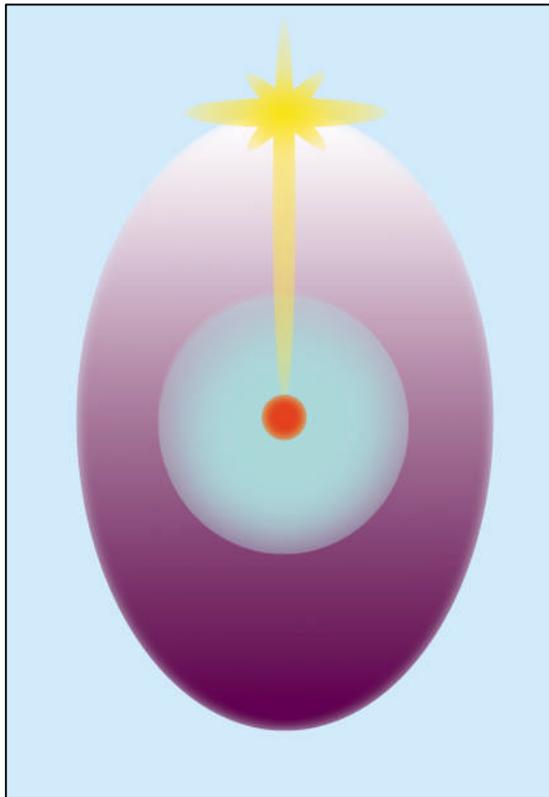


MY CUP IS HALF FULL

A Dissertation on the role of meaning in our experience of ourselves at work.



"I'm a checker and I'm very proud of it. There's some, they say, 'a checker – ugh!' To me, it's like somebody being a teacher or a lawyer. I'm not ashamed that I wear a uniform and nurse's shoes and that I got varicose veins. I'm makin' an honest living. Whoever looks down on me, they're lower than I am."

Babe Secoli – Supermarket Checker - in Studs Terkel's *'Working'*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Inputs to this work have been many. I would like to especially acknowledge the members of the Synthesis training group who have formed the crucible for my development over the last three years, especially Kunderke Kevlin the course leader and creator, Dana Douglas my therapist and Alan Robinson who co-led and co-developed the workshop. Next come my faceless but heartfull colleagues on the Internet whose communications have been so human, especially Amy Lynn Frost, Marilyn Reed-Bourquaye, Terry Gonda, John Pickrell and Karin Peterson. I would especially like to acknowledge John Cullen for his apparently tireless support of the discussion group. It is a real contribution and very much appreciated. Howard Schechter's book has been central to Chapter 3 and will remain a key manual for my clients and myself. I am always supported by the Imagework gifted me by Dina Glouberman. Finally, my thanks go to my long-suffering friends and even slight acquaintances all of whom have been badgered for their own work experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Everywhere I go it seems people are killing themselves with work, dizziness, rushing, caring, and rescuing. Work addiction is a modern epidemic and it is sweeping our land.
Diane Fassel¹

But I say to you that when you work you fulfil a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to you when that dream was born.

Kahlil Gibran - The Prophet

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Many people in our western work culture experience serious loss of quality in their lives associated with a loss of meaning in their work. What is meaning, how do we lose it and what can we do about it?

Time and again, when I have experienced problems in my working life, they have concerned meaning. If the work *lacked* meaning, I was uncomfortable, bored and de-motivated. If the work *had* meaning, I felt my enthusiasm was exploited, and I became workaholic. A recent survey in the US (Rossman in Schechter) cites dissatisfaction with work as the single most important risk factor for early death from heart disease.

As I became more interested in the subject, I began to talk to friends and colleagues and to read books in the area. I also engaged in an Internet discussion with other Psychosynthesis practitioners on the topic. What follows is an attempt to distill the mass of information and views that I obtained.

What is work? It is possible to define all of our activities from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night as work. I had hoped to confine myself to a consideration of paid work, but the closer I looked, the less easy it became to disentangle paid work from unpaid work such as child rearing and the volunteer sector. There are tasks with which we can all identify as "good work" and there are other tasks that are unique to who we are and fit only with us and not with others. There are tasks that involve inner work on ourselves and other tasks which involve our engagement with the universe. One of the things that I have found in this exploration is just how important the inner work is and how necessary it is to have engaged with this before we make choices about outer engagement. Work is, quite simply, what we are here to do.

Being Psychosynthesis trained, I have used the models and concepts of Psychosynthesis to describe this inner work. This I have found useful although I understand that there are other models of human consciousness that might have done just as well. Although this dissertation will go first to readers well versed in the concepts of Psychosynthesis, it is ultimately intended for a wider readership which is why I have explained the concepts from the point of view of someone who has not encountered it before.

Chapter 1 attempts to answer the question "...what is meaning? **Chapter 2** looks at the ways in which we lose meaning, have it taken away from us or throw it away. **Chapter 3** examines the Inner Work that we can do to "put us in the way of meaning" and become more conscious, aware and even self-realised. **Chapter 4** balances Chapter 3 and looks at some of the Outer Work necessary to create the sort of working environments that would support us.

The Appendices contain material which is not strictly necessary but which serves to illustrate and expand on various aspects.

Appendix 1 is an edited selection of part of the E-mail discussion which informed some of this work. I think that it illustrates some of the power of technology to unite people and disseminate ideas. The discussion "list" is about 180 people from all parts of the world interested in Psychosynthesis. This discussion gave me ideas, books to read, pain to witness and new friends, one of whom I hope to bring to the UK to give his "Rekindling the Spirit at Work" seminars. Truly a powerful medium.

¹ Quoted in Fox (26)

Appendix 2 is the notes from a workshop on the topic of meaning at work that I gave with a colleague when I was first engaged with this subject. It contains a useful exercise on finding purpose.

Appendix 3 -- my own career learning -- is the results of a reflection on what I have learned in the various jobs I have done in my life. A useful exercise and an illustration of a simple idea.

Appendix 4 is a paper on workplace abuse sent to me by Amy Lynn Frost on the Internet. It is a good example both of the pain that can be suffered from abusive management and of practical steps to take control.

References

Because I only cite one work from each of the authors in the bibliography, I have been able in most instances to give a page reference. The number following each mention of an author in the text therefore indicates the page number in the book. I trust that this is helpful.

Caveat – beware dictos

I can't type – won't type. All of this text has been inserted using voice recognition. Unfortunately, one of the disadvantages of voice recognition is that it occasionally puts in inappropriate words (dictos) which of course are ignored by a spell checker. I pick up most of these but inevitably some will remain. I like to think that I am a clarifier. If you feel confused, it may be that a wrong word has crept in. I apologise.

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CHAPTER 1

What is meaning?

"the man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life."

Albert Einstein

"I was finally about to transfer out of the division that I was in and my work situation improved. My new boss was shocked when he heard some of the things. He rewarded my hard work with better pay and leadership role. Now we've had a change of administration and he's gone but the memory remains. Someone believed in me. I think that's what all of us want, for someone to believe in us, acknowledge us, and feel that we belong to the whole (workplace)."

Karin Peterson²

"... a search too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor, in short, for a sort of a life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying."

Studs Terkel

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What does meaning mean? This is a concept which is slippery to grasp and is also understood differently by different people. My approach has been to attempt to triangulate by looking at meaning from a number of different directions. I hope by the end of this chapter that you will have at least a sense of what we are considering.

The dictionary definition (Collins Softback Third edition 1991)

Meaning n

1. The sense or significance of a word, sentence, symbol, etc.; import; semantic or lexical content.
2. The purpose underlying or intended by speech, action etc.
3. The inner, symbolic, or true interpretation, value, or message: e.g. the meaning of a dream
4. valid content; efficacy: e.g. a law with little or no meaning
5. *philosophy* a. the sense of an expression; its connotation b. the reference of an expression; it's denotation.
6. expressive of some sense, intention, criticism, etc.: e.g. a meaning look

I don't get too much further with this – let's have a look at how people experience meaning.

The phenomenology of meaning

What do I mean by meaning? How can I tell? How do I experience meaning? Well, in the first instance, I feel good, satisfied, in some way complete or whole. As well, I experience a sense of connection, to myself, to others, to the Universe. One important feeling or concept that I experience as meaningful is that of what I might describe as "goodness of fit". Goodness of fit is how my soul recognises itself. If I want to know who I am at the very deepest level, as a human soul, I must look in the mirror of meaning. Goodness of fit can be experienced as an alignment of body, emotions, mind, spirit, an alignment of subpersonalities, (personal synthesis -- see chapter 3), an alignment of who I think I am with who I really am (authenticity), an alignment with my higher Self, an alignment with others or an alignment with my purpose and skills and the challenges that I take on. "This is where I belong".

² Personal Communication

Ultimately, it is a goodness of fit, I believe, between what I might call my soul and the Universe. James Hillman, in his book *The Soul's Code* describes an aspect of who we are which he calls an *acorn or daemon*, which is a unique set of characteristics and aspirations with which we are born and which expresses itself in our lives more or less in spite of external influences. I believe that the experience of meaning is how our daemon tells us when we are on track with our personal destiny. I will return to this concept of goodness of fit from time to time during this dissertation.

Victor Frankl, a psychoanalyst who was imprisoned in and survived the Nazi concentration camps of the second world war has written a number of books on the subject of meaning. From this he has developed a therapeutic paradigm called Logotherapy which concerns itself with the search for meaning which he regards as central to the human experience.

Frankl divides the type of meaning experience into three broad categories. He defines *creative* meaning as essentially what I do to contribute to the Universe (e.g. work in the service of the community), he defines *experiential* meaning as what I get from the Universe (e.g. a sunset or a good friend) and he defines *attitudinal* meaning as the meaning that I place on, or the way I handle unavoidable suffering, guilt and death. (Frankl 69-73, 132)

In other words, we experience meaning by:

- creating a work
- doing a deed
- experiencing goodness, truth and beauty
- loving and being loved (encountering another unique being in the very uniqueness of this human being)
- a positive attitude to negative and unalterable circumstances -- especially if we are deprived of the other sorts of meaning.

Most of these are relatively easy to understand. Although attitudinal meaning is less easy to grasp, Frankl (73) considers this to be the most important. Deriving from his experiences in concentration camps, he explains that this is the way that we “stand to our fate” as a response to pain and the way that we “stand to ourselves” as a response to guilt.³ Attitudinal meaning also refers to the attitude that we have, in the face of death, towards what has already happened in our lives -- the storehouse of the past, of memory -- “usually man only sees the stubble field of transitoriness and overlooks the full granaries of the past.” Nothing can deprive us of what is in our memories. Once we have realised a value, fulfilled a meaning, we have done that once and for ever. However dreadful our circumstances, there is always retrospective meaning to be found.

In another take on attitudinal meaning, Frankl suggests that the mastery and self exploration of neuroses by the founders of the various schools of psychiatry/psychology has been a meaningful sacrifice by which they have contributed to the healing of the patients of each schools' adherents. I would go further and say that the sacrifices of all trainee therapists made in the exploration of their own issues/neuroses form the essential stuff of empathy and healing for their future clients. This is a good example of placing retrospective meaning on events and experiences that could at the time be construed as negative.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book “*Flow, The Psychology Of Happiness*” looks at what makes us happy in our lives and in our work. He sees happiness as a by-product of the way that we structure and organise our experience.

Csikszentmihalyi (66) goes on to describe the experience of what he calls *flow* by large numbers of interviewees in his own and other surveys. This flow seems to be very similar to the experience described as meaningful in other studies. The flow experience appears to consist of a goodness of fit between the person and the activity or environment which results in a loss of self consciousness, loss of awareness of self, loss of awareness of time, an effortless

³ Here he refers to Max Scheler's book "Repentance and Rebirth" where Scheler explains that man has a right to be considered (justly) guilty and to be punished, otherwise we will not treat him as a human being and we will “lame his will to change.”

involvement and the removal of the awareness of worries and frustrations. It is (understandably) very enjoyable.

There is also a sense of control over one's actions and the sense of concern for self disappears (although there is heightened sense of self at the end of the activity or experience). Interviewees sometimes describe such a loss of sense of self that their experience sounds similar to the unitary or peak experience described by Maslow and others. This loss of self consciousness does not involve either a loss of self or a loss of consciousness but a *loss of consciousness of the self*. What happens while our attention is removed, is that the self, at least our sense of self, grows and changes.

"When not preoccupied with ourselves we actually have a chance to expand the concept of who we are." (Csikszentmihalyi 66) Interviewees describe this as a sense of enrichment while they were not looking.

This experience sounds very similar to what people experience as meaningful activity and also seems to occur under a series of circumstances which it is within our power to recreate.

Essentially, flow seems to occur when we are paying attention, investing psychic energy, when our skills and the external challenges are roughly evenly matched (but with enough mismatch to keep us learning and growing), where there are clear goals and immediate feedback. Csikszentmihalyi describes it as the channel between boredom and anxiety, the boredom which occurs when our skills are more than adequate for the task and the anxiety which occurs when the task is too difficult.

Abraham Maslow (3) referring to his *hierarchy of needs* talks about an innate drive towards what he calls self-actualization. This has important implications when we are looking at the meaning of meaning because in the experience of many, it is in this movement towards self-actualization that we experience the deepest meaning.

"A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization... it refers to man's desire of self fulfilment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually, in what he is potentially: to become everything that one is capable of becoming..."

Here is also a reference to what we might call goodness of fit between who we are and what we do.

In common with Csikszentmihalyi, Maslow points out that self-actualization work "transcends the self without trying to, and achieves the kind of loss of self awareness and/or self consciousness that the easterners, the Japanese and Chinese and so on keep on trying to attain." He points out that this type of work is simultaneously a seeking and fulfilling of the self as well as an achieving of the selflessness which is the ultimate expression of real self. This, he says, "resolves the dichotomy between selfish and un-selfish."

In a rather different take on meaning, **John Cullen** asks us to check out how we experience meaning of a physical level, on an emotional level, on a mental level and on a spiritual level. This approach becomes important when we come to examine meaning for ourselves and to understand the different ways in which meaning can be experienced (IAMOP Monograph 11).

Meaning and need

Reading most of the books relating to meaning, I came to realise that there is a subtle suggestion that meaning can only come with self-realisation -- and that it is therefore almost exclusively an activity for the developed soul. This depressed me. I do not regard myself as a particularly self-realised person and certainly the people I can expect as clients are not -- that is why we are on the journey. So what hope is there for us beginners to discover or make meaning in what we do?

