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# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Companion Guide

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# Introduction

This program is designed to help managers more effectively engage, motivate, and retain employees by eliminating the three causes of job misery.

It can be used to train multiple managers simultaneously in a classroom setting (half-day) or as a self-guided development program for an individual manager.

The program contains a video in which Patrick Lencioni explains the model in his book, *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*, as well as first person employee stories illustrating each of the Three Signs. It also contains an outline for a half-day workshop and a sample Manager's Booklet which includes an overview of the model, a self-assessment, questions and answers about the model, and practical tools for applying the principles in the management of employees.

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## Model Overview

Before conducting this program, you need to be familiar with the basic concept that underlies its methodology.

There are three underlying factors which make a job miserable, and they apply to virtually all jobs regardless of the nature of the work being done. They are, at first glance, obvious and seemingly easy to resolve. And yet they remain largely unaddressed by even the most well-meaning managers.



# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job

## Companion Guide

### Anonymity

People cannot be fulfilled in their work if they are not known. All human beings need to be understood and appreciated by someone in a position of authority for their unique qualities. As much as this may sound like an aphorism from *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, it is undeniably true. People who see themselves as invisible, generic, or anonymous cannot love their jobs, no matter what they are doing. The person who must know an employee is that person's manager.

### Irrelevance

Everyone needs to know that their job matters to someone. Anyone. If there is no connection between a person's work and the satisfaction of another person or group of people, an employee simply will not find lasting fulfillment. Even the most cynical employee needs to know that his or her work matters to someone, even if it's just the boss. And the person who must help an employee understand how he or she makes a difference is that person's manager.

### Immeasurement

Employees need to be able to gauge their progress and level of contribution for themselves. They cannot be fulfilled in their work if their success depends on the opinions or whims of another person, no matter how benevolent that person may be. Without a tangible means for assessing one's own success or failure, motivation eventually deteriorates as people seem themselves as unable to control their own fate. And once again, the person who must initiate the identification of measurement is an employee's manager.

If all of this sounds relatively simple, even obvious, that's because it is. Nonetheless, it seems that most managers fail to provide their people with these fundamentals of a meaningful job. Why?

Maybe because it is *too* obvious. Well-educated people often have a hard time getting their hands around simple solutions. Perhaps the 18<sup>th</sup> century author Samuel Johnson is right, and they just need to be reminded a lot. Or maybe they're just not sure about how to get started.

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## Key Points from the Video

### Defining a Miserable Job

- » A miserable job is not the same as a bad job.
- » A miserable job is one of those jobs you dread going to because you know you'll come home with less energy, confidence, and self-esteem than when you left.

### Who's Responsible?

- » The person who has by far the greatest impact on an employee being miserable or not in their job is that employee's manager.
- » According to The Gallup Organization, the number one reason people leave their jobs or report unhappiness in their jobs is not money or working conditions, it is the relationship with their boss.

### The First Sign: Anonymity

- » Anonymity is the feeling employees get when they feel unknown or invisible at work.
- » A surefire way to go about eliminating anonymity from the jobs of our employees is to find a way to start genuinely caring about them as people, to empathize with them and wonder what it might be like to be in their situation, to walk in their shoes.
- » One of the real benefits of management is the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of employees, who in turn make a difference in the success of the organization.

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- » Practical steps to overcoming anonymity:
  - » Take time to find out and jot down a list of the interests of the people who work for you—their aspirations, special skills, hobbies, birthdays, family challenges.
  - » Keep these topics alive by engaging in regular conversation.

### The Second Sign: Irrelevance

- » Irrelevance is the sense that the work your employees are doing has no real impact on the lives of others, and that if they didn't show up for work or do their job well, it wouldn't really matter to anyone.
- » All people have a fundamental need to know that their work matters, that in some way, large or small, the job they do improves the life of another person or group of people.
- » When an employee understands how they can impact others, they inevitably have a greater sense of purpose and motivation.
- » Determining an employee's relevance comes down to helping them answer two fundamental questions:
  - » Who is the beneficiary of their work?
  - » How exactly do they go about making an impact on them?

