at all selfish or superficial because when each one of us tunes in to what we’re passionate about, we are at the same time tuning in to the clues, gifts, talents and experiences

that we've been given by our destiny – what we've been expecting and hoping for throughout our lives.

When we each start to be excited, happy, and passionate about what we're working on and how we're expressing ourselves in the workplace – that is probably the greatest contribution to our world at large.

It's easy to see why – because happier people are more productive, healthier, and have a greater uplifting influence on others when you're in that elevated joyful state. You have a clearer connection to source – the Infinite field of mind, Infinite Intelligence. That's where genius gets ignited. That's where we spark new ideas.

Clear and Creatively Responsive State of Mind

Dicken Bettinger in The Most Important But Least Recognized Variable in Business

A leader is often described as someone who has learned how to bring out the best in themselves and others, which is a calm, clear, peaceful, and creatively responsive state of mind. Leaders can help other people access their own clear and creatively

responsive state of mind, and then collectively together they can solve anything—literally anything.

We All Have Different Longings — Look at Values

Eva Maria Schielein in Letting People Do What They Really Want to Do

If we talk about people, we all have different longings, and that's ok. In order to find out what workers in a certain company lack and long for, I would take a look at their values. Every one of us has his or her own unique individual values. Our values are beliefs we have developed since our childhood. For example, if my highest value is autonomy, a workplace which gives me a good level of autonomy to do my job would be fine with me while somebody else who values recognition or friendship with other people may need to work on a team where they are recognized or compensated for their contribution.

Helping People See the True Impact of Their Work Is Very Important

Felicia Spahr in What do I need to embody?

Thinking about different ways you can help people see the true impact of their work is very important. I'm sure there are many ways this can be applied to all kinds of different industries. If you are a CEO or manager, you want to make sure employees have that feeling of this is good work. You want to show them and show them in different ways. What does it feel like? What does it look like? What are the long-term effects? Where is it going? More messaging on that so people can get excited and motivated, and take ownership of what they're going.

People Need to Feel Valued and Part of Something Bigger

Gwen Kinsey in How Do We Create that Environment that Uses Natural System Wisdom?

In my leadership work, I started off studying engagement strategies. As I peeled that onion, I kept coming back to the balance between I and We. If people feel like they're valued and contributing members of a community working towards something bigger than themselves... that's an important precondition to well-being.

Recognize We Bring All of Ourselves

Helena Lass in Who Is Leading Our Lives?

If we bring all of us to work, then literally everything comes along —all of the problems too. So managers can now ask you, "How can I help you integrate everything that you are and help you align that with this work so that you can work in the best way?"

Treat People as Human Beings and Not as Employees

Howard Behar in The Person Who Sweeps the Floor Pushes the Broom

Being treated with respect and dignity. Being dealt with as a human being and not an employee. They're not seen as an asset, but they're seen as a person with all their good points and all their flaws—they're accepted for that.

Give People the Ways and Tools to Find Harmony Between Work and Home

Brund Gunnsteinsdottir in Shifting the Center of Gravity

I've talked about intrinsic motivation and bringing out the best in people, and this idea of enabling people to live out their fullest potential is amazing. But you can't just focus on that at work. We need to respect that people have different roles and responsibilities, so I think that it's key to recognize that and approach every individual from that perspective. Not everybody makes that distinction. Some people are what they do. Some people come home and take care of their kids, and they can't stop thinking about what they're doing at work. It really benefits them and what they do at work to be present with their kids or otherwise in their private lives. So I think it's learning to allow all these components to work together.

Emotional Intelligence Isn't Enough

Irene Ricotta in Be Open & Curious to the True Voice of People

Jack Ma, Founder of Alibaba talks about something he calls L-Q or Love-Quotient. We not only need emotional intelligence but also love intelligence. We live in a society where gossip, criticism, and judgment are normal and more widespread than love. In this type of environment, people are longing for appreciation, recognition, acknowledgment, and love, which are powerful forces that people need. This is what is lacking in many workplaces. Bosses focus too much on control and don't act like leaders. They push to get people under their control. They want to command and push people down. These types of environment are not healthy for anyone — bosses or employees. Everyone is stressed. This doesn't work in any place.

