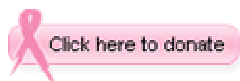


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### Absent friends

By Marcella Bidinost.  
The Sydney Morning Herald

Remember when you first landed your job? Chances are you were peachy keen to achieve.

But somewhere the buzz faded and along with that went your motivation, then your consistency and quality of work, then possibly the will to even show up. So what happened?

"You probably didn't have a realistic preview of the work," a professor of management and organisational behaviour at Melbourne Business School, Robert Wood, says.

"People often imagine jobs in the long term, whereas the short-term reality – particularly the initial learning and familiarisation phase – can be something different.

The more you unrealistically imagine and hold to an idea of a job, the bigger the potential fall. "Think of a doctor who enters the profession with the broader aim of helping people but finds the short term filled with repetitive, long, hard hours.

That bigger picture can be harder to sustain." Wood encourages as much research and reality checking as possible before beginning a job. "Find out what you'll be doing day to day, whether your new workplace will offer a good induction and what your managers and the overall culture is like," he says.

"Then you should ask yourself if all this does genuinely feel aligned with your aims." "Motivation is dynamic," agrees organisational psychologist Andrew Neal.

"Unfortunately, it's not always there for you. It changes in response to moods and environment, people and demands, hassles and uplifts. And while motivation may go away, it doesn't leave you permanently."

The good news is that motivation often returns with a different flavour and a different focus. A human capital consultant, Anthony Sork, says the person most influential to all our employment experiences is our immediate manager at work.

But according to Gallup's latest employee engagement survey, only a quarter of managers and executives within Australia are engaged with their employees. "All managers need to understand the great behavioural impact that they have on the climate, engagement, effort and performance of their various people," Sork says.

But the responsibility for your motivation doesn't stop there. "Work is a partnership between you and your employer," Sork adds. "Shared goals and issues need to be expressed and worked on to benefit each other."

The chorus of motivational experts seems to carry a common theme: if your motivation comes from an inner desire, you're more likely to do a better job and one with longer-lasting effectiveness; however, if your motivations are merely external (think competition, aiming for acknowledgement, the boss threatening to sack you), you'll more likely achieve little more than superficial effectiveness.

Since the beginning of the global financial crisis, Sork has noticed more managers using fear. "They're tending to drive performance via references to job security," he says.

"But when mobility returns to the employment market, those who are out of alignment, lowly engaged or detached will leave."

The Gallup survey reveals of the 21 per cent of Australians disengaged at work, half plan to stick with the company they work with for 12 months.

More alarming is that about one-quarter plan to stay with their employer for the rest of their working life. Imagine the fun they'll have.

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All up, 82 per cent of Australians are either not engaged or actively disengaged with work. While we're touted as one of the hardest-working nations, it seems we're more about droning than whistling while we work.

The 61 per cent who are not engaged are stuck in workplace neutral: being pleasant enough and doing what it takes to get the job done but tending to hang back rather than commit fully.

Meanwhile, the 21 per cent of actively disengaged employees are physically present but psychologically absent. They're unhappy at work, stuck in reverse and more likely to drag others down.

They take eight sick days a year – pointing to poorer physical and mental health (or perhaps their success at skiving) – compared to the three days off their highly geared counterparts take.

Gallup also estimates this disengagement costs Australian companies up to \$42 billion a year. But all is not lost. New motivations can always be found, Wood says.

"But if that willingness isn't there and you know work is affecting your mental health with no chance of this changing, it's actually best to leave," he says.

**How do you stay motivated? Tell us at [mycareer.com.au/vote](http://mycareer.com.au/vote)**

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