Then I started to examine the things that had meaning for me -- to look at the nature of meaning for myself. And I found myself asking the question "What does my reaction to a sunset or a rose (both of which encounters are meaningful experiences to me) have in common with a satisfying work relationship, an involving task, a cheque for \$8000 in the post, a pint of beer or a ham sandwich?"

Then it hit me -- whatever is meaningful to me has to do with the satisfaction or fulfilment of some need. This can range from a need for security and physical nurture right up to the need for challenge, beauty and love. So, the good news is, just as there is a hierarchy of needs, so there is a hierarchy of meaning. And this means that anyone, anywhere, wherever they are on the journey can experience meaning. Phew! There is a staircase for those of us who may just be setting out -- what a relief!

Meaning and relationship

When I look back on my life, especially my developing involvement with self development and my counselling training, I realise that for me, to encounter another human being on a deep and authentic level is intensely meaningful. The therapeutic encounter and other genuine and authentic ways of meeting both hold meaning for me and have qualities of what Csikszentmihalyi describes as a flow experience. I even experience this heart contact when I read books which reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of ordinary people. An example of this is the book by Studs Terkel – "*Working*" used as a reference here. It consists of a series of tape recordings in which ordinary people talk about their work and what they feel about it and the result is very moving.

Csikszentmihalyi (42) also records the deep meaning in the bond felt by people experiencing the comradeship of shared purpose and work. He suggests that in the common bond of working relationships and deeper commitment, there needs to be a balance of psychic energy between differentiation and integration, avoiding both selfishness and conformity. At another level in the hierarchy, Jean Hardy (personal communication) has also pointed out that people with poor social skills often derive meaningful relationship at work because the socialisation is diluted by the focus on work tasks.

Meaning as an expression of love.

I watched a programme on the television recently which described the experiences of a brother and sister of someone with cystic fibrosis. In order to save her life, they each of them underwent an operation to remove and donate a portion of their lungs. This, while dangerous and painful was clearly intensely meaningful to them, an expression of their love outwards to a meaningful target. We do need to give, and to be seen to give, and to have that gift acknowledged.

One of my Internet correspondents pointed out that when people go through near-death experiences, they go through a quick review of their entire life, and the emphasis is not on their accomplishments but on their loves. She was very certain that it is love above all else that gives life meaning.

Meaning as self expression

Several authors tell us that we can experience meaning as an expression of who we are in the context of the Universe, again a concept of "goodness of fit". Fox (9) talks about the extreme damage and despair created by unemployment, in part because the unemployed are unable to express themselves in the Universe or give of their unique gifts. Schechter (vi) talks about how work can be a natural expression of our Essence or higher Self. However Frankl (57-59) feels that it is important to realise that this is not just subjective self expression but that meanings and values can have an objective reality of themselves -- that there are in the Universe objective meanings and values to which we respond subjectively through the perspective of who we are. "...man is pushed by drives but he is pulled by values."

Meaning and evolution

Following a flow experience, the organisation of the self is more complex and unique than it has been before, implying personal growth. Csikszentmihalyi (41) describes complexity as the result of two apparently opposing psychological processes, *differentiation* (implying a movement towards uniqueness, towards separating oneself from others), and *integration* (a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self). This complexity looks very similar to the tendency in biological evolution towards complexity, a process which also involves both differentiation and integration. Both of these processes imply a move away from entropy -- the tendency of all structures to move from a higher energy state to a lower one. This is an important concept. The evolution of man in Darwinian terms has stopped. As we realise higher values, looking after our disadvantaged and disabled, the term "the survival of the fittest" no longer applies in physical terms. However, the pursuit of meaning and the growth and complexity that it brings could well be the new way in which humanity is evolving.

Meaning, success and failure

Frankl (76) points out that surveys show that there appears to be very little link between success and meaning and between failure and despair. There are many instances where individuals have found deep meaning in failure or are externally successful but find life meaningless. Despair despite success and fulfilment despite failure indicate that meaning is experienced on a different dimension to success. I could further quote many stories and major works of art which would support this. Tristan and Isolde is an opera which describes the triumphal consummation of romantic love at the same time as the death of the lovers.

Finding or making meaning?

Do we find it or make it? Frankl (61) seems to be clear that we have to find it -- or if we assign it then it has to be 'right'. For example, the meaning of $2 + 2$ can only be 4 -- I can't assign it as 5. Csikszentmihalyi (90) on the other hand describes examples of people apparently making meaning in extreme circumstances such as solitary confinement as well as unlikely working circumstances such as a production line. I think we can make meaning. As one of my correspondents on the Internet pointed out, we are all much too quick to assign or project a negative meaning if for instance we mis-hear or mis-interpret something someone says! When we play cards for instance, we are capable of assigning meaning to activities which (like life, the universe and everything) can be said to be intrinsically meaningless. And this brings us to the concept of play. Play of all sorts is one of the ways we learn (in common with other mammals) skills for the future. One of those skills is certainly meaning making.

Here's a third idea. I sense that we *raise ourselves into meaning -- put ourselves in the way of meaning*. In other words, we choose to undertake activities which might mean something. We do the inner work to heal the subpersonalities and wounding which might detract from our ability to source meaning. We train ourselves in the skills of feeling, of thinking and of attention which will enable us to make or discover meaning. And finally we become sufficiently self realised and spiritually aware that most things hold meaning for us (see below).

Universal meaning

Several authors seem to have a basic trust in ultimate or universal meaning. Me too. Travelling in a coach in the Arctic part of Norway, I noticed a number of street lamps, each clearly illuminating a small circle of snow. When the sun rose in a couple of months, the whole landscape would be visible. The significance of this image to me is that as we move up the hierarchy of either meaning or need, we experience a greater potential for circumstances and experiences to be meaningful. At the lower stages in the hierarchy it is as if we are able to only illuminate small and specific areas of our experience as meaningful. As our souls grow into more spiritual dimensions, it is as if the sun was rising, illuminating our entire psychic landscape with meaning. This requires an act of faith but my intuition on this feels sure. As we journey towards self-realisation more and more of our lives become meaningful. Frankl (150) says "... it is my contention that man really could not move a limb unless deep down to the foundations of existence, and out of the depths of being, he is imbued by a basic trust in the ultimate meaning.

Without it he would have to stop breathing. Even a person who commits suicide must be convinced that suicide makes sense.”

So this, from a number of perspectives, is what meaning looks like. Although this chapter has discussed meaning in life rather than work terms, I believe it to be important to grasp the basics before moving on. It is now time to look, specifically in terms of our working lives, at how meaning is lost, stolen or perhaps never comes into consciousness at all.

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CHAPTER 2

How is meaning lost?

When people come in the room -- that's what bugs me -- they give you that look: 'You just a maid.' It do somethin' to me. It really gets into me."

Maggie Holm -- hotel maid⁴

"It's the not-recognition by other people. To say a woman is just a housewife is degrading, right? Okay. Just a housewife. It's also degrading to say just a labourer. The difference is that a man goes out and maybe gets smashed."

Mike Lefevre -- steelworker⁴

The old days, when you had an engineer, he was the boss. He was respected as a man and his judgement was respected from the top of the ladder to the bottom. That's gone now. They can get an 18 year-old kid out of high school and make him a train master, and you try to tell him right from wrong, he's liable to have you up for insubordination. Respect' s lost.

Bill Norworth -- retired railroad engineer⁴

You're not regarded. You are just a number out there. Just like a prisoner. When you report off you tell 'em your badge number. A lot of people don't know your name. They know you by your badge number.

Steve Dubi -- steelworker⁴

No matter how bewildering the times, no matter how dissembling the official language, those we call ordinary are aware of a sense of personal worth -- or more often a lack of it -- in the work they do.

Studs Terkel

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What is going on? -- the existential vacuum in our culture.

We have more control over our environment and over our lives than ever before in history. We have better health, more luxuries and more support from the state. And yet in spite of this, instead of being filled with happiness, our years are mainly spent in anxiety and boredom if not humiliation and degradation. In spite of the fact that our external conditions continue to improve, the sad paradox is that with our circumstances, our expectations also rise, leaving us unsatisfied. The shields that have worked in the past -- the order that religion, patriotism, ethnic traditions, and habit instilled by social class used to provide -- are no longer effective for increasing numbers of people who feel exposed to the harsh winds of chaos.

Frankl (83) talks about the increasing experience of existential meaninglessness or vacuum (81% in a survey of American students). He describes this as an abyss experience in contradistinction to Maslow's peak experiences. As a consequence of the fact that we are no longer animals, there are no longer drives and instincts to tell us what we must do. In addition to this, in our "free" society there are fewer conventions, traditions or values to tell us what we should do. It is perhaps not surprising that in the midst of this cultural sterility the majority of people find their working lives boring, meaningless or downright abusive.

So these are the waters in which we swim. Let's now take a look at some specific ways in which we lose our way, become victims of unjust and abusive systems and generally fall off the meaningful paths that our souls are here to tread.

⁴ Quoted in "Working" by Studs Terkel

The hurt people

Abuse at work

In the hierarchical system of employment that has been the norm since the industrial revolution, practices and behaviour which are abusive of human individuals seem to be accepted as normal. This abuse can take obvious forms such as bullying, setting people up to fail by not providing adequate resources or support, making demeaning or sarcastic remarks, shouting, making attacks on self-esteem, making unreasonable threats of discipline or sacking and so on.

Over and above this there are more subtle forms of abuse. These include the basic assumption that the employee is a thing -- a replaceable cog in a machine. This form of de-personalisation returns again and again in interviews with workers (Terkel). Even more subtle is the sudden (and on government projects at least, often uninformed and damaging) withdrawal of funding from a project in which employees have invested meaning. Examples of withdrawal of funding for special needs education of local teenagers in local government funding cuts come to mind.

Then there is abuse through dishonesty. Mission statements are all the vogue today -- and indeed I applaud this move towards group consciousness and group agreement about an organisation, its objectives and the way it works. The trouble is that in most cases this is superficial and dishonest. There are statements about excellence backed by resources which simply can't deliver. There are policies of worker care and support which only exist on paper. And potentially even more dangerous, there are legally agreed safety practices which are ignored or avoided in order to save money. When the railways were privatised, it was clear that uncontrolled profitability would compromise safety. We were confidently reassured that mechanisms were in place to guard against this. They lied. And yet it has taken more than one tragic disaster for this particular brand of dishonesty to be made public.

Finally, there is abuse through lack of acknowledgement. This is unbelievably common. In preparation for this dissertation I have talked to many people and almost all of them tell me that what would make their working conditions significantly better and more meaningful is for managers or clients to say 'thank you'. In our money conscious culture, this costs nothing and yet there seems to be a macho management culture which regards it as a sign of weakness to give or receive thanks. When I tackled the chairman of the management committee of a unit that I used to run for the University, on this subject, he grew angry and abusive as if I had personally insulted him. I think we need to examine more the unconscious motivation behind such a lack of thanks.

I have to say what shocks me most is to discover that abusive and inhuman conditions and processes are common within the so-called caring professions and in the charities. It seems that we must be in serious denial if we are unable to see that caring for the carers might actually make them more effective at caring.

"There is a virus running rampant in today's business world. It's called workplace abuse. Most cannot name what is going on. They just feel a terrible unease. Many figure that it's their own problem. Others see it as business as usual."

Amy Lynn Frost

"Yelling at living things does tend to kill the spirit in them. Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts..."

Robert Fulgum

Effects of unemployment

Matthew Fox (9) points out that the results of lack of work are spiritually devastating. When people lack work they lack pride; they lack an opportunity to return their unique gift to the community; they also lack the means to provide the taxes that make services possible in the greater community.

"When people lack work, they also lack hope. The resulting despair eats into a community like an evil spirit, and the violent results can be seen everywhere: in self hatred, increased crime, the drug trade, a bloating of the prison population, racism, resentment, fear, alcoholism, break up of families, domestic violence, children born without stable and secure homes, lack of commitment and the abuse of God given talents of mind, heart and imagination."

Matthew Fox

Effects of workaholism or overemployment

Fox (10) also points out that the results of overwork or addictive work are equally devastating. Workaholism separates parents from children and is a major source of marital breakdown. "It numbs us out, stopping us asking questions about our vocation and purpose in living."

Csikszentmihalyi (62) warns that any enjoyable experience can become addictive and so even meaningful activities can have a negative effect when we lose control with the advent of addiction.

The damaging work and social systems

Man as machine, organisation as machine

Fox (69) and others describe the principal metaphor for the world since the industrial revolution as mechanical, as cosmos as machine, man as machine. Although this has proved a very powerful tool for success in the mathematical and natural sciences, we now need to re-dress the balance. If the worker is a machine, then he or she can be treated as one. This seems to be one of the principal sources of distress in work today with the result that people feel demeaned and objectified. This approach (Fox 75) brings with it assumptions which have a whole series of implications for the world of work. Some of these include: -- us against the environment rather than working with and for the environment -- us against other humans, the model of competition rather than cooperation -- an attitude which says that it is the individual (or the individual company or the individual nation) that is important rather than realising that we are individuals sharing a small planet -- that we live within an infinitely expanding frontier rather than recognising that our resources are limited and that we must husband them (").⁵ This conceptualisation of man as machine that has its roots in the philosophy of Descartes, results in millions feeling demoralised and depersonalised in work.

Have we got our economics right?

It would appear not. According to E.F. Schumacher, an experienced global economist, the concept of Gross National Product (GNP) is essentially meaningless.⁶ We should rather be looking at things which measure the quality of life, perhaps critiquing our economic system from a viewpoint of meaningful work for everyone.

"Experience shows that whenever you can achieve smallness, simplicity, capital cheapness and nonviolence, or, indeed any one of these objectives, new possibilities are created for people, singly or collectively, to help themselves, and that the patterns that result from such technologies are more humane, more ecological, less dependent on fossil fuels and closer to real human needs⁷ than the patterns (or lifestyles) created by technologies that go for giantism, complexity, capital intensity, and violence."

E. F. Schumacher

Profit is king -- right?

This seems to be so in our investment driven economic culture to date. If shareholder profit is seen as the biggest influence on the conduct of business, then there can be little possibility for the creation of "good" non-exploitative work. The Chief Executive Officer who is only concerned with maximising shareholder profit is likely to be more hard nosed and exploitative than even

⁵ Taken from Gregory Bateson "Steps to an Ecology of Mind"— quoted in Fox (75)

⁶ Quoted in Fox (220)

⁷ My emphasis

the robber barons of the 19th-century. At least when they made their money, they quite often spent it on charitable enterprises. Charles Handy (136) rightly challenges the concept that profit should be the bottom line in a commercial company. He describes profit as a *means* not an end or a purpose. Companies make a profit in order to continue to do things or to make things and to do things better and to make more things. A useful analogy is that of breathing. I need to breathe to live, but if I live only to breathe, I am living a pretty meaningless life. The same goes for profit. We need to check our logic.

