# THE NEW WORKFORCE EXPEDITION

**Building Meaningful Employment Environments™**
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Note: Meaningful Employment Environments is a trademark of TrailPaths Inc.

## The Workforce Expedition

We are experiencing significant workforce disruption. This is evident as we witness unprecedented changes in all issues surrounding our ability to attract, recruit, develop and retain top talent. From the pandemic-related recognition of frontline workers to the continued conversation of work-from-home, to upward pressure on wages to high levels of team member turnover and worker shortages, the fact is, the conversation relative to our workforces has changed fundamentally. This is particularly evident in our manufacturing and supply chain industrial sectors.  Is this some new phenomenon? Absolutely not, as these trends have been in motion well before the pandemic. Can we do anything about it? Can we understand what is heading our way relative to workforce challenges? Can we develop strategies to get ahead of the structural and leadership changes required of the organization? Can we build an employment environment that people recognize as meaningful and one that properly values frontline workers? Yes, we can, and this will be the next organizational expedition we embark upon.

Think of it as the next mountain an organization will need to ascend.

But before we can embrace solutions, before we head off on this challenging climb, we need to understand what exactly has changed and what the implications are of these industrial and societal shifts.

# Changing Demographic and Societal Shifts



Organizations are competing for talent today, and this trend will continue into the short and long-term future. This is a result of many forces that have now converged to create the perfect storm. Elements of this perfect storm are an aging population, decreased birthrates, increased levels of college education (and resulting career expectations), politization of legal immigration, reduced labor force participation rates, increased gap in skill requirements (in particular with skilled trades), shifts in attitudes towards work environments and shifts in attitudes towards work itself. These elements have now converged and have resulted in a shrinking workforce and a fundamental shift in attitudes within the workforce that remains.

What does this mean for organizations going forward? We will all be competing in our ability to attract, recruit, develop and retain top talent. The employer – employee power balance has inverted upon itself as the worker now has choices and can be selective in their decisions relative to their employment. People will no longer accept *declining* or simply *surviving* in their employment environment, but rather they want to be *growing* and *thriving*. In other words, employees have choices relative to where they want to work and who they want to work for, and it is a certainty that people are leveraging these options.

> **"WE WILL ALL BE COMPETING IN OUR ABILITY TO ATTRACT, RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND RETAIN TOP TALENT"**



## Decline to Thrive

**THRIVING**

**GROWING**

**SURVIVING**

**DECLINING**

### Dignity

**Decline:**
*I don't trust, my fundamental needs are not met, the work environment does not engage me, and my work is not meaningful. I do not participate. I will be leaving soon.*

**Survive:**
*I'm beginning to trust, some of my fundamental needs are being met, but the work environment does not always engage me, and my work is not meaningful. I struggled to participate. I will stay until I find something better.*

### Meaningful Work

**Grow:**
*I trust, my fundamental needs are being met, the work environment engages me, but my work is not fully meaningful. I am participating every day. I am optimistic this will work out.*

**Thrive:**
*I trust, my fundamental needs are being met, the work environment engages me, and my work is meaningful. I participate to my fullest potential. I can't imagine being anywhere else.*

Which begs the question; what can you do to ensure you are an employer of choice, to ensure you are capable of convincing people they should work for your particular organization? The answer to this question is this: *We need to build Meaningful Employment Environments (MEE) ™ for all team members.* That is, **we need to build employment environments where people thrive because organizational decisions, leadership behaviors and team member participation are deeply rooted and guided by dignity and meaningful work.**

While this may seem like a daunting expedition, the climb can be planned and managed, as there are tollgates along the trail. These include *building trust, meeting fundamental needs, elevating the environment, and uniting around the work*.

Let's get started on the expedition up the MEE Mountain.

## Basecamp 1: Building Trust

People want to work in a *Meaningful Employment Environment (MEE)™*. As an organization, we need to build this environment, which means, we need a starting point. This starting point, the basecamp of our expedition, is **Trust and Dignity**.

