

# Job, career or calling

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## Abstract

Our current job market identifies 3 distinct groups when studying an employee's career development goals: the job, the career, or the calling. Every employee fits into one of these categories regardless of age, gender, tenure or skill. Experts have identified an equal 3-way split between said groups, with one-third of employees representing each group.

As employers, it is our job to identify an employee's position in these groupings and engage them accordingly. While some employees will be content to remain within their current grouping, others, if presented with appropriate guidance, can be motivated to progress upward through the groups. Our goal as employers is to help the employee succeed in this mission.

To assist with this mission, a system known as "Job Crafting" can be utilized. Job crafting is the use of an autonomy technique which encourages self-management; this means the employee creates a job description that is personalized to their strengths and interests. This design yields a more engaged employee as well as improved job satisfaction, which in turn potentiates the progression from a job, to a career and finally to a calling.

**Key words:** career development, job crafting, employee engagement, retention

## Defining a Job, Career or Calling

Individuals often experience different career development paths. These paths are often determined by their life goals and what they wish to achieve from their occupation. Some individuals will be content to simply have a "Job". For the sake of this article, those individuals are defined as people looking for an occupation that supplies an adequate salary and benefits for their lifestyle with hours that are conducive to more enjoyable external activities. Some may think of these individuals as "unmotivated" or "underachievers," but this is not true. They are simply motivated to put in their time for equivalent or acceptable amounts of money and benefits with the commitment to their occupation ending there.

Next, we have the individuals who view their occupation as a "Career". These individuals are vested employees who are interested in the "Job" benefits, but are also interested in growing within the employer's business through the ranks or via their own development. They are willing to invest additional time into their education for the enhancement of their skills. These employees are often termed

"ladder climbers" and seek to progress beyond their initial post or skillset and will often push a business forward in its development.

Finally, we are left with the individuals who view their occupation as a "Calling". These individuals are unique in their commitment to a business or occupation. They will often derive a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment through their work. Some would term them "workaholics" as they always seem to be thinking about work or the business. They could easily be defined by the statement, "I am what I do". These employees are often the drivers of a company's vision and their dedicated effort outside of the standard workday has a large impact on practice direction and development. Often, these individuals are owners or managers of the veterinary practice.

It is important that we remember that these definitions can be used in flux and will often change based upon life events, family commitment, and employee feelings about the business they work for. As employees become more engaged or committed to the business's progression, employers will find that they often make a smooth transition UP the development ladder while those employees who disengage will work their way DOWN this ladder. No single step along this ladder is more important than another, and each level of career development is required for a healthy small business. But the more "Career" or "Calling" employees you have within your veterinary workforce, the higher the chance of growth for your business, as it is driven by these employees.

## How can we Drive Career Development?

Career progression can be fostered by an employer. If they can improve employee job satisfaction, engagement, and development there is a greater chance for employers to help their employees progress upward. One of the best ways to foster this is through a system known as "Job Crafting".

Job Crafting is the use of self-management and autonomy techniques to grow employees by encouraging them to engage in and elevate the amount of time they spend at work doing activities that are in the realm of their strengths and interests. By allowing them to center in these areas, employees can effectively change their job description to become more weighted in chosen areas, thereby improving satisfaction, engagement, and productivity. The end goal of this process would allow employees to add a personal touch to their job, which will improve their sense of control over their work causing a fundamental shift that makes them, not you, the primary driver of their happiness at work.

Before we dive deeper into the nuts and bolts of a Job Crafting program, let us look deeper at the “why” behind this technique and what it means for the employer and employee.

### **Why do we Engage in Job Crafting?**

What can we hope to accomplish using this system? By using the Job Crafting system, we hope to empower the “Job” employee to become interested in growing themselves and the business, turning them into “Career” employees. Additionally, this system can help take your vested “Career” employees and make them feel like they are personally engaged with the business turning their “Career” into a “Calling.”

Knowing this, we need to focus in on how we empower, engage, and grow our employees. These 3 metrics are key, as they help reduce employee turnover by up to 59% and improve employee profitability by 21%.<sup>2</sup> By these statistics alone there should be no question as to why an employer should foster or encourage Job Crafting as a primary vector to improve the business given its propensity to empower and engage employees. While a system such as Job Crafting will not develop overnight, (it is a complex and multifactorial transition) an astute employer can begin to set the stage for an easier and more directed career development approach which promises great returns for the employee and business.

Finally, Job Crafting is a great way to gain a competitive advantage. With only 45% of employers seeking to offer strength/talent evaluations or training programs<sup>1</sup>, which are gateway programs for Job Crafting, this is an easy way to stick out as veterinary clinic owners and to attract job-seeking associates. By presenting your employees with this unique opportunity you offer something few in the industry currently offer, which will improve your talent acquisition and retention rate.

### **What do Employees Really want from Job Crafting?**

When employers begin to Job Craft, they must first understand what employees really want. This can be a difficult problem to solve. Generational, gender and personality types will all dictate different results, but a good starting point is to ask ourselves this question, “What does the best vet clinic in the world look like to work for?” We can come up with some great answers and begin to craft the ideal work environment. This simple yet eye-opening exercise can help facilitate the most stuck-in-his/her-own-way employer into a new employee betterment program.

