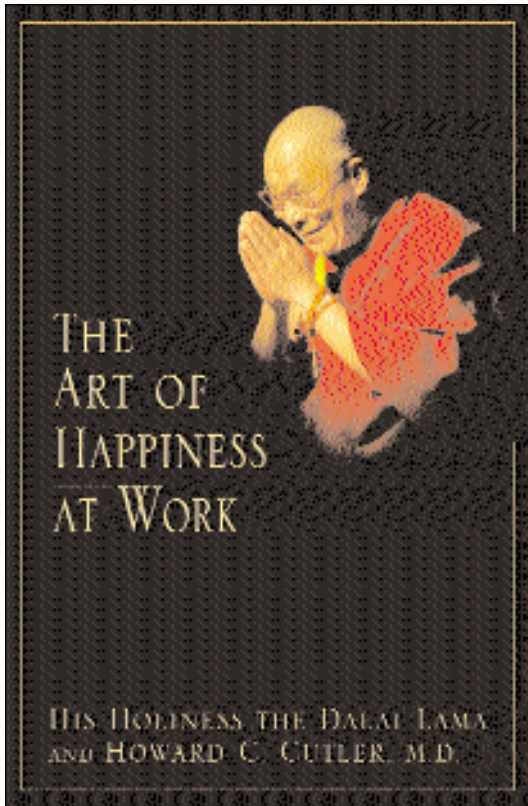


BOOKS



The Art of Happiness at Work

By the Dalai Lama and
Howard C. Cutler

Reviewed by Josephine Rossi

Imagine how you'd feel if you had a job that you dread, an over-demanding boss, and a paycheck that leaves you strapped for cash each month. Now imagine that same situation, but you channel your negative feelings to focus on a resolution instead of allowing anxiety to drain you.

Believe it or not, the difference is simply a change in outlook, and that kind of attitude adjustment is the focus of the Dalai Lama and psychiatrist Howard Cutler's new book, *The Art of Happiness at Work*.

There's no doubt that our careers are a large part of our identity. Westerners

spend a huge portion of their lives working. So, it's no surprise that when we are dissatisfied with our jobs, we tend to feel frustrated with our whole lives. But taking time to understand the harmful effects of negative emotions, as well as the positive consequences of tolerance and compassion, is crucial to a happy life in and out of the office.

If you're not familiar with the Dalai Lama's works, or Buddhism, there are a few things to keep in mind before cracking the cover of this new release. The biggest is that the book isn't a Band-Aid for your work woes. There are no quick fixes or a 10-step program to follow.

ON THE NIGHT STAND

By Ernest Gundling



Since it's not possible to read everything, I'm trying to be more disciplined about what I do read. I focus on a few good ideas at a time, dividing books into categories.

The first type consists of practical and research-based publications, such as *What Really Works* by William Joyce, Nitin Nohria, and Bruce Roberson. It's based on a 10-year study that tried to find the most effective management tools and techniques. *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins, is still on my nightstand because we're trying to apply his approach in our company. The text is easy to understand, yet the principles are challenging.

Another category is for pleasure reading and exploration. *India Unbound*, by Gucharan Das, describes the author's odyssey from childhood to CEO of Procter & Gamble India. The book helped me understand the background of India's tremendous economic surge over the past decade, as well as some factors that still hold it back.

I confess, I've been a science fiction reader since junior high school. I believe that some of today's fiction will become tomorrow's reality. *The First Immortal*, by James Halperin, has been echoing in my mind since I finished it. Halperin's depiction of medical science prolonging life and reanimating great-grandparents doesn't seem inconceivable given recent scientific advancements. Think of how different our approach to training and development would be if people could live for centuries.

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Rather, it's similar in tone and structure to its bestselling predecessor, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. Culter again presents the Dalai Lama's philosophies as a series of discussions, not definitive rules. This structure leaves readers to ponder what relevance the Tibetan leader's ideas have in the workplace and how to incorporate them into their lives.

Readers should keep in mind that these teachings require tempering our natural reactions in tough situations. After all, the advice is coming from a leader who lives apart from his homeland and people. Clearly, this man has more patience and determination than most of us.

What's really surprising about the book is that it isn't profound at all; it's actually a lot of common sense. After discussing the book with a friend, I was amazed at how many logical factors people ignore when choosing a profession. For example, most of us opt for a fat paycheck over a position with less prestige but tasks we enjoy.

Cutler takes the reader by the hand and walks him or her through the Dalai Lama's insights to workplace happiness. He probes particularly relevant topics for a Western audience, such as dealing with conflicts with bosses and co-workers, coping with boredom, and discerning your calling from a mere job.

I admit, it's easy to suspect the teachings of a man who has never punched a timecard or sent out a résumé. I didn't lose my skepticism until I was almost fin-

ished with the book. Even Cutler mentions that he's a bit critical of the kind of insight an exiled monk can offer to a mostly American audience. But perhaps it's the Dalai Lama's disconnection from the U.S. culture that makes his words valuable: His perspective sifts through superficiality to the raw essence of happiness—not just happiness in the workplace, but happiness in life.

The Dalai Lama bases his existence around several Buddhist principles, one of which is an interconnected view of the world and life. Understanding that, it's not so shocking to find versions of key concepts from the original *Art of Happiness* appearing in this workplace edition. One reoccurring theme is compassion. The Dalai Lama contends that it's easier to deal with a boss's bad temper or a co-worker's competitive streak when we understand their personal situations and can empathize with their motivations. We learn not to take such actions personally because we know other factors weigh into their behavior.

A huge breakthrough in the book rests in the discussions about self-awareness and identity. Most of us don't like to evaluate our abilities candidly. But when we have an unbiased view of our strengths and weaknesses, as well as our motivations, we can more accurately assess which career paths will be the most fulfilling.

The Dalai Lama says that people must feel they are productive at their jobs to be totally satisfied, though he encourages

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readers to embrace a definition of *productivity* to mean more than meeting a goal or striking a business deal. In the latter context, he explains, even the Nazis were productive. Incorporating the Buddhist concept of “right livelihood”—work that positively affects not only one’s self, but also co-workers, family, and society—broadens the notion of “productive labor” to include more than conventional accomplishments. That way, we can feel a sense of pride and achievement even during the slow periods in our careers.

The take-away value of *The Art of Happiness at Work* depends solely on the reader’s personality. If you swear by your copy of Anthony Robbins’s *Awaken the Giant Within*, I doubt that you will enjoy the gentle push of Buddhist philosophy. And I bet you’ll be annoyed that the Dalai Lama openly admits to not having all of the answers.

The best way to approach this book is to use it to guide your own soul search for workplace happiness. It provides good starting points, but true contentment is ultimately the result of your own values and actions.

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