



Work Is a Purpose, Not a Place

What can we do to make work a place people want to be?

by [Andrew Cooke](#), [Blue Sky GPS](#)

Too often we look at work as a place we go to, and where we can be found from Monday to Friday for eight to nine hours a day. This perspective, although true for the workplace in times gone by, is no longer valid or useful today.



Work or Vocation

Amy Wrzesniewski of Harvard Business School carried out a study of cleaning staff in a hospital. She was surprised at how people viewed the same job differently. Some saw it as a way to provide a pay check to pay the bills, while others considered their work to be a true calling. The difference lay in whether or not a worker had strayed from their formal job description and become involved in meaningful interactions and relationships with patients and visitors. Those who had done this found greater meaning in their work.

As one of the workers explained to Wrzesniewski, *"I do everything I can to promote the healing of patients. Part of that is about creating clean and sterile spaces in which they can recover, but it also extends to anything else I can possibly do to facilitate healing."* When these workers identified with being a part of the overall care team, it completely transformed their work and identity.

Transactional or Transformational Staff

The two approaches above highlight the differences in the relationship your organization can have with your staff.

- *Transactional* – here the focus is on being paid to do the work. Typically you have employees who show up to punch a time clock and who give only a fraction of their energy and effort to the organization's mission.



- *Transformational* – here the focus between the employee and the organization is on the relationship. The employees see meaning in what they do, and the employees go over and beyond what they need to do as they see what they do as contributing to something that is greater than just what they do.

Work for More Than a Living

Gallup conducted research on this topic. When workers across the United States were asked whether their lives were better off because of the organization they worked for, a mere 12 percent claimed that their lives were significantly better. The vast majority of employees felt their company was a detriment to their overall health and well-being.

Transactional relationships make it easy for companies to work someone to the point of burnout, knowing they can hire the next person in line. Everything from organizational hierarchies to compensation structures sends a simple message: you are replaceable.

Organizations need to move from a transactional approach to a transformational approach. We want engaged staff. The reality is this: what's good for an employee is in the organization's best interest as well. If you show up for work fully charged, it increases your engagement and leads to better interactions with your colleagues and customers. This is good for your peers, the people you serve, and the long-term interests of the organization.

A 2013 study of more than 12,000 workers worldwide found that employees who derive meaning and understand the importance of their work are more than three times as likely to stay with an organization. Author Tony Schwartz described how this one element has "the highest single impact of any variable" in a study that looked at many elements of a great workplace. Meaningful work was also associated with 1.7 times higher levels of overall job satisfaction. All of this delivers valuable benefits to the organization including the bottom-line.

So What Can You Do

Make your work, and that of your colleagues and report, a purpose - not a place. Help them understand what the greater purpose of the organization is, how they contribute to it, and how they can determine their progress in doing so. You need to repeat this message continually, and you know they have begun to get it when they can articulate it for



themselves. Make the message clear, consistent and concise in language that they can both understand and relate to. Look to catch people doing the right things, and publicise their success. Most of all be prepared to let go so that they can work in a way that can transform themselves and your organization in successfully serving your customers.

About Andrew Cooke and Blue Sky GPS (Growth & Profit Solutions)

Andrew Cooke

An experienced executive coach, business facilitator, and management consultant Andrew has more than 25 years' national and international experience, working across a range of industries and businesses. He is passionate in helping people, teams and companies to unlock their individual and collective potential, enabling them to achieve their personal and business goals and, in turn, to help them unlock the potential of others.

Andrew has extensive experience in dealing with both blue-chip and start-up companies, and has had extensive international experience in the UK, the Middle East and Ireland across a range of industries.

He has post-graduate business qualifications with a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the London Business School. He is an accredited associate coach for Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching in coaching executives and leaders.

Blue Sky GPS (Growth & Profit Solutions)

Andrew runs [Blue Sky GPS \(Growth & Profit Solutions\)](#), working with individuals, teams, groups and corporate so they can unlock their potential, that of others, and create a life and a job they love and choose to lead.

Through customized development programmes using experiential learning, backed by group workshops, individual one-to-one coaching and on-going support the individual and group development needs are addressed, the skills and capabilities are unlocked and the people can grow and achieve both personal and business outcomes on a sustainable basis. His blog, Growth and Profit, can be found at <http://growthandprofit.wordpress.com>.

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