

Unfear Newsletter: Restoring Meaning to Our Work

Dear Reader,

We inhabit an age of disillusionment. Employees either “quiet quit” or loudly resign. Op-eds and podcasts urge people to divorce their sense of purpose from their work and warn them not to love their jobs because the job will not love them back. This is a concerning trend for employees and employers alike. Most of us spend the majority of our hours at work. If those hours become meaningless, our performance and well-being both suffer. To work without purpose is to work without joy and passion. We must find a way to get people to reengage.

Don't Just Tell the Story, Live the Story

In our last newsletter, we talked about the power of an [Oh! Wow story](#) to connect employees to a company's purpose. However, as Claire Stapleton, a former Google employee turned writer argues in a [New York Times podcast](#) appearance, when companies fail to act in alignment with their narratives, they sow greater disillusionment. As evidence, Stapleton cites Google. For decades, the top leaders told eloquent, grand stories about Google's purpose. They called their employees family and treated them as such. Then, suddenly, thousands of those family members were laid off by email.

Google is hardly alone. Hundreds of companies use email to conduct layoffs. But when a company that used to tell compelling Oh! Wow stories pivots to such impersonal behavior it leaves workers feeling lied to, dehumanized, and cast aside. Such actions force the remaining workers to ask: Can we trust this company? Is the work I do actually meaningful? Are we striving to make this world a better place?

Obviously, we're not saying that there should never be layoffs. Businesses will always have to respond to external realities. The key is to simply assess every decision through the lens of the story you're telling. Whenever possible, act in alignment with your grand narrative. When you must act in a way that clashes with the story, you should, with empathy, explain why you made the choice you did and mitigate the fallout. For example, let us return to layoffs. If they are, in fact, necessary, then give careful thought to how you execute them. Can you conduct one-on-one conversations instead of mass emails? Celebrate the employees who had to be let go? Give them a chance to say goodbye to colleagues and friends? Can you invest some of the money you've saved to support the laid-off workers? Can you have conversations with the remaining employees to help them process their pain and the fear of being the next in line for cuts?

None of this is easy, but these steps are essential to keeping morale high through difficult stretches.

"We Gain More Through Belief "

Of course, we can't all make the decisions. Many employees have relatively limited control over operations and face a decision. Do I try to find meaning in my work, or do I disengage? The French mathematician Blaise Pascal said, "If God exists, not seeking God must be the gravest error imaginable. If one decides to sincerely seek for God and doesn't find God, the lost effort is negligible in comparison to what is at risk in not seeking God in the first place." We all stand to gain so much—joy, energy, a sense of purpose—from finding meaning in our work. Enter each opportunity with an open heart, not with cynicism. Try to believe in the company. If they prove you wrong, you'll have hardly lost anything, and you can go to an organization that aligns with your values. But if they prove you right, you've gained the world.

Worth thinking about

What story does your company tell about its purpose? What actions do they take that align with that purpose? What actions do they take that do not align with the purpose? What impact does each type of action have on productivity and well-being?

Take it to go

If you hold significant decision-making power, the next time you are about to make a decision, ask: does this align with our grand vision? If it does not, ask: how can I mitigate the fallout and earn our employees' trust?

If you don't have formal decision-making power, pay attention to your energy and engagement. The next time you feel a jolt of cynicism, or find yourself phoning it in, do a quick thought experiment. Ask: what if I choose to believe that this is my way to express my best self and contribute to the world? How would that change what I think and do? How I feel?

Questions?

Please contact us and schedule a call if you are interested in applying Unfear to improve your team and organizational culture and effectiveness. We'd love to hear from you.

[CONTACT US](#)

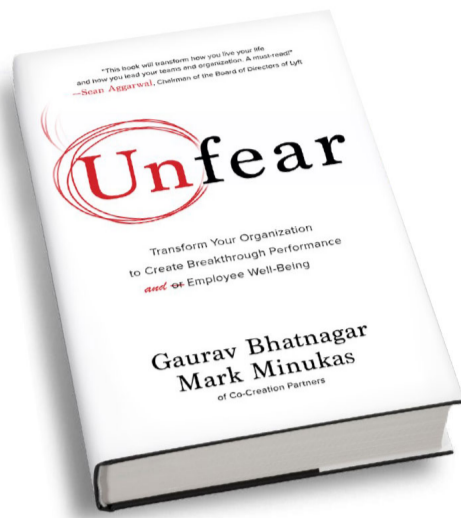


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