



# Leadership NOTES

## Six Ways to Make Work More Meaningful

In repeated surveys of employees regarding what attributes of the workplace are most attractive, inviting, and important, one item consistently appears at the top of the list... the nature of the work itself. Is it meaningful, authentic, and important? In servant leadership, it is considered one of the key functions of effective leadership to design and assign work in a way that contributes to the wellbeing of the worker, not only to the success of the enterprise.

Frederick Herzberg (1923-2000), an American psychologist and professor of management at the University of Utah, introduced the notion of job enrichment in his 1959 book, *The Motivation to Work* (Herzberg, F., Mausner, B. & Snyderman, B., 1959). Herzberg's 1968 *Harvard Business Review* article *One more time: How do you motivate employees?* became the single most requested reprint in HBR's history. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory explained that the aspects of work that are most dissatisfying, such as working conditions, salary, benefits, supervision, and policies were not the same aspects of work that people find truly motivating, such as achievement, growth, recognition, challenge, and the meaningfulness of the work itself.

*"Deprived of meaningful work, men and women lose their reason for existence."*  
Fyodor Dostoyevsky

*"Servant leadership make work meaningful in three ways. First, belonging to a community. Second, contributing to a mission. Third, growing as a person."*  
Joseph J. Iarocci

*"There is no income level at which people are not desperate for meaning."*  
David Brooks

## Six Characteristics of Meaningful Work

Purpose: Meaningful work is always connected to a larger purpose that is seen as important, consequential, valuable, and linked to the well-being of others.

Autonomy: Work is more meaningful when one has agency, autonomy, and ownership.

Challenge: Meaningful work is complex, daunting, but within reach. It occupies one's entire area of ability. It represents a considerable stretch but is not impossible.

Mastery: Meaningful work involves craft mastery, skill development, and peak performance in an area of one's strength and ability.

Recognition: Work is seen as meaningful when it evokes recognition from colleagues and others that are credible and knowledgeable.

Community: Work is meaningful when it provides opportunities to work together with like-minded colleagues to create synergy, collaboration, teamwork, and positive interdependence.

Additional resources: The following resources provide further support for the above characteristics of meaningful work. Each of these online publications would make effective read and discuss options.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/07/meaning-work-happiness-brooks/489920/>

<https://www.fastcompany.com/40513648/4-ways-to-help-employees-find-meaning-at-work>

<https://peterstark.com/meaningful-job/>