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What Job Crafting Looks Like

Stories of three people who changed their jobs to find more meaning.

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Job crafting — changing your job to make it more engaging and meaningful — can take many forms. We’ve been studying job crafting for 20 years and our research among [hospital cleaners](#), [employees in a manufacturing firm](#), [a women’s advocacy nonprofit](#), and tech workers identified three main forms these changes can take.

First, there is *task crafting*, which involves altering the type, scope, sequence, and number of tasks that make up your job. Next, you can

relationally craft your job by altering whom you interact with in your work. Finally, there is *cognitive crafting*, where you modify the way you interpret the tasks and/or work you're doing. To illustrate what each of these types look like, here are stories of three people who redesigned their jobs to unlock more meaning.

Candice Walker is a housekeeper at a university hospital. Her primary interest has always been the patients the organization serves and their families. From the time she started her job, she saw her work as much more than her cleaning responsibilities. Instead, she cognitively reframed her work as a form of healing, playing a key role “in the house of hope.” Defining her role as healer meant she paid additional attention to the tasks that might help people recover and leave the hospital more quickly. This meant dedicating extra care to cleaning bathroom features during the cold season so her patients weren't endangered. It also meant anticipating and providing materials that might be in short supply so that the patient could feel “things were in control” and that they were moving toward a faster release to home. She also formed relationships with patients and their families, getting to know them as people, not just temporary patients.

Candice used her emotional intelligence to make gentle inquiries that showed care and interest without overstepping boundaries. She used similar skills to discern who might need additional attention and conversation on a particular day or night because they were experiencing pain, fear, or loneliness. She would then alter which patients she spent time with so that her work could make a bigger difference in their lives. By cognitively crafting her job in these ways, Candice reported finding a greater sense of meaning in her job.

Rachel Heydlauff is a consultant who works for Root Inc., a firm specializing in organizational change. She designs and guides programs

and processes to improve organizational effectiveness, and the majority of her job involves working within teams on multiple client projects. Her firm has made an explicit commitment to helping employees pursue their passions, and its leaders encourage job crafting.

When she joined the firm several years ago, Rachel made it clear that she cared about sharing her expertise on positive organizational scholarship (POS). During her early years as a junior consultant she provided formal and informal workshops on POS to her clients and fellow consultants. This was not explicit in her formal job description, but she made it an increasingly larger part of her role, and she gained a reputation – inside and outside of her firm — for her expertise. She also has been able to integrate POS into some of her client solutions. She has sought and been granted permission to speak in university classes and participate in positive business conferences that further deepen her expertise.

Rachel has also done some relational crafting to build deeper, more personal connections to her clients and to her fellow employees. She deliberately arrives early to meetings and makes an effort to get to know people's interests and cares outside of work. Her joyful demeanor and ability to read the mood in a room have deepened her relationships and informed the way she frames her job. She sees herself as a positive energizer who detects when the energy on a team is low, and has means and skills to lift it up to tackle tough assignments or difficult feedback from a client. This type of cognitive framing has empowered Rachel to intervene in situations that others find challenging. It has also given her new ways to add value to her team.

Finally, meet Jake (a pseudonym), a longtime employee at Burt's Bees, a manufacturer of sustainable and natural personal care products. Jake is a compound mixer whose work involves following strict guidelines for

how to mix bulk ingredients that are part of product recipes before they are packaged. His job requires little, if any, personal interaction with others and limited autonomy on how to alter the physical tasks involved in his job. Jake would describe himself as a people person, yet his work, as designed, provides little opportunity for personal connection. So he decided to change that.

Jake was fascinated by the technicians in his plant who designed and built the specialized equipment needed for production. He initiated numerous conversations with the equipment engineers and attended their meetings to learn more about their approach and knowledge. He wove that information into more effective procedures for onboarding new team and is now fully in charge of that process. Jake's deep interest in the plant's sustainability efforts led him to join the Eco-bees, a group dedicated to reducing waste and coordinating actions to make the plant more environmentally friendly. His involvement in this group, the connections with the equipment engineers, and his onboarding responsibilities have changed the relational landscape of his job, while giving him tasks and activities that he deeply enjoys.

The positive impact of making thoughtful changes to the design of a job has been documented and studied in a broad range of occupations since our research was first published 20 years ago. The principles of job crafting remain deeply relevant in a world where job structure is rapidly changing, putting more and more responsibility on the individual for the experience and engagement in their work. While this certainly creates challenges, it also brings opportunities to build the kinds of task, relational, and cognitive landscapes that bring meaning to work.

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