

Nine Lies About Work: A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World

BY MARCUS BUCKINGHAM AND ASHLEY GOODALL

"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure, that just ain't so." Mark Twain

Ironically, although this quotation is often attributed to Twain, no one is sure that he ever said it, which reinforces the "danger of misplaced certainty."

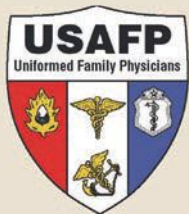
The authors of this book had written an article several years ago for the Harvard Business Review about the uniformly unpopular ritual known as "performance appraisals," questioning the value of the process and the procedures used by most leaders to complete it. Based on the favorable response to that article, the authors were asked to write a book looking not just at performance appraisals, but the entire world of work.

Marcus Buckingham began his career working with the Gallup organization and has since gone on to become a huge proponent of strength-based leadership theory. Ashley Goodall has been the lead researcher for understanding engagement and productivity at Cisco. Based on the leadership and organizational research they have done, Buckingham and Goodall have proposed some interesting perspectives and recommendations regarding many of today's current leadership practices.

The book begins with a significant paradox: why do so many of the ideas and practices that are held as "settled truths" at work end up being so frustrating and unpopular with the people they are supposed to serve? For instance, why is it "settled truth" that all the best leaders possess a defined list of attributes that you should aspire to acquire, when none of us have ever met a leader with every attribute on the list?

This paradox brings us to the authors' core idea for the book: the world of work today is overflowing with systems, processes, tools, and assumptions that are deeply flawed and push directly against our ability to express what is unique about each of us in the work we do every day. These processes were developed to help improve productivity and ensure objectivity at work, but with only 20% of global employees reporting that they are "fully engaged at work," it is obvious that something is not working right. And these processes together form the backdrop and justification for almost everything that happens to us at work (how we are selected for jobs, and then how we are evaluated, trained, paid, promoted and fired).

continued on page 42



Don't Miss Out on Complimentary USAFP Membership Benefits



DAILY INFOPOEMS

The USAFP is pleased to continue providing as a membership benefit a free subscription to Daily POEMs from Essential Evidence Plus. Daily POEMs (Patient Oriented Evidence that Matters) alerts and 3,000+ archived POEMs help you stay abreast of the latest and most relevant medical literature. Delivered directly to you by e-mail every Monday through Friday, Daily POEMs identify the most valid, relevant research that may change the way you practice. Monthly, the complete set is compiled

and sent for additional summary review. Ongoing since 1996, their editors now review more than 1,200 studies monthly from more than 100 medical journals, presenting only the best and most relevant as POEMs. The acclaimed POEMs process applies specific criteria for validity and relevance to clinical practice. If you want to subscribe, please e-mail the USAFP at cmodesto@vafp.org so your e-mail address can be added to the distribution list.

Nine Lies About Work

	“Lie”	“Truth”	Reasoning
1	People care which COMPANY they work for	People care which TEAM they are on	TEAM is where work actually happens
2	The best PLAN wins	The best INTELLIGENCE wins	The world moves too fast for PLANS
3	The best companies cascade GOALS	The best companies cascade MEANING	People want to know what they all share
4	The best people are WELL-ROUNDED	The best people are SPIKY	Uniqueness is a feature, NOT a bug
5	People need FEEDBACK	People need ATTENTION	We all want to be seen for who we are at our best
6	People can reliably RATE OTHER PEOPLE	People can reliably RATE THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE	Because that’s all we have
7	People have POTENTIAL	People have MOMENTUM	We all move through the world differently
8	WORK-LIFE BALANCE matters Most	LOVE-IN-WORK matters most	That’s what work is really for
9	LEADERSHIP is a thing	We follow SPIKES	Spikes bring us certainty

The authors call these accepted ideas “lies,” which is an overstatement, but they force us to critically review nine common workplace practices with an eye for at least tweaking/adjusting their focus and making them work better for everyone.

Each of the 9 “lies” presents a compelling argument; I would like to highlight two specific lies:

1. Lie #8: “Work/life balance matters most”
 - a. The chapter uses the life of a physician as an example: why does a profession with the highest purpose at work suffer from a 50% burnout rate?
 - b. If you look at how many traditionally view this “balance,” many people assume “work is BAD, life is GOOD,” so the key is to focus on decreasing work hours or making “life” a little bit better

- c. The authors recommend a different perspective: we need to find more “love-in-work,” true joy from doing the things that utilize our greatest strengths as often as possible. Only 16% of workers say they play to their strengths daily, but 72% of workers say they have the ability to modify work to better play to their strengths (but few people actually do this)
- d. The Mayo Clinic found that physicians who reported spending at least 20% of their time doing things they loved at work had a dramatically lower risk of burnout!
2. Lie #4: “The best people are WELL-ROUNDED”
 - a. We have all seen some form of the leadership competency model that begins, “every leader should have the following skills.”

- b. The competency approach causes us to focus primarily on fixing our weaknesses.
- c. Many of the world’s best leaders are “spiky,” with their own unique set of high-level skills providing their competitive advantage.
- d. Consider focusing your efforts on continuing to improve your best skills, while also working on glaring weaknesses, or finding others to complement your skill set

This “Free Thinker’s Guide” will challenge how you utilize some of the world of work’s “settled truths” to help you find more “love-in-work!” Our people and our organization’s performance will benefit greatly from this effort.