

Career development & training

Work can be a lifestyle choice

Organisations that seek to help rather than just profit have less to pay in wages. But that can be made up for by a greater sense of wellbeing, argues SIMON PANCKHURST

Most of us choose our career path at an age when we are deemed too young to handle alcohol.

As we contemplate a real job the primary driver is what we are good at.

If you have the aptitude, little motivation is required to climb from the unbearable poverty of youth or student life. Fat salaries, corporate toys, smart clothes. Easy choice. Life is good.

But funnily enough each step leaves us wanting more. We're sure a bigger house or boat will bring true happiness. But strangely real contentment remains elusive.

Something even emerges about corporate success that doesn't quite wash. Acquiring newer, bigger, faster and better doesn't seem to be the magic ticket.

For some with the ability to look outside the tunnel a new

reality emerges. They realize the benefits of keeping up with the Jones are not only short term but also artificial. It suddenly dawns that seeking extrinsic gain is not the key.

When a gap exists between material or physical aspirations and the realities of life, happiness seems to remain elusive.

Numerous surveys show that money is important until you reach an average level for your society and after that it has diminishing returns.

And for some (of course not all - I don't think Mr Trump would still be reading) a deeper contentment can come from work. For those that aren't clock watchers employment is not a means to an end but an opportunity to make a difference.

Unfortunately a commitment to saving the world does come at a cost. Organisations whose

primary goal is not making money don't have a lot to spend on wages.

It is an understandably difficult plunge to decide on a more altruistic career path.

Despite their honourable intentions some will have an accustomed lifestyle they will be reluctant to forgo.

Yet in recent studies at the Universities of Michigan and Massachusetts Medical School, it was found that altruism not only left subjects happier but with improved mental health, physical well being and longevity. The Michigan study found that among a group of 400 elderly couples over a five-year period, those who reported helping others were as half as likely to die as those that did not.

The Massachusetts study found that improved mental health was more closely linked to giving help than receiving it,

adding hard evidence to the adage that it is better to give than receive.

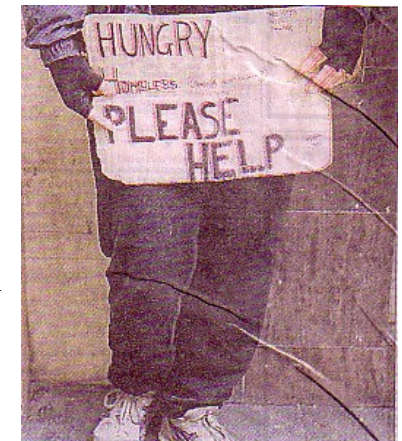
On a less scientific note Mother Teresa was 87 when she passed away outliving the national rate of life expectancy in India by 24 years. Our own Nurse Maude died at 72 when life expectancy for women then was below 60.

There also seems to be evidence to suggest altruism activates the "feel-good" hormones - endorphins.

Endorphins give us that warm feeling when doing a good deed. "Helpers high" is reported as a sensation of warmth, increased energy and euphoria.

John, a carer at Nurse Maude, told me he has had more satisfaction from the two years of working for Nurse Maude than from the 38 years he spent working in an office.

The world wouldn't go around without the corporate champions. But perhaps those who are killing two birds with one stone, by earning a living and making a difference, aren't doing too bad either.



Help needed: working for organisations that seek to help others can provide a sense of contentment.

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