

# Work should be about 'sharing your talents with the world



**KURT APRIL**

THE accelerated pace at which we conduct business and live our lives is resulting in a marked increase of depression and burnout in society, especially in the workplace.

Many people go to work each day feeling it is a necessity, an unfortunate part of life that must be endured to pay the bills and one day enjoy a hard-earned retirement.

The 21st century, however, is ushering in a new way of thinking about careers and how they can bring fulfillment to our lives, which is good news for workers and employers.

In many cases workplace suffering can be linked directly to the unhappy compromise that many people make when starting a career — choosing between love and money. Many of us are taught growing up that the two rarely coexist and we must therefore sacrifice one for the other. How many times have you heard about a talented artist pursuing a career in business, for example, because they didn't want to constantly worry about money?

The reality is that people who feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their work are rarely the ones who suffer from depression.

This is a view held by Nick

Williams, author of the celebrated book, *The Work We Were Born To Do* (Element Books), and co-director of the new Purpose and Personal Leadership programme at the UCT Graduate School of Business.

Williams says people should aim to express their spirit through their work and live out their true purpose in their careers: "This is the true meaning and purpose of work — and it lies a full 180° in opposition to the traditional economic and suffering-based view."

Regarding work as a form of suffering or survival inevitably leads to high stress levels and even depression. Williams says work should rather be about sharing your unique gifts and talents with the world, whatever they may be. With this naturally comes a deeper sense of purpose and happiness. However, many resist the urge to answer their true calling and stay in jobs that bring them little satisfaction.

Williams describes this resistance as "the tendency we all have to self-sabotage, undermine ourselves, procrastinate, make excuses, divert ourselves, rationalise away the need for change and hold ourselves back".

This resistance is a manifestation

Williams says leaders need to understand that they nurture peak performance out of employees by inspiring them and helping them to discover their own passions. To do this, leaders must ensure they themselves remain inspired and are able to access a deeper sense of purpose within themselves. "This is what makes a great leader."

This notion is increasingly feeding into new thinking around leadership, in which the concept is no longer directly linked to traditional positions of management.

It used to be that leaders were the people with the big titles and corner offices, those at the pinnacle of the company organogram. Now, however, it is increasingly clear that leadership is not about position only, but also about making a contribution to your organisation, your life and others' lives. This means serving something greater than yourself and inspiring people to the possibility of a more exciting, authentic and compelling future. Taking this courageous step to be inspired and inspire others can lead to real satisfaction, and, consequently, lower stress levels, he says.

"Today more people want to ex-

perience fulfilment; they want to feel appreciated and to experience some meaning in their work by knowing that they express their unique gifts and talents to make the lives of others better."

This may sound difficult, or even impossible, to achieve, but it goes back to the idea of separating the notion of "work" from association with "suffering" and "survival". This is essential for employees to fulfil their potential and deliver real value to their organisations.

Leaders need to spend time and energy in creating a work environment in which individuality can flourish and employees can grow both personally and professionally.

In turn, leaders must reflect on their own leadership style and become a force for good in their organisations if the challenge of 21st century workplace depression is to be tackled effectively.

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**To prevent depression and burnout, work should be about fulfilment, meaning and feeling appreciated, say specialists.** Picture: PHOTOS.COM

of the fear we all have of stepping out of our comfort zone and taking a risk in pursuit of happiness. It takes a great deal of courage to be more authentically yourself.

On the other hand, many people may not want to change their vocation at all, but rather find a deeper sense of purpose and satisfaction from the work they already do. This is where leadership can play a critical role.

