

7 Job Crafting

IN THE DAYS immediately following the birth of Bryan's third son, he and his wife, Amy, encountered one of their favorite people at Poudre Valley Hospital. She was a member of the custodial staff. Her name was Maggie; she was a middle-aged Latina whose job it was to empty the trash, clean and restock the sink area, wipe down surfaces, and mop the floor, among other such duties. They barely noticed that she was doing these things, although she was effective, leaving her area immaculate in her wake. Instead, it seemed to Bryan and Amy that her job was to dote on their new baby, to share openly in their joy, and to express genuine empathy when talking with Amy about her lingering pain from childbirth. Her cheer was infectious, and she had a way of making them feel like her visit to their room was the single most important event of her day. She obviously had a passion for her job, despite the fact that housekeeping is near the bottom of the prestige hierarchy at the hospital—as it is within most any organization. No matter to Maggie. “My coworkers are constantly giving me applications for translator positions at the hospital,” she said, “because I speak English and Spanish equally well. But they don’t realize how much I love the job I have now.”

Born to migrant farm workers (her dad from Texas, her mom from Mexico) in a car (!) in Wyoming, Maggie Garza, now sixty-two, has lived most of her life in Fort Collins, Colorado. After dropping out of high school (“the worst decision of my life,” she says), she

worked for a laundry service and later as a day care provider. For the last fifteen years, however, she has worked as an environmental tech for the hospital. “They call it that to make it sound important,” she said. “We just say we work in housekeeping.”

Can a housekeeping job be a calling? “For me it is,” said Maggie without hesitation. “I believe God put me here for a reason.” Ask Maggie for her job description, she’ll tell you: prepare her cart; clean the utility rooms; check which patient rooms are occupied and go to each one, knock on the door before entering, then clean the sinks, tables, restrooms, and floors; take out the trash and replace the trash liners; evaluate whether the walls need to be wiped down; if they do, wipe them down.

Ask Maggie to simply describe what she does, though, and you get a different answer. She cleans, sure—and does so well. But she also checks in with patients, assesses their needs, expresses concern and care, and assists them where she can. She talks with them, gets to know them, and helps them feel more at ease. Other hospital staff members notice this. Sometimes pediatric nurses call Maggie into a room to help soothe a frightened child or calm a patient who is acting out. Consider this story: “There was a kid who the nurses were having trouble with. They called me over and said, ‘Maggie, maybe you can break the ice.’ So I went in, and to get his attention I started crawling underneath the bed, from one side to the other. Another nurse came in and saw me down there, and thought I fell or something. ‘Oh Maggie, are you alright?’ she kind of yelled. She really kind of ruined it, because I was crawling to the other side to surprise the boy and make him laugh.”

That story illustrates how Maggie approaches her job. She makes silly faces at children to coax a smile. Sometimes she dances around the room while she cleans and meows quietly like a kitten, invariably causing her child patients (indeed, she sees them as *her* patients) to roar with laughter. Their parents, often swimming in

stress and concern, see this and laugh right along with their kids. It helps take the edge off. Maggie also provides words of encouragement, and she prays for patients in rooms where she cleans. As an environmental tech, Maggie could say her job is fundamentally about cleaning rooms. Technically, she would be correct. For her, though, the job is much more than that. It's ultimately about keeping hurting people comfortable, relaxed, cared for, satisfied. "I like to converse with people, see what they need, and see how I can help them," she said. "It makes them feel good. It makes me feel good, too."

One myth we attack whenever we can is that only specific types of people, within specific types of occupations, can experience their work as a calling. Although we readily acknowledge that far too many workers toil in job situations in which a sense of calling is thwarted, sabotaged, and otherwise blocked from nearly every angle, we contend that most people have more potential than they realize to transform their current work into a calling. The previous chapter focused on the question of how a person might discern a calling during the process of choosing or changing a career—both privileges that are not extended to some workers, who may have limited career options from the start, and who are inclined to cling to a job they may not like because an unpleasant job is better than no job. Others may dream of jobs other than the one they hold, but due to geographic constraints, family responsibilities, aversion to risk, or any number of other factors, do not see alternative career paths as viable. This chapter addresses the challenge of cultivating a calling in the context of one's current job, when a career change may be impossible, impractical, or for whatever other reason simply not on the table. People can take a range of approaches to cull a stronger sense of calling from their jobs. Perhaps the most promising approach—the one we focus on in this chapter—is engaging in a process known as job crafting.

