

The Changing Values of Workers: Organizations Must Respond with Soul

At a recent workshop for the management team of a large financially successful hospital in Southern California a senior vice president came up to ask a question.

"It seems to me that the people who work for us are changing, especially the younger ones. They don't seem motivated or loyal," she continued, "how do we motivate them, I'm lost!"

Her question captures the challenge facing leaders inside and outside of health care -- How to attract, motivate, and keep good people when the contract between employer and employees has been so drastically altered. Now that the turbulent condition of the health care environment makes the very mention of job security absurd, what is the basis for a robust and mutually beneficial contract between employers and employees?

This article suggests that workers are changing. They are wanting more from work and workplace and these changes will shape how organizations must organize themselves to attract and keep top people.

Soul and the Commitment Crisis

Fifty-Three percent of U.S. workers are planning to leave their jobs voluntarily in the next five years. In some industries, the stats are even higher. And the dominant reasons for this exodus are not financial but relate more to quality of work life.

In our recently published book *Awakening Corporate Soul: Four Paths to Unleash the Power of People at Work*, we suggest that this commitment crisis is intensified not just by the chaos of the marketplace but by the longing among workers for a new kind of workplace -- one which offers meaning, learning, and community in the midst of change.

Over the last decade a tremendous amount has been written about how the corporate world has changed. Workers are exhorted to face facts and change with the times. Within health care, competitive trends have driven home the message -- a leaner, more competitive health system will spit out anyone who does not adapt.

Accepting all of this as true, it is fascinating that so little has been written about how workers are changing and about how their changing expectations impact what organizations have to do to attract and keep good people. To attract and keep the best and brightest goes beyond money. It means taking seriously the need to create more "soulful" workplaces, places of compelling intrinsic value where the deepest energies of workers are engaged and tapped. To create such workplaces leaders must become students of the changing values of workers.

The Peggy Lee Phase of Life

After a decade of radical change workers have gotten the message that there is no security. Instead of looking for uninterrupted career growth they are seeking balance between personal and work lives.

Some are disillusioned with the promise of "corporate" reality. In the midst of corporate struggles for survival, workers are searching for new ways of defining success and the place of work in their life. A vast majority of North American now wish they could work for themselves (80%+) and believe that giving one's loyalty to a single organization is no longer useful.

Compounding these broad changes are two demographic factors that are driving workers to ask for more from work than salary and benefits. The aging baby-boomers are moving into their "Peggy Lee" stage of life, asking "Is this all there is?" These mid-life workers are asking tough questions about life and work -- Are the sacrifices I have made for work worth it? Is this work or this organization what I want as my legacy? Am I going to die an accountant?

In mid-life, people naturally move into what Erickson called the generativity stage, a time of shifting values from "making it and proving myself" to "making a difference and leaving something of value behind". Tired of waiting in line for organizational rewards that they have seen evaporate into thin air, these workers want work to align with their values and life purpose. They want to bring more of who they are in what they do. These baby boomers came of age in a time of great idealism. Now in mid-life they are resurrecting the "artist's paradigm" of their youth -- the belief that work should be an expression of the self, with a quality of play and artistry. Their questions set an agenda for organizations who want to develop a culture that can re-engage the mid life worker by taking seriously their need to infuse work and workplace with greater intrinsic value.

Decoding Generation X

Following on the heels of their baby-boomer siblings and parents (and numbering 42 million) comes the second demographic force that is challenging leaders and organizations to take stock. Labeled "Generation X" these workers are often the brunt of complaints by older managers who say they "are not motivated". In fact, these workers are motivated -- but differently than the generations that preceded them.

These workers know there is no such thing as job security. They feel little loyalty to an individual company. They watched the reward for loyalty given to their boomer parents -- down sizings and reorganizations that discarded decades of commitment in the time it takes to hand out a pink slip.

The gen x worker is not attracted by the promise of a rosy future but by the immediate opportunity to grow professionally and personally. They will exchange their best efforts for the present tense opportunities to learn and grow. And if their current organization does not provide opportunities in the present then they will look else where.

In this way they are highly adapted to an environment that is unstable, without clear lines of authority, and certainly without clearly defined career paths. Having grown up in the era of the Net and the fall of the Berlin Wall, these workers carry within them an "individualist paradigm". They put their trust in the power of the individual to shape or reshape institutions. They resist hierarchy and doubt the wisdom of authority. They function best in highly decentralized (read empowered) work structures.