My own experience confirms this. Economists today are similar to the scientists of 15 years ago who said in effect, 'if it can't be measured, it doesn't exist'. Nowadays the scientists have been forced to recognise that there are aspects of the basic framework of matter and the universe that are difficult or impossible to measure. Hopefully the economists who say "if it can't be measured it isn't worth consideration" will be forced to make a similar *volte face* in the years to come. We know this already -- we say things like 'the best things in life are free' but we don't seem to be able to translate this into business terms.

We can't talk to "them" (or they can't hear us)

One problem in changing some of these deeply illogical commercial myths is the lack of a common vocabulary or an agreed set of concepts. Maslow was able in 1962 to define pretty clearly what good (and profitable) organisations and enlightened management consisted of, but nothing much has changed in the last 40 or so years. One reason for this is suggested in an interview with Mort Meyerson in Maslow's book on management (Maslow 30). Meyerson says that Maslow's work is *counter-intuitive to the body of knowledge of business*. He also adds that most business decisions are based on qualities that can be reduced to figures, that can be accurately measured. Many of the values that we speak about are not susceptible to such metrication and are understandably dismissed. This "communications gap" was confirmed by a colleague Marilyn Reid-Borquaye when I asked a question about work associated meaning on the internet Psychosynthesis discussion group. In a personal communication she pointed out that the word meaning is not in the vocabulary of organisational people and systems. She says that the traditional curriculum such as group dynamics, group process, organisational psychology, organisational behaviour, organisational development and industrial psychology does not train you to respond to such question. People who have been trained in these disciplines would therefore rather avoid it.

Consumerism, socialisation and the work and spend cycle

Our culture driven levels of expectation of consumer goods tends to have us working from more than we actually need. In spite of the predictions of a leisured society back in the '60s and '70s, we have sold ourselves short. Instead of taking the advantages conferred by technology in the form of time, we have preferred to take them as money -- which of course has simply pushed up prices and so returned us nothing! We did it to ourselves!

And how we stop ourselves

Of course it would be easy to feel like victims and blame all of our misfortune on rotten systems perpetrated by others. The first point to remember is that, however powerless we feel, society is us. If society or systems are to be changed then we have to do it. Looking on a personal level, there are many ways in which we sabotage our own ability to experience meaningful work.

In the first place, we frequently do not have the inner skills that enable us to recognise or make meaning. This means inner work (detailed in the next chapter) as well as the training of outer skills to give us the widest possible choice of activities. Howard Schechter in his book "*Rekindling the Spirit in Work*" recommends that we do not go blindly into the first occupation that presents itself, or make choices on purely financial or security grounds. Instead, rather like delayed gratification, we need to choose a career path and do the necessary work to equip ourselves.

In the current moment also, we need to invest psychic energy, attention and awareness into our consciousness in order to produce the meaningful order described by Csikszentmihalyi. If we do not have the ability to control our attention, if we are excessively self-conscious or

excessively self-centred then we will fail. If there is an imbalance between challenge and competence (Csikszentmihalyi 52) then we will need to take informed action to increase our competence or to choose a different challenge.

Another way we can go off the rails is described by Frankl (96). He states that in those cases in which the will to meaning is frustrated (or we are just too tired), the will to pleasure which is initially a derivative of the will to meaning can become a substitute for it. The will to power/money serves an analogous and parallel purpose. This means that we will indeed chase money and pleasure as a substitute for meaning, vacillating between professional overactivity and centrifugal leisure, having no time to finish our thoughts and certainly no time for introspection or reflection.

Probably the most important way in which we stop ourselves, certainly in my experience, is that we identify with or live out of "survival" or "false" personalities. These are the aspects of our personality (see subpersonalities in the next chapter) which we have formed in order to survive in our families and in society. They are survival strategies and therefore not necessarily the truth about who we are. Inner work and healing can help us to understand the nature of who we are and to return to our authentic personalities. Meaning at a deep level seems to be an experience of congruence between who we really are, within our authentic selves as well as in our external circumstances. We cannot experience congruence if we are not sure who we are or if we are identified with a personality which is not truly us. I have certainly experienced in myself as well as for a client, a lack of meaning in work terms resulting from an expression of a survival personality.

So, what is going on? What do these individual, cultural, economic and self abuses do to us and what do they have in common? How do they separate us from meaning? The most obvious effect is depersonalisation. Most forms of work abuse and abusive economic systems treat us as things rather than people. All of these abuses act to take away our sense of self and of self value.

Csikszentmihalyi (157) states that in order to improve the quality of life through work, two complementary strategies are necessary. One is to redesign work so that it resembles as closely as possible the activities which are known to produce flow -- *Outer Work* (Chapter 4) -- and the second is to assist people to develop aware personalities, able to recognise opportunities for action, to hone their skills and to set reachable goals -- the *Inner Work* that is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 3

Inner Work

How can we achieve meaning -- and support our clients and our community in achieving meaning?

"If you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgement of them. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgement now."

Marcus Aurelius⁸

"men are not afraid of things, but of how they view them."

Epictetus⁸

"No one can steal the meaning of your work -- the meaning of your work is inside. Work is neutral, it is what you bring to the work that makes it meaningful or meaningless."

Marilyn Reed-Borquaye⁹

"The outward work can never be small if the inward one is great, and the outward work can never be great or good if the inward is small or of little worth. The inward work always includes in itself all size, all breadth and all length."

Meister Eckhart¹⁰

"When we understand better why we are as we are, and when we appreciate more fully the origins of instinctual drives, social controls, cultural expressions -- all the elements that contribute to the formation of consciousness, it will become easier to direct our energies where they ought to go."

Csikszentmihalyi

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This chapter sets out to examine the inner work which we can do to achieve a sense of meaning for ourselves and to support others in doing the same.

In the first place, it is important to understand that the search for meaning is not a disease but a normal aspect of the human condition. It is not a neurosis as Freud thought. Frankl (95) observed that man has "the will to meaning" and that to most of us the search for meaning is fundamental. In this context he reassures us that the very fact of our will to meaning justifies our faith in meaning. As the Austrian novelist Franz Werfel once said, "thirst is the surest proof for the existence of water."¹¹

Csikszentmihalyi (161) goes on to quote national surveys on dissatisfaction at work which record that there are three main sources of complaint. The first is a lack of variety and challenge, the second concerns conflicts with other people on the job, especially bosses and the third involves burnout as a result of too much pressure or stress. All of these might be improved by changes of attitude or by shifts in perception.

The great 20th-century thinker and psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli established a set of concepts, models of and approaches to the human psyche he called Psychosynthesis. I shall be looking at this inner work in terms of these concepts and models. Assagioli trained as a psychoanalyst with Freud and introduced psychoanalysis to Italy. It was not long however before he realised that the dry approaches and interpretations of psychoanalysis fell short of the mark. Psychosynthesis was developed as a synthesis of the scientific work done in Vienna and elsewhere by Freud and others with the more mystical and transpersonal approaches to human

⁸ Quoted in Csikszentmihalyi (20)

⁹ Personal communication

¹⁰ Quoted in Fox (58)

¹¹ Quoted in Fox (95)

consciousness also current at the beginning of the twentieth century. Psychosynthesis recognises a spiritual aspect to human consciousness and existence as well as anticipating the humanistic approaches of Maslow and others. Psychosynthesis is both a conceptual as well as a psychotherapeutic approach to human being which is based on psychological health rather than sickness or neurosis. It also recognises a drive in each human being towards what Maslow later termed self-actualization and that the apparent problems which surface in us may be the challenges necessary to the progress of this growth. Psychosynthesis also provides useful models of the human psyche and of its development as well as techniques for self exploration which are readily understandable by ordinary people.

Discovering our essence

Howard Schechter is an author who has taken Assagioli's principles and applied them to the world of work. His book "*Rekindling the Spirit in Work*" is probably one of the most practical and useful guides to having a happier, productive and more authentic working life available today.

In making a case to bring the spirit back into work, Schechter defines spirit, not as religion but as aliveness, the dynamic energy of God flowing through us. The word we use when we are filled with this spirit is enthusiasm, from the Greek "en theos -- filled with God".

"One need not be 'spiritual' to recognise and honour spirit. We have all felt spirit move in us: the sense of awe in the presence of birth; the feeling when we see an eagle fly or clouds floating across a light blue sky; the sense of greatness and power after coming through a dangerous experience; the sensation of having achieved something great, or a simple act of kindness, or a sense of expansion when working smoothly on a team with others to achieve something important."

Schechter (vii)

Although this spirit is very definitely part of who we are, we rarely take it to work and most of the time we are not aware of it at all.

Using a psychosynthetic approach, we can discover something about the nature of our higher Self or Essence, part of which can be understood as *life purpose* and indeed the unique *gift* we have to offer the world. With reflection, it is possible to find out that we have already been giving in recognisable ways and to bring this into consciousness can be a powerful and useful experience. Doing one of Schechter's exercises I discovered that the character of my own Essence is best defined by the word clarity. The unique gift that I have to give and have been giving through many different activities is that of the ability to take a complex and chaotic set of circumstances, be they intellectual or emotional -- scientific or artistic, and distill them into some sort of clear message which others can understand and benefit thereby. In a slightly different take on Essence, James Hillman ("*The Soul's Code*") describes a part of our soul which already exists with its own agenda when we are born. It is important to understand this concept when faced with the inevitable damage and misdirection that happens during our childhood (see below).

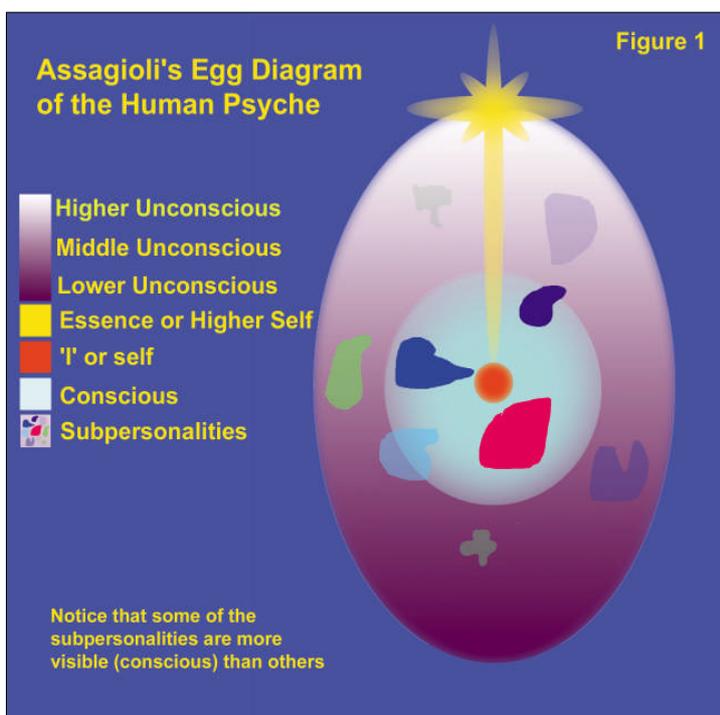
A Psychosynthesis model of the human psyche (Figure 1)

Psychosynthesis describes the higher Self or Essence as being more or less connected to our personality (self or ego) which itself is more or less in control of a number of fragments or subpersonalities.

Subpersonalities

For instance, the part of you that craves security, the part of you that likes taking risks, the part of you that would like a lot of money, the mother, the boss and all the other conflicting or agreeing bits through which we usually experience our lives can all be thought of as subpersonalities. Finally, all of these levels of consciousness are set in the context of a higher, lower and middle unconscious -- the bits of us that we don't know about but which nevertheless influence our lives.

Part of the work then is to recognise, accept and resolve disputes between subpersonalities. This will result in much less of the internal conflict which can detract from a sense of meaning.



Csikszentmihalyi (52) talks about the achievement of a balance between skills and abilities on the one side and demands and opportunities on the other. One way in which this can become unbalanced is via the very common 'critic' subpersonality which (for historical reasons) tries to persuade us that we are less than we are. Often work with this part of ourselves can bring a sense of balance and competence in work without any external change necessary.

Identification, disidentification and unfolding

Apart from working with subpersonalities, Psychosynthesis offers the opportunity to move our sense of identity from a superficial to a deeper level. Schechter explains ways and offers exercises in which we can "disidentify" from a single subpersonality (which is normal for most people) into a closer identification with the organising principle of the personality, the 'I' and eventually the Self or Essence. One of the main tenets of Psychosynthesis is that we spend our lives consciously or unconsciously unfolding into higher spiritual levels. This compares with the evolutionary picture presented by Csikszentmihalyi of growing into more uniqueness and complexity and with that of Maslow's journey towards self-actualization.

When we lack skills of consciousness and awareness, we identify at the subpersonality level. Each time we move into one or other subpersonality, we feel that this is the totality of who we are without any possibility of anything different. This makes us search for meaning at a subpersonality level, meaning which is relatively superficial and which of course will change every time we identify with another fragment of who we are.

John Cullen in his internet based IAMOP chapter on meaning at work points out that if we are operating at subpersonality or even ego levels, we are more easily exploited than if we are operating higher up the scale in our higher Self. (IAMOP Monograph 11 Chap 3, "*Designing Healthy Organizations: An Introduction to Organizational Psychosynthesis*")

With reference to work then, one of the key tasks becomes one of discovering our identity before we choose what we do, finding out "who we are" before we ask the question of "what we do" in terms of work.

Wounding and Healing

Finding out who we are does not just involve self discovery but also healing. Psychosynthesis, in common with other psychologies recognises that early childhood wounding forces us to adopt "survival" or "false" personalities which help us cope with family circumstances we are unable to understand or change. Schechter tells us that it is difficult to experience meaning when we are not living through our authentic selves. Personal experience as well as that of friends and clients leads me to confirm that if you are living through your survival personality, it is almost impossible to experience meaning. The feeling of being isolated from experience by a thick pane of glass is a commonly reported and perfectly natural result of living from "who you are not".

Understanding our subpersonalities and using them to track back, re-visit and heal the wounding which generates the survival personality enables us to move more consciously into our authentic personality, the "who we really are" that we were born with. The experience of being "real" which results from this can be very satisfying.