Job Crafting and Calling

The concept of job crafting was formally introduced to workplace scholars in 2001 by management professors Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton, who argued the basic premise that “work tasks and interactions that compose the days, the jobs, and, ultimately, the lives of employees are the raw materials employees use to construct their jobs. . . . Job boundaries, the meaning of work, and work identities are not fully determined by formal job requirements. Individuals have latitude to define and enact the job, acting as ‘job crafters.’”¹ Stated most simply, *job crafting* refers to those things that workers do to elicit a stronger sense of purpose, meaning, engagement, resilience, and thriving from their jobs. In crafting their work, employees might change their work tasks; branch out into alternative work activities; build stronger relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and customers; and reenvision the very purpose of what they do all day. Such strategies ultimately lead to changes in the design of a job, the social environment, or the job-crafter’s perspective—and research so far seems to suggest that it works. Scholars have found that workers across a variety of occupations (e.g., managers, teachers, salespersons) who implement job crafting strategies become more engaged, satisfied, and productive at work.² Can job crafting transform one’s work into a calling? The only study of which we are aware that begins to answer this question suggests that the answer is probably yes. Based on in-depth interviews of thirty-one employees who had “unanswered callings” (that is, one or more callings not satisfied by their current job), Justin Berg and colleagues found that workers were more likely to experience the satisfaction and meaning that is usually associated with “answered callings” in their current jobs when they used job crafting strategies.³ In short, job crafting, even in jobs that are not ideal, can help evoke the same psychological outcomes that typically accompany living out a calling.

As in most other aspects of life, chronically dissatisfying circumstances at work are hard to just accept and live with; when we're deeply unhappy, we want to make changes. People are motivated to craft their jobs when they want more control over their work, when they feel isolated and want a closer connection with others, and when they want to experience a greater sense of purpose and meaning. When people are successful at job crafting, they feel more engaged, satisfied, and content—the results of effectively implementing one or more of three crafting strategies. The first, *task crafting*, focuses on redesigning the job itself, changing the array of tasks in which the worker engages while still tending to the responsibilities for which she or he is held accountable. The second, *relational crafting*, targets the social environment and seeks ways to expand and improve the worker's relationships at work. The third, *cognitive crafting*, centers on developing new, more enriching understandings of the very purpose of the work. We explore each of these strategies in turn.

Task Crafting

For most people, task crafting is probably the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about job-crafting activities. In almost any job, workers have formal responsibilities, a specific set of tasks laid out in their job description that they are required to complete. Sometimes the tasks for which a person is responsible feel like a mismatch with that person's gifts—one's interests, abilities, values, and personality. Task crafting refers to the process of altering those responsibilities to better align them with the unique features of one's work personality. This change usually occurs by adjusting how tasks are completed, attempting to add new tasks or remove others, and potentially allocating one's time or energy for tasks in a different way.⁴ How one goes about task crafting, of course, depends on the amount of freedom or power a person has to change

the tasks while still performing the essential requirements of the job well.

Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton conducted a landmark study designed to provide a window into the motives, strategies, challenges, and outcomes of job crafting.⁵ They interviewed thirty-three employees, twenty of whom were employed at a for-profit manufacturing firm and thirteen of whom worked for a nonprofit political agency. From employees' responses to their questions, two types of task crafting emerged: one that focused on altering the scope or nature of tasks and one that concentrated on adding new and different tasks. Employees who used the altering strategy adjusted their approach to carrying out their required tasks, approaching the same activity in a novel way or directing more attention to those components of an activity that they find most engaging. "I really enjoy online tools and Internet things," reported one of the study's participants. "So I've really tailored that aspect of the written job description, and really 'upped' it, because I enjoy it. I spend hours exploring what else we're paying for with this service. So it gives me an opportunity to play around and explore with tools and web applications, and I get to learn, which is one of my favorite things to do."⁶ This employee identified a specific portion of her job that struck a chord with her, and she devised ways to spend more time and energy on those tasks. Doing so allowed her to use her strengths more effectively, to satisfy her interests and values more directly, and to simply be herself to a greater extent on the job—all of which are characteristic of people living out their callings. If she is able to maintain this focus while also fulfilling the other duties her job requires, her employer will be at least as happy with her as she is with her job.