Far from calling for a return of the good old days, these two groups of workers are looking for corporate cultures that allow them to make a contribution, not just a living, and that emphasize learning over security, and personal responsibility over control. Such an environment is characterized by what we call Corporate Soul.

What is Corporate Soul?

We chose to use the term Corporate Soul to describe organizational cultures that attract and engage the best that workers have to offer. If the words Corporate Soul conjure up images of workers praying in the corridors or Gregorian chants being sung in the cafeteria (or worse, motivational slogans while you are on hold at your hospital), think again. Corporate soul is about bringing the deepest and most sacred human energies into work. Corporate Soul awakens when individuals are truly alive in the workplace, pouring their creativity, energy, and passion into their work.

But Health Care is Different:

Some would argue that Health Care is different from other industries. It could be argued that health care is too competitive to make "soul" relevant or at the opposite end that there is "soul" inherent in the work.

It is true that people typically choose careers in health care because of a desire to heal and help. Their soul was there in the beginning. The intense frustration and anger expressed at an increasingly bottom line emphasis is a very real resistance against attacks on the original impulse that brought people to their work in the first place. As one nurse recently said to us "I didn't get into this line of work to look over budgets!"

Those organizations that will be most competitive in the next decade will be those who discover how to build organizations that meet both the stringent demands of the marketplace and the inner needs of the workforce. This will be as true for health care as any industry. This means tapping into something deeper than "organizational survival" as a motivator. (As noted neither the boomers nor the gen xers are engaged by notions of organizational survival).

An organization-wide survey at a large west coast hospital revealed that employees were not only angry but that they felt disenfranchised by survivalist attempts to bolster up a flagging bottom line at the expense of care and caring.

Four Paths to Corporate Soul

To uncover a practical strategy for awakening Corporate Soul, we asked several thousand people what we call the 150% question: -- Think of a job or project where you gave 150% of everything you had, and did so freely because you wanted to-what was it that made you do that?

Out of these interviews emerged four paths that describe the engaging corporate culture, one that can attract and motivate talented people. The paths were:

Path of Self: When taking action is a direct expression of one's values and essential identity.

Path of Contribution: when work has meaning because it is in service to a worthy goal.

Path of Craft: when attention to the work process develops mastery and artistry

Path of Community: when collaboration creates a sense of deep human connection to others.

Below we will describe each of these paths and discuss how an organization might help people find the soul of their work and awakening the Corporate Soul.

The Path of Self

The Japanese have a word - *kokoro* - that refers to the process of perfecting one's inner nature. It is recognized in many traditional Japanese arts such as flower arranging, tea ceremony, or swordsmanship, that flawless technique is not enough to make one a master. In addition to technique one must cultivate and harmonize one's inner nature, the soul force. True mastery is a matter of both being and doing.

Few organizations devote time or attention to helping people understand their being. Clarifying personal vision involves walking the Path of Self. To incorporate the Path of Self into our organizations means creating time for people to re-connect to their essential values and to reflect on how they can enact those values in the context of their present work. The Path of Self engages the sense of "ownership and responsibility" that so many leaders feel is lacking in the workforce.

When St. Mary's Health Care began to revamp its health care delivery system, leaders determined that sustainable success hinged on employees who were committed and caring. The fiscal price of hiring and training was too high and the spiritual price of becoming a hospital devoid of compassion was too great, St. Mary's leadership invited each person in the organization to spend time clarifying and

articulating his or her own most cherished values. Employees were then asked to discover or create ways they could express those values in their current work, Finally they were asked to identify the ways their personal values connected to the corporate values. One employee who participated in the process reflected, "I am working harder than ever. Not because I have to but because this job is a way for me to become more of myself."

Several large corporations including AT&T and American Express have begun to create career development programs that help front-line people identify their own values, identify what engages them at work, and to begin to look at ways to create more of that in their own work. Programs like this help people begin to identify the "150%" answer for themselves--how do I engage with my work--and how can I find more fulfillment in it. This kind of effort would benefit many health care organizations seeking new ways to kindle commitment. Great work begins with individuals clarifying their values and purpose and then bringing those into the workplace.

A mid-western hospital captured the literal voice of individual values in a pre-employment video shown to all prospective job applicants. The viewer sees and hears a variety of employees talking about their work, their values, and their vision for the organization. The video ends with an invitation, voiced by a front-line employee, to pursue employment. Beyond providing technical information, the video reveals an workplace following the Path of Self.

The Path of Contribution

One of the primary ways that people create soul at work is by connecting to the outcome of their work. When asked, people talk about the impact that their work has on someone or something of importance to them personally. In health care it may mean a patient who gets better, a family that is helped through a difficult time, money saved that can go to other ends, or a healthier community. The path of contribution is about believing your work makes some difference to others and, in some small way, to the greater world.

