Two Paths To Meaningful Work and a Meaningful Life:
(Some Time for Personal Reflection)

Prof. Brad Harrington
Boston College Center for Work & Family
October 2, 2013
Conflict Paradigm has dominated field

- Attention is on organizational policies and programs that can reduce scheduling conflict and allow flexibility
- But when we look back on our work and lives, I doubt they will be seen as meaningful because we minimized our scheduling conflicts
Shifting to Conflict & Enrichment Paradigm

- This is an improvement because it recognizes the ways one sphere impacts the other in positive ways.
- But still lacking until we help people more fundamentally come to grips with what equates to meaningful work & life.
- Otherwise, we end up like Mr. Mitchell …
WELL THIS SUCKS

MITCHELL
Change Gears: Focus on Development

- Gallup: only 30% of employees engaged at work
  - Feel work is uninteresting or unimportant
  - Don’t feel their aspirations align with employers
  - Don’t feel connected to their company’s mission
  - Feel their work doesn’t allow for balance

- Let’s move beyond these paradigms to finding meaning in our work
- Two paths to increase meaning – at work and in your personal lives
David Brooks: *The Summoned Self*

- In *The Summoned Self*, NY Times Columnist David Brooks discusses what he calls *the well-planned life* and *the summoned life*

- How would you describe *the well-planned life*?
- How would you describe *the summoned life*?
- Let’s first discuss the summoned life and the case of Welles Crowther (Boston College ’99)
- “The Man in the Red Bandana”
Levoy: Callings, The Turn of Events

- Calls are not just inner experiences – passions, dreams, symptoms – but also outer

- They come to us from the world and from events in our lives. The events themselves, which may appear so ordinary, can take on the contours of signs if we give them meaning and we do so when we pay attention to them

- Enter each day with the expectation that the happenings of the day may contain a clandestine message addressed to you personally
“First of all, Harrington, let me tell you how much we all admire your determination not to choose between job and family.”
Levoy: Callings, The Turn of Events

- Movement is not far behind *if* we are willing to be moved by our encounters, to be guided, and persuaded, and changed by them, and to ask them, “What are you here to teach me?”
- Whether the experience is positive or negative… the important question is:

  How will you interpret it?
What does *serendipity* mean to you?

*ser·en·dip·i·ty* [ser-uh n-dip-i-tee] *noun*
ser·en·dip·i·ty [ser-uh n-dip-i-tee];
Noun
1. Good fortune, luck: *the serendipity of getting the first job she applied for*
2. Positive accidents, welcomed accidental events
3. The faculty for finding positive outcomes in unexpected occurrences
Discussion Questions

- We will work in groups of three (triads)
- Take few minutes to write down the answer to these questions:
  - When you think about your life, are there:
    - Callings that you have heard and heeded?
    - Callings that you have heard and not heeded?
    - In retrospect, how do you view those?
  - What are the things that you could do to be more present and attentive to your callings today?
Small Group Discussion
The Well-Planned Life

- This is the focus of my work with MBA students
- The essence of what people need to focus on is how to develop to two meta-competencies:
  - **Identity**: Possessing a clear self-concept
  - **Adaptability**: The ability to adapt to changing professional and personal circumstances
- Most important and foundational questions are:
  - Who am I? What drives me in life? How can I best contribute to the world professionally and personally?
Dimensions of Identity

Components To Explore

- Exploring Our Past
- Understanding Our Peak Experiences
- Assessing Our Skills
- Clarifying Our Values
- Knowing Our Interests/Passions
- Articulating Our Vision
- Evaluating Our Lifestyle
Goals for 10 Years Out

- Intended to give you greater insight into what your career and work are leading you to
- This is your “personal vision”
- Articulating this will provide a clearer sense of what’s important and why
- Creating mental image of life (or 5) years from today
- All questions answered as if it is 5 or 10 years from today
Discussion
Summary

- Searched for ways to better connect my work as a Center Director to my work on the faculty
- Both are important, but …
  - One sometimes struggles for relevance
  - The other is so clearly central to people’s lives
- My hope is that:
  - You enjoyed thinking about these issues from a personal development perspective
  - Help me address this questions
  - Thoughts? Reactions?
- Thank you for your time!