### The Third Sign: Immeasurement

- » Immeasurement is the inability of an employee to assess his or her own level of contribution and success.
- » Essentially, it is a feeling of ambiguity about one's own performance, which makes an employee dependent on the subjective opinions of a manager.

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- » What most employees want to be able to assess for themselves is how to effectively measure how they're impacting people's lives. Managers need to consider their employees' relevance when determining what needs to be measured.

### **The Cost of Misery**

- » The cost of employees being disengaged and less than fully productive has a very real effect on a company's bottom line. It drives away customers, diminishes productivity, and increases costs of recruiting, retention, legal fees, and workers' compensation.

### **A Call to Action**

- » Ask yourself:
  - » How much do you know about your people, and how often do you engage them around their lives?
  - » Have you ever talked to them about the importance of their work in the context of other people's lives?
  - » Have you worked with them to establish a clear, meaningful way to measure their success?
- » Managing is not merely a job or a title; it's a vocation and a ministry.

## Outline for a Half-Day Program

### Classroom Instructions

If you've purchased this package in order to provide training to managers, you'll want to do the following:

1. Have all participant managers watch the video in which Patrick Lencioni explains his model and provides examples to illustrate each of the Three Signs. (*forty minutes*)
2. Ask the group for initial reactions and questions about the material. (*ten minutes*)
3. Break the class into groups of two or three, have them discuss the Three Signs of a Miserable Job and, using their best guess, rank their performance as managers against the signs: strongest area, next strongest, weakest. (*ten minutes*)
4. Now have them complete the self-assessment on page 4 in the Manager's Booklet. (*ten minutes*)
5. In the larger group, have participants report their insights. Survey the room for collective areas of strength and weakness, having participants look for any interesting trends or findings that emerge. Discuss findings with the group. (*ten minutes*)
6. Have participants complete individually the anti-misery planning worksheets for each of their employees on pages 7-19 in the Manager's Booklet. (*approximately five – ten minutes per employee*)
7. Break the participants into their original small groups to discuss their worksheets and provide one another advice about how to go about implementing their plans. (*twenty – forty minutes*)
8. Discuss the Next Steps section on page 21 of the Manager's Booklet. Explain that in order to sustain the momentum from the initial program—and avoid the lull that commonly occurs—managers need to take an active role in keeping the concepts alive. (*five minutes*)
9. Close the session by going around the room and asking each manager for his or her personal commitment. (*fifteen minutes*)

**Total time:** *approximately four hours*

# Instructions for Individual Managers

If you're an individual manager using this material for self-development, you'll need to watch the video in which Patrick Lencioni explains his model and provides examples to illustrate each of the Three Signs and complete the Manager's Booklet.

**Total time:** *approximately two hours*

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# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Companion Guide

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the difference between a miserable job and a bad one?

The definition of a bad job depends on the person doing the defining. For some people, a bad job is one that requires manual labor. For others it is a low-paying job. And for some people, it's one that involves sitting behind a desk. It's really a matter of personal preference.

The definition of a miserable job, on the other hand, is more universal. It's one of those jobs you dread going to because you know you'll come home with less energy, confidence and self-esteem than when you left. It's one where you've come to grips with the fact that you're generally not going to be fulfilled or rewarded or enriched at work.

### What about finding the right career and doing what you're passionate about doing?

Everyone would be better off if they worked in a job that involved passion and career fit. However, that has more to do with avoiding having a bad job. Even people who work in the field of their dreams, and in the company of their dreams, can be miserable if their managers are not helping them avoid the perils of anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurability.

And ironically, these people are probably more miserable than the average employee because they are not enjoying a job that they had thought would be perfect for them.

### What is the difference between job satisfaction and job fulfillment?

Real job satisfaction is a function of finding the right job (a good one for a given person) and avoiding the Three Signs of a Miserable Job. Which begs an important theoretical question: What is better? Having the right job but with a manager who makes you miserable or having a less-than-perfect job, but working for a manager that makes a job fulfilling?

# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job

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The answer to this question varies from person to person. However, job misery is something that causes suffering every day, and is probably more fundamental to a person's general satisfaction.

### What about compensation? Why isn't low pay one of the Three Signs?

Being undercompensated, or earning too little money to make ends meet, is a very real problem that cannot be trivialized or dismissed. Regardless of how fulfilled a person feels in a job, if they aren't earning enough money to pay their bills, there is no real hope for job satisfaction.

However, too often people convince themselves that money will compensate (excuse the pun) for the lack of good management. In most cases, this doesn't work. Even extremely-high-paid workers (e.g. professional athletes, senior executives) are often miserable in their jobs because of anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurability. And on the other hand, there are people who are paid relatively little who are extremely fulfilled in their work.

Do they want to make more money? Most likely. But most wouldn't trade a fulfilling job that doesn't pay particularly well for a high paying but miserable one.

### What about autonomy? Shouldn't being micro-managed be one of the Three Signs?

Micro-management can certainly be a painful issue for some employees; however, it often comes down to a matter of personal style and preference. Some managers tend to manage more "closely" than others, and some employees tend to want more specific clarity around their daily priorities.

Regardless of whether a manager's style matches that of an employee, if the manager is avoiding the Three Signs, then dealing with that style difference is going to be much more tolerable. Very few people find a manager who exactly matches the way they like to be managed, but many of those people can still find genuine fulfillment in their jobs.

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### How does an employee go about influencing a manager to improve in these areas?

This is an important and difficult question, with a few surprisingly simple answers.

First, an employee would be well served to find a way to make his or her manager aware of the Three Signs. Doing this might require a level of tact and dexterity, even courage, but is nonetheless doable and worthwhile. Whether it's an employee sitting down with a manager to talk about what he or she needs, or sending them an "FYI" e-mail about the Three Signs, or sliding a copy of the book under the boss's door anonymously (I like this one best!), there are ways to raise awareness.

However, another way to do it is by turning the tables and helping a manager eliminate the Three Signs in his or her job. It may sound crazy, but employees can take time to get to know a manager, as a person. They can remind the manager how he or she makes a difference in their lives, and in the lives of customers or stakeholders. They can even put in place a measurement system for tracking how often and in what ways they'd like the manager to interact with them to help them in their jobs.

Both of these approaches require a mind-set change for any employee wanting to affect positive change. First, employees must convince themselves that their managers are human beings who really do want to improve. Though it can often seem like a boss has no interest or capacity for improvement, managers are really no different than employees inasmuch as they are usually also employees with their own manager, and they are insecure about not doing their jobs well. Coming to terms with their humanity and desire for improvement, even if they are projecting an air of invulnerability, will help an employee have the courage to help their managers, and themselves.

### What should an employee do if that manager doesn't care about creating a fulfilling job for employees?

If an employee is convinced that a manager has no interest in making work more fulfilling for them, then it's not a bad time to invoke the serenity prayer: "Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

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That is not to say that an employee must simply accept his or her fate and continue to be miserable at work. But rather than bang their heads on a wall trying to change a manager who isn't capable or interested in change, it would be better to polish their resume and look for a job that is more fulfilling.

And remember, there are many, many managers out there who want to make their employees' jobs enjoyable.

### Are some managers just not naturally suited to doing this kind of thing?

Certain managers have personality styles that lend themselves more to talking about and embracing job fulfillment. However, that doesn't necessarily make them better at providing it. The qualities that are most required in a "non-misery-inducing manager" are empathy, integrity, and self-confidence. Managers that are inherently self-centered, deceiving, and insecure have little chance at creating a fulfilling work environment. But again, most people do want to do what is right. I really believe that.

