

## Job Sculpting: The Art of Retaining Your Best People

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In these days of talent wars, the best way to retain talent is to understand what really makes them happy and engaged and then use that information to customize their careers.

Talented people will stay with the organization only if their job matches their *deeply embedded life interests*. These interests are not hobbies – opera, skiing, and so forth – nor are they topics such as Chinese history, the stock market, or oceanography. Instead, deeply embedded life interests are long-held, emotionally driven passions. Deeply embedded life interests drive what *kinds* of activities make people happy. And that happiness leads to commitment, engagement and retention.

Life interests start showing themselves in childhood and remain relatively stable throughout our lives, even though they may manifest themselves in different ways at different times.

*Job sculpting* is the art of matching people to jobs that allow their deeply embedded life interests to be expressed. Job sculpting is challenging. It requires managers to pay more attention to their team members, observing and understanding things which would otherwise go unnoticed.

Many people have only a vague awareness of their deeply embedded life interests. This is because they may have spent their lives doing what others expected from them. Or they may have followed the most common career advice: “Do what you’re good at.”

Ability, meaning skills, experience and knowledge can make an employee feel competent. But although competence can certainly help a person get hired, its effect is generally short lived. People who are good at their jobs aren’t necessarily engaged by them. In the context of career satisfaction, values refer to the rewards people seek. Some people value money, others want intellectual challenges, and still others desire prestige. People with the same abilities may pursue different careers based on their values.

Take three people who excel in quantitative analysis. One might pursue a career as a professor of finance for the intellectual challenge. Another might go to Wall

Street to reap the financial rewards. And a third, driven by a desire for power and influence, might take up a job that leads to the CEO's office.

Like ability, values matter. In fact, people rarely take up jobs that don't match their values. A person who hates to travel would not likely join a management consulting firm. Someone who values financial security won't become an independent contractor. But people may choose a wrong career because they have the ability and like the rewards, even though they're not interested in the work. After a short period of success, they become disenchanting, lose interest, and either quit or just work less productively.

Compared to ability and values, life interests are a far more important driver of career satisfaction. We can be good at a job and we may be getting good rewards. But only life interests will keep us happy and fulfilled over the long term. And that's the key to retention.

The authors have listed 8 types of deeply embedded life interests.

**Application of Technology.** People with this life interest are curious about finding better ways to use technology to solve business problems.

**Quantitative Analysis.** Some people aren't just good at running the numbers, they excel at it. They see it as the best way to figure out business solutions.

**Theory Development and Conceptual Thinking.** For some people, nothing brings more enjoyment than thinking and talking about abstract ideas.

**Creative Production.** Some people always enjoy the beginning of projects the most, when there are many unknowns and they can create something quite new.

**Counselling and Mentoring.** For some people, nothing is more enjoyable than teaching, coaching or mentoring. These individuals like to guide and help others to improve and live up to their potential.

**Managing People and Relationships.** Counselling and mentoring people is one thing; wanting to manage them is another thing entirely. Individuals with this deeply embedded life interest enjoy dealing with people on a day-to-day basis.

**Enterprise control.** Some people want to be in charge of their unit. They find satisfaction in making the decisions that determine the direction taken by a work team, a business unit, a company division, or an entire organization.

**Influence Through Language and Ideas.** Some people love expressing themselves and communicating and enjoy activities like presenting, storytelling, negotiating and persuading. They feel most fulfilled when they are writing or speaking.