People Want to Have Time to Do the Things That Are Important in Their Life

Jeff Dalton in Making Every Voice Matter

I've been excited this past couple of years because it seems like the workforce is evolving. People are more interested in the work environment with time and challenge being the most important things. People want to have time to do the things that are important in their life. A career, making money and moving up are the things that people do, but it's not the reason we work. We don't work to move up and get a new title. We don't work to make an additional \$50,000 per year. Those things are nice and good things (and wholly necessary), but what we really work for is to spend time with our family, relax, read, and do other pursuits outside of our careers. And be challenged every day.

A Community You Can Trust Where You Feel Respected

Jim Finkelstein in The Workplace of the Future Has to Honor Mass Customization

You can cite various resources around this topic, but Gallup may have popularized it in their Q12 engagement survey with their question, "Do you have a best friend at work?" While now controversial and challenged as to importance, I believe that the question should be — "Do you have a community you can trust and where you feel respected and able to make a contribution?"

An Opportunity to Tell the Truth

Jim Haudan in Why Are So Many Unwilling to Say What They Think, Feel & Act On?

I think there are a lot of ways to answer this question. If I had to pick one, I'd say the thing that people most long for at work is the opportunity to tell the truth. The opportunity to be told the truth and the opportunity to feel free and safe, to tell the truth.

Understand What Each Person Values

John Bell in Voices Will Matter, People Will Thrive, & Innovation Will Become Ingrained in the Culture If...

Some people work to live and others live to work. I think that's critically important before you even address someone to know which ones you have and to value each of them. Times are a changing. I watch my kids balance their personal lives and their business lives way better than I ever did. My parents came out of the war and their parents were out of the depression so you're affected by that. Success meant making money and working hard, so we did and eventually we realized that's not all there is. There has to be satisfaction in the work and there's an immediate need to pay the bills, so we have to realize that.

People Lack and Long for Purpose and a Vision

John Ryskowski in How to Get Beyond the Way Most of Us Are Working Today

I believe what people lack and long for at work is a purpose ... and a vision. Being a leader and having a vision and mission that

you actually believe in—that you stand behind, that you really mean—is a very big deal. It’s imperative.

And it can be hard to do. You have your staff, you have your direct reports, you have hundreds, maybe thousands of people. Especially with a public company: You have all these people below you, and then up above, you’ve got shareholders and you have a board. With all that, it’s really hard to be transparent and speak from the heart about why your company exists, what you want to achieve in the next few years and feel good about it, feel right about it and feel in tune with it. That is hard to do. But it can be done.

A Fundamental Respect for People

John Toussaint in Insights from Leading a Lean Healthcare Revolution

One of my mentors in the leadership work that I do is Paul O’Neill, past CEO and Chairman at Alcoa. He made Alcoa the safest company to work for in the world back when it wasn’t cool to do that. He did it based on a fundamental respect for people. His point was the ultimate respect for people is to not have them get injured at work. In a manufacturing environment

back in the 1980s, a lot of people were being injured. If we fast forward today, safety is job #1 in most manufacturing companies. I think today it's respecting the work that people do and celebrating that work, which is another way of showing respect.

Through Community We Get Much Better Mindsets and Work

Jon Mertz in [Lead More Holistically by Learning the Secrets of the Aspen's](#)

It goes back to the question of shifting the mindset from workplace to community. Within a community, we need to deliver that sense of belonging, or provide that opportunity to achieve that sense of belonging, and through that we will get much better mindsets and better work within our communities. I think you fall into becoming parts of actions rather than an overall sense of belonging within the overall organization and the mission of the organization or the team. If we can provide a culture that has a better sense of belonging that will eliminate more of those factions and have better collaborative work.

People Want to Be Appreciated, but They Also Want to Be Part of a Winning Team

Judith Glaser in How Do We Tap into the Best Conversations that People Can Have

I think this question and the last one have a lot in common. People like to be appreciated. If you want to have one word, it's appreciation. But I think it's more than that for the employee. They not only want to be appreciated, but they want to be part of a winning team. They want to have a role that's important. They want to be able to share their ideas and engage with people on topics even if it means disagreeing with the boss. I call them "Expressing Conversations" where people can really express what's on their mind and really add value to an organization—not just become a number in an organization.