### How can I transform the culture of my organization by helping managers eliminate the Three Signs?

There are two powerful impacts that can be achieved by creating a culture of "non-miserable" management. First, and most obviously, productivity, retention, innovation, and reference-driven recruiting will skyrocket. Employees will work harder, stay longer, find new ways of doing things, and tell their friends about the companies or organizations where they work.

Secondly, managers will experience a liberating sense of daily purpose and satisfaction. They will shift from a Theory X way of thinking (command and control) to a Theory Y approach (employees want to do the right things as long as I put them in a position to do so). This shift transforms how a manager sees his or her job, shedding the negative self-image of being an adversarial task master, and adopting the more gratifying and effective personae of a coach, mentor, and leader.

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### What should I do if I struggle with eliminating one of the signs in particular?

**Anonymity:** Managers who struggle with demonstrating a real interest in their employees and eliminating any sense of anonymity they might have, may need to do one of two things, or both. First, they have to overcome their fear of being politically incorrect. Yes, during interviews managers must be careful about the kinds of personal questions they ask. But that doesn't mean that they should continue in that same vein after an employee comes on board. That doesn't mean all personal topics are suddenly fair game; it means that managers should become human beings, and not the automatons that our legal system requires them to be during the interview process.

Second, managers need to overcome their fear of coming across as insincere. That's not to say that they need to get comfortable being insincere. They just need to realize that it is okay if employees initially suspect that they are being manipulative, and have the courage and wisdom to realize that the truth about their intentions will eventually become clear after they demonstrate consistent, genuine interest in their employees as people.

**Irrelevance:** There are two main obstacles that prevent managers from helping their people discover the importance of their work in the lives of others. First, managers just don't realize how important it is. They assume, incorrectly of course, that employees just want to come to work, leave on time, get their paycheck, and go home and watch TV. The first thing a manager needs to do, then, is realize the importance of relevance.

However, even managers who understand this hesitate to talk to their people about relevance because they fear that it will come across as childish or condescending. This is true even in the most altruistic or helping professions.

For example, nursing managers often feel that they will insult the intelligence of their employees if they remind them about how they are impacting the lives of their patients. They assume that it's already obvious, and on a theoretical level, they are correct. But all human beings need to be reminded, emotionally more than intellectually, about the specific and real difference they are making in the lives of their customers or constituents.

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That requires a level of courage from managers who fear, perhaps as much as anything else, being seen as soft, “un-cool”, or patronizing. And yet, in ninety-nine percent of cases, employees delight in being reminded of the importance of their work, and in the knowledge that their manager noticed.

**Immeasurement:** Managers who struggle with helping their people establish observable, objective measures for success often lack creativity in their approach. They revert to obvious metrics, like revenue or sales or volume. And while those may, in some cases, be most appropriate, managers need to think beyond quantitative measures, in order to find more relevant, behavioral, and controllable ways to meaningfully assess performance.

What should a manager do if being a good manager and creating a fulfilling work environment isn't valued in an organization?

Do it anyway. There are two reasons I say this.

First, and most important, helping people become more fulfilled in their work is not a matter of mere pragmatism or practicality. I believe it is a moral obligation, in the same vein as parenting or coaching. When we are responsible for, or play an important role in, another person's financial and psychological well-being, we are obliged to do so in a way that serves them and makes them a better person. If a manager's manager doesn't value that, or if even the CEO doesn't, I continue to believe that an individual should still take it upon his or her self as a manager to do what is right.

And beyond this, when a manager does this in an organization that doesn't value it, he or she may very well help the organization change for the better. If I believe that employee fulfillment is good for people and for organizations (and I do), then it follows that those organizations who don't see it my way simply need to be enlightened. I don't mean that in a condescending way. But if I, as a manager or a consultant or an author, can help people understand the power of employee fulfillment, it is in itself a reward.

# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Companion Guide

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# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Companion Guide

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# Sample Manager's Booklet

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# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Manager's Booklet

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# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Manager's Booklet

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## Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to help you, as a manager, make your employees' jobs more fulfilling and productive. It is written in a short and straightforward manner because the key to avoiding the Three Signs of a Miserable Job is neither complicated nor terribly time-consuming. More than anything, it requires a little discipline, common sense, and genuine concern for the people you lead.