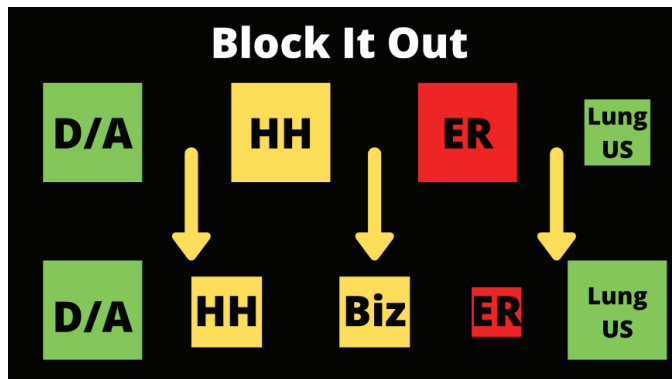
If that exercise did not work for the reader, I encourage employers to investigate Manpower’s 2020 article “Closing the Skills Gap: What Workers Want”.<sup>3</sup> This resource surveyed 14,000 employees over 6 age demographics and found that employees were primarily interested in 5 major categories: more money, challenging work, flexible hours, health insurance, and an opportunity to develop their skills.

Since employers often have less control over categories such as salary offerings, hour flexibility, and health insurance due to business structure, finances or staffing, we will ignore these areas in this paper and instead focus in on the more controllable; challenging work and opportunity to develop categories. This is where Job Crafting really shines. It allows the employee to dictate what work challenges them and where they want to grow rather than you, the employer, determining that for them.

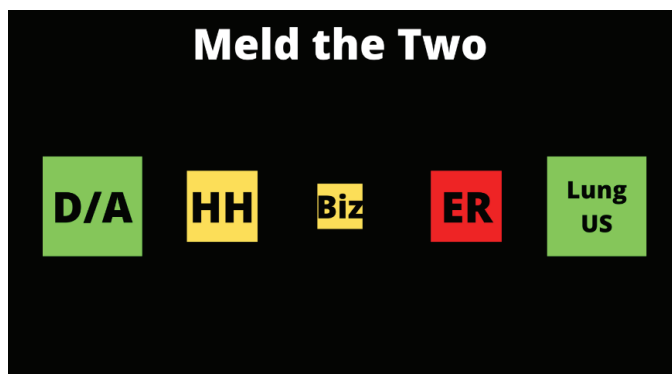
### **So...How do we Job Craft?**

Job Crafting can be a fun and enjoyable link between employee desires and employer needs. Below you will find a 4-step plan for implementing Job Crafting at a clinic. Know that is not the only way to implement Job Crafting, but it is 1 simple method that is accessible to all Job Crafting beginners.

1. The author first recommends the employer and employee use books such as *StrengthsFinder 2.0* or the timeless Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance (DISC) survey to facilitate employees discovering their strengths and pairing them with their interests. We can then begin to pair these strength areas with job elements they enjoy by crafting challenges and educational opportunities that are attuned to these pairings.
2. Second, we want the employee to engage in an activity known as “Block it Out”. This involves them visualizing their job as it is and mapping its elements. Common breakdowns for large animal vets are herd health, surgeries, consulting, specialty or even management type activities. Each of these areas is assigned a square with its size based upon the average amount of time per day it occupies. These blocks are then assigned colors: green for something they enjoy, yellow for a neutral activity, and red for an activity they dislike. Employees are encouraged to be truthful about the current job description and create a Block it Out map for this. Next, they create a Block it Out map for what they would ideally like their job to look like, following the same rules as above. Please see Figure 1 for an example of this activity.
3. Once the employee has created this map they then sit down with the employer and discuss the distributions of interests, time and/or new additions, seeking to meld the 2 areas into a more personalized job description. The end goal is to create value for the client base and clinic through the building up of employee skills and time in these desired areas. You can see an example of a melded map in Figure 2.
4. Now that the employee and employer have merged their needs and desires, the employer needs to support the employee in achieving these ends. It is not enough to discuss these means; instead they



**Figure 1.** This is an example Block It Out exercise. Line #1 contains the current job description with the author dictating green as enjoyable, yellow as okay and red as less desired job activities. The size of the blocks indicated the average time commitment to these activities. Line #2 contains what the employee desires the job description to be.



**Figure 2.** This figure shows what a “Melded” Block It Out map could look like when the actual vs desired descriptions are combined.

must provide mentorship, financial means, time investments, and leeway to learn, stumble and grow. Proper mentorship is key to the facilitation of a Job Crafting plan. Without this guidance employees can become confused, misguided, or simply choose to go their own way despite its potential negative impacts on the business. This means that a formal plan must exist that helps them have a vision for the end result with access to the necessary tools to make it happen and accountability for their progress.

### Conclusion

The ultimate message when Job Crafting is that employers need to remember that employees work for ideals and clients not a business. When was the last time you walked by an employee working late into the day and found they were

doing extra work to make the business an extra \$150? Never! Employees do this to help someone, fix a problem or take on a challenge. Never forget this and be sure to set your employment system up to play into the individual strengths that will allow them to reach for these ideals and help your clients.

Finally, for those of you out there that would say that your boss would never consider these techniques, or that your co-workers do not believe in this professional development material, consider this quote by Paul Arden:

“We all want to be proud of the company we work for. It enhances our reputation, makes us look good, feel good and gives us access to the best people.....But not everybody is fortunate enough to be able to work for the outfit that is currently favored. So, given that not everyone in your company is an idiot, what are you personally going to do to make it company of the year? Start by talking it up. Begin THINKING and BEHAVING like a winner. It will stop the rot. It will temporarily halt negative thinking and a defeatist attitude.....people will soon get the idea...Decide you are going to make the company great; at least decide you are going to make a difference.....You are on your own. Just do it. Better.”

Do not let the naysayers talk you out of career progression. Just because they have stopped at the “Job” career progression level, does not mean it cannot become a career or calling for you. Alternatively, just because they have a calling does not mean you need to achieve that level either. You can grow, develop, and commit to as much career progression as you personally want to in your career progression path; do not wait for someone else to ok your progression. As you seek to develop in your career progression, use Job Crafting to make this process easier and more enjoyable.

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