

The Increasing Need for Purpose and Meaning at Work

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In a world where traditional motivators like salary and status no longer guarantee satisfaction, employees are searching for something deeper; a sense of purpose.

Across industries, a growing number of people (especially Millennials and Gen Z) are questioning not just what they do, but why they do it. The result? A major shift in how we define engagement, success, and fulfillment at work.



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Employee engagement has remained consistently low year after year. According to Gallup's 2024 report, Europe has the lowest engagement worldwide; only about 13%. In Switzerland, the numbers are even more concerning, with just 8% of the workforce engaged at work.

There are many reasons behind these low engagement levels, but one key factor stands out: a lack of purpose, especially among younger employees. Gallup found that Millennials and Gen Z report significantly lower levels of purpose and mission at work compared to their older colleagues.

Why Purpose Matters More to Younger Generations

Research consistently shows that Millennials and Gen Z place a much higher value on purpose, meaning, and alignment with personal values. For them, meaningful work is not a "nice-to-have" but a non-negotiable. By contrast, older generations often prioritized stability, income, and status.

This shift sets the bar higher: when work feels misaligned, younger employees experience a deeper sense of disengagement. This helps explain why their engagement scores are lower compared to older colleagues.



The Global Context: Uncertainty and Responsibility

In today's world, social and environmental challenges are impossible to ignore. Climate change, financial market turbulence, the pandemic, and geopolitical conflicts have created a general sense of instability. Digital media amplifies this, giving us 24/7 visibility into global crises.

Against this backdrop, many younger workers feel a personal responsibility to contribute positively to the world. They want their workplace to reflect their ethical, social, and environmental values. Stability for oneself no longer feels sufficient if the world around remains unstable.

Work as Identity and Self-Expression

For Millennials and Gen Z, work is more than a paycheck; it is part of their identity and self-expression. They don't just want to *do* something; they want to *be* someone through their work.

Several factors reinforce this higher demand for purpose and meaning:

- **Shifting life milestones:** With high housing costs, delayed family formation, and intense job markets, traditional markers of success (homeownership, long-term stability, etc.) feel out of reach. Work becomes the area where they can find meaning and impact.
- **Higher education levels:** These are the most highly educated generations in history. They want their skills to go beyond transactional tasks and contribute to something meaningful.
- **Cultural influence:** The rise of self-development movements and “follow your passion” narratives on social media reinforce the belief that life should be purpose-driven.

A Call to Organizations

For organizations, these findings are more than statistics. They are a call to action. If we want to raise engagement, attract talent, and retain younger employees, we need to rethink the employee experience. People want to feel that what they do matters and that their company stands for something real. Purpose and alignment have become the true essentials of modern work.

About the Author

Hi! My name is Sasja. I offer coaching for individuals who feel stuck or unfulfilled in their career, so that they can create a career path that brings them joy, fulfilment and flow. My passion is supporting people to reconnect with their true passions and step into their full potential. With certifications as a transformative coach and yoga instructor, as well as my background in Strategic HR, I bring a holistic approach to my coaching practice."

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