This booklet is a living document, meaning that after you complete the initial exercises and action plans, it should be used, referred to, and updated regularly. As you know, managing people is an everyday activity of the utmost importance, requiring constant attention and review.

### Instructions:

- » Watch The Three Signs of a Miserable Job Video Presentation with Patrick Lencioni (Optional)
- » Read the Overview of the Model
- » Take the Self-Assessment
- » Complete the Anti-Misery Worksheets
- » Review Next Steps and Frequently Asked Questions

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## Model Overview

Before conducting this program, you need to be familiar with the basic concept that underlies its methodology.

There are three underlying factors which make a job miserable, and they apply to virtually all jobs regardless of the nature of the work being done. They are, at first glance, obvious and seemingly easy to resolve. And yet they remain largely unaddressed by even the most well-meaning managers.



# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job

## Manager's Booklet

### Anonymity

People cannot be fulfilled in their work if they are not known. All human beings need to be understood and appreciated by someone in a position of authority for their unique qualities. As much as this may sound like an aphorism from *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, it is undeniably true. People who see themselves as invisible, generic, or anonymous cannot love their jobs, no matter what they are doing. The person who must know an employee is that person's manager.

### Irrelevance

Everyone needs to know that their job matters to someone. Anyone. If there is no connection between a person's work and the satisfaction of another person or group of people, an employee simply will not find lasting fulfillment. Even the most cynical employee needs to know that his or her work matters to someone, even if it's just the boss. And the person who must help an employee understand how he or she makes a difference is that person's manager.

### Immeasurement

Employees need to be able to gauge their progress and level of contribution for themselves. They cannot be fulfilled in their work if their success depends on the opinions or whims of another person, no matter how benevolent that person may be. Without a tangible means for assessing one's own success or failure, motivation eventually deteriorates as people seem themselves as unable to control their own fate. And once again, the person who must initiate the identification of measurement is an employee's manager.

If all of this sounds relatively simple, even obvious, that's because it is. Nonetheless, it seems that most managers fail to provide their people with these fundamentals of a meaningful job. Why?

Maybe because it is *too* obvious. Well-educated people often have a hard time getting their hands around simple solutions. Perhaps the 18<sup>th</sup> century author Samuel Johnson is right, and they just need to be reminded a lot. Or maybe they're just not sure about how to get started.

## Self-Assessment

This assessment is designed to help you identify your susceptibility to the Three Signs of a Miserable Job. The more you understand yourself and the Three Signs, the more you can do to ensure your success and that of your employees.

Using your "top of mind" response, please use the following scale to indicate how each statement applies to you. Keep in mind that the following assessment is more qualitative than quantitative and is intended to be a simple indicator of the relative satisfaction of your employees.

- 1 - Disagree
- 2 - Hard to say
- 3 - Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I am aware of the individual aspirations of my employees.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. My employees know how their jobs make a difference in the lives of others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I have an objective, measurable way of assessing the success of my employees.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. My employees receive regular feedback about the effectiveness of their work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. My employees regularly discuss their personal lives with me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. My employees understand the importance of their work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. My employees know how their work contributes to the success of the larger organization.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I know my employees' interests outside of work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. My employees know how they're doing on a given day or week.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. In the course of their work, my employees know whose lives they impact.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I know the big things that are going on in the personal lives of my employees.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. My employees know how to measure their own success on the job.

# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job

## Manager's Booklet

### Scoring

Combine your scores for the 12 statements as indicated below.

Anonymity		Irrelevance		Immeasurement	
Statement 1:	_____	Statement 2:	_____	Statement 3:	_____
Statement 5:	_____	Statement 6:	_____	Statement 4:	_____
Statement 8:	_____	Statement 7:	_____	Statement 9:	_____
Statement 11:	_____	Statement 10:	_____	Statement 12:	_____
<b>Total:</b>	_____	<b>Total:</b>	_____	<b>Total:</b>	_____

- » A score of 10-12 is a probable indication that this particular Sign is not a problem for you.
- » A score of 7-9 indicates that this particular Sign could be a problem.
- » A score of 4-6 is an indication that this particular Sign needs to be addressed.