Adding tasks quite literally involves supplementing the tasks a person is required to carry out with additional tasks that a person especially enjoys or values. For example, another employee from the nonprofit organization stated, "We have an annual luncheon,

and I have become the person who runs the registration table. It would normally be something that a coordinator would do and was before I got here . . . but I've taken it on myself because I'm good at it and like the challenge and like being able to control it. I could have just as easily set it up, and removed myself, but instead, I stay much more actively involved.⁷ This employee obviously doesn't *have* to do this task, but chooses to do it because of what the task offers her: a chance to use her strengths and satisfy her needs for challenge, control, and mastery. By running the registration table, she is actively improving the extent to which her job fits with her gifts.

Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton's study highlights two key points. The first is that task crafting allows your job to be what you make of it. All of us have a set list of tasks we have to carry out to stay employed, at least some of which probably feel like they have little to do with our calling. Even those living out their callings can acknowledge that no job is perfect; virtually everyone has to put up with demands for completing tasks they really can't stand in order to support the parts of the job they love. Nevertheless, to the extent that external constraints allow, people in most any job can potentially accentuate certain tasks (like learning about new web tools and applications) or add in other tasks that are not required (like running a registration table) to help bring their jobs into closer alignment with their callings. The second point is that accentuating or adding tasks into your current job is almost always surprisingly easy. It is probably natural to assume that adapting one's work tasks means an entire overhaul of the job, and for most of us, such drastic and comprehensive change is impossible. In actual practice, though, effective task crafting targets the little things, like a restaurant server or cashier spending a bit more time talking to each customer, a teacher shifting more of his energy to individual instruction as opposed to class lecture, or a counselor deciding to run a grief therapy group once a week on top of her individual clients. Whereas task altering can turn one's job from a fruitcake to

carrot cake, task adding can serve as the icing on the cake. Either way, the cake tastes better.

Relational Crafting

In their influential article “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary discuss the ingrained desire that humans have to socialize with each other, likely due to the benefits people reap when they are in relationships.⁸ As we explored in chapter 5, any person living in society by definition relies on the contributions of others to survive, and those who engage with others in consistently positive ways experience a wealth of psychological benefits. This statement is as true in the workplace as in any other sphere of life. Establishing stronger, more positive connections with others around you at work will generate a greater degree of meaning and on-the-job happiness. Positive relationships at work also create more opportunities to engage in prosocial behaviors, a critical component of calling. Like task crafting, relational crafting entails both altering the nature or quality of one’s relationships and creating new ones.

As we settled into our roles as professors at large research universities, both of us were a little surprised by the level of isolation that can easily come with an academic lifestyle. Despite what may be a common perception, we don’t enjoy buffet lunches in a faculty dining room, and friendly philosophical debate over drinks at happy hour is a rare occurrence. Given the importance our universities place on maintaining productive, independent programs of research, during some weeks our computer screens get more face time than all of our coworkers and students combined. For Ryan especially, the dynamics of his department reinforce a fairly solitary existence. After his first two years struggling with this real-

ity, Ryan (who happens to be highly extroverted) had reached a tipping point: Should he just accept the system as it is and check out, or would it be worth the effort to craft a stronger relational experience? Fortunately, at the same time Ryan hit this point, a colleague down the hall was reaching his own tipping point: after three decades in the department, he had informed the university that within the next five years he would retire.