Trust is the starting point because the absence of trust will result in the absence of participation and the absence of participation will result in a failed expedition. The good news is the path to trust starts with one human behavior. As leaders, and as team members alike, we need to treat each other with dignity.

> **"THE ABSENCE OF TRUST WILL RESULT IN THE ABSENCE OF PARTICIPATION AND THE ABSENCE OF PARTICIPATION WILL RESULT IN A FAILED EXPEDITION"**

Treating people with dignity begins when we believe that people are valuable and deserve respect for no other reason than they are human beings. Dignity is not given, and it cannot be taken away; it simply is. Regardless of our position on the organizational chart, our time is valuable. We have real lives; we want to add value and we want to grow and thrive. As leaders, we must examine our own attitudes and ensure that our behaviors reflect a sincere belief that people are trustworthy, that people naturally want to work, that people seek responsibility and accountability, that people seek meaning in their work and that all people want to learn and progress in their lives. As a leader, to treat a person with dignity is to know *their stories*, understand *their potential* and improve them through supporting *their development*.

> **"DIGNITY IS NOT GIVEN, AND IT CANNOT BE TAKEN AWAY; IT SIMPLY IS"**

Treating people with dignity will also require an acute focus on the work environment that an organization has built through a historical evolution of good and bad organizational decisions. We have learned that employment environment factors, in particular for frontline team members, form a hierarchy (like Maslow's hierarchy of needs), in that lower order needs must be met before we can expect people to fully participate and thrive within the employment environment. These environmental factors can be categorized as *Fundamental Human Needs, Work Environment Needs and Work Needs*.

## Basecamp 2: Meeting Fundamental Needs

After Trust and Dignity are established, we need to trek to the next level, which is a person's fundamental human needs. The fundamental needs of people in the workplace include **physical safety, financial needs, and an absence of fear (emotional safety)**. People want to be in an environment that is safe from physical harm and where they know their safety is the first and foremost priority of the organization. People require compensation that is fair (defendable as compared to others in the workplace), competitive (as compared to competitors) and sufficient in meeting their basic personal needs. Lastly, people expect a culture where they do not fear failure or voicing their opinion, where mistakes are part of the learning process and where their opinions and ideas can be voiced and respected. People need to know they are part of an organization that is loyal and committed to them as human beings. Once these fundamental human needs are being met, we can then focus on the next section of the MEE climb, the work environment.



**"PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW THEY ARE PART OF AN ORGANIZATION THAT IS LOYAL AND COMMITTED TO THEM AS HUMAN BEINGS"**

## The Climb: Elevating the Environment

There are three core factors that are critical specifically to the work environment.  These are **autonomy & control, fairness & equity and a loyal social community.**