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## Anti-Misery Worksheet Instructions

Now that you have a general sense of your susceptibility to the Three Signs, the next step is to consider each one of your employees.

The pages that follow are worksheets for you to complete for each of your direct reports. They are designed to help you collect information and make plans for eliminating the Three Signs from their work lives.

Please complete the team profile to get an overall snapshot and then complete the Anti-Misery worksheet for each employee. The questions below are written to provoke your thinking so that you can more easily and effectively complete the employee worksheets.

### Anonymity

- » Do you know what your employees like to do away from work?
- » Do you know what is happening in their families?
- » Are you aware of their aspirations?
- » Do you know about their educational and work history prior to working for you?
- » Do you know what skills and interests they have that are unrelated to work?

### Irrelevance

- » Do you have a sense of how your employees impact the lives of others (customers, colleagues, vendors, etc.) in some way, large or small?
- » Who would suffer if your employees didn't perform well in their jobs? If their jobs didn't exist?
- » How do your employees' jobs contribute to the overall mission of the organization?
- » How would an improvement in your employees' performance impact individuals inside or outside the organization, or the organization as a whole?

### Immeasurement

- » Do you have an objective means for assessing the performance or contribution of your employees? What is it?
- » Can your employees objectively assess their performance or contribution for themselves?
- » On a given day or week, would they be able to confidently report how well they are performing?
- » What observable behaviors or results could your employees measure that would provide them with an indication of their success, especially in how they impact others?
- » What indicators exist to inform employees of their impact or success?

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## Team Profile

The purpose of this form is to give you a visual map of your team's profile as it relates to the Three Signs of a Miserable Job.

Taking into account the self-assessment you just completed, assess each of your employees. Please write the names of your employees down the left column. Next, respond to the questions listed below by placing an X along each continuum.

Employee	Anonymity	Irrelevance	Immeasurement
	How well would each employee say that you know them?	How much clarity would your employee say they have about how their job impacts others?	How would the employee answer the following question: Can I assess my own performance on a regular basis?
	Very little      Somewhat      Very well	Very little      Somewhat      Very well	Very little      Somewhat      Very well
_____			
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# Anti-Misery Worksheet

Employee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Notes	Actions/Plan
<p><b>Anonymity</b></p> <p>Employees who aren't known and individually appreciated by their managers will not be fulfilled in their jobs.</p>	<p><i>Use this space to jot down information about your employee.</i></p>	<p><i>Use this space to record your plans for eliminating anonymity from your employee's job. Be specific and include dates for completion.</i></p>
<p><b>Irrelevance</b></p> <p>Employees who don't know how their work impacts the lives of others will not be fulfilled in their jobs.</p>	<p><i>Use this space to write down thoughts about how your employee impacts others in his/her job.</i></p>	<p><i>Use this space to record your plans for eliminating irrelevance from your employee's job. Be specific and include dates for completion.</i></p>
<p><b>Immeasurement</b></p> <p>Employees who can't assess their own level of performance and success will not be fulfilled in their jobs.</p>	<p><i>Use this space to write down ideas about how your employee can assess or measure his/her contribution or performance.</i></p>	<p><i>Use this space to record your plans for eliminating immeasurement from your employee's job. Be specific and include dates for completion.</i></p>

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## Next Steps

To sustain behavioral change on the job, make learning a process, not an event. Below is a general outline of the steps that you should be prepared to take. You can use it as is or adapt to meet the needs of your style and/or team.

1. Provide an overview of the model at your next staff meeting.
2. Sit down with each direct report to discuss your commitments and action plans.
3. Keep the Anti-Misery worksheets alive by reviewing them periodically with your direct reports. Consider using them in your ongoing one-on-one meetings with your staff.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the difference between a miserable job and a bad one?

