

MAKING IT
MEANINGFUL
TO EMBRACE A
CUSTOMER
MINDSET

EPISODE SIX

THE WELLBEING LAB PODCAST SERIES FOR XERO



THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

1. STEP ON THE MEANING SCALE

Take a moment and note down your responses to the following question:

What is the positive difference my work makes for others?

2. APPLY YOUR PERMAH 3 POINT CHECK

Looking at your score, answer the following questions:

- ☐ **How** do I feel about my response?
- ☐ **Why** am I feeling this way?
- ☐ **Who** do I want to be as I step forward with this new insight? What wellbeing action do I want to prioritize to help make what I do each day more meaningful and embrace a customer mindset?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- For decades people have ranked having a sense of purpose in their work as more important than promotions, income, job security, or even flexible hours; yet, for many of us, finding meaningful work feels like something we just can't afford. However, the good news is that studies have found that the single strongest predictor of meaningfulness in our work is the belief that our job has a positive impact on other people. And when we can see how what we do helps others, a growing body of evidence suggests we feel happier, are more motivated, more committed, and more satisfied, which enables us to perform better and to thrive at work.
- In addition, when teams and organizations have a shared sense of purpose, studies have found that it generates positive energy, intrinsically motivates people, and heightens their willingness to sacrifice for the common good. And an analysis of thirty Fortune 500 companies identified as workplaces with a higher purpose found that these companies made \$8 for every \$1.10 made by companies who lacked a higher purpose – those just in it for the money.
- Professor Amy Wrzesniewski of Yale University and her colleagues have found that no matter what your job description says, what you do each day can make a positive difference for others. For example, in one study they found that while for some hospital cleaners their work of sweeping the floors, dusting, and emptying wastebaskets for patients is simply 'a job' (a means to a pay cheque), and for others 'a career' (a step up on the way to something better), at least a third of hospital janitors see their tasks as 'a calling'. How? They believe their work is essential to helping people recover from illness by ridding the hospital of dangerous germs. And this belief makes their job not only more bearable but more enjoyable as well. The difference is that instead of simply thinking of their jobs as 'what' they do or 'how' they work, they understand 'why' their job makes a positive difference for others. And this is what makes even the mundane meaningful for each of us.
- When it comes to helping your team find a shared sense of purpose, try to connect them to the people who benefit from your work to help them see the difference they make for others. For example, Professor Adam Grant at Wharton Business School found that when a team of university call center staff who were contacting alumni and asking for donations to fund student scholarships were given the opportunity to talk – even for just five minutes – with students who had been past recipients about the impact of the scholarship on their lives, they gained an emotional sense of the difference their work made for others. Having seen the potential positive impact, they could have; the average caller doubled their number of calls per hour resulting in 144% more alumni donating and increased the average \$411 donation to more than \$2000 which quintupled the amount of money raised. All from simply meeting and hearing the stories of the people they were helping.

- When it comes to finding our life purpose, however, researchers have found that this usually unfolds bit by bit over time. It often starts with the discovery of our interests, followed by a period of learning and development, which becomes a lifetime of going deeper and stretching further as we make a difference to others. For example, Steve Jobs wasn't suddenly struck with the idea of creating personal computers and music devices. He tinkered with electronics as a kid, dropped in and out of creative classes in college, and worked at Atari. Then finally, after joining a computer club, he got inspired to build computers with great graphics interfaces and changed the way people interacted with technology around the world.
- Professor Robert Vallerand of the University of Quebec in Montreal cautions that when it comes to finding meaning and purpose in our work, we can have too much of a good thing. His studies have found that when our work makes us feel so competent, good, and alive, it can become a way to compensate for other things that we might be missing in our lives, making it harder and harder to disengage from the activity and resulting in what he describes as 'obsessive passion.' While researchers have found that this kind of obsessive passion is unlikely to do much damage in the short-term and is fine for short sprints to meet a deadline, over time, it can take control of our lives – putting us at risk of damaging our relationships, undermining our wellbeing, and eventually leading to burnout. It also often makes us less open and flexible to change for fear that it will undermine the difference we have come to depend on making.
- Instead, Robert suggests our goal should be to try and keep our passions harmonious so that we feel in control of what we're doing and are able to put our work aside and keep it in balance with other parts of our life enabling us to experience higher levels of physical health, psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, positive emotions, creativity, and work satisfaction.