Autonomy & control are a result of work environments that are flexible, secure and predictable. People require flexibility in their work environment to feel in control of their lives. In addition, we yearn for a high level of predictability in our work and some assurance that our future is secure. The fact is, most people want to be in control of their lives, and the absence of this control will result in fear and anxiety, and fear and anxiety result in a lack of trust.
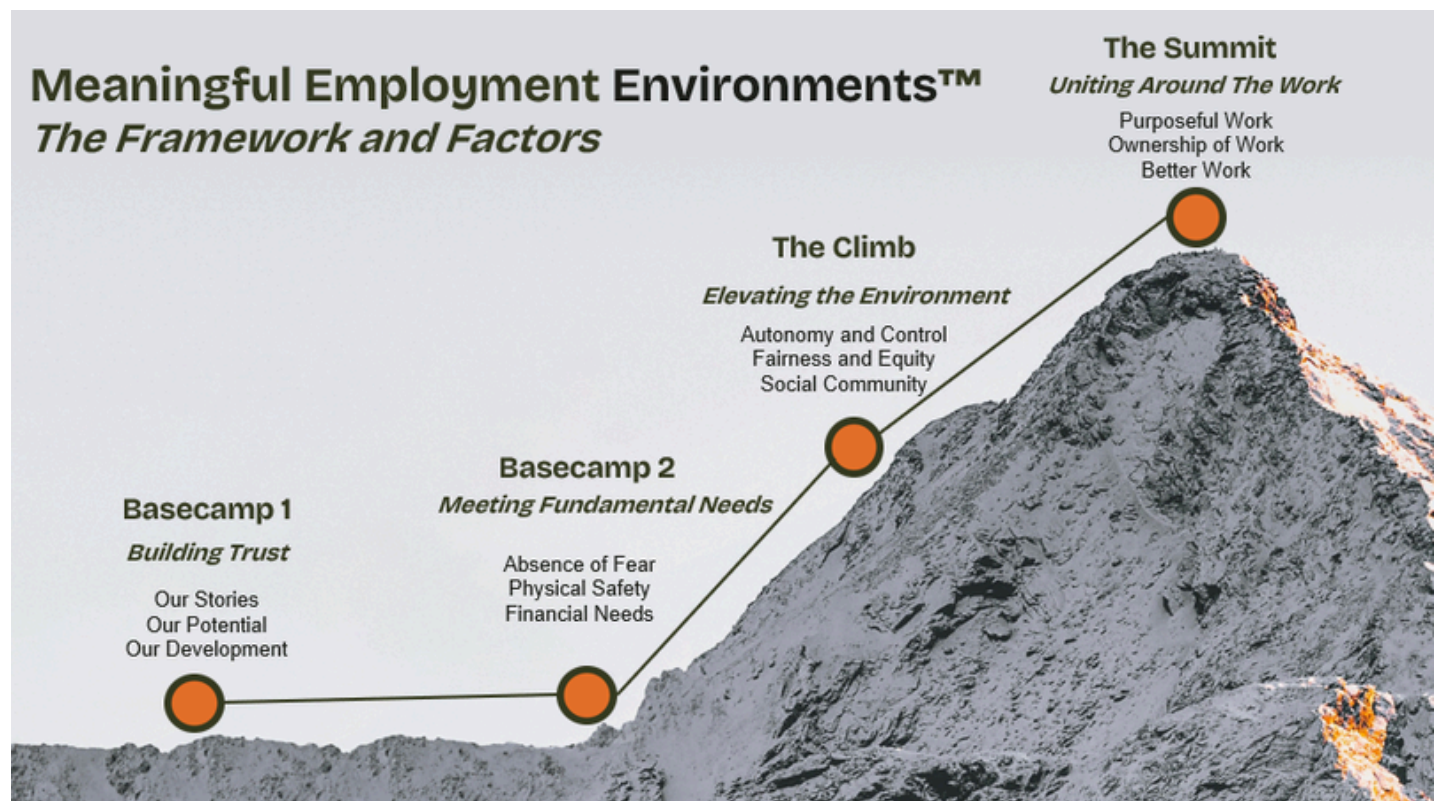
Team members today, particularly those on the frontline, crave mutual respect and to be treated with fairness & equity regardless of their position in the organization. It is important that our opinion matters, that our personal experiences are valued and that we are treated as the unique individual we are, where our individual life circumstances are known, understood, and improved upon.

**"WE GROW THROUGH LOYAL FRIENDSHIPS WITH SHARED VALUES, AND WE STRIVE TO BE PART OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY"**

The last important piece to our work environment is to recognize that people want to be part of a positive social community. We grow through loyal friendships with shared values, and we strive to be part of a successful community where we share similar experiences and like-mindedness in how we approach our work. Even though it is the workplace, as leaders, we must recognize that people take pride in true friendships that support them to become their best selves. In the end, team members want to be part of a successful community and a winning team.

With trust and fundamental human needs in place and improvement in the employment environment underway, we can then focus on the fourth and final section of our expedition. This is the work itself.