Though he and Ryan had never talked that much, he openly shared with Ryan his feelings of sadness about putting an end date on his academic career and pondered how he would be remembered once he left, especially considering how little anyone talked to each other around the department. The two of them quickly formed a bond over their shared angst about the everyone-is-an-island departmental culture. Ryan decided to ask, “What would you say to grabbing lunch every couple of weeks or so?” Their biweekly lunch meeting continues today, providing both of them with a chance to share in the ups and downs of their respective professional careers, naturally often spilling into their personal lives, too. This kind of relational crafting is obviously very easy, and for Ryan, it has provided an enormous return on the very minimal investment of time and energy the lunches require.

Improving the interpersonal climate of the workplace is one important outcome of relational crafting, but not the only one. Another participant in the study by Berg and colleagues, a customer service representative, established relationships with coworkers who could teach her new skills and knowledge that enhanced her ability to do her job well. “I have taken initiative to form relationships with some of the folks who fulfill orders,” she explained. “That’s not my area, but I was really interested in how that worked and wanted to . . . learn. . . . I have learned a lot from them, and that’s helped me in my job. I know more about how the ordering process goes so now I can explain it up front to customers.”

Of course, effective relational crafting does not always require expanding one's social network or investing more in already-existing relationships. Sometimes *decreasing* relational involvement in strategic ways can have a positive effect. A senior manager in Berg and colleagues' study provided an example: "I've tried to limit some interaction with my supervisor because sometimes she wants a really high level of . . . kind of pre-work. For example, we've had meetings before where it was literally . . . like a two- or three-hour meeting for something that I think we could have discussed really in a half an hour. . . . I enjoy working with her overall and we can have fun together, but there are certain types of interactions that I try to limit. Like for instance, sometimes if it's a meeting that I know could be much shorter, and I know it will go longer, I may schedule another meeting like an hour after that meeting starts so that we have to finish it up."⁹ People are able to more consistently sustain their callings when they can alter relationships in both directions where appropriate, increasing positive interactions and decreasing negative interactions. The goal, obviously, is to maximize the overall quantity and quality of positive interactions they have with others at work.

Cognitive Crafting

The third form of crafting is cognitive crafting. Cognitive crafting involves redefining one's perception of the kinds of tasks or relationships involved in one's job, or of the extent to which one's job is meaningful. At its core, this type of crafting involves a change in the way a person thinks about the job, regardless of whether any change takes place in the job itself. In its most basic form, cognitive crafting involves a simple attitude adjustment in which a worker adopts new and improved ways of thinking about the job's nature, purpose, and impact. This strategy has some key advantages, particularly for individuals in highly structured jobs (e.g.,

production worker, toll booth collector, truck driver) who may have little latitude for proactively changing their required tasks or their workplace relationships. Before we explore this further, consider a few examples of cognitive crafting from the participants in Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton's job crafting study.

One brand manager talked about how she defines the tasks she is responsible for carrying out on the job: "I'm . . . passionate about beauty. I love it . . . because in marketing, you can try to influence the way people think about beauty. You can have people think about it differently, because there's more than one standard of beauty. For example, I might ask, 'Well, is that all that's beautiful or are there some other images that we can think of that are beautiful?' . . . I see it as a chance to change the way people think about beauty."¹⁰ We are willing to bet that this brand manager's contract says nothing about changing the way people think about beauty. Yet for her, all the effort she devotes to creating logos and ads, and designing marketing campaigns, is fundamentally about influencing what people see as beautiful. Another customer service representative stated, "I'm passionate about . . . just doing a good job and doing my job well and going above and beyond what basic thing that I can do, not just giving an average phone call, going above and treating the customer well. . . . Technically, [my job is] putting in orders, entering orders, but really I see it as providing our customers with an enjoyable experience, a positive experience, which is a lot more meaningful to me than entering numbers."¹¹ Here again, the job description focuses on one set of responsibilities—handling phone calls with customers and entering orders—but she sees those tasks only as means to a more important and meaningful end: providing customers with a positive, even enjoyable experience.

Think for a moment about these two employees. Who do you think experiences work as more meaningful, the brand manager who thinks of her work responsibilities as a pathway for promoting beauty, or a brand manager who focuses solely on accomplishing

what is spelled out in the job description? The customer care representative who thinks of her work as a way to give customers a pleasant experience, or the representative who focuses exclusively on filling her weekly quota of answered phone calls and completed orders? Now think about this from the perspective of an employer. Which employees from among these pairs would you prefer to have working for you?