Feelings and Projections

In a chapter on "*Feeling the Feelings*" Schechter (42) gives sound Psychosynthesis techniques for working with the emotional wounding which we bring to work, describing ways of working with subpersonalities and of discovering "organising principles" which are analogous to the internal and external organising centres described by Firman and Gila in "*The Primal Wound*". Part of this work recommends ways of staying with our feelings -- something we might not ordinarily do. (Incidentally workaholism is one way that we use to avoid feeling our feelings.) Staying with our feelings enables us to bring the historical roots of those feelings into consciousness, healing the wounding and generating what he calls "the liberation of understanding".

Schechter also points out that one of the main blocks in our work culture is the spoken or unspoken injunction to leave our feelings at home. If we leave our feelings at home, he says, we are depriving our workplace of a large portion of who we are and as a consequence it is difficult or impossible to bring sense of aliveness to work. Relationships at work -- especially with bosses generate strong feelings and contain the potential for much unhappiness as well as happiness. Schechter (114) explains how we recapitulate the family in the workplace projecting father or other parents on to authority figures as well as sibling rivalry on virtually everyone else! Schechter (72) also helps us understand the phenomena of projection in ourselves and others. Knowing that the aggression or hatred levelled at you by a colleague probably has little or nothing to do with you renders you less vulnerable to attack and leaves you with self esteem intact.

Shadow and the Via Negativa

A concept that a number of psychologies have in common is that of the shadow. Our consciousness is set in the context of a much larger part of ourselves of which we are usually not aware and which is called the unconscious. Psychosynthesis divides the unconscious into higher, middle and lower sectors. The middle unconscious is that which is readily available to us and is populated by material which we don't happen to be conscious of right now. The higher and lower unconscious both contain drives, desires, values and indeed subpersonalities which we have for survival reasons, discarded and repressed into areas we can't normally reach. These are our shadow. Shadow material influences our lives in ways outside our control. Reclaiming and re-exploring these areas is hard and often painful work but results in much better understanding of who we are and fewer automatic reactions giving us more choices about how we might want to be.

This shadow exploration is often prompted by the emptiness or pain of unrewarding work and is analogous to what Fox calls the *via negativa*. He notes that as a prerequisite for understanding what constitutes good work, we must first understand how work empties us. In what ways is it demanding, frustrating, disturbing and disappointing.

"We cannot renew our work worlds until we acknowledge what is not working and admit to the holes in our lives, in our souls, in our collective psyches, in our communities. ... the mystics say enter in.

Embrace the dark. Don't run from the pain and suffering the work entails. Look for the meaning behind it, the gift that it gives.... bringing something new and worthwhile into the world is always difficult."

Fox (26/32)

And here is a poem from Rumi¹² which again illustrates the via negativa and shadow.

*Nothingness, empty space feeds our yearning for work.
I've said before that every craftsman
searches for what's not there
to practice his craft*

*A builder looks for the rotten hole
where the roof caved in. A water carrier
picks the empty pot. A carpenter
stops at the house with no door.*

*Workers rush towards some hint
of emptiness, which they then
start to fill. Their hope, though,
is for emptiness, so don't think
you must avoid it. It contains
what you need!*

*Dear soul, if you were not friends
with the vast nothing inside,
why would you always be casting your net
into it, and waiting so patiently?*

*This invisible ocean has given you such abundance,
but still you call it "death,"
that which provides you sustenance and work.*

Csikszentmihalyi talks about encountering grief, encountering shadow in both self and in community in order for better selves and better communities to evolve, enabling the letting go of racism, adultism, classism, denial, addictions and gender roles.

Investment of Will

Another Psychosynthesis concept is that of Will, and this is as necessary as its balance, love, if we are to create or find meaning. Csikszentmihalyi (68), describing attention as psychic energy, stresses that enjoyable (as opposed to pleasurable) activities are not natural, they demand an effort that initially one is reluctant to make. But once the interaction starts to provide feedback, it usually begins to be intrinsically rewarding.

Vocation and Purpose

Purpose in psychosynthetic terms is closely allied with meaning, often used in the same phrase. Through reflection and exercises, we can discover our unique purpose, a very similar process to that recommended by Schechter for discovering the gift of Essence. Purpose is discovered not made -- it is already there, it is part of who we are. One practical result of having a conscious purpose and consequential goals that is not often mentioned is the disappearance of the feeling of vague disappointment or dissatisfaction which can plague those of us whose purpose is operating at an unconscious level. When purpose is conscious, we know whether we are meeting our targets and we can consciously modify our strategies if necessary. If we fail to meet unconscious goals, we simply feel uncomfortable without being able to do anything about it.

Some of us do not have to work at this. Our soul presents us with purpose. This is vocation. Many people are drawn to or called by specific types of work or goals. Purpose, life themes, vocation are all an experience of the goodness of fit between a unique soul and the universe.

¹² Quoted in Fox (55)

Whatever we call them, they need not be effortful, they are statements about who we are. Maslow (14) describes a feeling of yielding or letting go into a vocation which transcends the polarities between activity and passivity in the same way as happens in the love embrace.

"Since many things are needed for the human being's life, for which one person could not suffice of himself, it is necessary for different jobs to be done by different people. For some should be farmers, some have care of animals, some are builders, and so on for other tasks... now, this division of various tasks among different persons is done by divine providence inasmuch as some people are more inclined to one kind of work than to another."

Thomas Aquinas¹³

Intellectual approaches to inner work

We should not, as sometimes happens in psychotherapeutic circles, dismiss the mind as a tool for inner work. For instance Schechter (77) talks about the cycle of blame and defence in working relationships and how this can be countered by strategies of identifying needs and meeting them. One useful device that Schechter uses is that of reflecting on our work history in terms of what we have learned from each job or activity. Appendix 3 contains an example of a reflection that I did around this and it has been personally useful. Carole Robin (personal communication) has devised a method she terms "meaning mapping" in a piece of research designed to investigate how a group of male Californian executives defined meaning. Csikszentmihalyi (129), among other examples cites good conversation as an improvement to the quality of experience. He also recommends the use of personal journals and diaries in order to create order and sense, to analyse and understand experience.

Use of Imagework

One of the (to me) most useful techniques in Psychosynthesis is that of visualisation, especially when we allow images to arise from our unconscious. This is a very powerful way of discovering, talking to and negotiating with the contents of the unconscious areas of our psyche that would otherwise be closed to us. Dina Glouberman in her book *"Life Choices, Life Changes"* has codified a large number of eminently practical ways for us to work with the images generated by our unconscious "bits". If I could only recommend one set of tools for this inner journey, Imagework as conceptualised by Dina would be it. It has certainly never let me down.

The next chapter examines the outer changes that could take place in our social systems and working world once we have engaged with the inner work detailed briefly here.

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¹³ Quoted in Fox (103)

CHAPTER 4

Outer work

What needs to change in the world to support meaningful work for all?

"the time has come in a post industrial era to make changes that would be as sweeping as those of the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago and the industrial revolution 200 years ago."

Matthew Fox

"Work is for the people, people do not exist for work."

Matthew Fox

"GNP values very high bullets, tanks, and cars; and it values at zero the environment, clean air, clean water etc. It also values at zero our children, who really our our future wealth.... the raising of children, managing household activities, serving on the school board, and many other activities are not considered to be part of the formal economy... In so many countries in the world, the contribution of unpaid workers is far larger than the GNP."

Hazel Henderson¹⁴

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What needs to change in the outside world? Quite a lot. Before we look at specifics, I want say why I am talking about something which is clearly much more difficult to change than our inner natures which (hopefully) are more closely under our control. Things can and must change externally. The systems of which we are victims, are made up of people like ourselves. Change will take work from politicians, lawgivers, educators, businesses, unions, citizens groups and individuals. It will be hard. But with increasing numbers of people sufficiently self aware to demand a better deal, a better working environment and a more meaningful life the pressure for change is increasing. Change will of course occur, that is the nature of society. What we have to do is to make sure that we know what we want -- that way we are more likely to get it. This Chapter looks at some possibilities for change and the sort of targets we might be shooting for, however far away they seem.

The reinvention of work

The time has come to reinvent work. Fox (1-308) and Schechter (270) remind us that we are moving into a post industrial era where are some of the old systems are looking increasingly shaky. Right now might be a good time to look at what we want.

The opportunity for organisational change

We still have to organise the way we work, but we can do it differently. The mass organisation is increasingly vulnerable to take-overs, stock exchange movements and rapid political and economic change beyond its control. At the same time, economists like Schumacher are puncturing the myths of GNP and size. The internet is rapidly changing the way we do business, making way for home working, flexible working and putting the power of information back into the hands of the individual or small business.

Organisation as organism not machine

At the beginning of the industrial revolution, Descartes conceptualised the universe and man as machines. Kant was immediately and articulately critical of this concept *"It is God in the human soul, not God the architect of the scientific universe, who makes sense of who we are."*¹⁵ (in Handy 238) Unfortunately we still got swept away by the physical and financial advantages of the machine viewpoint. Now, this mechanistic concept is not only being re-challenged but viable alternatives are being created, albeit on a small scale (Fox 75). And they are being seen

¹⁴ Quoted in Fox (218)

¹⁵ Quoted in Handy (238)

to work. It seems far more satisfactory to regard the universe and man as organic entities rather than machines. This allows concepts to emerge such as interdependence and co-operation as opposed to competition. A more global awareness is also making us aware of the need to husband resources which are all too finite as well as the way in which we are poisoning ourselves and our environment. It is becoming pretty obvious that our fascination with the tools we use -- and of course we are the tool-making animal -- can destroy us as well as support us.

Thinking of, and structuring organisations as organisms (Fox 69) is a paradigm which is much more likely to provide meaningful work and to make a better profit as a result. This sort of organisation will be more likely to embrace a set of values which will include interdependence, husbanding of finite resources, working with the environment and contributing to the community.

The 'good' organisation

Taking this model of the organic organisation further, what might this look like? The new sort of organisation would operate not just for the shareholder but on behalf of all stakeholders -- the customers, the workers, the shareholders, the wider community and the environment. This is not so far fetched as it may seem. Fox (230) describes a business that donates 7.5% of its pre-tax earnings to nonprofit organisations. This company also has a portfolio of community activities which includes hiring the homeless and buying from and banking with organisations with similar values. They include in their annual report an "Audited Social Statement" that details just how they have helped the community. The creators of this organisation -- Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream -- have an alternative definition of a business which reads "organised people plus money = power". Viewed in this way, the power of business organisations could be used much more effectively in societal terms than simply to exchange goods and services for profit.

Maslow (20) gives a blueprint of 36 assumptions about people which can inform good management within an enlightened organisation. These assume higher values such as trustworthiness, goodwill, educability etc. but they are no higher than those to which many of us aspire. This new edition of "*Maslow on Management*" contains a number of interviews with corporate leaders who have effectively applied his principles over the last 30 also years. Among others, it describes (Maslow 30) a company called Perot Systems that actively encourages its employees to contribute to the community -- frequently in company time. Directors of the company point to the regard with which the company is held in the community (and isn't this why companies sponsor various events) but also to the increased commitment of involved employees to the organisation itself. The book also quotes an interview with Sherri Rose (Maslow 57), a former director of Apple University. She describes a real alignment of personal and corporate goals. Although many companies aspire to do this, it is a process which takes work, time and integrity to be effective. This produced some powerful and effective teams which have gone on to make a real impact on the computer industry.

Finally, the bottom line is that companies which are supportive of their employees are actually more profitable. A Columbia University study in 1986 covering 495 organisations showed a significant correlation between financial performance and practices such as profit sharing, employee involvement, flexible work design and training and development. In 1996 I read a newspaper report on a conference in the US chaired by President Clinton which went under the headline "Nice Guys Are Winners". This conference which was attended by the CEO's of many of the US corporate giants, conclusively showed that companies which had aggressively downsized to gain stock market approval were catching a "financial cold" after a few years as a direct result of employee stress, demoralisation, inefficiency and loss of loyalty. In contrast, those companies which were supportive of their employees were gaining the business their competitors had lost.

The concept of "right" work

Many forms of work today are damaging the environment (or indeed other people) to our ultimate mutual harm. One way in which we can define good and bad work is by viewing its effect on the environment, on society and on individuals. We are more likely to derive meaning if we choose to do work that benefits others and the community at large.

"Wherever there are people, there are needs to be met and thus work to be done. We need to eat, to be clothed, to be educated, to be

treated with affection, to be played with. We need laughter and purpose and healing. We need to be invited to stretch our minds, hearts and imaginations...."

Fox (59)

As Fox says, we need these things far more than we need thirty brands of toothpaste or forty styles of watches. Good work balances independence and interdependence and as recent discoveries have revealed, our whole world is radically interdependent.

Time to reinvent time

The work and spend cycle tends to trap people into a full-time working week. In a survey quoted by Fox (40) in 1989, it was revealed that 80% of Americans would sacrifice career advancement in order to spend more time with their families. We need to create different approaches which will recognise the value of working at home, improve the wages of the lower paid and above all establish time as a value in itself independent of its price. In this way it will not be readily exchanged for money. Fox illustrates this by calculating that if a worker's real income were to rise by 4% per year and if all of it were channelled into time off, after ten years this would represent a gain in free time of 600 or so hours. This worker could take a four month vacation, go back into education for one term per year or work a 5 hour day. More work would be available for the unemployed and the under-employed and we would have more time for art, education and especially the volunteer work our communities so desperately need.

Hitting back

Many workers are at least passively hostile to their bosses. This emerges either as active hostility and vandalism, passive and secretly vicious negativity or simply "doing the minimum". I have heard these factors quoted as losing UK industry as much productivity as overt strikes back in the days of powerful unions. How, ask the managers, are we to make the assumptions that Maslow makes when they are patently not true? Looked at however from the point a few of the general objectification of the individual in the workplace, is it surprising that people who feel manipulated, dominated, not respected and exploited fight back! What they are doing is stating their personal dignity in the only way they know how.

Much better to bring this resistance movement out of the unconscious and apply overt strategies to fight back. Amy Lynn Frost in a paper on workplace abuse (Appendix 4) gives a practical series of steps that can be taken by ordinary individuals.

Education

We need to educate people -- and people need to educate themselves. Frankl (83) presses for education to "equip man with the means to find meanings." Schechter (36) urges us not to sell ourselves short for short-term financial gain but to examine our life path and develop the necessary skills to engage in work which fits who we are.

Csikszentmihalyi (235) reminds us that other people have been down this path. Although we have to discover our own particular meaning, our goodness of fit, there are plenty of others who can point the way towards ways of being and doing which are likely to bear fruit. Biographies, plays, films, and other works of art are insights into other people's journeys and into the soul work which will help us develop life themes for ourselves.