People Are Longing to Feel the Workplace Is One Where They Belong and Can Contribute

Karen Mack in Culture Makes the Difference

Because we rarely choose the people we work with, belonging or having a positive or family oriented atmosphere is often an unspoken or possibly an unconscious desire.

People want to feel comfortable and confident that their work matters, and they're in a place where they can give their best. People are longing to have workplaces that provide opportunities to give and receive. If these dynamics are present, it captures people and keeps them engaged. Employees will be more productive because they feel they are a part of an inclusive culture. However, there's often a significant disconnect, which leads to workplace issues.

A Clear Mind & Meaningful Work

Ken Manning in [What Does the Wisdom in Me Move Me to Do Right Now?](#)

People want to be able to have a clear mind and have what's meaningful to them be respected and appreciated. They want to have the opportunity to engage in something meaningful that is also meaningful to them personally.

A Sense of Connection With Life's Purpose

Kent Johnson in [How to Help Employees Engage with Passion](#)

It's interesting. When I ask people that, they often say they don't really know. Some will say, "I'm not sure what my expectations are. I want to make a living. I want to make good money and retire early and go fishing." But often, when you scratch the surface and get people thinking about what it is they long for, they'll say, "I want a sense of connection with my life's purpose. I was made to do this stuff. I feel like I was made to thrive in this way and to help society by contributing to this company in this

particular way.” That is a profoundly “religious” kind of expression, in the broad sense. It’s a sense of carrying out a calling. It’s the difference between I got a job and I’ve got to do this little thing.

What Proportion of the Population Do You Think Would Give Up What They Do if They Had a Free Choice?

Lance Secretan in Inspiring Belief Changing Wisdom that Will Change the World

I make a lot of speeches publicly and around the world. In every speech I ask this question: What proportion of the population do you think would give up what they do if they had a free choice? I run this like an auction. I say let’s start at 50%. Do you think 50% is a reasonable number? Immediately people say no, it’s 60%. Then somebody will say no, it’s 70%. Then somebody says no, it’s 80%. Eighty percent is where we always end up.

People Are Looking for Meaning in the Work They Do Every Day

Lindsay Pedersen in What Is the Most Powerful Tool You Have as a Leader?

I think it's a very human quality to be a meaning seeker. We're looking for meaning in everything that we interact with in our environment. When that's missing from a significant part of a person's life, there isn't a sense of why am I here? What is this all for?

I think there's something very existentially draining about being in an environment that has no meaning. Conversely, when people are finding meaning in the work that they're doing every day, it's really energizing. I think that what people lack and long for at work is the same thing that people lack and long for in all of their lives, which means that something that they're spending their precious time and attention is something that matters to them.

It's an eight-hour day, but if you're checking your watch every five minutes, it's because you want it over with, which is the opposite of the flow state. In the flow state, time disappears, and you get lost in the creation of something that is engaging to you. It's difficult enough to engage you, but not so difficult that you're

put off by it. It's so soul-sucking when you're in a place that's devoid of meaning for you.

It's Up to All of Us to Help Each Other Make Meaning of What's Going On

Lynne Cazaly in Why You Need to Rattle Your Cage

Broadly speaking, there's a sort of disconnection going on, and there's probably a range of things causing it. I think we need to help people understand things quicker and not leave them in that ambiguous state before announcements are made. If we don't, the rumor mill starts working and the grapevine's in full swing because people pick up clues and hints about what's going on. Why keep them in the dark? What's caused some of this are the practicalities that Dan Pink's book *Drive* identified such as autonomy, mastery, and purpose. He said if we have these things, these are the things people long for at work. I'd add to Pink's list the idea of having some sense of being able to work out what's going on and find that out quickly. It's not up to the employees to find out what's going on; it's up to all of us to help each other make meaning of what's going on.

People Want to Feel Good

Mara Gleason in How to Unleash Your Human Operating System

I would put it very simply; it's the same thing people lack and long for life anywhere in the world, which is good feeling. I could say that in a million different ways — more connection, more feeling, more in the moment, more inspiration, more recognition, and so on. There are so many words you could say, but I would sum it up by saying people want more good feeling. They want to feel better at work and in life. I've never met a human from anywhere—and I've worked with violent gang members who are doing lifetime prison sentences to CEOs with millions and millions of dollars in their bank account—and underneath the wrapping of those individuals on the inside is the same desire, which is to feel nice in life. I don't mean happy all the time; that's not what I mean. I think more good feeling can just be peace of mind.

