

Rethinking meaning and sustainability in the workplace

For more and more people, meaning and sustainability are important requirements for a fulfilling career. I think this is a positive development. However, I am amazed at how narrowly many define these terms: Only work related to climate and environmental protection or social commitments seem to come into consideration. If they can't find their way into these areas, many opt for a «traditional», extrinsically motivated career. I would like to contrast this «either/or» with a broader definition of the terms.

Peter Näf

The line manager at an NGO offered a young employee, let's call her Beatrice, a personal and professional assessment with me. Beatrice was doing a good job in the accounting department, but her line manager realised that she was not happy in her job and suspected that she had hidden talents. She would have been happy to give her a different task and support her if Beatrice had been able to tell her what she wanted.

The personal and professional assessment revealed that Beatrice didn't enjoy her work and that it didn't suit her talents. She had decided in favour of accounting because of the job security and on the recommendation of her private environment. Another reason was that she could do this job at an NGO that represented issues that were important to her.

Doing good things and doing things well

Many people for whom sustainability and meaning are important attach disproportionate importance to the purpose of the company compared to their personal inclinations and enjoyment of their work.

As an alternative to this, I would like to introduce you to three people who fulfil their meaningful work with genuine joy in professions that do not carry the label of sustainability.

I have been self-employed as a single entrepreneur for many years and cover a wide range of tasks: From consulting, product development and marketing to administration and bookkeeping, I do everything myself. And yet I work with a few indispensable external service providers. To be able to concentrate on my work and deliver a sustainable performance - which is also important to me - I must be able to rely on my helpers. Anyone who is self-employed knows how poor performance by service providers can set you back by months, if not threaten your very existence.

Heroes and heroines of everyday life

My trustee has been advising me for many years to ensure that I make the right financial arrangements and don't neglect my retirement provision. More than once, he has prevented me from making expensive mistakes. My communications consultant gave me a meaningful appearance and shared a lot of her knowledge on communication with me. And finally: my IT consultant has been making sure for years that I have an infrastructure that meets my needs and always works. He has not only saved me a lot of money on an issue I was anxious about but has also spared my nerves and thus my health.

In short, my consultants do a good job and I think that's both meaningful and sustainable.

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