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### What about finding the right career and doing what you're passionate about doing?

Everyone would be better off if they worked in a job that involved passion and career fit. However, that has more to do with avoiding having a bad job. Even people who work in the field of their dreams, and in the company of their dreams, can be miserable if their managers are not helping them avoid the perils of anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurability.

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The answer to this question varies from person to person. However, job misery is something that causes suffering every day, and is probably more fundamental to a person's general satisfaction.

### What about compensation? Why isn't low pay one of the Three Signs?

Being undercompensated, or earning too little money to make ends meet, is a very real problem that cannot be trivialized or dismissed. Regardless of how fulfilled a person feels in a job, if they aren't earning enough money to pay their bills, there is no real hope for job satisfaction.

However, too often people convince themselves that money will compensate (excuse the pun) for the lack of good management. In most cases, this doesn't work. Even extremely-high-paid workers (e.g. professional athletes, senior executives) are often miserable in their jobs because of anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurability. And on the other hand, there are people who are paid relatively little who are extremely fulfilled in their work.

Do they want to make more money? Most likely. But most wouldn't trade a fulfilling job that doesn't pay particularly well for a high paying but miserable one.

### What about autonomy? Shouldn't being micro-managed be one of the Three Signs?

Micro-management can certainly be a painful issue for some employees; however, it often comes down to a matter of personal style and preference. Some managers tend to manage more "closely" than others, and some employees tend to want more specific clarity around their daily priorities.

Regardless of whether a manager's style matches that of an employee, if the manager is avoiding the Three Signs, then dealing with that style difference is going to be much more tolerable. Very few people find a manager who exactly matches the way they like to be managed, but many of those people can still find genuine fulfillment in their jobs.

# The Three Signs of a Miserable Job

## Manager's Booklet

### How does an employee go about influencing a manager to improve in these areas?

This is an important and difficult question, with a few surprisingly simple answers.

First, an employee would be well served to find a way to make his or her manager aware of the Three Signs. Doing this might require a level of tact and dexterity, even courage, but is nonetheless doable and worthwhile. Whether it's an employee sitting down with a manager to talk about what he or she needs, or sending them an "FYI" e-mail about the Three Signs, or sliding a copy of the book under the boss's door anonymously (I like this one best!), there are ways to raise awareness.

However, another way to do it is by turning the tables and helping a manager eliminate the Three Signs in his or her job. It may sound crazy, but employees can take time to get to know a manager, as a person. They can remind the manager how he or she makes a difference in their lives, and in the lives of customers or stakeholders. They can even put in place a measurement system for tracking how often and in what ways they'd like the manager to interact with them to help them in their jobs.

Both of these approaches require a mind-set change for any employee wanting to affect positive change. First, employees must convince themselves that their managers are human beings who really do want to improve. Though it can often seem like a boss has no interest or capacity for improvement, managers are really no different than employees inasmuch as they are usually also employees with their own manager, and they are insecure about not doing their jobs well. Coming to terms with their humanity and desire for improvement, even if they are projecting an air of invulnerability, will help an employee have the courage to help their managers, and themselves.

### What should an employee do if that manager doesn't care about creating a fulfilling job for employees?

If an employee is convinced that a manager has no interest in making work more fulfilling for them, then it's not a bad time to invoke the serenity prayer: "Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

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That is not to say that an employee must simply accept his or her fate and continue to be miserable at work. But rather than bang their heads on a wall trying to change a manager who isn't capable or interested in change, it would be better to polish their resume and look for a job that is more fulfilling.

And remember, there are many, many managers out there who want to make their employees' jobs enjoyable.

## Are some managers just not naturally suited to doing this kind of thing?

Certain managers have personality styles that lend themselves more to talking about and embracing job fulfillment. However, that doesn't necessarily make them better at providing it. The qualities that are most required in a "non-misery-inducing manager" are empathy, integrity, and self-confidence. Managers that are inherently self-centered, deceiving, and insecure have little chance at creating a fulfilling work environment. But again, most people do want to do what is right. I really believe that.