**Meaningful Employment Environments™**
*The Framework and Factors*

**The Summit**
*Uniting Around The Work*
Purposeful Work
Ownership of Work
Better Work

**The Climb**
*Elevating the Environment*
Autonomy and Control
Fairness and Equity
Social Community

**Basecamp 2**
*Meeting Fundamental Needs*
Absence of Fear
Physical Safety
Financial Needs

**Basecamp 1**
*Building Trust*
Our Stories
Our Potential
Our Development

# The Summit: Uniting Around the Work

Attitudes towards work itself have shifted fundamentally. People want to perform work that is *meaningful, where as an organization we are proficient in our work and where we can experience success in improving our work* at the end of each day. This means, as leaders and team members, we need to be fundamentally focused on knowing what makes *purposeful work*, understanding how to take *ownership of the work*, and improving every day to make it *better work*.

As an organization, we need to know and understand that people want to know why their work is important, how their role connects to the customer's purpose, and how to perform the work proficiently in order to truly understand why the work is worth doing well. This means that as leaders, we need to ensure our teams understand why their particular role is important and how it impacts overall team success. To accomplish this, all team members need to be properly trained and have the proper tools and technology to successfully execute their individual role.

In this new environment, our work needs to be well designed, understood, properly supported at all levels and free of obstacles. Performance needs to be visible, and we must ask for input from the people doing the work into how the work can be better designed and executed, including an understanding of how adjacent processes impact the work. People want the freedom to communicate obstacles in their work and to provide positively received input into improvement ideas.

Lastly, it is critical that, as leaders, we sincerely believe that our team wants to be successful and learn and grow as a result of improving their work. No reasonable person wants to waste their life simply working for a wage. People want to experience victories and know their work is adding value to the customer, to the team and to the organization. People want to learn and progress in their education and development through improving their work, and they want to share those learnings with others. Our people desire to be part of a winning team, something that is greater than themselves.

*"NO REASONABLE PERSON WANTS TO WASTE THEIR LIFE SIMPLY WORKING FOR A WAGE"*

# MEE: The Work so Far



We have had the honor and humbling opportunity to begin this important work with several organizations. These organizations share several commonalities. The first, and most significant, is the owners and senior leaders sincerely believe people are their most important asset, and they believe that engaged people provide the largest opportunity for product differentiation. They do not need to be convinced that dignity is our primary guiding principle. Second, as leaders in the supply chain industry, they are all challenged with the new dynamics that exist within our workforce ecosystems, in particular with frontline team members, and they totally understand these new challenges are here to stay.

What are the lessons learned so far in our work implementing a Meaningful Employment Environment?

The first lesson is taking the time to understand the financial "prize" in creating a Meaningful Employment Environment. Not only do dignity and meaningful work show respect for people,

> **"ENGAGED PEOPLE PROVIDE THE LARGEST OPPORTUNITY FOR PRODUCT DIFFERENTIATION"**

but there is also a very pragmatic purpose to MEE, in the reduction of employee turnover and the corresponding cost of this turnover. Estimates suggest that employee turnover costs range from $5,000 to $15,000 per attrition event. This means there is a significant financial reason to create stable business environments where people want to stay, grow, and thrive.

> **"THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL REASON TO CREATE STABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO STAY, GROW, AND THRIVE"**

The second lesson learned is that building a Meaningful Employment Environment will require three plans:

