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Dear Reader,

The last week world leaders at Davos were meeting under the motto “committed to improving the state of the world”. They discussed economic growth, financial systems, environmental sustainability, health for all and social development. The terms “conscious leadership”, and purposeful business were heard at the convention. Times are changing! Welcome these times, so challenging and so filled with opportunities.

This month we are addressing the topic of how to bring meaning to work.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

# LIM News      Bringing Meaning to Work

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## Bringing Meaning to Work

By Isabel Rimanoczy

In a recent interview with [CR Magazine](#), PricewaterhouseCoopers' CEO, Bob Moritz, shared his perspectives about the challenges in attracting, engaging and retaining employees. With employees at an average age of 27 in a profession perceived as “old white guys crunching numbers with a number-two pencil”, the company competes with recruiters from Google, Apple and Facebook. He began asking himself what can be done to make work at PWC an attractive option, and how the company could find new ways to engage the employees. “How do I engage all 35,000 in the workforce in creating an environment where impact is not just weighed by making money?” he wondered. The answer came through the word ‘impact’.

If we think back ten or twenty years, employee motivation tended to center on salary and career advancement. But things are changing rapidly. Gen X and Y (also called “the millennials”) are more prone to seek out workplaces that offer work-life balance, and where employees are given the opportunity to feel they are making a valuable

contribution, where they can make a difference. American author Gregg Easterbrook notes that a ‘transition from material want to meaning want is in progress on an historically unprecedented scale involving hundreds of millions of people, and may eventually be recognized as the principal cultural development of our age.’

CEO Moritz is not the only one seeking to grasp what ‘engagement’ may mean for the present day workforce, and what can be done to develop it. One clue may be found in what [author Parker Palmer XE "Parker Palmer" refers to as 'divided lives'](#), which are the result of working in environments where employees have “to check their soul at the door.” In other words, we all have heard or known about the tacit expectation that spiritual issues don’t belong in the workplace, that ‘personal problems’ are to be left at home, and that feelings or emotions should not cloud good, sound ‘rational’ decisions. As widespread as the practice may be, it is not a very realistic expectation. Who is it that steps into the office if we leave our soul at the door? A soul-less body? Who would want interactions, decision-making or simple tasks performed by soul-less bodies? Fortunately, this expectation is increasingly being brought into question these days. Recent studies about depression, urban stress levels and burn-out connect these symptoms with the characteristics of a fragmented life; a permanent sense of being rushed without ever achieving all one’s tasks; a lack of work-leisure balance; a sense that one’s obligations are taking over life and excluding enjoyment; the lack of personal connections at work, in the neighborhood or community; and a pattern of materialistic consumption that results in only short-term satisfaction, and a lack of fulfillment or meaning. Some individuals are beginning to identify what is missing, and are seeking activities and a new life-style that, allow a fuller expression of self: mind, body, soul, emotions, creativity at work and outside of it.

### **Let's try with Corporate Responsibility**

One area that, increasingly, corporations are using to bring meaning to the work and to engage the employees, is that of *corporate responsibility*, referring to the social and environmental responsibility of the corporation. This comprises a broad spectrum of possibilities that includes: initiatives to [assess the ecological footprint](#) of the organization or of a particular sector; innovation contests to develop new processes thinking out of the box; projects to identify the community or social impact of the operation; and the exploration of opportunities to bring benefits to the neighborhood or community, including (but not exclusively) through volunteer programs. And it also includes the personal development of the individuals employed, helping them pay attention to their mental, spiritual or physical needs. CEO Moritz reflects that the economic situation doesn’t allow him to give great raises, but sabbaticals or wellness programs that help reduce stress levels or improve the work-life balance are important options.

As an innovation to traditional philanthropic contributions, PWC reduced the charitable checks from 4,200 organizations to 1,200, because they ‘wanted to do more than just write checks’. Their attitude was that there are other ways to make a more lasting impact in the community, such as leveraging the organizations’ assets. Employees were invited to find other, creative ways to bring their talents and resources to bear, for example setting up financial literacy courses for people in the community.

Employee engagement pays off, Moritz observes. He finds that it has reduced the turnover and has increased the success rate of on-campus recruitment efforts. Furthermore, there is a 70 to 75 percent correlation between engagement of the workforce and the brand health index: corporations with more engaged employees also score higher in the satisfaction and brand-awareness of customers, not to mention productivity where employees are working smarter, but not longer hours.

And wellness programs and practices, Moritz avers, must extend throughout the entire organization. For instance, when employees decide to take a walk around the block to reflect, their managers need to understand the importance of this action and not to view it as ‘goofing off’.

### **It's the mindset...**

Approaching the corporate social and environmental responsibility as a way to bring meaning to work and engage the employees is a good start. However it is still a profit-driven and instrumental perspective. It is thought from within a mental model that is expired. The social, environmental and economic crises we are struggling with didn't happen to us because of happenstance. They are the result of deliberate thinking, and our challenge is to step out of the **mindset** that got us into trouble in the first place.

In my study of business leaders **championing sustainability initiatives**, it became clear that their motivation to do so came from a deep empathy for a planet that has borne the impact of our collective behaviors for too long. The motivation came from feelings of responsibility, guilt, compassion, or the urge to make a difference. Profit was just not on the list. Interestingly, as they wanted to advocate for their cause, however, the leaders sought to make 'the business case', as if that was what ultimately counted. Taking their lead from their superiors, the employees in turn rapidly signed up for the new attitude, finding something that brought meaning to their work, converting their job into an exciting opportunity to make a difference. It was not the profit motive either that sparked their hearts.

This is not to deny that profitability is a key factor for an organization to survive and thrive. It is to argue only that it goes beyond profit. Without natural resources, we don't have sourcing for the products we want to manufacture. Without a planet, there is no business. Without health, priorities shift. Without meaning, why work?



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Editing Support: Tony Pearson  
E-mail: [newsletter@LIMglobal.net](mailto:newsletter@LIMglobal.net)  
<http://www.LIMglobal.net>

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