Education also needs to explode some of the myths of our culture. For instance that consumer goods bring happiness. That it is necessary to objectify and exploit people in order to make a profit. That profit is the bottom line. That people would rather slack off than do a good job. That a search for meaning is sick (Freud quoted in Frankl 87). Finally we need to explode the myth that work is bad and leisure is good. It ain't necessarily so. This particular myth was highlighted in a study described by Csikszentmihalyi. A group of people in a study of flow experienced being more happy, challenged, creative and satisfied at work than in their leisure experiences and yet would still rather have more leisure. It seems that this group were paying more attention to the cultural stereotype of work than they paid to their actual experience of the moment.

The three senses

Charles Handy (237) suggests another way of looking outward to create meaning -- and hopefully bridging the gap between inner and outer work. He first suggests that we find meaning in a *sense of continuity*. A sense of locating ourselves in the broader picture of past, present and future. "Society is a contract... not only between those who are living but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born." Secondly, he says we rejoice in a *sense of connection* -- of connection with the community in which we live. Nation states, he says, are too big for us to feel connected to. A city is something we can see across, comprehend and belong to. We can have that old-fashioned term civic pride. He has a vision of a federal Europe in which the sub-unit is not the state but the city. An interesting thought. Finally, he says, we need a *sense of direction*. We need another level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs which he calls *Idealisation*. After self-realisation we need an ideal, a cause or a vision which is *more* than who we are.

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"this is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

George Bernard Shaw

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CONCLUSIONS

So, where have we got to? In Chapter 1, we saw that meaning is clearly central to human experience and aspiration. It can be experienced as congruence, alignment, a goodness of fit at all kinds of levels, but basically between who we are and the Universe we inhabit. Meaning can be experienced in giving and receiving, it can be discovered in the darkest experiences. It can be found in the satisfaction of need and in relationship with others and ourselves. It can be a discovery of, as well as an expression of who we are.

Meaning can be looked at as a structuring or ordering of our experience in the face of chaos, bringing it under our control. It is valuable to us -- and mostly enjoyable -- although sometimes only in retrospect. It also clearly needs an investment of psychic energy, of attention and reflection, of self awareness, intentionality and choice if we are to move into greater depth (height?) and complexity in what appears to be a hierarchy of meaning. In terms of our own life experience, it seems clear that we can take responsibility for how meaningful we make our lives.

Chapter 2 looked at ways in which we can be knocked off course at work. These include all forms of workplace abuse, bullying, humiliation, attacks on self-esteem, dishonesty, threats to our safety etc. Moving up a level, we see systems that make this all right because they are focused elsewhere -- mainly on making a profit. And we also see that it is not just individuals who suffer from these systems, many of them damage the environment or exploit people or nations remote from the organisation concerned. Looking further into society, we see the consumerism by which we collude with the profit motive and by which we focus our attention away from our deeper needs and those of our neighbours.

We also let ourselves down. Making or discovering meaning takes energy that we often fail to commit. We fritter away opportunities for deeply meaningful leisure activities even when we cannot encounter meaning within our work. We make cash rather than quality of life the bottom line and we buy into the cycle of work and spend when even a little reflection might show us that there are other choices that would be better for us, as well as the community we live in.

All of this implies that we need to do some work. We need to become more self aware and we need to develop the understanding and skills which put us much more firmly in charge of who we are. We need to develop the self discipline necessary to approach meaning at the highest possible level. Once we can begin to take responsibility for ourselves, we can then start looking outwards to see what we can do to change the abusive systems that we have accepted as normal.

Chapter 3 used the concepts and models of Psychosynthesis as a framework for the many ways in which we can do our inner work, enabling us to be more comfortable with ourselves and to achieve a greater sense of meaning at work and in our lives. It described the elements that exist in our conscious and unconscious psyches and showed us how that knowledge can assist us to heal ourselves and operate at a higher level of self and with a greater repertoire of choice.

It described the concept of Essence, and with it the unique gift we have to offer and how this relates to life themes, vocation and purpose. It introduced the concept of shadow and also of working with feelings and projections, all of which offer strategies by which we can become more aware of how we operate and be in more control of how we want to relate to our colleagues and our work.

Chapter 4 looked at some of the ways in which outward change might take place. It looked at how work could be reinvented and described some of the opportunities for change. It introduced the concept of organisations conceived organically as opposed to mechanically and run for the benefit of all stakeholders rather than just the shareholders. Organisations that were aware of the need to balance competition with interdependence and of the need to manage finite resources. Organisations that would be deeply connected with and contributing to the community at many different levels.

Chapter 4 also looked at the need for different approaches to economics and at the illogicality of making profit the bottom line. It described the concept of 'right' work and looked at ways in

which we might take time instead of money to give ourselves more flexibility in our lives and more opportunities to contribute to our neighbours.

Education in ways of achieving meaning is needed as well as the explosion of the myths that stand between us and an economics of meaningful work. The chapter concluded with a viewpoint from Charles Handy that combined inner and outer perspectives. He recommends that if we develop a sense of historical continuity, a sense of connection with community and a sense of direction or vision we are also likely to experience a sense of meaning.

People who find their work meaningful and are appreciated and acknowledged will clearly put in far more commitment and energy. They may also of course choose not to do work which is ultimately abusive of others or the environment.

Recently, I watched a serious and distressing programme on the impact of AIDS in southern Africa. It was both moving and informative. What was different about it was the fact that it was "The Money Programme" a magazine devoted to economics and finance. This gives me grounds for optimism. Business is just now starting to become involved with humanitarian problems simply because what happens to people impacts at all levels of our global society including organisations and the profits they make.

Writing this piece has been for me a journey of enlightenment. The challenges are many but there are plenty of do-able things to do. Step by step, doing our inner work first and then applying our insight, energy and love to the outside world *will* make a difference – and the more of us that do that, the bigger the difference will be. Truly a Great Work.

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Then a ploughman said, Speak to us of Work.

And he answered, saying:

You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth.

For to be idle is to become a stranger unto the seasons, and to step out of life's procession that marches in majesty and proud submission towards the infinite.

When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music.

Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent, when all else sings together in unison?

Always you have been told that work is a curse & labour a misfortune.

But I say to you that when you work you fulfil a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to you when that dream was born,

And in keeping yourself with labour you are in truth loving life,

And to love life through labour is to be intimate with life's inmost secret.

But if you in your pain call birth an affliction and the support of the flesh a curse written upon your brow, then I answer that naught but the sweat of your brow shall wash away that which is written.

You have been told also that life is darkness, and in your weariness you echo what was said by the weary.

And I say that life is indeed darkness save when there is urge,

And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge.

And all knowledge is vain save when there is work,

And all work is empty save when there is love;

And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God.

And what is it to work with love?

It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.

It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.

It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit.

And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching.

Often have I heard you say, as if speaking in sleep, 'He who works in marble, and finds the shape of his own soul in the stone, is nobler than he who ploughs the soil.'

'And he who seizes the rainbow to lay it on a cloth in the likeness of man, is more than he who makes the sandals for our feet.'

But I say, not in sleep, but in the overwakefulness of noontide, that the wind speaks not more sweetly to the giant oaks than to the least of all the blades of grass;

And he alone is great who turns the voice of the wind into a song made sweeter by his own loving.

Work is love made visible.

And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy.

For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half man's hunger.

And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes, your grudge distils a poison in the wine.

And if you sing though as angels, and love not the singing, you muffle man's ears to the voices of the day and the voices of the night.

**Kahlil Gibran - The Prophet**



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## APPENDIX 1

### MEANING AT WORK

#### Compilation Document From Internet Discussion

I have added this as an appendix, partly to illustrate some (not all) of the source material that my initial questions stimulated but also to illustrate a relatively new way of exchanging ideas with people of similar interests around the world in a fairly rapid manner. It is informal and can be very messy to follow-up all the threads but nevertheless a good illustration of a positive use of the Internet. It has also led to a meeting between myself and Howard Schechter from San Francisco which we both hope will result in him coming to the UK to do some workshops in the year 2000 or 2001.

I kick off with my trigger E-mail.

#### TRIGGER DOCUMENT

Over the past few years I have become drawn to working in the area of what I term "work abuse". I am in my final year of a Psychosynthesis professional training and I have chosen for my dissertation (and for a presentation that I have to give with a colleague), the area of the Psychosynthesis concept of meaning and purpose and whether it could be used to understand and heal some of the demoralisation and stress that many people experience in our western work culture. If this area is as important as my intuition leads me to believe, I should also like to work towards the publication of a book on this -- probably several years down the line.

I set out some preliminary thoughts and questions below. I would appreciate being pointed towards relevant literature and case studies (especially the personal experience of members of this list) and even video clips illustrating relevant points that I could use in my presentation. Finally, your thoughts and comments on the material below would be greatly valued.

#### THE THEFT OF MEANING

I have had a number of exciting careers in my life so far, veterinarian, pathologist, university teacher, choreographer, dance teacher, academic manager, learning technologist, instructional designer, trainee therapist. Despite this, I have often felt vulnerable either to those who would devalue my work, or exploitation by those who knew how important my work was to me. I have a feeling that, had I been able to develop emotional skills earlier in my life and an understanding of the relationship of meaning to career and vocation I could have been more present and committed in my work and less of a victim. This would have meant a better all-round experience of life.

#### JOHN PICKRELL

People are as vulnerable as they choose to be, and as open as they choose to be. Unfortunately, there appears to be a correlation between these 2 "skills". Its taken me about 14 years to figure that this is an apparent correlation, not a real one. A major feature which will help you is BEING. BEING is composed of empathy, consciousness, and joy-passion. Empathy is a skill beyond price (you'll have to tell me what psychosynthesis principles drive it though). Empathy is composed of 3 basic skills (adventures; honestly, I got it from psychosynthesis), role taking, role experiencing and role distinguishing. When you learn to role distinguish, you can deepen the other skills (adventures) to your and your partner (work or home)'s advantage. If you can't role distinguish, you run a severe risk of

cross transference, which has ruined far more interesting lives than mine and I suspect yours.

In addition to this, I feel strongly that our current Western culture of work is intrinsically abusive in its objectification and exploitation of its so-called "human resources".

### **JOHN PICKRELL**

The accepted power structure is driven by people who have struggled hard to get the symbols they now flaunt, who have as yet not asked themselves "is there more, like someone I can mentor, a purpose I can live for, or just life I can live for, that is they have not found (as Mary Chapin Carpenter sings about) "Their place in the world". Affective (feeling intensity) taxonomies call it BALANCE, anthropologists describe it as an integration, fitting in, of our purpose with all other purposes in the world. Civilizations (Teotihuacan for example) had a fair start on doing this, but found it was just too hard to try to fit all puposes in and when their city grew to more than 250,000 (London at than time was 5,000, New York did not exist, Egyptian had not grown beyond 25,000-30,000 and the Indus River Civilization, Chinese, Olmec and Maya were <20, 000)...So you see, this civilization was an order of mangitude larger and probably several orders of magnitude more complex.....for whatever reason, BALANCE eluded them....it was just to hard, and too many people were hurt, killed or made brain dead, as you are alluding to. The experiment was noble and as close to the sun as Acarus ever flew as far as we know.

Here might be a good place to explain my model: *see below*

The very use of the term is significant. I also cannot help but feel that a demoralised workforce is less likely to make a profit for shareholders or improve the economy than a motivated workforce in which creative individuals can find meaning in their work. If this is true, then it means that we can and should be working alongside the employers and the leaders of industry because in fact we will be working towards the same set of objectives. This non-confrontational approach should help the creation of policies, attitudes and environments which are supportive of meaning and motivation but which also recognise the dangers of workaholism and work obsession.

### **JOHN PICKRELL**

On the surface, it would seem so, no one has ever gotten where you want to go, and civilizations have literally died trying (Teotihuacan for example), but its a noble experiment.

This may be where they (the civilizations) fall. Get motivated, but don't get too deep...it is incredibly difficult to find one's BALANCE and equanimity will save the world, probably by means that we have yet to figure out.

How you will take the confrontation out of industry driven by so many who have power by symbols and symbols by confrontation is going to be an interesting process. In fact, how you will sell it to the confrontational leader to whom you pitch it, so that you can get your foot in the door is yet another interesting process.

It is my experience that much of the pain, dissatisfaction, demoralisation and damage that I and others have suffered in association with work or career has to do with lack or loss of meaning.

**JOHN PICKRELL**

DOING need do nothing but add meaning....you can lose meaning, but your sole aim in doing, adventuring is to add meaning...along the lines of harmony, finding support, defining your levels of power and finally finding your BALANCE. Your check sheet should be "What meaning have you added today??"

Meaning can be lost or stolen in many ways. These can include the poor manager who says or implies "what you do isn't very valuable anyway", the absence of support, mentoring or training to enable the acquisition of work skills in order to job better, lack of or withdrawal of funding in the public sector, sudden changes of policy or management in the private sector, downsizing, dishonesty in terms of expectations, demands to do more for less etc. etc. The list could go on. On top of this, many jobs by their very nature are difficult to invest with meaning except that contained within the pay packet.

**JOHN PICKRELL**

You've described what is done to you, but why do you assume that you need do nothing, or you will do nothing, or you are powerless to do nothing.....Get on with it!

The generic question which I'm setting out to ask is as follows.

**Psychosynthesis is a therapeutic paradigm which places great stress on meaning. Given the apparent importance of meaning in many forms of "work abuse", how might it be possible, using Psychosynthesis techniques, to support and heal clients who find themselves in apparently abusive and meaningless work situations? Additionally, how might be possible for people to find or invest meaning in the apparently meaningless and to defend this against the forces which might erode it?**

**JOHN PICKRELL**

YES!!! Its taken a while, but you should be investing meaning, because that is the only important aspect of doing....the rest is !@#\$%^, well maybe not totally !@#\$%, but pretty nearly !@#\$%! It is incumbent on each of us to "make our own kind of music and sing our own special songs...regardless of how many (or few) sing along."....get on with investing meaning....its 1 of 2 of the most powerful aspect [the second is finding your interactions] of the 2nd most powerful business principle...ADVENTURING....Like BALANCE, I recommend it.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS WHICH FALL OUT OF THIS MIGHT BE:

**How many people who feel dissatisfied or stressed or demoralised in their work associate this with lack of meaning?**

**MARTIN NELSON**

I know this sounds naive but I know it would help me if you could define what you mean by the term "meaning." If for example you mean a "sense of worthwhileness" I might answer differently than if you mean "a sense of spirituality." Are you asking "Does lack of meaning" cause stress or demoralization? IMHO stress is caused when there is a gap between what I want and what I am capable of getting. Now if its "meaning" I want and I'm not getting it then I would be very stressed.

