

STYBEL PEABODY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



Laurence Stybel, Ed.D., and Maryanne Peabody, MBA, founded Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

If I am Not Working, Then Who am I?"

Clotaire Rapaille is a French psychologist (Ph.D., Paris-Sorbonne University) with homes in the United States and France. He conducts research into what he defines as "cultural archetypes" based on traditional learning theories of imprinting. (2007).

Imprinting refers to powerful, permanent learning based on the pairing of cognitive stimuli with powerful emotional experiences. Below is an example of imprinting:

If a mother tells a daughter, "Do not touch a hot stove" it is merely words. If the daughter touches the stove and immediately

experiences pain in her hand, she learns a powerful lesson that lasts a lifetime. That's imprinting.

The American Culture Code for "Work:"

Compare the word "work" in the United States and France.

Dr. Rapaille's research examines the cultural imprinting of the word "work." For the French, work associated with keeping France strong or supporting God's work. Any work that does not have these noble missions is associated with the word "vulgar."

And business-related work is often associated with the word "vulgar."

If two French strangers meet in a social gathering and one asks, "Tell me about yourself?" you never know what the other person is going to say. It could be about work, politics, philosophy, religion, family, or hobbies.

"Work" has a different cultural meaning in the United States.

In the United States, the emotional imprinting of the word "work" is "who I am."

If two U.S. strangers meet at a social gathering and one asks, "Tell me about yourself?" you can predict that the other person will respond with a job title!

The American Code for Money.

Since "work" is "who I am," American attitude towards money is complex.

Americans esteem people who rose from relatively ordinary beginnings to achieve great wealth through hard work. This would include people like Bill Gates, Oprah Winfield, Warren Buffett, and Steve Jobs.

People who have great wealth through inheritance are not admired.

Wealthy people who put their money into a passive instrument like ETFs or bond funds are not admired. People who achieve great wealth by winning the lottery are not admired.

Those with great wealth are not admired. Having great wealth through hard work is admired.

Compensation of U.S. Professionals

How do these ideas translate into motivating U.S. professionals?

One of our clients is a nonprofit with limited financial resources. It generally provides an across-the-board common percentage salary increase to all employees.

How well will this approach work in a U.S. culture that says work is "Who I am" and money is "proof of my success through hard work."

Psychologist Frederick Herzberg and his colleagues (2011) would describe this approach to compensation as a "hygiene" compensation system. According to Herzberg, compensation can either be truly motivating or it can simply be hygiene.

A motivation-based compensation system recognizes the individual and provides an incentive to remain at work and to work even harder in the future. An example would be an individual bonus at the end of the year.

A hygiene-based compensation system like across the board salary increases is a bit like having air conditioning in an office located in Houston, Texas on August 1. Having proper air conditioning in a hot, humid environment does not motivate employees. But the lack of air conditioning will demotivate.

If the cost of living increases 2% and you fail to provide a 2% increase to every employee, there is nothing else people will discuss! And if you

provide a 2% increase to every employee, nobody is motivated next week. This is a classic hygiene approach to compensation.

Team Compensation:

In the United States, most work is now being done in a team-based environment.

When everyone in the team receives the same compensation, you have created a hygiene approach to compensation. Team demotivation is achieved at the price of failing to motivate your team members.

If work is “Who I Am” and money is one way to keep score, then there needs to be some way to achieve individual recognition in team-based environments.

The U.S. military found a solution to this compensation dilemma years ago.

It has a cash compensation program that is mostly hygiene. At best, the cash compensation system keeps people from being demotivated. In addition to cash compensation, the military is effective with non-cash compensation for individual excellence. This would include medals or commendations and informal squad meetings at a local tavern where the leader toasts the excellence of a key member of the squad.

Civilian companies might do well to look at how the military uses formal and informal compensation systems in team-based environments.

Team Based Versus Individual Recognition:

We consult with physician practices where the culture is shifting from the individual physician being the center of the enterprise to the individual physician to being an important member of a total care team.

The problem is that many of our physicians’ self-definition do not embrace team membership.

The compensation systems in this physician practice group requires an appreciation that complex work requires team effort and individuals crave unique affirmation.

Outstanding teams require stand-out individuals.

What does your company do to identify and to single out its outstanding team members?

Words and Authority Matter.

Since "work" is "who I am," words and authority matter.

At the Ritz Carlton, people who work there are not referred to as "employees." They are defined as "ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen."

And they have been known to politely eject customers who were not behaving as "ladies and gentlemen" with "ladies and gentlemen" Ritz Carlton employees!

Notice how clear the company is in defining "This is Who You Are."

The Ritz Carlton gives its "ladies and gentlemen" the spending authority (within clearly defined limits) to solve customer problems on the spot:

If a customer complains about not being able to sleep well because of noise coming from a nearby room, the clerk at the check in counter has the authority to do more than apologize. The clerk can void charges for that guest's bad night and issue an order for a free night's stay in the future. No need to go to one's supervisor.

Managing specific "words" with authority to act become important in a culture where "work" is "who you are." Ritz Carlton does an outstanding job of this.

Scaling Companies in a “Work is Who I Am” Culture.

The Ritz Carlton is a big, global organization. It is part of an even bigger organization, Marriott Corporation.

As companies scale, “efficiency experts” look to allow for job design so that individuals can easily be ‘swapped out” for other individuals or replaced by technology.

What happens to employee motivation in a growing company where employees feel they can be “swapped out” at any time?

If work is “Who I am,” can work and compensation systems be designed to give people a sense of pride?



Source: Peggy Lachmann-Anke:/pixabay

The M&A Dilemma:

If we view M&As through a “Work Is Who I Am” lens, we can understand why so many transactions fail at the last minute. On paper it would seem a good tradeoff: give up control/authority of your company in return for an increasing in your personal assets.

People who become wealthy through hard work are admired. People who are wealthy because they have large assets are not admired.

That entrepreneur needs to have a game plan about Chapter Three prior to signing the M&A deal...not after the deal is done.

Chapter Three refers to the Late Professor Anthony Athos of Harvard Business School’s framework for professional life:

Chapter 1: Learn the Game.

Chapter 2: Win the Game.

Chapter 3: Define the Game I wish to Play for the Next X Years.

References:

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (2011). The motivation to work (Vol. 1). Transaction publishers.

Rapaille, C. (2007). The culture code: An ingenious way to understand why people around the world live and buy as they do. Crown Business.

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Stybel Peabody provides companies with “leadership and career success” for valued senior level talent. Core services include retained search (Board members, CEOs, COOs, CFOs), leadership development coaching, and executive-level outplacement using the Stybel Peabody Five Distribution Channel System.

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