

Work needs more depth

Businesses, employees should find meaning beyond the duties.

Inspiring customers, employees part of job.

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For the AJC



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business education such as MBA programs, have come under harsh criticism because they have led to a lot of financial ruin.

Does this mean we need to rethink traditional business practices? Can business organizations transcend their goal of making money?

Can they not look at profit as a by-product of other meaningful and purpose-driven goals?

This is what management guru Peter Drucker reminded us not long ago: "Profit should be a result and not a cause of doing business."

Apparently, not many have paid attention to Drucker's vision. Is Drucker's vision realistic?

It is tempting to think that taking a job at a charitable or nonprofit organization would give your work more meaning, but this is not practical. If everyone is involved in charity, who would run the engines of our economy?

I argue it is possible to find meaning and purpose in everyday work.

Rather than shying away from your current work and its roles and responsibilities, you have to change the way you view your work to make it more

meaningful.

You must ask yourself, "How does my current work provide value that transcends individual and organizational goals and contributes to something meaningful or of greater purpose?"

My attempt to understand the meaning and purpose of my own work was a personal journey of introspection and discovery.

Although technology management has been my livelihood for many years, I have found greater satisfaction in knowing that my work – although miniscule relative to industrywide efforts – is crucial to helping people connect with each other, gain access to all kinds of information, and enhance overall life experience.

This understanding gives meaning and purpose to my work.

Technology has helped us to understand ourselves and our surroundings.

Take Amazon.com for example; it can predict customers' buying behavior better than the customers can.

Think of modern day meteorology; imagine our daily lives without the ability to get weather forecasts.

Consider communications services, from wireless devices to Internet services such as Facebook and Twitter. With the proliferation of broadband wireless technology and ubiquitous computing, our ability to communicate and get the latest news and information will multiply several times in the com-

ing years.

Technology, in many ways, is bringing us closer to each other and helping us realize that each one of us is a part of the greater fabric of life.

One of the biggest challenges to finding meaning and purpose in everyday work is the constricted view of business management.

The traditional business objectives – such as fulfilling customer needs and wants, providing certain services, maximizing shareholders' wealth, and maximizing profit – cannot take us to the next level of business evolution.

We, as business managers, must come up with creative ways to inspire and guide our employees, customers and shareholders to see what is not so obvious and to establish a vision that transcends such objectives.

Google's founding philosophy is one example of how deep meaning and purpose can create value that goes beyond financial goals. One of its 10 commandments reads, "You can make money without doing evil."

Can other businesses create meaningful and purpose-driven visions such as these companies? Absolutely. It simply requires thinking beyond profits and losses, and asking, "What fundamental human problems are we trying to solve with our business goals?"

The answers to these problems will unearth meaning and purpose that are missing in workplaces today.

Can we derive meaning and purpose from everyday work beyond the usual personal and organizational goals typical in the business world?

Many management practitioners and scholars are asking this question in light of recent reports on worker engagement.

The Conference Board (conference-board.org) reports the job satisfaction rate – which currently stands at 45 percent, meaning more than half the workforce is not engaged at work – has declined steadily for more than 20 years.

Obviously, the current business environment and practices are not motivating most workers.

One likely reason: These practices do not encourage employees to derive deep meaning from their work.

The notion of meaningful work raises questions about the goals of business management.

The primary goal of all for-profit businesses is to make money. However, the intense focus on profit-making has not worked well; the recent recession is a testimony to that.

Business practices, and even