

SIMON NG FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Work: the 21st century obsession

Jobs used to put food on the table

Now they feed our heart, soul, and ego

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10,440. That's the number of days we put in at work over a typical 40-year career. Not surprisingly then, how we feel about our jobs spills over into just about every other facet of our lives. Which leads us to the all-important question: just what is it that we really want from our employment?

Before addressing this, consider the role that work has come to play in our society. As recently as a generation ago, people regarded their livelihoods simply as a means to an end. A job provided pay and security — anything more was a bonus.

Today we are a culture obsessed with our occupations. "The reality is that we define ourselves by what we do," says Ann Coombs, thought leader and author of *The Living Workplace: soul spirit and success in the 21st century* (HarperBusiness).

Longer work weeks, the need for dual-incomes, the erosion of extended families and decreasing use of social outlets such as religious associations make

workplaces the new town hall. In addition, "our increasing reliance on materialism to satisfy our needs means that we are more inclined to let our employers own our souls," according to Coombs.

The result is that our jobs have a tremendous impact on the rest of our lives.

On the personal front, employment satisfaction can increase our feelings of self-confidence and optimism about the future. It frees us up to pursue outside interests and reduces our overall stress levels.

The effect on our workplace performance is significant as well.

"Satisfaction at work helps employees become engaged, motivated and productive," says Tim Arnill, president and COO of Verity International, a leading Canadian career management firm.

On the flip side, not getting your needs met at work can have far reaching effects.

When people are frustrated in their jobs, morale can plummet and loyalty may all but disappear.

According to Arnill, that's when you often see absenteeism and turnover rates shoot up, along with an upswing in healthcare costs for stress-related illnesses.

► Please see **Jobs, D12**

We expect as much from work as we give

► Jobs From D11

Which brings us back to the original question: what is it then that people truly want from work these days?

It seems that, when it comes to the basics, not a lot has changed since 40 years ago. Pay and security are still crucial, according to the 2000 Canadian survey, "What Is A Good Job?"

Dr. Graham Lowe, a University of Alberta professor and co-author of the study (which can be viewed at www.cprn.com), notes that "Those who are unhappy with their level of pay have been found to exhibit lower levels of job commitment and often have less faith in management." They are also more likely to be chronically tardy.

Interestingly though, the issue of money comes up relatively low on many surveys about workplace needs. In a 2000 study by Randstad, one of the world's largest temporary and contract staffing organizations, "getting raises" ranked fifth over-all in definitions of success in the workplace.

Atop the list was being trusted to get the job done, followed by getting the opportunity to do the kind of work you want, having the power to make decisions that affect your own work, and finding a company where you want to stay for a long time. Flexibility followed closely be-

hind raises in 6th position.

So what does this say about compensation? "Receiving satisfactory pay and benefits are definitely important factors in promoting employee well-being," according to Lowe.

However, since almost three quarters of respondents in the CPRN study were reasonably content with their salaries, this suggests that they are able to focus on other wants and needs.

It should be noted that a person's age or stage strongly influences what is sought. For in-

Pay and security are still crucial but satisfaction is way up there too

stance, security tends to be more pressing for those aged 45 plus. This makes sense when you take into account the financial and family responsibilities often associated with this period in life.

Beyond a salary and the desire for continuity, what we want from work varies as widely as the range of our individual values.

Penny Balberman, CFO of a mid-sized software company, seeks out variety and challenge in her jobs. "I think of myself as a high achiever who is motivated by solving problems and making a difference," she says.

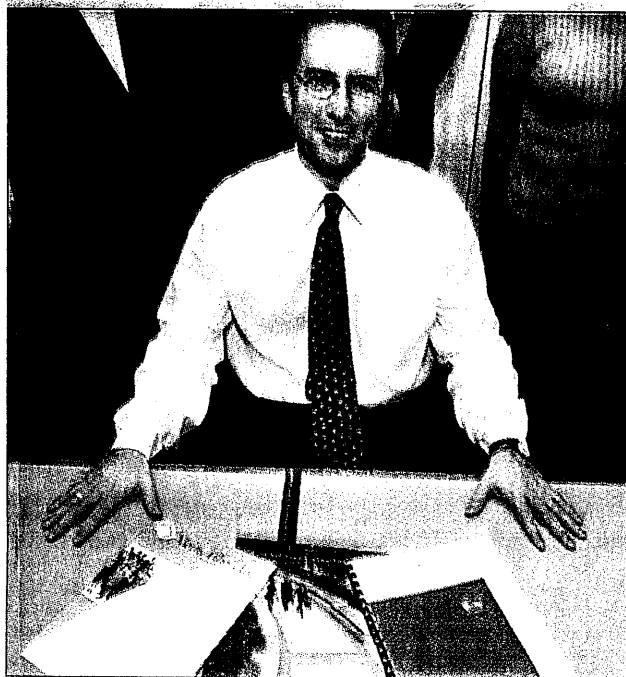
In her case, the rewards are in producing tangible results. Autonomy is essential as well. "I derive great satisfaction from being able to choose my responsibilities."

Balberman is among the growing ranks of professionals who enjoy being paid for performance. Her compensation consists of a base salary plus bonus, hinged on her contribution to the company and her business units.

Naturally this injects an element of risk. Yet it also provides the stimulus to go above and beyond the norm in terms of involvement.

The desire for personal fulfillment is another feature that people are seeking more of. Roman Plawiuk, a financial services marketer, says that he is happiest "when my skills and talents are being utilized to the fullest, and I feel as if I am adding personal value."

For him, recognition from peers for a job well done and a sense of fitting in to a workplace that appreciates his efforts are major drivers. An understanding boss who supports his goals is vital as well. Beyond that, he looks for an environment where he can just be himself on a daily basis. "It's great when you can find an open, honest company where people can drop their



MICHAEL STUPARYK/TORONTO STAR

Pay and security still matter, says Tim Arnill, a career management specialist, but we also work to be directly stimulating, engaging enough to be embraced as part of normal life, not a chore.

personal shields."

Both Balberman and Plawiuk have children, and they strive for a sense of balance between work and home. This doesn't necessarily mean that the two elements must always be at odds. "I find that our clients are

expressing a need for greater work/life integration, as opposed to mere balance," says Arnill, whose company helps downsized employees from all ranks and industries. "They want to know that their job supports their outside commit-

ments, and that they don't always have to trade off one for the other." This is especially true for Generation X and Generation Next.

What else are people searching for these days? Quite a bit, according to the Web site that is based on Lowe's study, www.jobquality.ca. Factors covered are influence, rewards, security, job design, environment, schedules, relationships, job demands, pay and benefits, training and skills, and special indicators such as union arrangements and the impact of technology.

With all of these permutations of values, needs and workplace configurations floating around, how do you choose what's best for you? "Start by listening to what your gut tells you," says Coombs. She adds that there is a stiff price to pay when you ignore your internal compass.

This thought is mirrored in the words of Balberman. "I'm at a stage now where I know where I stand in life, and where my job fits in. I refuse to settle for less than I deserve." Plawiuk completes the thought. "What's out there will obviously influence what you get, but the truth is that it all begins inside of you."

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