## How can I transform the culture of my organization by helping managers eliminate the Three Signs?

There are two powerful impacts that can be achieved by creating a culture of "non-miserable" management. First, and most obviously, productivity, retention, innovation, and reference-driven recruiting will skyrocket. Employees will work harder, stay longer, find new ways of doing things, and tell their friends about the companies or organizations where they work.

Secondly, managers will experience a liberating sense of daily purpose and satisfaction. They will shift from a Theory X way of thinking (command and control) to a Theory Y approach (employees want to do the right things as long as I put them in a position to do so). This shift transforms how a manager sees his or her job, shedding the negative self-image of being an adversarial task master, and adopting the more gratifying and effective personae of a coach, mentor, and leader.

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### What should I do if I struggle with eliminating one of the signs in particular?

**Anonymity:** Managers who struggle with demonstrating a real interest in their employees and eliminating any sense of anonymity they might have, may need to do one of two things, or both. First, they have to overcome their fear of being politically incorrect. Yes, during interviews managers must be careful about the kinds of personal questions they ask. But that doesn't mean that they should continue in that same vein after an employee comes on board. That doesn't mean all personal topics are suddenly fair game; it means that managers should become human beings, and not the automatons that our legal system requires them to be during the interview process.

Second, managers need to overcome their fear of coming across as insincere. That's not to say that they need to get comfortable being insincere. They just need to realize that it is okay if employees initially suspect that they are being manipulative, and have the courage and wisdom to realize that the truth about their intentions will eventually become clear after they demonstrate consistent, genuine interest in their employees as people.

**Irrelevance:** There are two main obstacles that prevent managers from helping their people discover the importance of their work in the lives of others. First, managers just don't realize how important it is. They assume, incorrectly of course, that employees just want to come to work, leave on time, get their paycheck, and go home and watch TV. The first thing a manager needs to do, then, is realize the importance of relevance.

However, even managers who understand this hesitate to talk to their people about relevance because they fear that it will come across as childish or condescending. This is true even in the most altruistic or helping professions.

For example, nursing managers often feel that they will insult the intelligence of their employees if they remind them about how they are impacting the lives of their patients. They assume that it's already obvious, and on a theoretical level, they are correct. But all human beings need to be reminded, emotionally more than intellectually, about the specific and real difference they are making in the lives of their customers or constituents.

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That requires a level of courage from managers who fear, perhaps as much as anything else, being seen as soft, "un-cool", or patronizing. And yet, in ninety-nine percent of cases, employees delight in being reminded of the importance of their work, and in the knowledge that their manager noticed.

**Immeasurement:** Managers who struggle with helping their people establish observable, objective measures for success often lack creativity in their approach. They revert to obvious metrics, like revenue or sales or volume. And while those may, in some cases, be most appropriate, managers need to think beyond quantitative measures, in order to find more relevant, behavioral, and controllable ways to meaningfully assess performance.

What should a manager do if being a good manager and creating a fulfilling work environment isn't valued in an organization?

Do it anyway. There are two reasons I say this.

First, and most important, helping people become more fulfilled in their work is not a matter of mere pragmatism or practicality. I believe it is a moral obligation, in the same vein as parenting or coaching. When we are responsible for, or play an important role in, another person's financial and psychological well-being, we are obliged to do so in a way that serves them and makes them a better person. If a manager's manager doesn't value that, or if even the CEO doesn't, I continue to believe that an individual should still take it upon his or her self as a manager to do what is right.

And beyond this, when a manager does this in an organization that doesn't value it, he or she may very well help the organization change for the better. If I believe that employee fulfillment is good for people and for organizations (and I do), then it follows that those organizations who don't see it my way simply need to be enlightened. I don't mean that in a condescending way. But if I, as a manager or a consultant or an author, can help people understand the power of employee fulfillment, it is in itself a reward.