

Leading through Meaning : A Philosophical Inquiry

Michael W Morrison, PhD

Everyone is a potential leader.

Much of who we are is at an unconscious level or buried under the countless adaptations we make to meet the expectations of other. The first causality in a life is often our eccentricity—the most unique part of whoa re are (and possible the source of both our inner peace and outer greatness).

Creating meaningful change becomes the central practice of leading.

Core needs: positive, purposeful, and proactive in our lives.

Our politicians have a unique leadership challenge – an environment dominated by special interests; the fight for limited resources; and competing ideologies. To lead in this environment requires patient, behind-the-scenes planning and deal-making to keep legislation moving in a positive way. Without these careful, plodding, efforts, nothing would happen... The veterans long ago learned that it is naïve to think that reason and objective analysis would win out in such a fragmented environment.

The system isn't working. All of our hard work is simply not paying off. It is so frustrating. I've always felt in control of my success. But now it's different. I know my team and feel the same way. We couldn't be working harder. As a team leader, I try to put the best face on it. But all of the rework seems to go nowhere. The leadership team can't seem to give us any straight answers.

What is important to you? What are you doing about it?

The most important role of the leader is to be a shape of meaning.

Leader ship is the act of creating meaningful change.

According to Ellsworth (2002), customer-focused companies outperformed their industries over a decade in three key areas: return on equity, sales growth, and total return to investor. A critically important finding highlighted by this research is that a meaningful purpose serves as a catalyst for high performance.

The meaningful life is enhance through meaningful work.

The reality is that work consumes the majority of our working lives. It can have the qualities of boredom and disengagement. Or it can be a primary source of learning, personal growth, and great meaning in our lives. More and more, the organizations we work for in their leaders determined to a great degree of the quality of life of its participants.

The quality of life that we seek is beyond the financial security that represents our minimum needs to provide for ourselves and our families. We also want to do more than just work for competent managers who can keep us productive. We want to work on a “moon mission” that gives meaning and importance to our lives. Instead of just serving our bosses, we

want to serve a greater purpose that makes the world better in some way. More than just a paycheck; we want our work to be a source of fulfillment.

Researchers have identified three common work orientations: the job, the career, and the calling.

The act of creating a vision is simply the process of connecting people to the future in the most positive way.

If time, money, and status weren't factors, what would I like to do? This question comes from an article entitled "living dangerously" in Fast Company. Write down the two activities that come to mind first. Do it now before reading any further. Now here's the trick: cross off the first activity on your list. Why? As the article's author Harriet Rubin writes, "... I am your place first is the one that you mentioned because you think it makes you look good to others. The item you play second is your true passion."

Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.
– Henry David Thoreau

I broadly define "organizational purposes" as the why, what, and how of organizational life: why do we exist and what are the highest priorities that we will serve? What is the end or vision to which we direct our strategies and activities? How will we do find the shared values that will help guide our efforts?