WHAT CAN I TRY?

- **SEE THE DIFFERENCE** – By connecting directly with end users, you can give your team the chance to see their past and potential impact. This is why leaders at Facebook invite coders to meet the friends and family members who have been reconnected through their website, so they understand why every line of code that they write matters. When you help people see the direct consequences of our work for others, you help them find greater meaning, and this is actually one of the greatest untapped sources of motivation any workplace has.
- **BRING VISION STATEMENTS TO LIFE** – Don't just rely on people's sense of meaning being found in a vision statement. Bring your company and your team's purpose to life for each other and make it real by regularly meeting the people that you actually make a positive difference for. Then once you've found your purpose make sure it guides your leadership decisions and communications and each person's behavior as they go about their jobs each day.
- **CREATE STRENGTHS SURGES** – Create your own 'cleaning moments' by finding ways to make what you do each day an expression of your deepest interests, values, and strengths. Use whatever method you prefer to plan your days – like a to-do list or your diary – and pick one or two tasks that would benefit from the intentional use of your strengths. Write the strength you want to apply in capital letters next to this task. For example, if your diary says 'Meeting with Michelle' you might write 'ZEST' if this is the strength you want to draw upon when you meet. HINT: This might sound familiar because we also suggested you create a Strengths Surge in Episode 4 to enable you to develop your strengths, so consider it a two-for-one wellbeing strategy!
- **MAP MEANING** – Grab a blank piece of paper and write down all the ways you like to help others – at work or outside of work. What lights you up when it comes to making a difference – big or small, frequent or rare at this point in time. Then circle the three things on the list that you really like to do to help others – it's okay if that is your whole list at this point. Is there any pattern or common theme in what you've selected? Or is there one thing that you've circled that really makes you smile when you think of the chance of doing this for others? Could you create at least one small opportunity each day on your to-do list to integrate this into more of your work?
- **MAKE THE MUNDANE MEANINGFUL** – Grab a blank piece of paper and write down the most tedious thing you have to do in your job. That thing you dread having to get done. Next, to this task draw an arrow pointing to the right and ask yourself: Who does this help? What difference does it make for them? Then write your answer down. Now you may find these two simple questions – Who does this help? What difference does it make for them? – are enough to suddenly find the meaning in the mundane or you may find that if your answer isn't immediately personally meaningful that you need to ask the question a few more times again before you reach your aha moment. And feel free to get a colleague, your boss or a friend to help if you get stuck.

- **TRY MEANING MAKING** – Professor Angela Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania suggests that if you haven't found your passion yet, a good place to start is figuring out what actually interests you. Simply sit down and answer some simple questions like: What do you like to think about? Where does your mind wander? What do you really care about? What matters most to you? If money wasn't an issue, what would you choose to do and why? How might this help others? What do you love doing, are good at, and get lost in? And, in contrast, what do you find absolutely unbearable? And if you find answering these questions hard, think back to your teen years when vocational interests commonly sprout, or you might want to ask others what they think you are good at, create a list, and consider what that reveals about you.
- **CREATE A PASSION PROJECT** – Give yourself permission to create a Passion Project at work or at home to play with what interests you and see where it takes you. As your interests grow, see how others are using those interests to accomplish something that goes beyond themselves and consider how you can also make a difference by using your interests in the service of others. Start where you are and see if you can incorporate even just 10 minutes a day to exploring your passions – you might want to align it with your strengths habit or your positive emotion activity to give it an extra power shot and improve a couple of wellbeing pillars simultaneously.
- **RESTORE BALANCE** – Short bursts of obsessive passion rarely do any lasting harm, but when the milestone has been reached, it's important to rebalance your life and put your passion back into perspective. Remind yourself of the other things you love. Go back to your normal schedule. Revert to who you really are when life is harmonious.
- **CULTIVATE ALTERNATIVE PASSIONS** – Having more than one passion in your life will help you keep a passion from getting out of control. Each additional passion you cultivate outside of work gives you an opportunity to value the strengths you have beyond your job and lowers your chance of burnout. Think about what else interests you. What would you like to pursue purely for the joy of the activity? What lights you up outside of work?
- **SET BOUNDARIES** – Avoid bringing your work home whenever you can. Leave your computer and those files that you didn't get to at work. Limit or don't check your work emails at home or while you're on vacation. Set an out-of-office message so people know they can't reach you.

