WORK AND MEANING



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1 Warm up

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. Imagine you got a job where you were paid $1,000,000 per year. The job was cleaning toilets. Would you be happy to do the job? Why/Why not?
2. Would it make any difference to you if the job was in a hospital where there were very ill children?
3. Would it make any difference to you if you were doing the job in a company where most people were making at least $5,000,000 per year?



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2 Finding vocabulary

Find vocabulary in the article on page three which means the same as the following definitions.

1. _____ (n, para. A): a reason for something to happen
2. _____ (n, para. B): a person who provides money or effort to partly support something
3. _____ (n, para. B): a strong desire to do a particular job, especially one that is helpful to others
4. _____ (n, para. B): a way of using skills or energy to do something useful
5. _____ (v, para. C): use something for a particular purpose
6. _____ (n, para. C): the state of being connected to other people
7. _____ (n, para. C): the state of having complete control over what you do without having to ask for permission
8. _____ (n, para. D): the main reason for living

3 Reading for gist

Match the following sentences to the first sentence of paragraphs A - D. There are more sentences than paragraphs.

1. Being part of a community also gives work significance.
2. Many people in life find themselves searching for meaning to what they do day to day.
3. In 2020, McKinsey & Company did a survey asking if it was important for their company to have a purpose.
4. So what can we learn from this information?
5. For others, meaning can come down to the age-old question of whether you live to work, or work to live.
6. But what's the meaning of 'meaning'?

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Why we do what we do

Finding meaning in work

A. _____ 82% responded that it was. In 2022, a new survey by the same company found that when it came to having a personal sense of purpose, 70% said that it was largely defined by their work. Given the large proportion of time we spend working, it seems the majority of people want their work to go beyond giving them a paycheck. A company that has purpose has workers who share that purpose. When that work is meaningful to them, it gives them the impetus to work hard and are less likely to leave. So for work to have meaning is advantageous to everyone, from the CEO down.

B. _____ It can vary greatly from individual to individual. Often it means having a sense of being a contributor to society. It's why careers in education and medicine are often described as a calling. Having direct contact with people who you are helping, often in life-changing ways, can be an important driver for many people that wouldn't be fulfilled if they worked in, say, retail or the media. However, for others, being part of creating something is what gives definition to their lives. Not using the talents you have to express yourself and be part of something larger can be deeply frustrating for most people. Finding an outlet for them serves as a motivator. It is this that can drive people to start new businesses, turn to creative hobbies, and no doubt explains the underground movements in dance and graffiti.

C. _____ Teamwork is utilized in many fields, from catering, to sales, to professional football. Knowing that others need you and would be worse off without you is not just important as an employee, but as a person. This is why freelance and remote work can sometimes be challenging. If you start asking yourself: would anyone notice if I didn't show up? You know that there's a problem. A 2020 study by Brookings found that relatedness was the most significant factor in when it came to how much meaning we experienced in our work, with autonomy coming second. Although many of us like to be able to have a sense of control over our work, it seems we want to connect with those whom we work alongside much more.

D. _____ Receiving money for a job that allows you to do what you enjoy with your free time can be enough to give it meaning. If you enjoy collecting hats, or traveling around the country on your motorbike and your job pays for that, then this can be reason enough to do it. Some work only as much as they need to and find their raison d'etre in volunteer work, or caring for family and friends. The key, it would seem, is being content with your personal choices.

Source: BBC



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4 Reading comprehension

Read the article and choose the correct endings a - g for the sentences.

1. When asked about their personal sense of purpose in a survey, 7 out of 10 people responded that it ...
2. Employees who do work which ...
3. The need to be helpful to other people ...
4. The ability to be creative in their work ...
5. Community is important to the human condition and feeling connected to others in ...
6. There are those who see work as a means to pursue their interests in their free time and don't feel ....
7. Overall, if you know you are in a situation due to your own choices, this is what ...

a. ... was defined by their work.
b. ... is meaningful to them are likely to work harder and stay longer with that company.
c. .... a need to find meaning in their work.
d. ... a work team can be very rewarding.
e. ... is a key motivation to some, as they can see the way they are improving lives for others.
f. ... is vital to having a feeling of control.
g. ... is essential for some people.



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5 Idioms of success

Look at the idioms in the box. Use them to replace the words in bold in the following sentences. You may have to change the form of some of the words.

- to have a long way to go
- to have got what it takes
- to get something off the ground
- to do well for yourself
- to be better late than never
- to wish someone the best of luck with something
- to do something to good effect
- to make your mark on something

1. After he left university, Stanton used his degree in business and economics **well** and quickly found work as an advisor.

_____

2. I'd love to really **have a huge impact** on the film industry and make a film that everyone would talk about for years and years to come.

_____

3. I've made a good start in my first business, but I still **need to make a lot more progress** before I'm where I want to be in life.

_____

4. I was 49 years old before I really found what I wanted to do with my life. **It's good that I found it rather than not finding it at all**, I suppose.

_____

5. He's talking about becoming a professional soccer player. I mean, he's good but I don't know if he **has the skills that he needs to do that**.

_____

6. My manager is leaving tomorrow after working here for over ten years, so we're having a small party to **say we hope he will be successful**.

_____

7. My sister worked as a cook after she left school, but she's **been very successful** and now owns three restaurants.

_____

8. It took me about three years to **really start having success with my photography business**, but I've been making a decent living from it for several years now.

_____

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Now in pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. What do you hope you will have **made your mark on** in twenty years from now?
2. Who do you know who has **done very well for themselve**s? What did they do?
3. When you were at school, did you think you **had what it takes** to be successful? Why/Why not?
4. How long did it take you to **get your career off the ground**? What have you done that really helped?
5. Are you happy with what you have, or do you think you still **have a long way to go** before you will have done what you want to do with your life?
6. What lessons or things you learned from experience have you put **to good effect** to help you in your career?



6 Listening for gist

Listen to three people talk about finding meaning in their work. Underline the correct option for each speaker.

1. Speaker 1 now works as a photographer/banker/sales person/baker/teacher/lawyer.
2. Speaker 2 now works as a photographer/banker/sales person/baker/teacher/lawyer.
3. Speaker 3 now works as a photographer/banker/sales person/baker/teacher/lawyer.

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7 Listening comprehension

Read the statements and complete the table by ticking the correct box if it's true for that speaker.

	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3
1. I invested a lot of money in chasing my dream job.			
2. I feel like people I knew when I was growing up judge what I do.			
3. I'm excited about the chance to do a trip in the near future where I can follow my passion.			
4. My main motivation when I left school was making money.			
5. I really enjoy being part of a team at work.			
6. An activity that started as an interest in my free time became a way of earning money.			
7. I get a lot of happiness from seeing other people feel so happy.			
8. My salary is lower now than it used to be.			
9. I found when I started doing my dream job that the reality was different from the idea.			

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8 Talking point

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. Which people in the listening task have the most similar ideas about work to you? Explain your answer.
2. Do you find meaning in your job? If so, what is it about your job that gives it meaning?
3. Is there any part of your job that is creative? What is it?
4. Do you think it's more important to make good money or do a job that you like? Why?
5. Do you think it is possible to do a job that is meaningful and also pays you very well? Why/Why not?
6. Do you spend a lot of time outside of your job doing things you love to do? What are they?

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