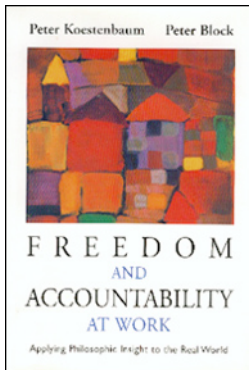
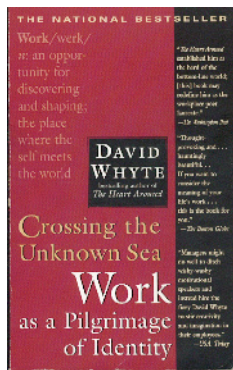


Book Reviews for Managers

Freedom and Accountability At Work Applying Philosophic Insight to the Real World & by Peter Koestenbaum & Peter Block



Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001
ISBN #1-7879 5594-9



Riverhead Books, 2001
ISBN #1-57322-914-8

REVIEWED BY IAN COOK

We have all experienced a time in our career (and life, perhaps) when we feel a deadness, a loss of enthusiasm. Our former passion and drive is gone. We have to drag ourselves into work each day and we wonder why we are still bothering to. When we get to our workplace we find that we are, in David Whyte's phraseology, merely impersonating ourselves.

Many employees experience this, even on an ongoing basis. While their manager wants commitment from them, they seem indifferent to the outcomes of their work, their unit and the organization. At best, they give compliance (otherwise, they won't get paid).

What is happening to us at times like this? One of two things. Either we have lost touch with our deeper purpose, our "why" for working, or we are doing work that does not allow us to live our "why." In either case, we are not able to tap into our drive to accomplish something that matters to us. The bottom line: we are not motivated!

These two books talk about what individuals (your employees and you) can do to find their passion and energy and what leaders can do to support this happening. First, here is a consolidation on what they say about *how to find your own motivation*:

1. **Accept responsibility for the choices you make.** Poet David Whyte uses the metaphor of a boat on the open sea. We are the captain of our life (and work). We need to accept this fact and take action when we feel off course or stalled in the doldrums. Koestenbaum & Block say we humans freely choose everything we decide to do—or not do—in life. In fact, the

Crossing the Unknown Sea Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity by David Whyte

only thing we can't choose is not to choose!

2. **Choose to decide what is important to you.** Whyte says this is akin to a boat captain who *chooses* to fix on a star and keeps the craft heading in that direction. This becomes a force that pulls you. But, let's face it, at work we can easily be distracted by short-term objectives, like fighting for your extra half-percent raise this year or angling for a cubicle with a window. We begin to lose sight of our bigger purpose and values and operate like that same captain who navigates by pointing a powerful flashlight beam off the bow into the dark, blotting out the star entirely. On this point, Koestenbaum goes deep. Most of us, he says, are not in touch with our own mortality. This allows us to deny or at least remain indifferent to any core reasons for living and working. Remembering that we will die one day creates an urgency in us to get clear on what is important in our life. It focuses our efforts and gives us new courage to act and take risks. Just ask anyone who has had a close brush with death.

3. **Choose to engage life and work fully and with vitality.** Whyte, shifting to a theatrical metaphor, advocates that we stop "painting the background scenery" and "step out on the stage, front and center." Koestenbaum and Block caution that letting your creative passion out means you risk scaring some control-oriented people and organizations. You also risk having to deal periodically with failure.

Now, Leaders. *What can you do to engage the motivation of those you lead?*

"Their vessel of choice is the sea-going canoe. ...all the paddlers face forward"

1. **Confront them with their freedom (to choose).** This, says Koestenbaum, is the primary role of the leader. Remind them that it is they who choose how hard they work, how they feel about the organization, what attitudes they have, how they react to people, policies and events, and so on. Peter Block recommends teaching those you lead that, by choosing to deny their own freedom, they keep themselves weak and give over power for their satisfaction to other people and situations.

The essential choice your people need to make is what is important to them. Why do they come to work? What do they (choose to) need from their work? What do they really care about in connection with the enterprise? Invite them to think about these questions, support them if they struggle with the answers, and congratulate them when they do identify their own "why's."

2. **Don't impose too many rules, expectations, missions, meaning, values, etc.** The operative word here is *impose*. Replace these "shoulds" from you and your organization with

invitations for them to sign on. When you insist your people adopt your values and agenda, you cause them to suppress their own needs and, quite possibly, extinguish their motivation to deliver solid performance.

I struggle in vain in a two-page book review to do justice to the wisdom of these fine thinkers. Nevertheless, a core message for organizational life from these thought-provoking books is that people will be motivated to the extent they (a) exercise the courage to create purpose and meaning in their life and (b) find in their work a channel to fulfill that purpose. The choice is always up to the employee. As David Whyte so aptly puts it...

"We are the one part of creation that can refuse to be itself. Our bodies can be present in our work, but our hearts, minds, and imaginations can be placed firmly in neutral or engaged elsewhere."

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Ian Cook, trainer, consultant, keynote speaker and Principal of Fulcrum Associates Inc., helps managers and supervisors get more from their people and teams through modern leadership approaches. Contact Ian to discuss the ideas in this article or to find out about related training programs, facilitation and coaching services, and keynote presentations for your organization.

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