Nothing Different From the Rest of Their Lives

Marc Hanlan in Why Isn't It that Simple?

My simple answer is nothing different from the rest of their lives.

People Lack Being Recognized

Marcel Schwantes in Human-Centered Leadership Empowers People to Scale Mountains

People lack so many things but let me boil it down to what keeps coming up for me in client surveys and the people I interview. People lack being recognized. They lack having the spotlight put on them for the work they do. I believe that executives and high-level managers now have the self-awareness to give their employees the credit. But what happens at the end of the year and who gets the big fat bonus and more stock options?

The recognition part has to extend beyond an “attaboy” for good work. When I say put the spotlight on people, I mean recognize them not only for their work and contributions, but continue to recognize them through compensation.

That really separates the most humble and human centered leaders from the pack because it shows that “Hey, I’m not above you.” Because as an executive who achieves some measure of financial performance, they get more money, more notoriety, and the parking spot in front of the building and so on. So as leaders,

we must level out the playing field so that employees are recognized through various means on an equal par.

Feeling Valued

Mark Ricketts in A Virtual Space for Collective Minds to Imagine & Create

This is quite interesting for me because when I did this I thought, “Well, given the way the economies around the world work, I fully thought that this would end up being a money question.” Now you can see the answers that people came back with: to be valued, quality of life, money gets there in third place, see the bigger picture, and flexible working conditions. Then to understand the purpose of the company they work for, not just the vision. Not quite a lot of people working on that. A couple of hundred individual judgments. So the top answer quite strongly was feeling valued at work.

People Want a Sense of Purpose and Desire to Make a Difference

Martha Kesler in Why is Role Clarity So Important in Today's Workplace?

I think people want a sense of purpose and desire to make a difference. They want a line of sight to the impact that they can make.

I developed a model for evaluating and understanding customer value. Through the model, we look at what's important to different customers at different points in the life cycle of the business relationship. Clear line of sight from every single person within the organization to that end user customer is the goal. It's like spokes in a wheel. How does each spoke contribute to the overall strength? I think that analogy applies from several perspectives. For example, the recent US government shutdown referred to a distinction between essential and non-essential employees. If an employee is viewed as non-essential, what does that say about the value they bring? How might that impact the individual's desire to perform on the job? Understanding how their own work links to value helps employees develop a sense of purpose.

Give people the authority, the autonomy, and the know-how to accomplish what is expected.

People Need Time to Think, Not Just Execute

Masa K. Maeda in Vanishing Mental Barriers that Limit True Collaboration

I think most people long for the freedom to be able to grow and express themselves. When people approach me, there comes a moment when they get comfortable and relate things that are rather personal. I can't remember one customer where there wasn't at least one person who came to me in frustration and said "I've been doing the same thing for years and I'm bored and frustrated" or "I don't have the opportunity to think, I just execute."

It's Not New, We Long for Significance

Meredith Haberfeld in Leadership Behavior Sets the Tone

Clearly we're now in the IMPACT or PURPOSE generation. There's a 5,000-year-old cave painting in France that's a little hand print. When I see it, I imagine a caption that reads " I was here." So it's not a new concept, we long for significance. We come most alive when we can see a narrative bigger than ourselves, and we can find a place in it where we can plug in. Our piece of that story matters.

Help People See a Direct Loop Between What They Do and How It Affects Customers, Society or the World

Michael Anderson in Let's Figure Out Why That's Not Happening

They want to see a direct loop between what they do personally and how it affects their customers or society or community at large. A leader in a transformational workplace gives people that. It's one of these things that's sometimes hard to measure in terms of the productivity or heart people put into it. You oftentimes have to look past the quantitative numbers to get

these concepts that the things that truly make the difference in organizations.

