

The Three Signs of a Miserable Job: Q&A with Patrick Lencioni

Patrick Lencioni is the president of The Table Group and author of several national best-sellers including *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Lencioni tackles another critical leadership topic — helping employees find fulfillment in their work—in his recent book, *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*.

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Linkage: *Why did you decide to write this book?*

Lencioni: As a kid, I watched my dad trudge off to work each day and became somewhat obsessed with the notion of job misery. Somewhere along the line I came to the frightening realization that people spend so much time at work yet so many of them were unfulfilled and frustrated in their jobs. As I got older, I came to another realization – that job misery was having a devastating impact on individuals, and on society at large. It seemed to me that understanding the cause of the problem, and finding a solution for it, was a worthy focus for my career.

Linkage: *What exactly is a miserable job?*

Lencioni: A miserable job is not the same as a bad one. A bad job lies in the eye of the beholder. One person's dream job might be another person's nightmare.

But a miserable job is universal. It is one that makes a person cynical and frustrated and demoralized when they go home at night. It drains them of the energy, their enthusiasm and their self-esteem. Miserable jobs can be found in every industry and at every level. Professional athletes, CEOs and actors can be – and often are – as miserable as ditch diggers, janitors and fast food workers.

Linkage: *How prevalent is job misery?*

Lencioni: Attend any kind of social gathering, anywhere in the country, and talk about work. The stories and anecdotal evidence confirming job misery are overwhelming. Misery spans all income levels, ages and geography. A recent Gallup poll found that 77% of people hate their jobs. Gallup also contends that this ailing workforce is costing employers more than \$350 billion dollars in lost productivity.

Linkage: *What is the root cause of job misery?*

Lencioni: The primary source of job misery and the potential cure for that misery resides in the hands of one individual – the direct manager. There are countless studies confirming this statement, including both Gallup and The Blanchard Companies. Both organizations have found that an employee's relationship with his/her direct manager is the most important determinant to employee satisfaction (over pay, benefits, perks, work-life balance, etc.).

Even employees who are well paid, do interesting work and have great autonomy, cannot feel fulfilled in a job if their managers are not providing them with what they need on a daily or weekly basis.

Linkage: *What are the Three Signs?*

Lencioni: The first is anonymity, which is the feeling that employees get when they realize that their manager has little interest in them as human beings, and that they know little about their lives, their aspirations and their interests.

The second sign is irrelevance, which takes root when employees cannot see how their job makes a

difference in the lives of others. Every employee needs to know that the work they do impacts someone's life – a customer, a co-worker, even a supervisor – in one way or another.

The third sign is something I call immeasurement, which is the inability of employees to assess for themselves their contribution or success. Employees who have no means of measuring how well they are doing on a given day or in a given week, must rely on the subjective opinions of others, usually their managers', to gauge their progress or contribution.

Linkage: *What can a miserable employee do to improve his or her situation?*

Lencioni: The first thing they can do is assess whether their manager is interested in and capable of addressing the three things that are required. And they have to realize that most managers really do want to improve, in spite of the fact that they may seem disinterested.

The second thing miserable employees need to do is help their managers understand what it is they need. If they have a strong relationship with their manager, they can come right out and say it ("You know, it would mean a lot to me if you knew more about who I am and what makes me tick." or, "Can you sit down and help me understand why this work I'm doing makes a difference to someone?").

Finally, employees would do well for themselves if they turned the tables and started doing for their managers what they want for themselves. For instance, employees who take a greater interest in the life of their managers are bound to infect them with the same kind of human interest. Similarly, employees who take the time to tell their managers (in a non suck-up kind of way) about the impact they have on their job satisfaction, will likely inspire them to respond in kind.

However, if an employee comes to the conclusion that his or her manager is indeed completely disinterested in helping them find fulfillment in their work, it may well be time to start looking for a new job.

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