Whether redefining a particular task or redefining what is meaningful about a job altogether, these strategies can help people alter the perception of what they do at work. Such alteration is probably most powerful when it helps workers view their jobs as more meaningful, more prosocially oriented, or both. Because these components tie directly into a calling, crafting one's job to have these components is critical.

Remember Maggie Garza? Maggie is a shining example of all three types of job crafting. While engaging in the essential duties of the job, which center around cleaning and sanitizing, Maggie adds other tasks, such as asking patients if they need anything and then finding a nurse, a meal menu, the TV remote, or whatever else they require. She expands the relational boundaries of her job description by interacting meaningfully with patients and their families—encouraging them, joking with them, making them feel welcome and cared for. She also thinks of her job as consisting of far more than the discrete tasks that technically define it; for her, the job is about providing high-quality care to sick and suffering children. Maggie's approach to her job also conforms to what Jane Dutton and colleagues found in their interview study of twenty-eight members of a hospital cleaning staff.¹² An analysis of the interview data revealed two groups of employees. One focused rigidly on the job requirements as described; they punched in, punched out, did the minimum number of tasks necessary in between, and limited their interactions with others as much as they could. This group disliked cleaning, described the skill level of the job as low, and were

generally unwilling to do anything outside of what was articulated in the job description. The other group consisted of cleaners who adopted an approach like Maggie's. They took on additional work tasks; freely conversed with patients, visitors, and medical staff; and planned their days in ways that made the whole system work more smoothly (e.g., by timing their regular duties in ways that made the work flow maximally efficient). They considered their role as critical in advancing the broader goal of healing patients. Here again: Which group do you think derived more meaning from their jobs? Which group would you want working in your hospital?

How to Craft Your Job

Are you ready to give job crafting a try? You've seen the advantages of crafting the tasks, relationships, and cognitive appraisals of a job. Crafting may seem very appealing and (deceptively) simple. Still, we advise you to prepare yourself before you jump in. The most important component of job crafting is, without a doubt, your mind set.¹³ Embarking on the job-crafting path with skepticism and half-hearted reluctance is likely to sabotage its effectiveness and leave you more discouraged than before you started. Believe that your job is not set in stone but is malleable enough to be changed through your own efforts. Be on the lookout for opportunities to engage in crafting, and be willing to experiment and make at least small changes to your normal work routine. Then prepare yourself to be persistent and patient, seeking small wins that will accumulate and result in bigger changes in due time.

The job crafting pioneers—Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski—developed the Job Crafting Exercise, a tool designed to help workers identify and plan ways to put into practice some of the strategies they have uncovered through their research. Readers interested in completing Berg and colleagues' formal exercise, which we strongly recommend, can purchase the materials at www.jobcrafting.org.

Below, we summarize a more informal approach, a teaser of sorts that we've adapted to help you begin exploring opportunities for crafting your current job.

Outline Your Job Tasks

To begin, take inventory of the tasks for which you are responsible in your current job. In a journal or on a separate sheet of paper, write “Current Job” on the top of one page, and create three columns, labeled “Low,” “Medium,” and “High.” Under each of these columns, create lists of the various tasks you are required to carry out in a typical workday, organized according to the level of time and energy they require. In the Low column, list five or six of those little things that don’t take much effort; in the High column, list the major tasks that require a considerable amount of effort; and list the in-between tasks in the Medium column. As an example, if you are an elementary school teacher, you might list “arranging desks and chairs” in the Low column, “developing a lesson plan” in the High column, and “teaching that lesson” in the Medium column. Try to list five or six tasks under each column, although obviously the number of different tasks depends on the job. When you’ve finished, take a moment to evaluate the chart. Does this look like your typical workday?

