

Jim's Profit Accelerator 15: Delight or Drudgery: What Kind of Place Are You Running?

One of the most destructive business canards is the belief that striving for happy employees kills performance. That Puritan wish is vapor. Find me five exceptionally successful organizations that drip with unhappiness, and I'll rethink my stance.

In fact, profitable businesses often result from satisfied, happy employees. (Warning: Remember that "satisfied" is not the same as "complacent." In fact, complacency usually equals poor performance and dissatisfaction.)

Would you assume that Zappo's is an anomaly, just because its employees are unabashedly happy and proud of what they do? I don't. Zappo's key measures all are tops: profit, profitability, employee performance, customer reputation, market value, and sales growth (from \$1.6 million to \$1 billion between 2000–2008). Their morale and customer service are legendary. Amazon paid \$1.2 billion for the company in 2009.

Read it on the box: "Delivering Happiness." And it's delivered to employees too!

Zappo's is not a tech play. Its success applies directly to any business that wants it enough. It's a shoe retailer whose laser focus on execution and customer service uses tech tools, but it isn't the tech that makes it great. It is a relentless drive for exceptional experience for employees and customers. (For more, see founder Tony Hsieh's book, *Delivering Happiness*.)

How can you put this to work this week? Start with satisfaction, which is the powerful foundation of happiness and fun. Here are three starters:

1. **Choose the level of delight that you want in your organization:** Happiness, delight, fun? There is no right answer here, so pick what's comfortable for you. Start with happiness (or satisfaction).

Bring laughter to your executive meetings every week by leading the laughter and inviting a funny story. Why not "Today's Funny" as an agenda item at meeting start? If you bring your "like" (if not "love") to your interactions with your people, your world can change, and so will theirs. (Full disclosure: You'll get more truth faster, too.) Test question: When your people see you coming, do they smile? That's your pass/fail.

2. **Seek satisfaction as you would any other goal:** Don't dismiss satisfaction as the magic of a charismatic leader; any leader can promote it, and it's one outcome of healthy leadership behaviors. Satisfaction comes from doing something that matters, and being sure about it.

“Being sure” results from leadership communication. It’s the broth that cooks up great performance.

Challenge: If you try this, write me and tell me what happened: Add “Laugh Count” to your daily Flash Report, and ask your people about it. I dare you.

3. **Focus mostly on your people’s experience.** Are you providing the three basic platforms of satisfied, motivated, happy employees?

- **Autonomy:** This results from a clear operating framework and allows workers to choose how they will do their jobs. The limits are obvious (safety, performance, etc.). The trick is the framework.
- **Choice of work partners:** At least involve your workers in interviews for hiring and promotion. Beyond that, consider job rotation, for growth and enhanced teamwork. One of the best teams I’ve ever seen (after working in 23 companies) was an accounting team whose leader included all team members in choosing a new member to join them. It seemed natural, since they shared goals and problems daily. One payoff: On their own they moved to a weekly (instead of monthly) “close” because it made sense to them. It saved them time and the company money.
- **Recognition:** One or two measures allow easy recognition of improvement or consistent performance. Provide measures at the team and company levels, and tell everyone every day about them. Result: instant recognition.

In a company where I worked, a thermometer sign, visible to all employees, measured daily shipments against a monthly target. The sign was like one of those trackers for a charity fund drive. In addition to a small bonus for “making the month,” a particularly successful week produced a pizza lunch for all. One day I asked a new machine operator (he’d been there four weeks) how he liked his job. He raved, and said, “All this, and we get pizza!” Part of his “all this” was “leaders who listen to me.”

NBA All-Stars Damien Lillard and Chris Paul, both powerful competitors, were laughing as Lillard pulled up and dropped a three-point shot right over Paul. They laughed because they both knew it was coming, and Paul wouldn’t be able to stop it. Laughing on the job didn’t get in the way of Lillian sinking a three-pointer, did it?

When did you see an employee laugh today? Maybe there’s a different meaning to “Laughing all the way to the bank”? Let me know, and don’t forget my challenge to you.

Call me.

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses

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