Does everyone want a challenging job? In spite of all the attention focused by the media, academicians, and social scientists on human potential and the needs of individuals, there is no evidence to support that the vast majority of workers want challenging jobs. Some individuals prefer highly complex and challenging jobs; others prosper in simple, routinized work.

The individual-difference variable that seems to gain the greatest support for explaining who prefers a challenging job and who doesn't is the strength of an individual's needs for personal growth and self-direction at work. Individuals with these higher-order growth needs are more responsive to challenging work. What percentage of rank-and-file workers actually desire higher order need satisfactions and will respond positively to challenging jobs? No current data is available, but a study from the 1970s estimated the figure at about 15 percent. Even after adjusting for changing work attitudes and the growth in white-collar jobs, it seems unlikely that the number today exceeds 40 percent.
The strongest voice advocating challenging jobs has not been workers—it's been professors, social science researchers, and media people. Professors, researchers, and journalists undoubtedly made their career choices, to some degree, because they wanted jobs that gave them autonomy, recognition, and challenge. That, of course, is their choice. But for them to project their needs onto the workforce in general is presumptuous.

Not every employee is looking for a challenging job. Many workers meet their higher order needs off the job. There are 168 hours in every individual's week. Work rarely consumes more than 30 percent of this time. That leaves considerable opportunity, even for individuals with strong growth needs, to find higher-order need satisfaction outside the workplace. So don't feel you have a responsibility to create challenging jobs for all your employees. For many people, work is something that will never excite or challenge them. And they don't expect to find their growth opportunities at work. Work is merely something they have to do to pay their bills. They can find challenges outside of work on the golf course, fishing, at their local pub, with their friends in social clubs, with their family, and the like.