**A LONGSTAFFE**

It is clear to me that the concept of meaning as applied to work is something which is immediately recognised by some but also leaves others puzzled by the terminology. I am including your paragraph above

with some other responses posted to the Psychosynthesis list. It will be interesting to see what sort of response we get.

Demoralization, for me, is a sense of hopelessness. It may or may not be caused by external objects, such as lack of a meaningful job, meaningful relationships at work, meaningful use of my competencies or ideas, etc., but most certainly is caused by what I think about these kinds of things. So, I guess, I cause hopelessness, not others. Can Psychosynthesis be used to develop a sense of meaning when this has been lost or when the work appears to be intrinsically meaningless?

#### **TERRY GONDA**

wow..you've touched a core aspect of an unhappiness I carry around regarding work. I think "meaning" is essential and much of the culture is starting to understand this. You can see the residue of corporate culture trying to implement the beliefs you expressed in the Dilbert Cartoon popularity. Slogans emphasizing Quality, "Associates" instead of employees, Mission Statements worn around your neck (I'm serious), and emphasis on training. Unfortunately, the execution of the concept has been so poorly carried out in most environments, that it has magnified the problem. Now you have people who lack meaning and are now cynical about those running the ship. I've found it very Demoralizing and Dilbert Cartoons literally wallpaper some people's cubicles.

Psychosynthesis...I suspect, that those that need to be healed are management first. Many will read a book and try for instant corporate turnaround. And when a CEO comes and goes and has the power to manipulate the environment so drastically, good work could be destroyed quickly. So one person comes in and mission statements talking about Quality and how valuable "associates" and customers are are drawn up. Meanwhile, attitudes and business practices still reflect other truths.

Heal from the top and perhaps insight will follow how to truly implement the change that is needed. I'm not saying the "worker" does not need healing. I do. Those around me do. I'm just saying that your understanding about meaning already has a foothold. I pray you can bring additional insight as well as a glimpse into how we can implement solutions.

#### **JOHN CULLEN**

Terry Makes an important point that we may need to start at the top. For many years, I have conducted psychosynthesis training for managers. The first workshop is, "The "Self-Actualizing Manager: An Introduction to Managerial Psychosynthesis". At the present time this course is offered for free on the internet. It is my hope that this will be the beginning of providing opportunities for more managers to function from a higher level of consciousness. We also need psychosynthesis professionals to reach this group. Visit the following URL for more information:  
<http://www0.delphi.com/psegg2/>

#### **A LONGSTAFFE**

Thank you so much for your response -- I share your cynicism about misguided or incompetent efforts by corporate bodies to motivate the workforce.

I would challenge you however on needing to heal the management first -- you are absolutely right of course but if we roll over and accept this, nothing will ever change. What I feel is needed is a multifactorial approach whereby we begin to heal the victims of this abuse and at the same time try to produce hard evidence for managers that a properly motivated workforce will increase their profitability.

**TERRY**

I agree. I think I wanted to overstate the point about hitting the top (and for that matter, middle management), because I'm tired of hitting my head against a wall and being burned by well meaning, but poorly executed plans for "improving" the work environment.

Meanwhile healing middle managers and empowering them to make small changes such as the adoption of the mentoring approach to management may help. I'm still thinking (with a colleague who has written a book on the mentoring approach to management) about this approach.

**TERRY**

Depending on the environment, targeting middle managers as a start may be a good idea. I'm not sure how effective trying to hit everyone at once will be in a large organization. That's the problem isn't it...trying a one size fits all approach. I think if manager's get the concepts down...the first and foremost being...take the time required to do the job right, then perhaps they could think of the proper execution on their own or with some minor help. I am weary of consultants who know diddly about a specific organization coming into a workplace and trying to "work their magic". I understand the desire for easy solutions and anyone wishing to make a difference must recognize that that perhaps is an overwhelming factor in all of this.

"I don't have the time."

Which leads to "can we hire someone to take care of this for us?"

It's the concept of not having time to sharpen the sawblade. Before you can heal someone, you have to get their attention first.

"If I can't read a book in a night or a week and get from it what I need to, then I won't deal with it."

The instant society wants instant solutions to the workplace dilemma.

And the problem has been going on for so long now, that not only do we not have good mentoring now, we have leaders who weren't mentored and don't have the skills THEY need. We've tried to implement mentoring now...but who has the time? I admit to being caught up in the fray as much as the rest.

I am aware from my conversations with friends and colleagues that this is a really important topic and that awareness of the importance of meaning is beginning to take hold in a wider circle so I think that there are grounds for optimism.

**TERRY**

I couldn't be more glad to hear it.

**SCOTT\_GARVIN**

On the topic of work and meaning.

It occurs to me that it is the affluence of our culture that allows us the luxury of considering meaning an important part of work. As in Maslow's hierarchy of needs - the basics are covered, so now we can ask what's all this effort for now.

As such, I'm not so sure that transpersonal mission based change will only come from the top of the corporate ladder. While it is true that upper management has the modernistic role of 'command and control' and therefore the 'power' to create change within organizations, I wonder if meaning making might be truly more organic and available to all levels of the organization?

This process of finding one's own meaning is only encouraged by individuals who act as role models and eschew the consumerist media culture of 'you can have it all, Right Now'. People are choosing to turn off the TV, and turning attention back to their experience through participation in their families and communities. People are leaving jobs they have worked for the money for more grounded meaningful work everyday.

The science of technology has helped create abundance and awareness of the interconnectedness of all forms of life on the planet. Through communication (ie Internet) we create connected communities of shared concerns and interests that shrink the world, we also create access to information that expand possibilities.

Preparing food, cleaning, gardening, teaching/learning, creating beauty, serving basic human needs will forever be meaningful work.

#### **A LONGSTAFFE**

Thank you very much for your optimistic viewpoint.

I too, believe that change can take place at many levels within an organisation and that it could be a mistake to think in a hierarchical manner of either/or top/bottom. Most organisations have a very big middle and it is middle management who by changing as individuals for themselves are likely to also facilitate change in those they manage (and indeed in those that manage them).

I am interested in your phrase "meaning making" and I'm interested in what you think the characteristics of role models might be in this context.

I agree that preparing food, cleaning, gardening etc. are intrinsically meaningful but I am certain that many thousands people do not find or experience this meaning. Do you have any ideas as to how they could make that shift?

#### **JONATHAN SPENCER**

It might be worth you looking at the structure of such organisations as The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the UK. I know that zen master Thich Nhat Hanhs Buddhist group in the UK used The Quaker way of doing business as a model.

#### **JOHN CULLEN**

A Contingency View of Psychosynthesis Typology and Meaning.

Meaning is in the Type of the Beholder.

One can explore meaning at the transpersonal level by describing the different meanings that different Psychosynthesis Types aspire to. What may be meaningful for one type may not necessarily be meaningful to another type.

HIGHEST ASPIRATIONS BY PSYCHOSYNTHESIS TYPOLOGY

## WILL

I aspire to become a dynamic, powerful and benevolent leader, serving the greatest good.

I aspire to liberate people from all forms of bondage and oppression.

## LOVE

I aspire to a deep intuitive, loving-understanding of people, so that I can nurture them, and help them to unfold their highest potential.

I aspire to a wise and complete understanding of life so that I can teach and illuminate others.

## PRACTICAL

I aspire to great mental agility and resourcefulness, so that I can apply them creatively to intellectually challenging enterprises.

I aspire to arrive at truth through the power of deep thinking and careful reasoning.

## HARMONY

I aspire to express great artistry in every aspect of my life, thereby inspiring others to increase their sensitivity to beauty.

I aspire to be a mediator - a reconciler of human conflict and an instrument of peace.

## SCIENTIST

I aspire to become vitally involved in discovering solutions to Nature's mysteries through scientific research and experimentation.

I aspire to invent or develop those mechanisms, instruments, or technological improvements which will transform and uplift the quality of human life.

## DEVOTION

I aspire to live with complete faith and commitment - true to my highest "Vision of the Right."

I aspire to serve God or the "highest ideal" with complete faith and utter devotion.

## ORGANIZER

I aspire to bring rhythmic order out of the chaos of human living by "grounding" progressive ideas in practical activity and "seeing them through" to perfected expression.

I aspire to take a practical, administrative role in redesigning and transforming the patterns of human civilization, so that a "New World Order" may emerge.

\*Robbins, Personal Inventory Profile (PIP) Seven Ray Institute

**KARIN PETERSON KPET**

I applaud you for taking on this project. And would like you to keep me informed on your progress.

This particular subject is very near and dear to my heart. I've been calling it Emotional Abuse (EA) at the Work Place. It means the same.

I am a 1st year Psychosynthesis student who's experience a lot of abuse but EA is the worst - it creeps into your very soul before you know it. For 3 years I worked in an environment that was very, very abusive but I needed a job. (I design web sites) Is there meaning to need? I always go back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a base. I fully agree with you that a organization of any kind would be more profitable if the abuse would come to an abrupt halt. I believe it has a lot to do with ego.

I was finally about to transfer out of the division that I was in and my work situation improved. My new boss was shocked when he heard some of the things. He rewarded my hard work with better pay and leadership role. Now we've had a change of administration and he's gone but the memory remains. Someone believed in me. I think that's what all of us want for someone to believe in us, acknowledge us, and feel that we belong to the whole (work place).

I don't know how you can resolve the exploitation. There are too many people still willing to close their eyes. HR should be supportive but often times they betray your trust. I'm trying to get into the Employee Assistance Program to stop all that.

It's funny. This situation has been around for eons, people know it but it's not any better than it was. Once in a while you find someone who is "enlightened" - but they're rare.

Please keep me in touch with your progress and good luck.  
Karin [kp@flash.net](mailto:kp@flash.net)

**A LONGSTAFFE**

I believe you have made an important observation when you mention your experience with your new boss. I think that being seen, believed in, mirrored is a vital way to experience meaning.

May I post that paragraph from your E-mail together with my response to the Psychosynthesis list? I think this is a valuable contribution to the discussion.

**KARIN PETERSON**

Yes, you may quote my statement. I am enjoying the "conversations" on your subject. Am following it closely - please let me know how your progress is going.....

You've really touched upon a very "volatile" subject which is good. It makes people (I'm included) stop and think about their work environment and question whether or not they contributing subconsciously to the problems. We all hope that we're "better" than that - but we do slip. It would be fun to develop cues to stop bad habits that sneak in. There are ways to stop smoking, drinking, chewing nails - but are there cues to stop being abusive at work. Sorry - I always get off the subject..... one thing leads to another.....

## HARVEY LACEY

Forum: The Texas/Oklahoma Forum

Subject: Management labors the soul

I'm a lazy person. I admit it. The proof is my position on employees. I figure I can have tools or fools. I like tools. I have no employees. That's my choice. Of course that limits me to making only the dollars that I can personally generate.

I was once responsible for seventy people. I had to help generate their workload, coordinate their schedule, supervise their quality, and help them with wives, kids, sickness, drug and alcohol abuse, etc. I learned a lot about human nature and how we're all the same yet we're so different.

I also came to the conclusion that productive employees require only one thing. Good managers and supervisors is the secret.

In our society there is conflict between employees and management and it is one hundred percent managements fault. Management initiates the friction by insisting that they are the boss and they know what is right. They create the gap between the two sides.

I was very successful as a supervisor and manager until I was forced to accept supervisors that were from other departments onto my team. It happened that I was going through a marital difficulty at the same time and the load of fighting at home and facing resistance at work just wore me down until I gave up.

My problem at work was my employees knew they were the most important part of the team. They knew my whole reason for being there was to make their job easier and more productive. I had worked very hard to instill in them the faith in the job and the company and the perspective that they were the key to success. I was just there to clean the floor of the trash they generated as they kicked butt. They did the work. I took care of the pay and paperwork.

My crew was successful. Of course the company assumed that I was the key to success and that I had picked the very best to fill my crew. There was an effort to rotate employees so that the success could be duplicated throughout the company. They felt that if I trained all the craftsmen that they would have a bunch of crews as productive as mine. The end result was my crewmembers assumed the attitude of the new crew shortly after arriving and the same happened to their replacement. So as soon as my crewmember was treated as just another body to be ordered around they became just like everyone else on that crew. In turn the new member on my crew responded immediately to the new position of power and prestige and became as productive as the other members of my crew.

The important lessons I learned from this three year experience are many. I know what makes employees produce. I know how management sabotages production. And I understand that it is all about perspective. As long as management takes the position that they have the power and they are in control then there will be chaos and heartache for the employees and waste within the company. But when the employees are given the knowledge about the objectives and pitfalls facing the company and they are given responsibility for meeting the

first and avoiding the second they will respond in a positive manner, profitable positive even. Harvey, just getting warmed up.....

### **HENK VAN DOORN**

Maslow on Management' (ISBN 0-471-24780-4)

Dougalog@aol.com

In his (psychosynthesis inspired) book called Rekindling the Spirit in Work, Howard Schechter assumes difficult work scenes, and then offers an enriching spiritual path for "rekindling the spirit".

\*\*\*\*\*

### **MARYLIN REED-BORQUAYE**

I'm responding to you and not to the whole group. My response is a bit personal and probably not of interest to the group. The experiences, however, shifted my way of being in the workplace and has made all the difference in my life.

Re: The theft of meaning - using the concept of meaning to understand work abuse

Adrian, thank you asking that question. I've earned a Master of Science degree in Human Resource Management and have been certified as an Organizational Development Specialist. My feelings on this matter, however, are not a consequence of my education. The traditional curriculum, by which I was trained, does not teach you to respond to such a question. The course materials used to teach Group Dynamics, Group Process, Organizational Psychology, Organizational Behavior, Organizational Development, Industrial Psychology and on and on, are designed by people who worked very hard and paid dearly to earned their pieces of paper that certify them as experts. If they were to admit that there is a possibility that the entire discipline was on the wrong track, it would mean that their education and their consequential credentials were worthless. Most choose to perpetuate the fantasy.

I earned my graduate degree in 1993. I, however, had the good fortune of taking courses called Curriculum for living at Landmark Education in 1994. The courses at Landmark were a lot cheaper, yet worth their weight in gold. Two years later, I found Psychosynthesis. Landmark and Psychosynthesis caused me cease using traditional OD techniques when I supervised and managed. It made a big difference in the people I supervised and I now that I've retired, I hope it will be an asset in my new private practice.

