

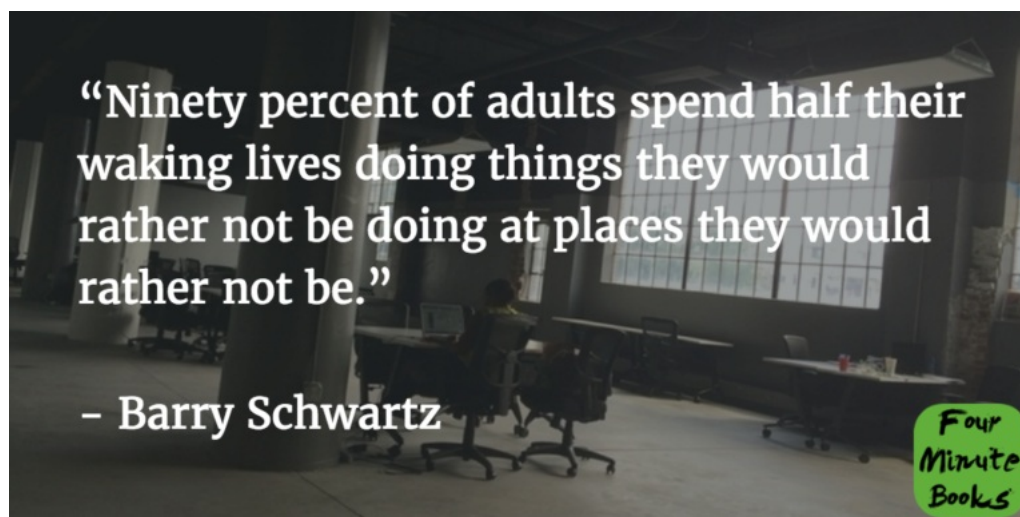
Why We Work Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Why We Work* looks at the purpose of work in our lives by examining how different people view their work, what traits make work feel meaningful, and which questions companies should ask to maximize the motivation of their employees.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Why We Work is a little book meant to accompany one of Barry Schwartz's TED talks, and it talks about what motivates us to get out of bed in the morning. The famous author of *The Paradox of Choice* argues that we use the wrong incentives and ask the wrong questions to lead those, who make great products and services a reality.

Whether you're an employee and want to find out if your employer is actually doing a good job at keeping you around, or a manager trying to improve your team's motivation, these lessons will help you understand the other party a bit more.

Here are 3 lessons about the motivation, meaning and work:

1. Do you perceive your work as a job, career, or a calling?
2. Autonomy, investment and a mission are what keeps employees engaged and motivated.
3. A pay raise is one of the worst incentives for true motivation.

Let's put the purpose back into work, shall we? Here we go!

Lesson 1: Ask yourself if you perceive your work as a job, career, or a calling.

You've surely thought differently of your work at different times. In general though, most of us land in one of three categories at any particular point in time:

1. **Your work is a job.** As the joke says, your job keeps you **just over broke**. It's a way to make money. You show up, do what you're told, but anything else is a stretch.
2. **Your work is a career.** You have prospects, you want to grow, make progress, get better, take on more responsibility, and you have a shot at moving up in your organization, which motivates you to give your best.
3. **Your work is a calling.** You know exactly how your work creates positive change in the lives of other people. It's not a compartment of your life, it's an essential part of it and makes you happy, because you know you're doing the right thing.

Of course how you see your work depends a lot on who you work for, and how that company communicates with you. A crucial part of perceiving your work as a calling, though, is connecting with the end users of your product. This way you're repeatedly reminded of how exactly your work makes a difference, which helps you move towards perspective number 3 from the list.

Lesson 2: Autonomy, investment and a mission are what keeps employees engaged and motivated.

Similar to the results Daniel Pink found when investigating motivation in "Drive", Schwartz made out three factors, which keep a business running well (by keeping people motivated):

1. **Autonomy.** Giving people control and the power to make decisions makes them feel trusted, helps them commit to moving the company forward, and instills a sense of respect for co-workers and managers in them. Autonomy lets you be proud of what you do, and there's hardly anything more motivating than that.
2. **Investment.** Daniel Pink calls this mastery. People should feel like every hour of their work is valuable and that their role is needed. Helping employees develop their skills by sending them to conferences and training them with seminars will achieve just that.
3. **Mission.** The company's mission must be clear to every single employee, at all times. A single sentence should do. The more you're aware of how you're changing the world, the more likely you are to actually give a damn about it.

Sadly, these three factors are what most companies cut back on first in a crisis – which is exactly the *wrong* thing to do. If you control people more, train them less and forget about why you're here, you'll sap their motivation and the company will end up performing even worse.

Instead, increase these three wherever and whenever you can. *Especially* when shit hits the fan.

Lesson 3: Raises are crappy incentives to actually motivate people.

Whether you've learned this first-hand already or not, **more money is a really bad motivation to do stuff**. Take this example highlighted in Freakonomics, which Schwartz also talks about.

In a variety of children's day care centers in Haifa, Israel, people tended to show up super late to pick up their kids. Nobody ever stuck to the 4 PM rule. Every week, there were 8 late pickups per center, on average. Supervisors then introduced a fine. Every parent, who was more than 10 minutes late, would have to pay \$3 for each child, each time they missed the deadline. This charge would be added to their \$380 monthly bill.

Guess what happened?

Late pickups more than doubled, shooting to 20 late pickups per week. That's because:

1. The fine wasn't high enough and people didn't care about a less than 1% increase of their monthly bill.
2. Instead of feeling like an immoral, bad parent, they could just buy their way out of the guilt of showing up late now.

It's easy to justify working with shitty colleagues, throwing others under the bus and sacrificing your health for those \$10k extra next year, but the more raises you get, the more you'll see they don't really make you happier.

Why We Work Review

Why We Work is a short book, very concise, and a nice addendum to the TED talk. It's one of those things that it never hurts to be reminded of. Obviously, it's a lot more valuable for people with responsibility over others, so if you lead people at work, take a good hard look at this.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Which work industries one study observed to determine what makes work a calling
- The most common problem that causes a lack of motivation in the US
- Why Adam Smith's ideas might be wrong
- How limited the idea of efficiency really is
- Which questions employers must ask themselves to create a great, thriving workplace

Who would I recommend the Why We Work summary to?

The 22 year old in his first job at a big bank, who's still very motivated, and would like it to stay this way, the 52 year old manager, who's always managed his staff with strict discipline and evaluation, and anyone who's currently struggling towards a raise.

