

## **Changing Ambitions**

by Jessica Guynn, Contra Costa Times

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It was -- literally -- a wake-up call for Marcy Scott Lynn.

After suicide hijackers slammed into the World Trade Center, dark images of desolation filled her dreams. Night after night, Lynn struggled to make sense of the enormity of what had happened to her country -- and to the neighborhood where she grew up. Battery Park City, which once prospered in the shadow of the twin towers, now huddled in their smoldering wake. Jolted one morning from a fitful sleep, Lynn had a change of heart that would change her life.

"I woke up thinking, 'I don't want to go to work,' and it hit me: 'Oh my God, how many people who died in the World Trade Center woke up thinking that very same thing,'" she said. "That's when I decided, 'That's not going to be me.'"

Two weeks after the attacks, Lynn, 29, quit her job as corporate communications manager at Levi Strauss & Co. to search for "something socially relevant."

A time of tectonic transformation for the nation has led to personal reflection and shifting ambitions for thousands of American workers now yearning to make a living by helping others. Government and intelligence agencies, nonprofit organizations and police and fire departments across the country report a dramatic surge in interest and applicants as people rethink their priorities and careers.

"The events of Sept. 11 have made people look with a critical eye at their choices in the past," said Sharon Stearns, a Walnut Creek career counselor. "They realize that time is not infinite, that none of us ever knows what life has in store for us. They are feeling the importance of having a life that feels purposeful."

This collective mid-career crisis, coming as the fleeting promises of New Economy fame and Wall Street riches lie in ruin, could have a profound impact on the American workplace. Even before the terrorist attacks, a survey by online jobs site Monster.com found that 29 percent of job seekers believe it is very important for their job to have a social impact.

Now for the first time since the dot-com boom, white-collar workers are thinking about meaning, not money. Overcome by feelings of grief, anger and vulnerability wrought by the terrorist attacks, they are undergoing a major shift in how they think about work. Many are taking a hard and sometimes uncomfortable look at their 60-hour work weeks, drab cubicles and unending flow of projects and deals. More and more say they are asking themselves: Is this all there is?

