



More Fun = More \$\$\$

After he'd removed the previous leadership team and stepped back into the CEO role, P. John Aldred, the founder of Enerflex Systems, lamented to me that for weeks he'd looked in vain to find someone, anyone, who was having fun in their job. John's belief was that business had to be fun for the people who worked there and only after they were having fun, would good results follow. An experienced and practical leader, he attributed Enerflex's poor performance over the previous couple of years to a culture that wasn't fun. His belief was proven right because after he successfully improved the culture, Enerflex started growing again.

Interestingly, John's belief in the role fun plays in the workplace has been validated by more than two decades of research. This research shows that when companies make their workplace fun, they create happier employees who, in turn, are better at their jobs. Surprisingly, workplace fun has been linked to higher productivity and task performance, sort

of the opposite of what many leaders expect. Less surprising is that having fun enhances employee motivation, reduces stress, and creates higher job satisfaction. The research shows that there are significant benefits to having a fun workplace, and that fun and productivity are not opposites; they can and do go together.

Also interesting is that John worked to restore the culture as a necessary first step to improving the business results. He didn't demand good results with the intention of improving the culture once he got the results. He understood the difference between results and the drivers of results, and that a company needed to work on the drivers before expecting to achieve the results. His belief that a positive culture is a driver of positive results has been proven in many studies.

So, given the research linking workplace fun with productivity and positive financial outcomes, why don't more companies intentionally create a fun work environment? One reason is that

leaders often see work as serious, and workplace fun as frivolous and therefore the opposite of what work is. They think fun in the workplace means foosball tables and goofing off. But fun means more than such a narrow, simplistic definition. People also have fun when they're doing great work, when they're succeeding and having an impact on something they care about. In fact, the hope they could do great work and have fun is why they chose to work at your company. From the leaders of traditional companies like GE to the leaders of high tech companies like Google and Amazon, all recognize workplace fun as important. They simply adapt their tactics according to what they feel will work for them.

So, with that broader definition of workplace fun, here are some suggestions on how you can inject it into your company.

MAKE HAVING FUN A CORE BELIEF OF THE COMPANY.

Zappos is famous for having

entrenched fun as one of their 10 core values (No. 3: Create fun and a little weirdness). Tony Tsieh, founder of Zappos, spent a year creating their core values so he'd never have to work with someone he wouldn't enjoy having a beer with. All their core values are enforceable and employees or applicants who don't fit don't get hired or don't last. It must have worked for Zappos because it's harder to get a job there than it is to get accepted at Harvard!

MAKE IT OK AND ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO LAUGH AT WORK.

As Jack Welch, former chairman of GE said, "Never let your company take itself too seriously." Contrary to his public persona of gruffness and bluntness, he looked for the attributes of informality and a sense of humour when hiring or promoting managers and leaders. Furthermore, Jack advocated getting rid of everything that makes people less excited about going to work. This includes streamlining processes to eliminate boring, useless steps (this desire fuelled the famous GE Work Out and Six Sigma programs) and getting rid of people who don't fit the culture.

ENSURE PEOPLE HAVE THE CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE WINNING.

Winning is fun. Get them working on interesting things, new projects or special "stretch" assignments. It's fun to learn and acquire new skills and experience. It's fun to take on the competition and win. Business is about the fun of doing great work, making an impact and creating something bigger or better. However, do your best to avoid allocating all your tough or thankless projects or customers

exclusively to a few people. For your people, tough projects and customers can be the opposite of fun. Find a way to help them see the bigger picture and support them through a tough situation.

GET THE TEAM INVOLVED

When fun activities are chosen and mandated by management, they fail and people mock them. The most successful fun activities in the workplace are those developed and implemented by employees themselves – not by their bosses. Leadership's role is to sponsor it. Encourage them to have fun. Leave the details to the employees.

COMMUNICATE YOUR QUARTERLY GOALS VIA A FUN GAME AND THEME.

Making a game of things introduces an element of competition and fun. That's why "gamification" is so successful. This technique worked for Jack Stack, CEO of SRC holdings and author of the book *The Great Game of Business*. In a turnaround few have matched, he used mini-games and fun to take SRC Holdings from a heavily indebted spinoff of International Harvester to one of America's most successful growth companies with superior financial returns. SRC has created more than 50 subsidiary companies, all led by leaders they'd developed inside SRC. Jack Stack proved that playing games, competing, achieving goals, and winning are all fun.

RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE YOUR PROGRESS AND SUCCESS.

Capture and recognize people's progress and improvement by whatever

mechanism is appropriate; shout-outs at your daily huddle, weekly progress celebrations, parties, and open houses all are fun, energizing, and memorable. At Enerflex, customer open houses were focused on ensuring people had fun and the employees had a lot of fun preparing them. Warren Buffet is renowned for making Berkshire Hathaway's annual meeting a fun and memorable event for attendees. ♦



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