Outline Your Gifts

On the top of a second sheet of paper, write “Gifts.” We’ve used the term “gifts” broadly, to describe interests, abilities, personality, and work-related values. We broaden the term further here to include the three personal characteristics that are the focus for Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski: motives, strengths, and passions. Under “Gifts,” create three more columns, this time using “Motives,” “Strengths,” and “Passions” as the column headings. In the Motives

column, create a list of five or so specific outcomes you hope to attain by working in your current job—things like financial security, happiness, meaningful relationships, or making a difference. In the Strengths column, write down lists of strengths that you can apply in some way to your job. [Refer back to the “you at your best” exercise in chapter 4 (pp. 78–79), if that helps.] Examples include making connections with people, computer programming, problem solving, mediation, and public speaking. Finally, in the Passions column, create a list of your strongest areas of passion—those things in which you are most interested or that you most value—that apply in some way to your current job. Examples might include helping people learn, mentoring, creating order out of chaos, persuading people, or being creative.

Integrate Tasks and Gifts

For the third step of the exercise, write “New and Improved” on the top of a third sheet of paper. Your goal now is to combine your job tasks with your gifts in a way that reflects how you most want to use your motives, strengths, and passions in your job. To accomplish this, begin by creating the same three columns you have on the Current Job sheet—“Low,” “Medium,” and “High.” Then transfer the tasks from the Current Job sheet onto the New and Improved sheet, but this time put them in the column that reflects how much time and energy you *wish* you were devoting to each task. For instance, if talking with parents about their children was in your Low column before, but you would like it to be a bigger part of your job going forward, write it in the Medium or even High column this time. Strive to be both ambitious and realistic as you do this. If developing lesson plans simply takes an enormous amount of time for you right now, it won’t make sense to write it in the Low column. However, by adjusting your strategy (e.g., adopting a higher-quality curriculum with excellent preplanned lessons, identifying and revising your

favorite plans from among those you've used before), your planning efforts could become efficient enough to warrant its placement in the Medium column.

While reorganizing your job tasks to reflect your preferences, you will probably notice some themes emerging. Circle clusters of tasks that illustrate those themes, and give each theme a name. For example, classroom instruction and tutoring students one-on-one might be grouped under a "Directly Helping Students Learn" theme; creating lesson plans, meeting with parents, and consulting with other teachers might be grouped under the theme "Behind-the-Scenes Student Support." Try to identify at least three themes.

Once you have transferred your tasks onto your New and Improved sheet in a way that reflects your ideal job, start incorporating your gifts. Focus on the themes that emerged from your task list. Look back to your Gifts sheet (where you listed your motives, strengths, and passions), identify the gifts that support those themes, and write them near each other on the New and Improved sheet. For example, your motive of wanting meaningful relationships might map well onto the overall theme of Behind-the-Scenes Student Support, which includes the tasks requiring you to interact with parents and other teachers with whom you could foster mutually supportive working relationships. Similarly, your strength in problem solving and your passion of helping people learn would fit well with the theme of Directly Helping Students Learn. Keep in mind that the same motive, strength, or passion may support more than one theme; do not hesitate to use them more than once. When you complete this process, you have a visual representation of what your job could become. This visual representation, ideally, also converges well with what you understand to be your calling.

Take Action

The final stage of this process is to develop an action plan for making your hypothetical New and Improved job more of a reality. Task

crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting come into play at this point. You don't have to do this on your own. We suggest inviting a counselor, one or more members of the personal board of directors we invited you to name in chapter 4, a trusted colleague, or your supervisor (if you feel safe in doing so) to look over your New and Improved sheet and help you brainstorm some realistic approaches for crafting your job in ways that bring it into closer alignment with your calling.

After identifying specific job crafting opportunities, however small, make a commitment to engage in at least three of these behaviors per day for a trial period of at least a week. Write about these behaviors in a daily diary, evaluate your effectiveness in executing them, record their consequences, and check in with your counselor, friend, coworker, or supervisor about your progress. Challenge yourself to take some calculated risks, stir the pot, and change the status quo, because the very nature of job crafting *requires* you to do something different in your work tasks, your relationships at work, or the way you think about your job. This can be a scary proposition for anyone, even (and perhaps especially) people who are highly dissatisfied with their jobs. Developing the necessary level of commitment, attention to possible opportunities, and willingness to take the risk of trying out these strategies may be the most challenging step in the job-crafting process, especially for those who are naturally risk averse. If this applies to you, don't worry. Your initial experiments with job crafting do not, and probably should not, involve big changes or jumps. Rather, experts in job crafting suggest that small steps are the best way to start, because small steps result in small successes, which accumulate and become larger successes. As this process moves on, you'll feel encouraged to take slightly larger calculated risks later.

