

Most adults spend more than one third of their waking life working (Wrzesniewski 21). Thus it's not surprising that those who enjoy their work are happier. So, the question comes to mind: why do some people enjoy their work while others do not? The answer lies in something called *authentic alignment*, which Howard Gardner defines as the state in which one's interests and ideals align with their work (Gardner 27). People who find alignment in their working lives are more satisfied with their work and with life in general. Most psychologists and sociologists emphasize the importance of authentic alignment.

Those who see their work as a calling are more satisfied with their jobs. In *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Haidt gives a vivid description of alignment. He says that when one's working life is aligned, "there is a strong felt connection between self and object: a writer is 'swept away' by a project, a scientist is 'mesmerized by the stars'. The relationship has a subjective meaning; work is a 'calling'" (Haidt 224). In other words, those who see their job as a calling are more engaged in their work and inherently more satisfied. In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah shares a few personal stories that shed some light on the effects of the job-career-calling distinction. He speaks of four individuals, two of whom don't feel completely satisfied in their working lives, two of whom find great fulfillment in their jobs. He found that those who were satisfied were those who felt they were doing good work—their working lives were aligned. In her study, Amy Wrzesniewski found that those who saw their work as a calling were better off in many respects. These people reported more job and life satisfaction than others, and even reported more satisfaction in their work than other things such as hobbies or time with friends. Hence we see that their work was a hugely important, enjoyable part of their lives. In his book, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet*, Howard Gardner further explains that people actively seek out alignment. He argues that this sense of fulfillment is the reason so many people want to become doctors. People are attracted to jobs that offer the chance to excel at good work—jobs that offer alignment.

Gretchen Spreitzer, however, has a different view of alignment, namely that alignment is not a sufficient nor a necessary condition to thrive at work. Firstly, she argues that alignment is not sufficient to thrive in that one must also feel that they are learning in order to find fulfillment in their work. In her article, she defines thriving at work as the mental state in which one feels alive at work and also learns on the job. She explains that learning adds to the sense of progression, which is essential to job satisfaction. Secondly, Spreitzer challenges Gardner's idea that alignment, namely the facets of achievement and some contribution to the greater good, is necessary to thrive at work. She references Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which states that certain needs are more fundamental than others. According to this hierarchy, one needs esteem, arising from a sense of achievement before one can move on to self actualization, or fulfillment. Gardner might agree with this idea, or at least he believes that both achievement and good work are necessary to thrive at work. However, Spreitzer does not agree. She mentions that research has found that "most people can identify some time in their life when they were thriving at work" (Spreitzer 539). It is very unlikely that all these people have found alignment in their jobs. Thus, such information suggests that one can thrive at work even if one's working life is not aligned.

Gardner and Haidt share the premise that authentic alignment has been lacking from society for some time. In *Good Work*, Howard Gardner gives a historical example that illustrates how these gaps in alignment formed. He explains that the realm of healthcare underwent major

changes during World War II. Many families moved from the city to the suburbs, and it was no longer feasible for doctors to perform home visits. As a result, doctors became both physically and mentally distanced from their patients. Gardner argues that this type of change led to a less personal, more profit driven healthcare system. Haidt offers a similar historical explanation for our society's gaps in alignment. He cites the industrial revolution and the shift to assembly line work as a major turning point in our history. He argues that this kind of work alienated workers from the products of their work, and therefore deprived workers of any sense of job satisfaction. In providing these historical examples of misalignment, Haidt and Gardner both imply that gaps in alignment still exist in society today.

Haidt and Wrzesniewski believe that alignment and misalignment are not determined by profession. Haidt mentions the work of hospital janitors. One would expect that janitors see their work as a job and don't obtain any kind of fulfillment from it. However it turns out that, when interviewed, these janitors described their work in a surprising way. They described their work as something very meaningful. They "saw themselves as part of a team whose goal was to heal people" (Haidt 222). This kind of view indicates that they saw their career as a calling. So we see that jobs we see as menial and unimportant are not always seen that way by the very people who perform them. Wrzesniewski studied one office, which employed 24 administrative assistants. She found that 9 of these assistants saw their work as a job, 7 as a career, and 8 as a calling—a surprising result from employees of the same job (Wrzesniewski 29). Thus we see that how people view their work can be independent of their actual occupation.

While the above reasoning seems to suggest that anyone can have alignment, Douglas T. Hall disagrees. He believes that contextual factors must be taken into account when discussing these issues. He especially focuses on economic factors that often "impact [one's] ability to enact a calling" (Hall 166). Hall gives the example of a man who feels a calling toward the profession of medicine. He has all the talent and drive necessary to go to medical school, but cannot afford to go while still supporting his family. He also mentions the effect of economic factors on a larger scale. Many times people who are unhappy at their jobs quit and look for a more fulfilling, better aligned position. However, in a recession, these people may be discouraged as they are not able to get any interviews as a result of the scarcity of jobs on the market. They may very well end up doing the opposite of what they intended, taking a job that does not offer alignment, in an effort to support themselves financially.