I worked in civil service for 31 years. The perception of a civil servant, in the United Kingdom, is quite different from that of a civil servant in America. It is nearly impossible to fire a civil servant and some people say that because of this, we don't work "hard." I started in the system in 1968 as a grade 3 clerk, the lowest possible level. Over the years, as a result of earning higher degrees and passing civil service exams, I made my way through various supervisory and middle management positions and ended my career as a Deputy Director of a unit.

When I'd been on the job about 26 years, I remember having a conversation with my boss. He was a bright young man, about 20 years my junior. I was complaining about the lack of meaning in what I was doing. He said to me, "You're not going to find what you're looking for doing this job. We're pushing paper and it doesn't mean anything. This is the nature of the job. You come here because it enables you pays the bills: buy food, clothing and pay the rent. If you want to feel useful, you have to do that outside of the workplace. Do volunteer work." My boss and I became even closer friends after the conversation because I appreciated that this "young kid" had given me a "wake up and smell the coffee" jolt.

What he said reminded me of a poem that I'd read in school. It said that those who can make their vocation their avocation are blessed. Most of us are not blessed. This, however, is not simply the nature of the beast. It is the choices we make. What I hadn't realized was that if you take a job for money, the money is what you will get.

When I became a civil servant, it wasn't because I was committed to becoming a paper pushing bureaucrat, it was because being a bureaucrat offered job security, health benefits, paid vacation, paid sick days and a host of other perks. I wasn't looking for meaning. The job gave me exactly that which I had sought. So, sitting in my boss's office some 26 years later, bemoaning the fact that my work had no meaning was quite silly to say the least.

This realization motivated me to explore other options. I began to do volunteer work with a group called New York Youth at Risk. I also found new ways to make my job meaningful. I began to counsel, mentor and develop my staff. Nothing about the job had changed except the way I looked at the job. I created my own mission. I then changed jobs and continued to counsel, mentor and develop. Finally, I decided to convert my computer consulting business (which I'd always had on the side) into an ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION practice.

When I was unknowingly operating at the safety, food and shelter levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, I was miserable. After having the conversation with my boss and experiencing Landmark Education, I elevated myself to the levels of belonging and self-esteem. I was blessed with Psychosynthesis and early retirement. I am now **actualizing** (I'm working to attain the level of Transpersonal Self) as I venture forth, committed to sharing my experiences with my clients.

No one can steal the meaning of your work; the meaning of your work is inside. Work is neutral; it is what you bring to the work that makes it meaningful or meaningless.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hello Everyone,

I have been much touched for the past month by Adrian's letter and the many responses to it.

So I want to share with you a source which I cannot recommend highly enough. Some of you may be familiar with it already. I realize I may be carrying coals to Newcastle, but it is worth the risk.

It is a book we used during our second year of the three year PS course at Paoli, and I have recently rediscovered it. But now I have time to savor it more fully. It is CARE OF THE SOUL -- A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life, by Thomas Moore; Harper Collins Publishers, NY, NY; 1994; ISBN 0-06-016597-9.

The author states: "Care of the soul is a continuous process that concerns itself not so much with 'fixing' a central flaw as with attending to the small details of everyday life, as well as to major decisions and changes.... Its goal is not to make life problem-free, but to give to ordinary life the depth and value that come with soulfulness....

"When people observe the ways in which the soul is manifesting itself, they are enriched rather than impoverished. They receive back what is theirs, the very thing they have assumed to be so horrible that it should be cut out and tossed away. When you regard the soul with an open mind, you begin to find the messages that lie within the illness, the corrections that can be found in remorse and other uncomfortable feelings, and the necessary changes requested by depression and anxiety." -- and so much more!

Best wishes to all.

Marion M. Horne

innerway wrote:

> I have also read that when people  
 > >go  
 > >through near-death experiences, they go through a quick review of their  
 > >entire life, and the emphasis is not on their accomplishments but on  
 > >their  
 > >loves. All this says to me that it is love above all else that gives  
 > >life  
 > >meaning.

>  
 Yes, I'm sure this is true. I once heard an extremely in-depth, near-death experience which made a lasting impression on me. The woman describing her experience said that when she was having her life review it was not the life she ever would have imagined if someone had asked her to think about what she'd achieved in her life to that point. She would have thought of awards and honors, important jobs, etc., but standing in the presence of the Being of Light whom she called the Blessed Beauty, she said that all of the veils fell away and suddenly she \*knew\* what the important things in life were.

She said that any deed which she did in life which manifested in any way at all the pure, selfless love which she knew then was being showered on each and every human being on the planet every moment of their lives was wonderful beyond measure. It was as if that one deed had made her whole life worthwhile. For instance she saw an incident where she was working in a home for retarded children and one of the children looked sad and lonely so she picked him up in her lap and rocked with him awhile. She said this was such a small thing. She never would have remembered it. But she felt, during this life review, that she was being showered with so many honors about this one incident it was as if she had been elected the President of the United States.

She said that any time she had spent in idle pursuits -- she hadn't learned something or wasn't manifesting this selfless love -- it was as if that time had never existed. And if she had actually done something to \*harm\* another soul, even to the extent of a minor competition, she wanted to die from shame in that holy Presence. I remember then she laughed and said this was ironic because she had already died. :-)

She also said that in watching her life review there wasn't the normal separation which we have in this world between people. It was as if she beat with the same heart as each and every person whose lives she had touched in some way. She didn't just know intellectually the effect of her deeds. She felt it as they did. Do you think this is what hell is? The people who've spent their lives destroying other people feel what all of their victims have felt and the effect of their deeds?

Kind regards,

Suzanne Gerstner

**APPENDIX 2**

# **PSYCHOSYNTHESIS AT WORK**

**Synthesis Presentation and Workshop 30th September 1992**

**Alan Robinson and Adrian Longstaffe**

## Framework

1. Introduction and framework for the evening
2. Psychosynthesis in the workplace – a personal exploration  
Guided meditation  
Group Work
3. Tea
4. Psychosynthesis and meaning at work – Presentation
5. Discovering Purpose – Exercise
6. How can Psychosynthesis help your clients – Presentation
7. Work based case studies – Exercise
8. Conclusions – Discussion

## Part I – Psychosynthesis in the Workplace

Alan

This section of the workshop has been designed as an exploration of the part that Psychosynthesis could play in improving, where appropriate, our personal experience of “work”.

It takes the form of an experiential exercise leading to group work. The group findings will be collated by Alan to produce a set of handouts.

In addition, the accompanying handout *“Relationships and Needs in the Workplace”* covers the one day seminar designed by Alan from which this exercise is drawn.

## Part II – The theft of meaning (and what to do about it)

Adrian

In this section of the workshop, Adrian will ask two questions.

The first is:

***How can the Psychosynthesis concepts of meaning and purpose help us understand and integrate work associated problems?***

Time and again, when I have experienced problems in my working life, they have concerned meaning. If the work *lacked* meaning, I was uncomfortable, bored and de-motivated. If the work *had* meaning, I felt my enthusiasm was exploited, and I became workaholic.

To try to answer this question, I intend to share some of my own thoughts, which in recent months have arisen from reading and from discussion. I will also give a taster of a possible exercise around purpose that you could use with individuals or groups.

The second question I want to address is:

***How can we use Psychosynthesis counselling to support clients with work related problems?***

I will share a few points, mainly from books written by Schechter and Maslow and then move into a case study exercise (structured by Alan) which we can look at on a group basis.

Finally, we will come together again to wrap up the evening.

## Objectives for Part II

- By the end of this evening you will have given some time to considering the relationship between meaning and work problems.

- You will have considered some ways in which the psychosynthetic process can be used to help clients or individuals with work problems.

## Reading List

Howard Schechter, "**Rekindling the Spirit in Work**", Station Hill Openings Barrytown Ltd.

*Howard is a Psychosynthesis trained therapist who also works with organisations. The book is pure Psychosynthesis from start to finish and I have found it very useful indeed. Additionally, he also explains Psychosynthesis concepts such as the Self (he calls it Essence), authenticity, subpersonalities etc. in a way most lay people can understand -- very useful for lending to clients.*

Abraham Maslow, "**Maslow on management**", John Wiley & Sons Inc.

*I haven't read this book all through but these are notes from a journal that he kept some 35 years ago during a six-month attachment to an organisation with very enlightened management attitudes. He makes the point that most organisations are into controlling people on the assumption that they would rather not be there. This of course is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, he suggests a number of alternative ways of viewing attitudes to work including the assumption that most people would rather do a good job than not. And that if management makes this assumption, again the prophecy is likely to be self-fulfilling.*

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "**Flow**", Rider.

*This book has an excellent chapter on "The Making of Meaning" which I have found very helpful.*

Matthew Fox, "**The Reinvention of Work**", Harper Collins.

*I haven't read this yet but it comes recommended by Jean Hardy.*

Alan Robinson, "**Starting the Revolution – Introducing the Mentoring Style of Management**", Word Bookshop

*Alan's ideas of a system of management which is more flexible and supportive are well stated in this useful book – not aimed at counsellors, it nevertheless outlines a practical approach to making the workplace more effective as well as more pleasant. (AL)*

## Meaning and Work

### The Double Bind

- Lack of meaning = boredom / wasted life / emptiness
- Much (too much) meaning = exploitation (workaholism)?

### What is meaning?

- A feeling of being at one with what I am doing.
- A feeling of flow, of satisfaction.
- A feeling that I get when what I am doing is congruent with who I am -- in terms of my needs, my competencies, my vision, and my purpose.

### Meaning and Needs

Do we need to be self realised to experience meaning?

How have I experienced meaning:

- when I teach a good class?
- when I experience a workshop that speaks to my personal truth?
- when I eat a good meal?
- when I relate to a friend?
- when I see a sunset or a rose?

What do these have in common?

A Hierarchy of Meaning.

### The Making of Meaning

- The good news in negative meaning making
- What about play?
- Bringing the whole of ourselves to work
- Protecting ourselves from the thieves
- En Theos
- Rewarding ourselves

### Meaning and Purpose

- Purpose is something about who we are.
- We do not need to take it on.
- We may need to discover it.
- Goals are not purpose -- goals are like stations along a railway line -- purpose is the engine which drives the train.
- Going West

### More on Purpose

needs

vision                      skills and competencies

values

### Discovering Purpose

- Helps with life and career decisions
- Purpose changes as we change -- need to keep monitoring
- Even helps if you know you are not on purpose

## Exercise – Discovering Purpose

1. Sit comfortably and ground. Centre your attention on your breath. Don't do anything with it. Just watch the breath going in and out. Notice any tension in your body -- breathe into this area. Let go of your attention to breathing.

2. Allow yourself to remember your competencies.

What qualifications you have. What skills you possess. What training you have. What experience you have.

Allow yourself to remember times you have succeeded. Not just the big things, passing exams, having a baby, making a supportive life decision and sticking to it. Remember also the smaller things -- last week I bought my partner a cup of tea in bed. Yesterday I stopped and chatted with a homeless person. Today I called a friend. Last week I planned my dissertation. Friday I had an insight about a client. Thursday I got myself to a supervision session and got supported.

All these are also part of our competencies.

3. Now put your attention back on your breath.
4. Now allow yourself to recall a time when you were happy at work.

What was going on? What were the feelings? What did you do which elicited these feelings? How do you enjoy using your skills? As a teacher?, a counsellor?, an organiser?, a creator (physical, mental emotional)?, a supporter?, a lover?

5. Now return your attention to your breath.
6. Now allow yourself to recall your values. What is there inside of you that you want to realise in the world? What is your vision of what could be? Think big, but also think small. What steps could you take on the way to your vision.

What would you like to be remembered for?

7. Now put your attention back on your breath, bring your focus back to the present.

Take a few minutes to write down three lists.

- |                 |                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a) Competencies | -- what I do well.                                                                                               |
| b) Vehicle      | -- the medium through which I like to express myself in the world (e.g. teaching, counselling, organising etc.). |
| c) Vision       | -- what I want to realise in the world, what I would like to be remembered for.                                  |

8. Preferably with the help of the friend, try to distil from this a statement of Purpose. At first it may look something like this.

I will use my... special skills... through... vehicle... in order to realise my... vision...

9. Later, you can reflect on this, refine it, shorten it and of course change it whenever this seems appropriate.

Review it every time you have to make life decision, either choose to be on purpose or change your purpose. And it still helps to know when you are not on purpose even if this is due to circumstances beyond your control. To be clear about where you are is half the battle.

**Next question:**

How can we use Psychosynthesis counselling to support clients with work related problems?

Here are a few suggestions -- I am sure you can think of more possibilities.

- **Acceptance, listening, witnessing, validation.**
- **Explore needs.** Relate meaning to needs. Things can be meaningful, even at a survival level.
- **Purpose.** Work on personal psychosynthesis leads to authenticity and with authenticity you can find and/or create meaning.
- **Relationships and feelings in the workplace recapitulate family.** What is being projected? What family stuff needs to be healed?
- **Clarify feelings and uncover relating skills.**
- **Concept of Projection.** Understanding how others project material that is more about their own history helps lessen the impact when workmates abuse.
- **Do the do-able!** Yes, the system is abusive but if we focus on that, we become victims and despair. Acceptance of what is rather than focussing on what should be opens the possibility of change (you don't have to like it, just accept it). Most pain has less to do with what happens than my attitude to what happens. I can change my attitude without the need for others to change.

**Case Study**

Divide into three roughly equal groups -- we will provide a case study (written by Alan) which consists of notes from a presenting session of a fictitious potential client with work problems.

*How might you want to work?*

*What else would you want to know?*

Summarise the main points and bring them back to the main group.

**Conclusion****Sharing, discussion, feedback.**

What did I learn? What would I do differently? How will this help me in my work? What's next for me?

**Evaluation**

Comments, praise, supportive criticism -- in writing please, we may forget them otherwise!

**Hope this contributes – love from Alan and Adrian**

## APPENDIX 3

### MY OWN CAREER LEARNING -- a reflection on what I have learned from my work.

Looking back on my own career, I can see that every single activity undertaken has taught me something valuable. Study for examinations at school taught me the love of learning and understanding how things work, especially the natural world. I also learned that mathematical approaches were not my thing and started to develop the skills of clarity of expression.

Working with horses as a teenager reinforced my love of being in nature, and introduced me to the concept of a working relationship with animal that was deeply physical without being sexual. At the same time, working with others in the stables began to establish some relating skills in context of work. Being intrinsically afraid of horses, I also discovered my courage in the face of fear.

