

MANAGEMENT

## I Don't Have a Job. I Have a Higher Calling.

Some employees balk as many firms—from motorcycles to accounting—step up talk about changing the world

By [RACHEL FEINTZEIG](#)

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Meaning and purpose is a “fallow asset” that firms can tap to boost staff loyalty and engagement, said Bruce Pfau, who oversees consulting giant KPMG’s human-resources department in the U.S.

That firm is trying to imbue accounting with world-changing sweep, launching a campaign to boost employee retention and outside recruiting that highlights the broader purpose of number-crunching for major corporations.

The initiative kicked off with a video featuring company leaders that boasts of the firm’s hand in the election of Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid in South Africa, the launch of NASA’s first space station and the release of Iranian hostages in 1981.

“We can see ourselves as bricklayers or cathedral builders,” said Global Chairman John Veihmeyer in the video. The company held a contest for U.S. employees to share stories and design digital posters touting the bigger impact of their jobs, and it netted 42,000 submissions.

In an interview, Mr. Veihmeyer said it can be tougher to convince an auditor of his or her higher purpose—“helping to sustain confidence in the capital markets”—compared with, say, the meaning a doctor feels when caring for patients.

Siobhan Kiernan, a KPMG manager, acknowledged that she’s not a brain surgeon or a scientist. But she is helping some of those people do their taxes.

“I can take the worry of doing their tax returns off their mind,” she said, explaining a poster she made for the contest that reads “I support advancements in medicine.”