The *Path for Every Organization* (PFEO), the *Path for Every Leader* (PFEL) and the *Path for Every Team Member* (PFETM).
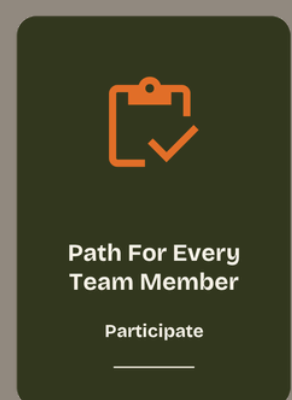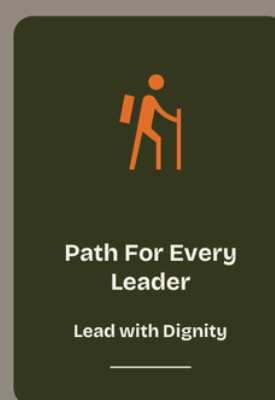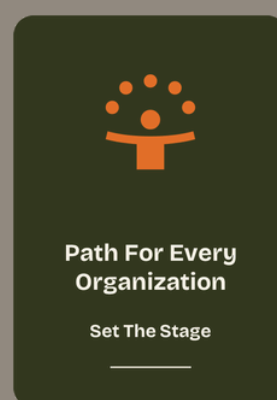
The **Path for Every Organization** is the plan to build and grow a Meaningful Employment Environment by focusing on *organizational decisions* and their impact on people. This means committing to specific improvement projects in order to prepare the environment for successful implementation of the key MEE factors of *Trust*, *Fundamental Human Needs*, *the Work Environment* and *the Work itself*. Examples of specific initiatives include rigorous compensation reviews, questioning attendance, performance and overtime policies, modernizing recruiting strategies, improving new team member on-boarding processes, and formalizing corporate communication processes.

> **"THERE IS A SINCERE COMMITMENT FROM TEAM MEMBERS TO WORK HARD TO MOVE FORWARD ON THE MEE EXPEDITION FRAMEWORK AND THE DECLINE TO THRIVE PATH"**

The **Path for Every Leader** is the plan to teach and educate individual leaders to lead with dignity and meaningful work as the foundation for all *leader behaviors*. Leaders create their individualized *learning-and-action-plans* so they can begin the important work of building trust and making work more meaningful for all team members. This work being completed is at the heart of leading by; *knowing people and knowing our work, understanding people and understanding our work, and improving people and improving our work.*

The **Path for Every Team Member** is the plan for individual team members to sincerely participate in this new work environment. This is the *learning-and-action-plan* that recognizes that all people are unique and have individual needs to thrive inside the organization. With this individualized plan, there is a sincere commitment from team members to work hard to move forward on the *MEE Expedition Framework* and the *Decline to Thrive* path. In addition, with this unique and personal plan in place, team members will participate by believing in the organization and by building sincere, honest and trustworthy relationships, all while participating to create a Meaningful Employment Environment for all team members.

These three plans represent the path towards a Meaningful Employment Environment.

With our three MEE plans firmly in place, the remaining step is to implement the processes, systems and platforms that will sustain the MEE and the three plans on an hourly and daily basis.

This is the work that is happening now and will continue into the future.

# The MEE Expedition: The Time is Now!

People expect to be treated with dignity and have a further expectation to perform purposeful and meaningful work, all within a meaningful work environment. This means that, as an organization, we must build Meaningful Employment Environments, and as leaders, we must focus on dignity and meaningful work. With this in place, all employees have a shared role and responsibility to fully participate and engage within this Meaningful Employment Environment. *It is a triad system of organizational decision-making based on people first, modernized leadership behaviors focused on dignity and an expectation of full-contact team member participation to make the work meaningful.*

This is all to recognize that, first and foremost, people want to progress from declining to thriving in the workplace. However, in the absence of dignity as a core guiding principle, now and into the future, it is very likely that an organization will have zero success in their ability to attract, recruit, develop and retain top talent.



**TrailPath Workplace Solutions (TWS) is a workplace and people development company leveraging modernized methods and technologies to build Meaningful Employment Environments™.**

TWS provides a disciplined learning framework, business management system and defined pathways for the advancement of organizations, leaders, and team members.

Building your own MEE™ begins with the MEE™ Assessment, a comprehensive survey and analysis scientifically designed to give insights into your employment environment through the eyes of your team. Once completed, organizations receive a prioritized recommendation plan with a clear path to achieve a MEE™.

Get started at www.trailpathws.com