When it comes to the path of work healthcare is fortunate. We have worked in many industries where the product is benign at best and often destructive to the larger society. In medicine, the work is essentially about healing, which is something that most people find soul in. The challenge for a health care organization is that

often people lose sight of the impact of their work and that our focus on efficiency is making it difficult for workers and providers to see through the cloud to its meaning.

A hospital executive we work with relates the story of leaving the executive suite and going out into the hospital. Tired and burned out from a week straight of meetings sequestered like a juror on the executive floor, he ran into a very sick patient on a gurney in the elevator. His first reaction was something like "my God there are sick people here." But a conversation with the family in which they praised the care they had received, and spoke of how the hospital had helped them so much left him with a new sense of pride. Newly invigorated, he went to the next meeting connected again to the reason for the work.

There are a number of strategies an organization can employ to help people connect with the impact of their work. One way to do this is to create deliberate ways for people see the impact of their work. One HMO tracks the reenrollment percentage of members who bring complaints to service representatives. Now for the first time, the staff see that what they do has an impact. Several health care organizations that we work with have videotaped focus groups with customers and members and presented an edited version to all staff. These frank discussions by customers about what service meant to them with specific incidents good and bad have had a powerful impact on both pride and motivation. In one hospital, a nurse saw the video with a patient whom she had served and cried as she realized the impact of her work. Sadly, most leaders do little to "amplify" the voice of contribution. There is something about hearing from our customers and seeing how important our work is that creates soul.

Some of this task is in helping workers look for the connections themselves. One simple method some of our clients have used is to include a regular time during staff meetings in which staff speak of a way they or someone else on the team "made a contribution" in the last week. Such simple reminders made on a regular basis are powerful reinforcement for the value of the work.

Yet a significant part of finding soul in work is about enlightened leadership that understands the human need to see the importance of our work. We must find ways to re-frame the challenges we face in any business away from the pure "business" purpose and towards the higher purpose. We ask workers, for example, to help us control costs because our institution must survive, yet survival does not stir the human soul. It is sheer fantasy if we believe people will give their best to survive. Enlightened leaders might do as the factory manager and help re-frame cost consciousness as a desire to continue to provide high quality and service to even if our resources are decreasing. A CEO of a large regional health authority in Canada frequently reminds his staff that the challenge they are involved in is about meeting the challenge of a generation-delivering quality health care with limited resources. The difference is subtle and can be manipulative. However, the difference is profound between saving the institution and trying to ensure high quality and service in spite of limited resources. The first is pedestrian and the second noble.

The Path of Craft

Following the Path of Craft focuses on the process of working in the present moment. On the Path of Craft we develop mastery and artistry by attending to details of the moment-by-moment action of work.

Every job has its own type of artistry. Abraham Maslow, a pioneer in the field of human development, said, "A first rate soup is more creative than a second rate painting." Organizations that engage workers at all levels and in all types of work in defining high standards of mastery, are pursuing the Path of Craft.

Workers want to bring their creative energies to work. They want to walk the Path of Craft in their workplace. But unless they are involved in setting standards of craftsmanship -- the soul will stay home and invest itself in after work hobbies.

Our experience in helping companies improve in the area of customer service illustrates how Corporate Soul awakens when people engage in establishing high standards for themselves.

Customer service turn arounds begin by creating a steering group of top performing staff members from all levels of the company, weighted towards the front line. These people are already the organizations master craftsmen and women. As such they are given the mandate of upgrading the customer service standards throughout the organization. We help them do this via a three-step process:

1. The group interviews customers to identify what great service means to them as customers.
2. Then the group defines new standards for customer service based on the customers' input and their own sense of artistry regarding customer service.
3. The group communicates these new standards in partnership with management, to the entire organization.

This process results in improved service as staff members persuade their peers that a new level of performance is both needed and attractive. In addition, we have seen a renewed sense of enthusiasm and commitment emerge in organizations where bureaucracy had dulled the soul's heart beat to almost undetectable levels.

The Path of Craft also centers itself on the process of life-long learning. The Chinese word for boring consists of two characters : heart and killing. Boredom kills the heart. When work becomes rote and tasks repetitive then the heart ad soul are killed by boredom.

Soul emerges when people find and discover new arenas of mastery. This can be accomplished in a variety forms-job trading, more fluid boundaries between departments and jobs so that people can do more cross-training, defining high standards from the front-line up that meet people's need for "artistry in their work." Clearly the trends show that today's workers have a greater desire for such art in work.