One last piece of advice for the potential job crafter. Properly choosing the types of job-crafting activities in which you might engage will almost certainly influence your level of success with these activities. For this reason, we urge you to remember your

gifts, and choose crafting strategies that align closely with your motives, strengths, and passions. If you are a mechanic with a passion for German imports and strengths in creative problem solving, consider crafting opportunities that capitalize on those gifts, such as working with your shop's boss to design a marketing strategy intended to bring in more Volkswagens and BMWs. If you have strong interpersonal skills and value positive relationships, focus on strategies that strengthen your network of relationships at work, such as organizing a monthly happy hour, lobbying management for funds to celebrate birthdays with a cake at lunchtime, or garnering support for a workplace mentoring program. The bottom line is that aligning crafting activities with the unique features of your profile of gifts will, in time, turn the job you have into more of the job you want, one that resembles your New and Improved sheet, and ultimately, your calling.

A Job Is Like a Marriage

To better imagine how successful job crafting might unfold, think of a job as similar to a marriage. For more than fifty years, researchers have studied how happy people are in marriage and how their level of happiness changes over the course of the marriage. Results from these studies are not particularly encouraging: on average, the longer people are married, the more unhappy they tend to be with the marriage.¹⁴ This conclusion seems like a real downer, but buried in this research is another finding to consider. Although on average, people who are married become less happy in their marriage over time, a subset of people stay consistently happy or grow even happier as the marriage endures. What do these people have in common? The common thread is that, one way or another, they have learned that being happy in marriage is not just about marrying the right person, it is about working really hard as the marriage goes on to build and maintain happiness. They focus on

learning to communicate better, to spend quality time with each other regularly, to learn more and more about each other, and to stay enmeshed in each other's lives. They are active and vigilant about addressing and readdressing the strengths and weaknesses of their marriage over time.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of how commitment, hard work, and persistence translates into happiness comes from research on couples in arranged marriages, still practiced in some cultures in South and East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. According to a *Scientific American* article by Robert Epstein, couples in arranged marriages often report that their level of happiness has increased over time, the opposite of what is found for most couples in "love marriages."¹⁵ Epstein speculates that couples in arranged marriages focus less on maintaining happiness and more on building it, and therefore work harder at investing in the relationship in ways that lead to long-term happiness. If you find yourself in a work environment that wouldn't have been your first choice, or that ends up seeming less perfect than you assumed it would be—as is inevitably the case in a marriage—you can choose to stick with it and be miserable, to give up on it and leave in the hope that the next job will be the right one, or to work hard at improving the fit, adapting to it, making it work. Job crafting helps you carry out this last option.



Viewing your job as a calling is likely influenced by a combination of factors that may include a transcendent summons perceived either directly or indirectly through that job's degree of fit with your gifts, as well as the extent to which that job provides a strong sense of purpose, meaningfulness, and a means of contributing to the greater good. This chapter has focused on the challenge of turning an existing job into a calling by improving its fit with what you

perceive to be your calling. Task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting individually and together offer avenues for shaping your current job into closer alignment with your ideal job. Will job crafting turn any job into the perfect job? Of course not, but if crafting is done effectively, it moves things in the right direction, making your work a better fit for your gifts, providing you with a stronger sense of meaning, and establishing new pathways for serving the greater good. As we have maintained throughout this book, a calling is best approached not as a thing to be discovered once and for all, but an ongoing process of evaluating and reshaping work in ways that continue to use your gifts meaningfully, in service of others. Indeed, one of the most important lessons we have learned from interviewing workers with a calling is that actively striving to keep their passion alive is every bit as critical as discerning their calling in the first place. Job crafting provides a useful set of strategies for molding your work over time in ways that continue to support a sense of calling, even—indeed, especially—when work tasks or the work environment starts to shift in ways that threaten your opportunities to live it out.