YOUR INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE

1. FIND THE RIGHT MEANINGFUL BALANCE

If you've been struggling to find meaning in your work, then take one task each day this week and ask yourself the questions we explored earlier:




- Who does this help?
- What difference does it make for them?

Then write your answer down and see what pattern you can spot over the week to help you find more meaning and embrace a customer mindset each day.

Or if you feel like you've been struggling with too much meaning in your work, then challenge yourself each day this week to switch off at a reasonable time each day and invest in your energy in other passions such as exercise, time with friends or family or just relaxing. And if you find this hard, tune into the stories you're telling about why you can't stop and then try again tomorrow. You've got this.

2. COMPLETE YOUR TEAM SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen actions, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below for each of the priorities you've chosen:

 <p>What's your WANT-TO CHOICE?</p>	 <p>How will you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?</p>	 <p>Who will you BUDDY UP WITH?</p>
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For example, if you've made a WANT-TO CHOICE about trying to find more meaning in the mundane then note the task that you want to start asking: Who does this help? What difference does this make for them? Then find a way to TRACK YOUR PROGRESS, for example, each time you complete this task, take a moment to note what impact it had for anyone and score how meaningful you found it and keep playing with ways to make the task more purposeful. And BUDDY UP by finding a colleague or friend you can share your experiment with.

YOUR TEAM CHALLENGE

1. CREATE A MEANING MAP

To improve your team's sense of meaning and purpose try creating a meaning map together. Grab some post-it notes and note down all the different ways that you make a positive difference for others.

Consider – How does this relate to each of your roles? How does this relate to what your organization as a whole is trying to achieve? Are there opportunities for you to leverage your interests and your strengths to have an even greater positive impact based on your organization's vision and mission? How can this help you to embrace more of a customer mindset?

And if you struggle with this exercise, then it's time to talk to the people you serve — and ask them. Remember more than anything else we each want to feel that what we do matters at work.

2. COMPLETE YOUR TEAM SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen actions, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below for each of the priorities you've chosen:



**What's your
WANT-TO CHOICE?**



**How will you
TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?**



**Who will you
BUDDY UP WITH?**

For example, if you've made a WANT-TO CHOICE about creating a meaning map and finding ways to have more impact together note this down. Find a way to TRACK YOUR PROGRESS like using your team meetings to check in on what difference you've made recently for others and how you could build upon this. And BUDDY UP with each other in between by helping spot the difference you are each making for others.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- **Watch this talk** by Professor Amy Wrzesniewski on how meaning can be found in any job.
- **Listen to this podcast** with Professor Dab Cable on feeling more alive at work and **grab his cheat sheet**.
- **Listen to this podcast** with Emily Esfahani Smith on the power of meaning and **grab her cheat sheet**.
- **Listen to this podcast** with Professor Robert Vallerand on keeping your passions harmonious and **grab his cheat sheet**.
- **Grab these Wellbeing Cards** for small, practical ways you can improve each of the PERMAH pillars.