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Motivation
In Search of Meaning

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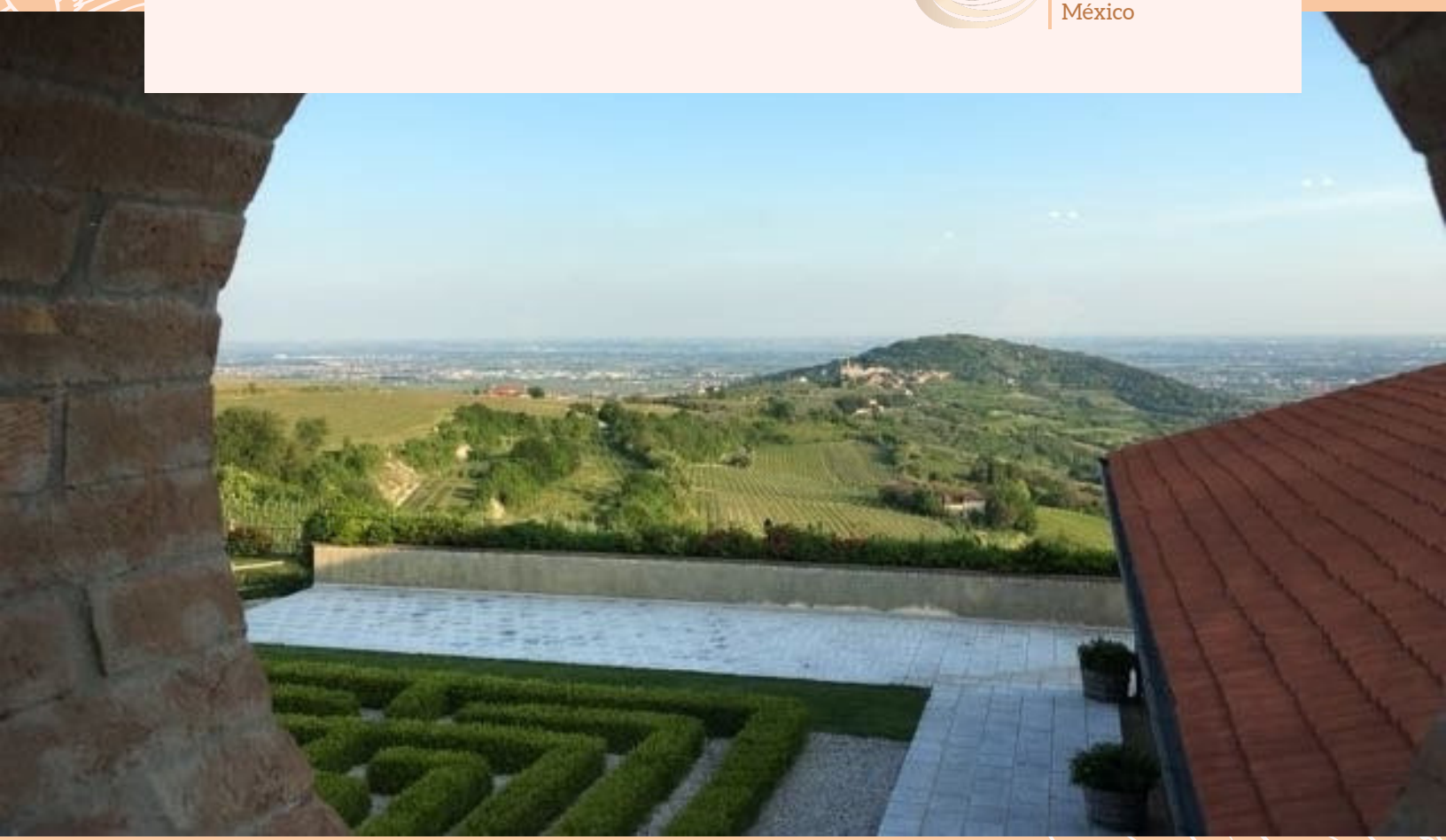

Motivation: in search of meaning

By Alfried Längle
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When do employees bring new ideas? Why do they engage themselves in their leisure time for a social project? How do we succeed to motivate our team for best performance and excellence? The answer seems difficult – nevertheless simple: Because they do it with inner consent. *They see a meaning in their actions.*

What is meaning?

Existential meaning is „the most valuable possibility which we have and can choose in an actual situation“

This means, that we ALWAYS – although mostly unconsciously and in a split second – decide, and have do decide, to choose, to put ourselves personally into the situation.

To be able to decide, to make a meaningful life, ***4 steps*** are needed:

1. ***Realising*** the possibilities within the reality. Every actual situation offers possibilities. I can choose e.g. to go on reading this article or to prepare myself for the next project presentation tomorrow. I can stay in my job - or choose another one.
2. ***Feeling***, what appears more valuable to me: E.g. my interest in reading or the value of fulfilling my duty? My safe job or a new challenge?
3. ***Deciding*** for what is most important in my view - with all pros and cons: going on reading can add up to some pressure of time afterwards. Changing the job means losing secured income. If I decide, I accept that and hazard the consequences. In spite of everything: I want to do it now! In this actual moment, in this situation it seems to be most meaningful as far as I can see.
4. ***Acting by choice.*** This means realizing my existence by engaging myself in a deed or action, becoming fruitful, productive, influential.

As Viktor Frankl pointed out, personal meaning gives *orientation* to our decisions and forms the final motivation factor: people want to experience that what they do is in favour of something valuable. Employees want to feel valuable for their commitment and be part of the common success. Then their work makes sense to them.

Leaders can contribute as collaborator to find meaning:

- Look out for a “tailor-made” job for every staff, so that they can experience that something valuable comes to existence through their efforts.
- Give orientation: Employees should understand and feel, to what the organisation is striving to. They need an attractive vision of the future. Only quantitative goals are not enough. There is a need of stories, pictures and analogies, to touch the staff in their values.
- Illustrate, discuss and demonstrate through your daily-life-actions the values of the enterprise. Is it only increasing the shareholder value or also the personal meaning and fulfilment in life?
- Explain the need of measures clearly: Employees usually also accept cuts and high performance goals, when they see why they are needed and what they are good for.

However, this kind of leadership needs to notice the single person in his or her competence. If you only see them as “headcounts” or “fulltime equivalents” (FTEs), you will not succeed in the creation of meaning. For existential leadership one needs time for open dialogues with your staff, so that trust and confidence can grow. The instruments of this kind of leadership are mainly intuition and authenticity, personal example and your own personal consent with your leadership function.

Succeeding in such a form of communicating meaning will bring along a win-win-situation: Meaning and self-fulfilment for the employees – commitment, creativity and performance for the organisation.