

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

BE HAPPIER AT WORK: FINDING MEANING IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributor: Annie McKee, PhD, senior fellow, the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and author of *How to Be Happy at Work*.

THE GOAL:

Increase your happiness and engagement at work by aligning your job with your values.

NANO TOOL:

Most of us spend at least a third of our day working and commuting to and from work. But there's a pervasive belief that "our lives" are somehow separate from "our work." Many people think that happiness and value come from "life" but not "work" (unless you're a monk or employed by an NGO). It turns out that belief is false, and it hurts both us and our employers. Purposeful, meaningful engagement with work is not only possible, it enables us to be smarter, more innovative, and more adaptable. In this state, we're excited to take on new challenges and are more resilient and motivated.¹

There has been a lot of attention to the younger workforce lately — Millennials and Generation Z — who are looking for "more than just a job." These workers, researchers reveal, want to experience a sense of purpose in addition to making a living. But the truth is everyone and every organization can benefit from feeling that work has meaning and is aligned with personal values.

The good news is you don't have to change jobs to find meaning in your work. Even though your company probably doesn't share all of your values (that sort of organization is very rare), you can have an impact in some ways that are meaningful to you. Finding that meaning can start with exploring the three action steps below.

ACTION STEPS:

1. Find a written statement or list of your organization's values, if it exists. If it doesn't, review some of your leaders' speeches, talks, and other correspondence to employees. Take a look at the human resources policies and orientation process too. Then draft a list of your organization's espoused values: what it says it stands for.



2. Next, create a list of the values that *actually* drive your organization. Some hints for how to tell what these “hidden” values include:
 - Observe how people communicate with one another in person, on the phone, and through email and text. What do they prioritize — completing tasks or caring for others? Are people considerate, engaging, rude, abrupt? What behavior is rewarded — in terms of recognition, compensation, or promotions?
 - Reflect on how people at different levels interact with one another. Are people with more seniority or bigger titles given more respect or let off the hook more easily when they make mistakes? Or, are people treated more or less the same, no matter what job they have?
3. Now, compare your assessment of your organization’s espoused and actual values with your values. Where are the similarities and differences? How do you feel about what you have discovered? What can you do to leverage similarities and mitigate conflicts between your and your company’s values?

HOW LEADERS HELP EMPLOYEES FIND MEANING:

- One of Josh Peirez’s core beliefs is that everyone deserves respect, no matter the circumstance. But some leaders at financial services company Dun & Bradstreet, where Peirez serves as chief operating officer and president, prioritized strategy over people, executing frequent change initiatives without considering how they affect workers. Peirez instead invests time in understanding what people — wherever they sit in the organization — find fulfilling in their current ways of working and what gets in their way. He knows that motivating people to change with the evolving business means preserving what they find most meaningful in their jobs and connecting it to a broader purpose. His role is to create space for people to identify that purpose for themselves, to help them feel heard, and to remove any obstacles that get in the way.
- Mark McCord-Amasis, vice president of real estate and facilities for the R&D divisions of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), and his team came up with an innovative lab design known as “SMART Labs.” These collaborative spaces support the kinds of interdisciplinary work favored by researchers today. By engaging directly with GSK scientists on the design, the new spaces have helped research, discovery, and development of new medicines and vaccines go further and faster.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *How to Be Happy at Work*, Annie McKee (Harvard Business Review Press, 2017). Based on extensive research and decades of experience with leaders, reveals the three essential elements for finding happiness at work, and provides practical advice for finding them in any job.
- “Putting a Face to a Name: The Art of Motivating Employees,” *Knowledge@Wharton* (Feb. 10, 2010). Cites research by Adam Grant that shows employees who know how their work has a meaningful, positive impact on others are not just happier than those who don’t; they are vastly more productive, too.

CITED IN THIS NANO TOOL:

1. See Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Resonant Leadership: Renewing Yourself and Connecting with Others through Mindfulness, Hope, and Compassion* (HBR Press, 2005); Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relations* (Bantam, 2007).

ABOUT NANOTOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.