Get Underneath to the Why

Michael Bonamassa in How Voices Are Heard, Passion Is Followed & Innovation Is Empowered

When I think of what people lack, I think they lack clarity on purpose. I see that repeatedly. We throw around words all the time like customer and value. But if you stop and ask, “What is it we do that's really valuable?” Almost every single person answers that question at the how level. I'm a big fan of Simon Sinek's book Start with Why. Sinek says, our Why is in the center, then there's What, and then there's How. Almost everyone talks about Value at the How level. It's so much more transformative when you get down to the Why. I know How we're doing these things, and What we're doing is driving our How. But Why are we doing something? What is underneath it? When you get to that, that tends to be transformative.

Craving That Sense of Being Part of Something Bigger

Michael Neill in It's not about working harder, or even smarter

I remember years ago working with a weight loss group. I said to them "There aren't enough cookies in the world to make you feel loved and whole." It's the wrong tool for the job. The things we traditionally think of people wanting like better salaries, more beanbags, whatever, are sources of “imitation connection”, “imitation purpose”, and “imitation happiness” at work. What we're craving is that sense of being part of something bigger than us that matters.

Everybody Longs to Be Doing Something That's Meaningful to Them

Natasha Swerdloff in Realizing How the Mind Works

I think everybody longs to be doing something that's meaningful to them. I think everybody wants to feel like what they do

matters to someone—not necessarily that we all have to be doctors and nurses—but that what we do can be seen in some greater whole. I think a big part of motivation and well-being at work comes from having a sense purpose that arises from the quiet space within.

A Sense of Clarity and Direction

Nem Bajra in How to Allow Kindness and Compassion to Be the Essences of Work

Clarity and direction are absolutely attached to a sense of accomplishment. If I'm communicating strategy, goals, and direction in a persuasive way, then that means that people can then look at how they spent their day. They can then understand whether or not they accomplished what it is that we're all trying to achieve together. If I don't have that sense of clarity and direction, I'm not going to have a sense of accomplishment. If I don't have a sense of accomplishment, then basically all I'm doing is earning a paycheck.

Purpose and Impact

Nick Hughes in How to Incorporate Purpose & Values to Build a Thriving Community

There are many things but probably it comes down to purpose and impact. If people are longing for something or have a sense of a lacking in their company; it's what's my purpose here? Why is my work impactful and meaningful in the world? If you feel you're doing meaningful work improving people's lives, whether that's through technology or through social impact, or quality of life living whatever the case may be, then that's what I've noticed with many people. They want to know what they're doing and how it's a part of this larger entity. Where does it actually make an impact? The more granular you can make it the better.

Accept What Is and Be Detached From It

Norman Bodek in Discover the Spirit of Self-Reliance

We end up trying to change others and change events. We can't. We're given a life and you have to learn to accept it and to be detached from it. That's pretty much the key.

Engaging Employees Needs to Go Beyond Big Cheerleading Events

Patrick Ross in Don't Overlook This Key Distinction When Giving Ownership

I suspect a lot of people have told you “Wanting to be appreciated.” On that front, let me speak about some of the internal communications campaigns I oversaw at the Patent and Trademark Office (PTO)—where we had 13,000 employees spread across all 50 states—and we climbed our way in the Partnership for Public Service’s independent rankings of Best Places to Work in Government to number one. One way we did that was recognizing that engaging employees goes beyond big cheerleading events. We would host big town hall events.

Leadership would come in and say, “You guys are all doing a great job!” But you know at least one person is sitting there is saying, “Well, I actually feel like I’m doing a good job and working hard, but this person next to me has been phoning it in. Where’s the recognition for me personally?”

It's the Employers Job to Create an Environment Where Everyone Matters

Paul Akers in Leading a Lean Thinking & Lean Health Revolution

If a human being feels like they matter, then they are contributing and have some level of importance in what they're doing. If they feel self-worth, then they will be invested in any process. But the moment they feel like they don't matter, you're wasting your time. It's the job of the employer to make sure you create an environment where everyone matters.

Help People Grasp on a Multi- Sensory Level What We're Trying to Do

Paul David Walker in Getting Leaders to a New Level of Understanding

It's all about relationship and connection with people. If they feel connected to you as their leader, if they feel like you care about them, and if you give them a clear picture of the mission—you can't create what you can't conceive. If they can't grasp on a very multi-sensory level what we're trying to do, there's going to be confusion. There's going to be misunderstandings. There's going to be chaos.”

