

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CALGARY

JOB, CAREER, OR CALLING – WHICH IS YOUR FIRST PRIORITY?

Here is the story of the three bricklayers. One day a passerby asked the three bricklayers why they were laying bricks. The first one said it was just a job that provided him with the cash he needed to pay his bills. The second brick layer said he was trying to improve his skills, impress his boss, and get a promotion that would advance his career. The third brick layer said, with pride, that he was helping a family by building a warm and safe home that would meet their needs.

Dr. Amy Wrzesniewski of Yale University was so struck by this type of phenomena that she did a study to better understand how this is possible. Her research helped her discover that there are three different views that people have towards their work. Some people tend to see their work as a job, yet others are focused on their career. The third group seems to focus most of their time helping others. Each of these are described below.

Job Focus

Job-focused individuals, regardless of their position in an organization or the extent of their education, seem to primarily approach their work simply as a job. So while there definitely may be other factors that drove them to work in their position, they do it primarily because they need the money to cover their bills. In some cases they desire to make a lot of money, and are driven by different kinds of financial incentive-type environments where they can see a direct relationship between what they do and how much money they can earn (i.e. as seen in a commission model used in sales). Other aspects of their work like quality systems, customer service, corporate/community involvement, are secondary considerations for them and therefore are pursued with less passion or engagement and tend to be overlooked once the primary pursuit of pay has been achieved. Job-focused employees may not be interested in the people they work with, as their interests may be with others outside of the job. Job-focused employees may not even be genuinely interested in meeting the needs of their customers/patients/clients/students over and above what is outlined as required in their position description.

From the research conducted by Dr. Wrzesniewski, it does not seem to matter if they are a doctor, lawyer, engineer, teacher, retail clerk, or factory worker – job-focused employees tend to be primarily concerned about what is in it for them and less concerned about others. Many of them do not even seem to be that happy with their job, and are often looking for other opportunities that pay more. These individuals can be more critical of others, resent expectations placed on them, and cannot wait to go home at the end of the day. Some cannot wait to retire.

Career Focus

Wrzesniewski found that the second group of people that are career-focused can also be found working in junior, intermediate, or senior positions in an organization.

While some individuals are attracted to a career for self-serving reasons, others see their career or position in an organization as an opportunity to help others or to fulfill an intrinsic cause or purpose. This second group of cause-driven' individuals are members of the Calling-focused group described in the next section.

While career-focused individuals need an income and expect to be fairly compensated, this is not their primary focus. According to Dr. Wrzesniewski, they tend to be more focused on their status, position, and career first and helping others second. They acquired the skills and/or education needed to attain the position they hold, and take pride in the title they hold. They tend to be more motivated by achieving peer recognition and acceptance, and less on positive outcomes that can go unnoticed or bring little recognition. They tend to take pride in what they have accomplished and share these frequently with others. They find personal comfort and self-gratification in the relationships, prestige, and sense of belonging to a profession, occupation, or organization.

Career-focused individuals tend to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and perform their work to established standards and may be exceptional at what they do. Some of these individuals may concentrate on upward mobility along with increased income. However, it must be kept in mind that while their primary focus is not about helping others, this may occur naturally due to the nature of the work they perform.

Calling

This third group of individuals tends to be primarily motivated by a cause and/or helping others. They try to understand the needs of those they work with such as patients, clients, customers, students, and colleagues. They build personal relationships where possible and focus their energy on satisfying the needs of each individual they come into contact with, which, in turn continually satisfies their own passion about their work. Regardless of the position they are in and/or what career-related knowledge and skills (education) they have acquired, they primarily take pride in helping others grow, develop, and succeed. They tend to demonstrate a more openly caring, humble, sincere, respectful, and committed behaviors towards helping others. They find great joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in their work and would probably do it for nothing, if they could afford it.

Priorities and Basic Skills

It may be interesting to compare the diagram on the left below, with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs on the right. Both relate to the fact that we all have similar basic needs that must be met before we can focus on any priority. For example, each of us should be provided with an income from our employer that is comparable to what others receive, who have similar experience, education, responsibilities, and duties in other organizations within the same industry. Once this is achieved, each of us can then determine where we wish to primarily focus our energy (Job, Career, or Calling). It is also valuable to note that employees can move between different types (Calling, Career, Job) of engagement in their work as the environment around them changes. An individual who is hit with a major financial drawback in their lives may find that they fall into a Job mentality to help them recover financially in the short-term ... only to aspire to climb to the Career or Calling mentality once they find financial stability.



Satisfaction, Success, and Supervisors

To find greater satisfaction and success in life, each of us should consider doing a self-assessment in order to determine what approach to work we prefer (Job, Career, Calling). If, for example, you desire only to fulfill the requirements of your job to ensure you have the money you need to pay your bills (or to pursue other financial goals) and this is your priority – then you should identify an occupation, profession and/or organization that will allow you to achieve this desired outcome. On the other hand, if your preference is on a career or a calling, then you would excel in working towards the goal of being in an environment, occupation, profession, and/or organization with a similar priority/passion to your own. Finding that fit between what inspires and drives you as a person and what inspires and drives success for an organization leads to greater workplace satisfaction and fulfillment.

While it is important to know how each of us are primarily motivated in our approach to work (Job, Career, Calling), there is also value in looking at what you perceive to be the primary motivators of your coworkers and/or your perception of the overall motivators and organizational culture where you are employed (or are looking to become employed). Do you perceive the primary motivators to be focused mainly on just getting the job done? Are the motivators primarily about reaching that career goal and/or title or achievement? Or do you perceive the primary motivators are driven more by a purpose or some form of inspiration and commitment (calling) towards helping others achieve success?

Note: Wrzesniewski, Amy, McCauley, C.R., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/faculty.som.yale.edu/amywrzesniewski/.../Jobscareersandcallings.pdf>). *Journal of Research in Personality* (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/personality>), 31, 21-33.