Going to vet school taught me that rigid inauthentic structures can destroy enthusiasm and motivation. At the same time I acquired much biomedical knowledge and understanding and more clarity of expression.

Working early in my life in the amateur and later on professional theatre, confirmed my love of music, singing and dancing. Especially, it introduced me to the concept of teamwork and co-operation which sports had failed to do. The experience of being part of a synergistic group I found to be deeply meaningful. I also acquired skills of visual design and lighting, a sense of theatre and began to discover things called feelings.

Working in veterinary practice and in hospital internships taught me that abusive management damages motivation and the soul. I also learned that I don't have to be perfect to contribute, I don't have to know it all, I can begin to be authentic with where I am at in terms of skills and knowledge. Moving from here into research, I also learned that bad peer working relationships can create depression and kill motivation. A lack of support from above is also damaging. I also learned that my soul shape does not match the disciplines of research especially in terms of the lack of rapid feedback.

Moving to a job in veterinary pathology, I discovered that I love finding out, exploring and problem-solving in the shorter term. This gives me the feedback that I need for meaning. I also discovered that when I expressed my enthusiasm it made me a better teacher and in fact is what underpinned my effectiveness as a teacher. Further work in veterinary teaching reminded me that clarity is fun and fuzziness is painful. Seeing people and making sure that they know they are seen is powerful.

Moving into dance teaching I discovered that I could teach from underneath as well as on top -- by this I mean that teaching veterinary students I was always going to be more knowledgeable than they whereas teaching actors to move, I was contributing to a skill set which I myself could not match. I can contribute from partial skills and knowledge. I accept more where I am and what I can reasonably improve rather than striving for the impossible. Moving into choreography I discovered a powerful creative source within myself and that I love the synergy of the creative process in rehearsal. I can enjoy the results of my own work.

Work with performance psychology reminded me that I have feelings and that I had been running away from these feelings because I didn't know I could learn to enjoy them and control them. Feelings are important to give colour, life and authenticity. I am not just a mind and a body. Moving into personal development psychology I learned that I can take responsibility for my maturity and development, I can take steps towards understanding who I am, towards controlling my life, towards the excitement of genuine human soulful relations. I discover the concept of purpose.

Working in the field of learning technology and the management of teams, I begin to integrate some of the feeling stuff into my intellectual activities especially that of management. I learned that not seeing people can be disastrous. I learn not to trust all the time. I learn that I can survive disaster and I learn that disaster always seems to leave me stronger and in a better

place in my life. I begin to learn to trust my soul. I also learn that putting all my eggs into one basket makes me workaholic, driven and unhappy. I learn of my need to have parallel heart and head activities/career paths. I also learn that skills and knowledge acquired in the past can be used both for interest and financial support. I learn to relax as a self-employed person.

Training in Imagework opened me to the strong powers of my own imagination and I discover ways in which I can dialogue more effectively with my unconscious and that I can use these both for myself and for others.

Counselling training results in my learning more about who I am and what I am capable of. I learn that being and awareness are even more powerfully transformative than doing. I learn to value who I am and to accept the appreciation of others. I re-clarify my objectives as well as understanding the value of stepping back and listening. I learn to stand in my power.

## APPENDIX 4

### Giving Workplace Abuse a Bad Name by Amy Lynn Frost, MBA and MA Spiritual Psychology

*Reproduced with permission*

"It is not sign of health to be well adjusted in a profoundly sick society."

J. Krishnamurti

"Yelling at living things does tend to kill the spirit in them. Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts..."

Robert Fulgum.

#### What is it?

There is a virus running rampant in today's business world. It's called workplace abuse. Most cannot name what is going on. They just feel a terrible unease. Many figure that it's their own problem. Others see it as business as usual. Take the example of Joe. He had spent two weeks, much of it overtime, working on the proposal for funding new projects for the next quarter. He wanted it to be perfect knowing how picky his boss could be especially under pressure of a deadline. He chose a moment when the manager was not distracted and gave him the project. He waited anxiously for five minutes while the proposal was scanned. Then the unthinkable happened. The manager crumpled it up and threw it at him and yelled so that the whole floor could hear "This is unacceptable. We can't submit this crap. I want a rewrite on my desk tomorrow at eight am sharp." Everyone within earshot turned away in embarrassment. Joe wished that the ground would open and swallow him up. Sounds like a scene from a melodramatic business movie. Unfortunately not -- it happened. It's an example of abuse in the workplace.

Some other examples:

- Setting them up to fail by not providing adequate resources and support
- Not considering the personal life to be of value
- Demanding more from the worker than is reasonable
- Demeaning and sarcastic remarks
- Managing by intimidation with comments like: 'Get that list to me or you're fired.'
- Unfair and unjustified performance reviews
- Not showing appreciation for a person's work and value
- Yelling at others
- Hurtful attacks of your nature and abilities

I was preparing to write this and I pulled out a notebook from my work with the Air Force from three years ago. Inside it was a yellow post it note saying, "Amy - Rewrite this paragraph so it flows. The document was almost right before; now it is horrible." For a moment I flashed back there. I had spent weeks writing a lengthy, complicated acquisition document. It was reviewed by many, many people and I rewrote and rewrote striving for excellence on this very important project. Then in a fit of rage my boss describes the document as horrible. This is abuse.

I am writing on this topic with the hope that workplace abuse can be identified, healed and prevented. I believe that companies with 'soul', that are values driven and people oriented make for a kinder, gentler workplace with an excellent bottom line.

There are toxic systems, policies and people that cause deep hurt, reduce productivity, and generally raise the misery factor at work. Workplace abuse results in depressed workers with the joy sucked out of them, who dread going to work, hate what they do, have frequent absenteeism, show little loyalty to the company, and even resort to violence to themselves and to others.

### Are you in an abusive environment? Do any of these describe you?

- You feel off balance and unable to be back in balance.
- You feel disconnected, confused, disoriented.
- You are upset by the mere presence of a person.
- You feel a strong desire to leave.
- You feel empty and unfulfilled.
- You don't feel safe.
- You don't feel appreciated.

Thousands will attest to the fact that abuse happens all the time and at many levels in almost all businesses. In recent years, sexual harassment has rightfully received significant attention. There are more subtle and not so subtle forms of mistreatment at work that do not get the press that they deserve.

Joe and my experiences are only the tip of the iceberg. Sometimes it's the whole corporate culture that hurts people. At times it takes just one bad apple to make the whole barrel rotten. It's not just bosses that mistreat subordinates. Corporate bullies are found at all levels. It's just that the more "senior meanies" don't get called to task for their misbehavior. When bad manners becomes normal behavior, abuse sets in and destroys people and companies. Abuse in the workplace is real it affects us every day in many tangible and intangible ways. The example I began with is based on a true event. Joe left the job he loved because the harassment his boss, Ted, was giving him became unbearable. Jane came in to take Joe's place. Jane was working hard for Ted even though she was going through a messy divorce. Finally one more put-down tipped the scale. Jane came to work with a gun to kill Ted. Ted had left for the day, she went to Ted's boss, another abuser, he was gone. She went to her estranged husband's house he was gone. Jane then tracked down her husband's lawyer she killed him and then herself. Ted's answer to this tragedy, "she was nuts and get metal detectors". Are there enough metal detectors?

### How do we identify it?

If a person feels that he/she is being abused then it is more than likely happening. Granted some people are thin skinned and feel 'abused' by the heavy demands or high standards of a job. There is a huge difference between a tough boss and one who rules by intimidation, one that is demanding and one that is abusive. Harvey A. Hornstein in "Brutal Bosses and Their Prey" distinguishes the two styles of leadership.

**Tough Bosses** Do not tolerate low quality work. Expect employees to work hard Model and expect the best effort all the time.

**Abusive Bosses** Make personal attacks rather than give fair work evaluations Treat employees unfairly for no apparent reason Humiliate employees in front of others.

Abusive bosses often have an attitude of condescending contempt towards those under them. They often seek to motivate by intimidation and so create an atmosphere of fear. Such a workplace environment does not evoke the best from the worker. If there is any innovation that departs from "standard procedure" it is a function of the strength of the employee. Companies rife with abuse often lose their brightest and best employees. They jump ship to the company that treats them respectfully and fosters a climate of cooperation and creativity.

In the end, low employee morale and loyalty sabotage any chance of the company remaining competitive. Even a good salary in an abusive company is not enough for employees to stay. Although money is a necessary concern to workers, people are really motivated by intrinsic factors like doing the job for itself. That is, finding value in one's work as an expression and expansion of the self, needing to be

recognized for excellence, the drive to be creative (innovative and seeing the world with a new set of eyes), and the desire to make a contribution to society.

### **What are the consequences of living with this virus?**

Workplace abuse hurts everyone. Like ripples in the pond it spreads to the person's family and then to the community at large. The road rage manifest on the freeways today is in part a result of unbearable work stress. Domestic conflict is often a spillover from an abusive workplace. We have to give it a bad name. We have to train managers to recognize it's symptoms and act decisively to reverse the process. But denial of the problem is rampant.

Some other consequences are:

A loss of enthusiasm; being on guard; a loss of self confidence; a reluctance to take action to make decisions; increased absenteeism; as well as emotional and physical health problems. It kills all initiative, causing people to shut down and be protective.

### **Why do we resist calling the virus ABUSE?**

Carmen started working in a department store. Within two months, she saw five "good" workers walk out with no notice leaving the rest of the people to take up the slack. Everyone kept saying, "its okay here" there are no problems. Obviously good workers don't walk out of a good workplace -- there is a problem BUT no one wants to admit it -- power denial.

Other whys:

- We may be an abuser and don't want to admit it.
- We don't have a vision of a healthy environment so we just accept this is as good as it gets.
- Its not abusive all the time.
- The abuse can be so subtle that it erodes slowly and we don't notice until we are ill or walk out without notice.
- We are too busy to deal with it.
- "I'm lucky to have a job" attitude
- We don't know what to do so why acknowledge it.
- I don't hear others saying its abuse so I must be overly sensitive.

The problem is that people hurt in the workplace but often don't quite know why. Unfortunately they have adapted to the pain. Like a frog that is slowly boiled in water it adapts to the heat until it's too late, the abused worker has to 'hit bottom' with a major breakdown or flare-up before the problem is addressed. People who were abused tend to be abusive. Since the workplace is and has been abusive for a long time it makes sense that many operate this way for it is what they know how to do. There is another way.

After one of my classes, a student came up to me and said, "I realized that I am being abusive and I am going to take steps to change that." WOW! He also said, "This behavior can be avoided by remembering, that not everyone can live up to your level of expectations. People should be measured on their own merits against the expectations of the position they fill and their contribution to the team effort."

How is a certain action considered to be abusive? An acid test: If you did the same action would you be considered disrespectful, out of line, or be fired? If so, then that action may be abusive.

### **What can we do about it?**

I gave you some ways to identify if you were in a environment where workplace abuse was happening. Now we know what it is, we can identify it, so what can we do about it?

## Breaking the Chain

The time has come for us to call a spade a spade. Abuse is abuse. Abuse is manifested in toxic social situations and interactions. The unseen killer of the human spirit needs to be brought out into the open

and resolved. Disempowered individuals need to recognize that the problem can be changed. Despite the perspective of the "golden handcuffs" (I can't leave because I have it too good -- great benefits, pay, and/or title), the long history of helplessness, and the growing toll on the human spirit victims can learn to be victors. Above all the following strategies are intended to counteract the powerless victim attitude.

Abusive corporate structures and personnel cannot be changed by band aid interventions like group dynamics, job enrichment, and educational seminars. The abuse must stop and the bullies must change. The managers who abuse and coworkers who demean must change their basic view of people and motivation.

### Here are some of the steps to break the chain:

**1. Admit the problem** - Coming out of denial is the first step. Sometimes the pain from the abuse has to become so great that in desperation we admit "we cannot go on like this any longer." We then begin to look for options other than being trapped. Abuse is receiver defined. You don't have to wait until you hit your limits. We have to learn what is abusive to us. This is also a good time to look at your own actions. Are you helping to perpetuate a cycle of abuse by not standing up for yourself or letting the pain roll down hill to those around you? Is your response to the abuser the energy needed to continue the abuse?

**2. Gather information** - A journal of abusive incidents reminds you of the severity of the situation. It gives you ammunition when you report to appropriate authorities or superiors. It helps you to divorce yourself from the issues and define the real source of the problem. Ask others to document and write memos for you. This will empower the entire group and add more strength to your claims.

**3. Set Appropriate Boundaries** - Learning to stand up for yourself and others is essential in the breaking of the chain of abuse. "Just say no" is futile unless it can be backed up with consequences. This also gives you the freedom to say YES and feel good about it.

**4. Heal yourself from the past** - If you have suffered from abuse earlier in life, recognize the patterns you may be living today; such as defending the abuser and thinking that the pain is normal. Be gentle with yourself as you grow out of accepting abuse as normal. Now is the time to ensure that you are not self abusing in addition to the external abuse. Listen to your Self Talk. Would you say to a friend what you are saying to yourself? Be patient and view personal empowerment as a process. Become a part of a support group of survivors of abuse. Learn from others who have walked the path of empowerment.

**5. Create a 'tool-box' of skills** - There are multiple ways to stop the cycle of abuse. Different situations demand different skills. Learning the abusers hot buttons and the times when they are likely to be abusive and consciously avoiding them is a self-protective strategy. Assertiveness training helps you make your needs known. Critical thinking strategies can be developed to disarm some irrational bullies. This involves responding to irrational requests in common sense ways.

**6. Know your job options** - Find out what are viable job options. Knowing when to get out of an abusive situation is a judgment call. You have to do what is best for you. Knowing what you legally need to do is an important option.

**7. Establish a value driven organization** - A corporate environment that places high value on the individual, human dignity, and kindness can become the norm for American business. Here is where companies need to

'practice what they preach". I worked with a corporation that has the words "We care" in the corporate logo and mission statement. Brutal downsizing, all time low company wide morale, worker insecurity and fear all showed a breach between the stated and actual values of the company. The company mission statement needs to be values driven and actually lived out day to day.

These prescriptive steps are not the end all in stopping abuse. They are a guide to help you take charge of your situation and make a difference for YOU. It takes courage to take action. Make sure you are not being abusive in how you handle the situation. Once you courageously stand up and begin to make a change, you will become a leader and a mentor for your fellow employees. You will no longer be a force of one AND together you will make a difference. No matter what the outcome you will feel good about you.

*"The world knows very little about its heroes. The courageous acts that take the most out of you are usually the ones that other people will never know about."*

Anne Tyler

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