Make It Ok to Try Something New

Paul McMahon in Is Upside Down the Key to Moving Forward

I believe it is an environment where the employee feels it is ok to try something new, and an environment where it is even ok to fail. Now you might be thinking, “Sure, but do such companies really exist?” The answer is absolutely YES and I will give you an example.

Deep Down Most People Want to Live the Hero's Journey

Perry Marshall in How to Get 80/20 to Work for You

There's just this kind of pervasive attitude in our society that life is sort of meaningless. Life only has the meaning that you assign to it and that we're just billiard balls banging around in the universe. Allegedly, supposedly, that's the scientific view. Well, I would submit to you in practice that nobody actually believes that. Nobody acts like they believe that. Perfectly logical rational people who say they believe that will line up around the block with movie tickets to go watch Star Wars, which is an epic story. The reason Star Wars is so popular for so many years is it's a very well told Hero's Journey epic story. What people long for and are also terrified of is living the Hero's Journey.

They Lack the Same Thing We Long for at Life in General

Pierre-Boris Kalitventzeff in One CEO's Inspiring Adventure in Bringing More Life & Humanity to the Workplace

It's a pity people cannot show up at work how they are able to show up elsewhere in their life. Because in the end, we long for a sense of purpose and being useful, we long for connection. Many of us find this sense of purpose elsewhere in our lives. That's why we engage in social projects because we need to be fed by something. All this urge of wanting to contribute to something greater than ourselves shows there are some needs to be met. It's important for the organization to know and satisfy these needs as well.

Feeling Like They Have Impact on What's Around Them

Rob Allen in How to Build Cohesive Teams that Have Impact

In a word, agency. Feeling like they have impact on what's around them. That's what people crave out of what they're doing. If you're a barista at Starbucks, you want to know you're providing this vital coffee to someone's day or this service makes someone's day go a little better. You want to know you have a positive impact on that person. When you're writing code, you want to know you're providing service to the code base for your employer, your customers, and to the world. There's a lot you

can do as a leader to give your people that agency or not. The more you strip away people's ability to feel that, the more disjointed and unhappy they will be in their work.

We Need Liberty to Explore, Equality to Perceive, and Fraternity for Collaboration

Robert Fuchs in What if corporate culture is perfect, but I'm not?

The function, meaning, and purpose of living beings are learning, growth and transformation (to who we truly are). This means that in order to learn, grow and transform, we need liberty to explore new solutions, equality to perceive and communicate information on the same eye level, and fraternity for collaboration.

Connect the Work That People Do to the Value That the Organization Delivers

Rod Collins in Challenge the Status Quo to Become Skilled at Innovation

Meaning is a fundamentally important human dimension that is probably the difference between a high-quality life and a not so high-quality life. As much time as we spend in the workplace, and as much of a dimension about personalities as work is, it's an important source for meaning. Companies that are overly hierarchical and overly task focused can be environments where people lose their connections to customers. I think, if you are working in a meaningful workplace, everyone understands how they are contributing value to customers in a way that gives them a sense of meaning. The more we can design organizations so that the work that people do connects to the value that the organization delivers to customers in a way that is clearly evident, I think that's an important thing that people lack for and long for at work.

Ask People What They Lack & Long For!

Russell Dalglish in The Starting Point is Always Strategy

I've got a sales company and once a month the managing director takes all the top sales performing people out on a lovely lunch. They have a few drinks then they get the rest of the afternoon off. One of the people who has been on this celebration is a lady. At a management meeting I once asked the team what they want? This lady spoke up and said, "This is really a minor point, but I'd prefer not to do that because I'm on a diet and I'd rather do something else than sit in a pub. We had never thought of that! We just assumed that people would love getting a half-day off with a lovely lunch and that would be it. But what would really motivate her would be a trip to a spa. Now we realized other female people in the company may be sitting there going, "Why do I want to be top salesperson because I don't want to go do that." We've defeated ourselves by not understanding what people really want.

Peace Is a Natural State When Thinking Comes Off Our Minds

Sandra Krot in Do you see the true paradigm or not?

