

# THE QUEST FOR MEANINGFUL WORK

## TIME TO USHER IN A NEW ERA OF LEADERSHIP

PART 2/3



**Christopher Roberts**

MD, ENGAGED STRATEGY

Creator of the *Total Engagement Model*\*

The workforce today has a very interesting mix ranging from Baby Boomers who is on the cusp of retirement to the burgeoning presence of Generation Z, the newest entrants into the professional sphere. This diverse tapestry encapsulates a spectrum of experiences, work philosophies, and aspirations, shaping a multifaceted landscape in today's corporate world.

The desires and aspirations of younger employees have evolved significantly. A major part of the workforce now comprises of Gen Y and Gen Z, who seek work that holds deeper meaning and purpose, resonating profoundly with their values. Compared to their predecessors – the Baby Boomers and Gen X – who typically had a greater requirement for job security and were used to the Command & Control style of leadership, the current newer workforce is more focussed on making a difference. They expect to be respected and recognised for the knowledge that they have and the work that they contribute to. They want to be a part of growth and change within the organisation. This is a clear shift from the typical drivers of security and ego-based achievement of their predecessors. Command & Control leadership doesn't work anymore.

Leadership is thus faced with an imperative challenge—to steer away from traditional structures toward establishing a profound connection with their workforce.



## **Need for a transition to Transcendental Leadership**

Traditional leadership styles, which were once effective, are encountering limitations in this new era. The emergence of transcendental leadership offers a pathway to align with the current workforce. This approach transcends conventional methods by emphasising a profound connection between an individual's daily tasks and the broader purpose of the organization.

Leaders who have embraced this approach serve as guiding lights of change. Brands such as Nordstrom, Singapore Airlines, and notably, Virgin, epitomise the benefits of embedding employee engagement within their organisational discipline and culture.

Virgin, for instance, stands out for its innate ability to challenge the status quo. Its philosophy revolves around entering industries entrenched in complacency and reshaping them. This aspect holds a distinctive appeal for employees seeking a deeper purpose beyond their job roles. At Virgin, the purpose isn't just about selling a product or service; it's about redefining norms, disrupting markets, and creating genuine change. This resonance with a higher calling attracts individuals who are driven by the notion of making a meaningful impact.

Singapore Airlines, popular for its impeccable service, invests extensively in employee training and empowerment. Its staff understands their role in creating an exceptional travel experience, fostering a culture of commitment and excellence.

Likewise, Zappos, the online shoe retailer, exemplifies a culture where employees go beyond selling products; they aim to provide unique and delightful experiences for their customers. This dedication emanates from aligning employees' values with the company's mission, creating an engaged workforce that thrives on delivering exceptional service.



## **Practical Implications of Transcendental Leadership**

Transcendental leadership isn't an abstract concept—it's a practical approach to nurturing meaningful connections within the workplace. This approach encourages leaders to embrace higher-order goals, fostering innovation, boosting morale, and driving retention rates. By transcending traditional strategies, leaders can profoundly impact employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment.

Leaders seeking to transition to this transformative approach can take practical steps. Aligning leadership styles with higher-order goals involves redefining success metrics and adopting strategies that promote purpose-driven work environments. It requires creating pathways for personal and professional growth that resonate with the intrinsic values of employees.

Numerous case studies spotlight the triumphs of organisations that have embraced transcendental leadership. These stories illustrate specific actions and initiatives that propelled their success. By delineating the tangible benefits in terms of employee commitment and business outcomes, these case studies offer a blueprint for aspiring leaders.





## The Body Shop

The Body Shop, a global beauty brand, is popular for its commitment to social and environmental causes and its ethical approach to business. Its success in engaging its employees stems from its practice of strong ethical values and purpose-driven mission. The company empowers its employees by involving them in its social and environmental campaigns. Employees are encouraged to contribute to causes they are passionate about, such as environmental sustainability and community engagement.

This involvement not only creates a sense of purpose among employees, but also aligns their personal values with the company's mission. The Body Shop's commitment to empowering employees and advocating for social causes results in a highly engaged workforce, driving the brand's success and positive reputation.

## Southwest Airlines

Southwest Airlines is an American airline known for its unique corporate culture and dedication to customer service; but more importantly, it is popular for its commitment to its employees.

Southwest Airlines stands out for its employee-centric culture, fostering a strong sense of ownership and camaraderie among its workforce. The airline's employee engagement strategy revolves around trust, mutual respect, and empowering employees to take ownership of their roles. Employees are encouraged to bring their authentic selves to work and are given significant autonomy to make decisions that benefit customers.

This level of trust and empowerment translates into exceptional customer service, high employee morale, and industry-leading employee retention rates. Southwest's emphasis on employee engagement has been a key factor in its success and positive brand image within the highly competitive airline industry.





## Nordstrom

Nordstrom is an American luxury department store chain and is recognised for its exceptional customer service and employee empowerment.

Nordstrom's success in customer service is attributed to its commitment to employee empowerment and a customer-first approach. The company instills a culture where employees are given significant autonomy to make decisions in the interest of customer satisfaction. Employees are encouraged to personalise customer experiences, leading to loyal customers and positive word-of-mouth.

Nordstrom's engagement strategies, including a focus on training, empowerment, and recognition, contribute significantly to its success and competitive edge in the retail sector.

From redefining job roles to igniting a cultural shift, these organisations underscore the practical implications of transcending traditional leadership paradigms. They showcase how a direct and profound connection between an employee's work and the greater organisational purpose can yield remarkable results.

The quest for meaningful work is a call to reimagine leadership in a way that transcends the traditional paradigms. Embracing a transcendental approach aligns with the changing aspirations of the modern workforce, fostering a work environment that instils purpose, fuels motivation, and cultivates unwavering commitment. Remember that all roads lead to leadership in an organisation. So, if you want your staff to be fully present mentally and emotionally, and completely invested in their job, you need to make sure that as the leadership you are completed invested in engaging your employees.

In the final part of this three-part series, I will delve further into addressing the disruptive phenomenon of "**Quiet Quitting**" by exploring hygiene versus higher-order measures within organisations.