

THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

By Steven Dahlberg – *The Global Knowledge Review* – May 2005

When is the last time you sat down and wrote out a Great Workplace Manifesto – one, where if all the stars aligned to create that place, you'd most like to spend eight to ten hours a day?

We face a choice everyday about creating meaningful jobs, work and workplaces – places where our creative spirit is tapped, encouraged and supported. Doing purposeful work calls for imagining what we want to do and then making that vision real. It compels us to use our creativity to keep asking “what if...” and “how might I...”.

Anyone can undertake the challenge of transforming the workplace, whether or not it's his or her formal responsibility. Author Caroline Myss admonishes people: “Do something. Do something about yourself: don't just assume a passive stance. ... Get rid of your wishbone and get a backbone. It's time to really move forward with strength instead of identifying yourself by your weaknesses.”

Former Citibank Senior Vice President Steve Barger emphasizes the individual, too. “It's about you,” he says. “It's not about the company. Your objective is to improve your quality of life.”

The individuals who work with you and for you and use your product have the same objective – to improve their quality of life, according to Barger. His own work has included being a senior advocate for creating the systems and culture that enable individual performers to succeed.

Quality of life is driven by a sense of purpose. Purpose helps focus people on exploring the kind of place in which they want to work, what it will take to create it, and the leadership it will take to sustain this new culture. To personally create purposeful and meaningful work, focus on three areas:

- **Imagine:** Think differently. Ask the big questions. Don't judge your ideas at first. Shift fundamental assumptions. Generate lots of alternatives. Think wide.
- **Connect:** Become aware of the interconnectedness of everything, including how your purpose unites with others' purposes. Connecting is where synchronicity – or unexpected and meaningful coincidences – occur, bringing together the right pieces at the right time. Practice the art of dialogue.
- **Engage:** Finally, do something. Implement your ideas and your purpose. Balance being and doing. Serve others. Take risks. Collectively shape your destiny.

What might a workplace look like where workers are “possessed by a purpose” and led by great managers? It would be a place where:

- People reflect on and learn from what they've just completed.
- Courage is regularly demonstrated.
- People take the risk of responsibility, thereby committing to something specific.
- There is a compelling vision and purpose – even if one's organization “isn't curing cancer.”
- There are leaders and mentors who drive this vision and connect it to workers' personal lives.
- People seek out new opportunities and endeavors – which are supported with the time, energy, money and people resources required.
- The individual is supported in her desire to improve and develop herself.
- People risk changing what is and pursuing what might be.

This kind of workplace requires a commitment of dedicated “zealots,” explains Barger. It is a very simple concept, yet often not implemented. It is very doable and it can be initiated from any level of the organization. Managing this way is an absolute necessity for today's workplace.

It takes new ways of thinking about what is meaningful to you. It challenges you to consider how you might create a different work culture for yourself and your co-workers.

Continuously asking the question “how might I improve the quality of my life?” is itself a creative act, allowing us to sculpt the lives we want in workplaces that make sense and nourish the spirit.

This requires radical imagination, your will to learn, and your engagement in new ways of working.

“It's about changing the world,” says performance support consultant Gloria Gery. “Nothing simpler.”

It's your job. Your life. Imagine what could be ...

Find out more about Steven Dahlberg and the International Centre for Creativity and Imagination at www.appliedimagination.org.