When I ask people if they had a magic wand, what would they want? Many of them will say, “I want more time.” Then I’ll ask them, “What would more time do for you?” They’ll say, “It will allow me to get all my work done.” Then I’ll say, “What would that do for you?” They’ll say, “I would be able to relax.” Then I’ll ask again, “What would that do for you?” Finally, you get to the fact that people want this sense of peace, this sense that they are fine. All is going to be ok. They’ll find the answers that they need.

People Really Lack and Long for Meaning

Sarah Elkins in How to Leave People Feeling Confident, Connected and Valued

I think not just meaning but support for what they believe. I can give you my personal example. When I was a public affairs

specialist, what I lacked was support for my vision. I think my boss intuitively knew that I was right, but he didn't support me in my efforts. Not because he wasn't smart, but because he was so resistant to letting go of control of messaging.

People Long to Be in Alignment With Their Heart's Desire or Passion

Sarah Rozenhuler in How to Create the Right Conditions for Stunning Conversations

I think people really long for self-expression – to be in alignment with their heart's desire or passion. What is uniquely theirs to do. What I notice in people that I work with, is even if that person can't express and articulate clearly what their purpose or their passion is, what they absolutely do know is when there's a lack of that. When people are not following their north star, they will notice that their energy is low. They feel directionless or burned out or chronically under-stimulated in some way.

Help People See a Direct Loop Between What They Do and How It Affects Customers, Society or the World at Large

Sesil Pir in Why Aren't 21st Century Employees Thriving?

They want to see a direct loop between what they do personally and how it affects their customers or society or community at large. A leader in a transformational workplace gives people that. It's one of these things that's sometimes hard to measure in terms of the productivity or heart people put into it. You oftentimes have to look past the quantitative numbers to get these concepts that the things that truly make the difference in organizations.

A Sense of Clarity and Direction

Simon Heath in What is the most important leadership skill you possess?

In my experience, a sense of accomplishment. Did you accomplish anything? And that links back to my answer to the

previous question, which is a sense of clarity and direction. If I don't know what I'm trying to achieve, I can't have a sense of accomplishment. I'm just doing the work and grinding my way through the day. I don't know where I fit in. I don't feel that I made a difference. I don't feel that good about how I spent my day. I was just earning a paycheck. But if I have a sense of clarity and direction, then I can map that out to the activities over my day.

Clarity and direction are absolutely attached to a sense of accomplishment. If I'm communicating strategy, goals, and direction in a persuasive way, then that means that people can then look at how they spent their day. They can then understand whether or not they accomplished what it is that we're all trying to achieve together. If I don't have that sense of clarity and direction, I'm not going to have a sense of accomplishment. If I don't have a sense of accomplishment, then basically all I'm doing is earning a paycheck.

Create Space for People to Engage in Meaningful Conversations and Be Themselves

Simon and Maria Moraes Robinson in Helping People to See More and Value Everyone's Contribution

Another aspect which I ask people to reflect on is how they can develop curiosity, better able to evolve and discover new things. In those company cultures, which have a strong degree of command-and-control, people are given responsibility for specific tasks and feel that normally there is no space to allow them to contribute more or to engage in truly meaningful conversations where they feel able to articulate their fears and be their fully authentic selves. In this kind of environment, it's not possible to evolve and be happy. Business environments where people are very careful in what they say and always holding back on what they want to can be very stressful because individuals are unable to be themselves and are not able to relax. Experiencing this day after day consumes a great deal of energy and impacts on our emotional states.

The Biggest Thing People Lack Is Transparency

Steph Holloway in Compassionate Communication Is the Key to Everything

The biggest thing that I feel that they lack is transparency. Many employees in the businesses I work with talk about lack of transparency being the number one problem they have with the management. Rumors take over instead of facts. The toxic people have a field day spreading malicious gossip and management does nothing to stop it.

Does a Corporate Strait Jacket Limit Imagination?

Steve Tendon in Getting Teams & Individuals into a State of Flow

I think people in companies are so accustomed to the strait jacket that the corporate environment imposes on them that they are not even capable of imagining what they would want and long for in that setting.