At a large power generation company, coal miners sit on a task force that decides where to invest the company's pension fund. In this expansion of craft, the coal miners' find soul and a renewed commitment to work. A housekeeper's job is reengineered and now they have increased contact with patients, take vital signs, and help transport patients. They speak to us with pride about the new found love of craft.

There are several implications and potential strategies for healthcare organizations. First and foremost, we must constantly find ways to help stretch our people towards mastery by providing them opportunities to learn and develop new skills. This may take the form of organization re design teams, quality projects, task forces to determine how to spend foundation money, expanded jobs that require new skills, and so on. At one long-term care organization in Canada, a task force of front-line people made the major recommendations that led to a needed \$10 million cutback. Another has a regular routine of job trading.

To awaken Corporate Soul means beginning to create workplaces where people can extend their capabilities, where high standards and attention to detail are supported by life long learning. Today's changing workers are demanding personal and professional fulfillment in their work.

Path of Community

All work is finally team-work. We have found that to foster this sense of community is one of the surest paths to soul. A robust community is essential to the kind of collaborative work that our streamlined systems require.

There are many ways to foster community in our organizations. The first is to break down the barriers that create the we-they phenomenon which is exacerbated in times of economic crisis. A long term care facility instituted "A day in Your Shoes" program. Every other month, members of

the senior team spend half a day working side by side with members of the staff doing the work of staff such as nurses' aides -lifting residents and cleaning bed pans. One worker, in the housekeeping department, reported that his experience was "Powerful. I knew that we were in this together and that he was one of us." Community means transparency of organizational levels.

In many spiritual traditions, storytelling is critical and spiritual truth is often conveyed through parables. It could be argued, that soul begins in organizations when the stories or parables of its members are respected and given value. When our story is told we can begin to define a corporate story that has the possibility of inspiring excellence. Part of telling our story is the ability to speak the truth without fear because our truth is part of our story. At a recent meeting of a restructured health care organization, staff complained that management did not want to hear their laments about what was being lost through this process. One wise woman put it profoundly: "They seem to miss the point that until what is being lost is honored and we can somehow talk about how to bring what was valuable forward, we cannot help them do what they want to do!" The first step of healing our organizations may be the telling of stories and the power of listening. This is especially critical to "gen x" workers who despise hierarchy, organizational politics, and value the workplace where one can speak one's mind and shape that which shapes you.

Storytelling can become part of any organization's culture. One of the best ways to begin is for executives to tell their story and to listen to others. A simple example came to us by way of a senior vice president at a large organization. Embroiled in a meeting of frustrated workers she confessed that with all the pressures in health care today, there is not a week that goes by that she does not want to come in and tell the CEO that she quits! It was a breakthrough moment, her story allowed others to tell theirs but also, to express commitment in spite of doubt. Such vulnerability breeds community and begins to create a sense that we are in this together. Such togetherness brings soul to work.

Finally, community can and should stretch beyond the walls of the organization. Whether it is the large factory that allows professionals leave to work for charitable organizations, the hospital that adopts a school, or the large power plant that spent a years worth of profits to plant a million trees in Central America to offset their emissions, when we can make our workers feel part of a larger community this also breeds soul.

The Soul of Competition

We began this article by recognizing that it is harder to attract, motivate and keep good workers today. While the world of health care has changed dramatically so have the value of our workers. Desperately seeking more from work than pay and security, the emerging worker wants community, a sense of contribution, a place to be themselves, and to grow as a professional.

Talking about "soul" in times such as this may seem like a luxury at best or a waste of energy at worst. It is our contention that the changing values of today's workers will make this a compelling issue for every leader as we approach the 21st century.

Strategies for Creating Corporate Soul

Path	Organization Strategy	Personal Strategy
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Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Help people see the results of their work -Give people bigger jobs that take in a larger part of customer' experience -Find deeper value behind changes such as reducing cost
Craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Give people opportunities to develop new skills/crafts -Strive for excellence by sweating the details -Help people recognize what skills they love to use and make career choices
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Get executives out in the field next to front-line workers -Clarify organizational values pre-hiring and help people choose whether they fit in -Provide opportunities to interact with customers and see them as real people -Connect with history/lineage of our work as healthcare workers
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Deliberate efforts to clarify personal values and aspirations -Encourage self-responsibility and choices about bringing values into work <p>-Role model truth telling so the tension between soul and our work can't be resolved</p>