People Long to Feel Seen, Heard and Appreciated

Sue Elliott in How to Get Beyond the Way Most of Us Are Working Today

We've touched on helping people feel seen and heard, so let's talk about appreciation. Your people are giving you their eight hours or 10 hours or however long it may be every day, and they want to feel like somebody notices and cares: not just that there's a butt on the seat, but that it's my butt!

They also want to feel connection. They want to feel camaraderie. Studies have shown that the number one key indicator of happiness in life is having a friend at work. That's so simple. But it takes a certain kind of workplace for that to even be possible, right?

It's What We All Long for — to Be Loved — to Be Seen

Susan Taylor in Making a Commitment to Daily Work Activities as a Vehicle for Change

I think it's what we all long for – to be loved – to be seen. As I mentioned earlier in the first question, I believe the most

fundamental human need is acknowledgement. Whether it's a pat on the back from your boss; a hug from your child; or a kiss from your spouse, all those things help us to feel recognized—to feel as if we are part of the tribe. We are profoundly social creatures, gregarious by nature. At the core of our existence, the one thing that truly matters is to belong; to be loved; and to connect with others—so much so that when that need is not met, we become dysfunctional.

People Are Lacking a Feeling They Have Influence

Tobias Theel in How to Create Spaces for Everyone to Grow Their Ideas

It depends a lot on the organization they are working in. If you think of the common classical hierarchical organization, what they're lacking there is a feeling they have influence. Feeling that what you do matters and counts. What you do is seen and contributes to the product or the service you produce. It forces people in these types of organizations to fulfill a role or a position. They have to work in a process and follow it today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, again and again. While working they see what's not going well. They see room for

improvements. They have ideas. They're creative. But they are limited in using their creativity or innovative spirit to make improvements.

A Goal That Intrinsically Motivates People

Tom Cagley in Why Leadership Needs to Facilitate Engagement

We all know people that are internally motivated and can do a wonderful job and contribute to get the best performance. They're finding what they want. The knowledge of what they long and lack for comes directly from themselves rather than from someone or something externally. But I think if we take that a step out, we can say they're doing that because they found somewhere where the goal that they're serving is something that intrinsically motivates them. And they get feedback that says that there's value in what they're doing, both internally and externally.

Allowing Meaning to Show Up for Each Individual Is What's Important

Tom Thomison in How Do We Start & Make It Real?

Work is where we spend the clear majority of our time. It's our extended or second families in some cases. In a sad number of cases, we're working in a dysfunctional environment with an unwanted dysfunctional family. Fundamentally, we want a sense that my contribution matters, and that I can see it. We want a sense that my contribution matters, and I have the feedback to let me know that that's true. I want to see that I can make a difference.

Purpose We Can Buy Into

Valeria Maltoni in Bottom It Up and Top It Down

There's the purpose we buy into, which is the expressed vision of the organization. We may find that it's something the organization and its leaders embody. Or we may find it's a lot of messaging and perception rather than true reality. We bump

against that wall when things are not going well, and then we're forced to pay attention.

About Bill Fox



Hi, I'm Bill Fox, and I help build forward thinking human workplace cultures.

I lead a growing global conversation with 75+ forward-thinking leaders to help you discover new and better ways to achieve your most important strategic objectives. My work will help you discover new pathways, make better decisions, and help solve today's most vexing workplace challenges.

I'm the author of *The Future of the Workplace*, the *Be a Workplace of the Future NOW Series*, and *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*.

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What others are saying...

“Stepping into the future looks a lot like this. I applaud the direction you are taking with this initiative.”

—Gwen Kinsey, Leadership Coach

“This conversation invites and allows whole beings to show up; like whole food, whole beings are more nutritious to the system they exist within.”

—Anonymous

“Your questions are more important than our answers! Why? Because every leader ought to be asking him/herself those questions and implementing the forward-thinking insights that will create meaningful purpose, and superior performance.”

—John Bell, Former CEO at Jacobs Suchard

The Forward Thinking Approach

“The forward-thinking approach creates an opening in the fabric that’s built from each person’s deep desire to live a life that matters — and a knowing that much more is possible.

In this ever-changing world we find ourselves in, it requires each of us to enter into a quest to transform ourselves and learn new ways of living and working together that elevate everyone.”

— Bill Fox, Co-founder, Forward Thinking Workplaces