

CC:YOU



Go Fish

What a fish market can teach you about loving your job and thrilling your customers.

By Steve Lundin

Photo/Tony Stone/Connie Coleman

Life is too precious for us just to be passing through. So for my training and development consultancy, I searched for an image that would remind us that it's possible to make work an enjoyable part of our lives. I was looking for a way to demonstrate that work is, in fact, life, and the way we work is one way we honor life.

One day the phone rang and I was invited to join a company that makes business learning films. John, the

president and "playground director," and I talked about making a film so powerful that everyone could see the possibilities for enjoying work.

Then, on a cold January day, John and I were finishing up some business in Seattle. I was preparing to fly back to Minneapolis; John was staying behind. As I left, I asked him about his plans for the rest of the day. He answered as he always does: "Shopping."

Later, John told me the story. As he approached the Pike Place Market, he heard what sounded like a crowd at a sporting event. The source of the commotion: World Famous Pike Place Fish. As he approached this Seattle landmark, one of the fishmongers tossed a large, slippery salmon several feet over the counter to a co-worker, who made a spectacular one-handed catch. The crowd cheered and clapped for more. Everywhere John looked, people were smiling, and the cash registers were ringing like crazy. A light bulb went off in his head: Here was the workplace we'd been searching for. We returned with a crew to capture the spirit of the market on film.

In the process, we traced the fishmongers' energy to a few principles for creating a work life that balances joy, productivity, and passion.

Play. The Pike Place fish sellers are known around the world for throwing and catching fish, to the delight of their customers who come from far away to watch and take pictures. In a livable workplace, you find people doing serious work in a lighthearted way. Their secret is finding a way to take their work seriously, but not themselves.

At another workplace, having fun helped a group of call center agents serve clients more effectively. The agents hung disco balls from the ceiling and piped in music. A supervisor has been known to put on roller blades and skate through the call center. On the midnight shifts, workers have pajama parties, donning slippers and playing bingo to keep their energy high. Although the company was at first leery of allowing such unorthodox practices, the proof is in the results: Callers can hear the energy and smiles in the agents' voices.

I challenge you to find a work setting where play is inappropriate. I have yet to come across one; I've collected examples of lightheartedness in mortuaries, oper-

ating rooms, and gas stations.

Make your customers' day. Watching the fish market show, you might think you're just being entertained. But stay around and you'll be engaged. The people who work at Pike Place Fish are dedicated to making customers' visits memorable by finding ways to make their day. If you visit, you may end up catching a fish or taking part in a harmless practical joke.

Our workdays are full of such opportunities. You too can make someone's day just by remembering a name or committing a small act of kindness. The key is to focus on serving. In turn, you'll receive great satisfaction.

authentic conversations makes work a reward and not just a way to rewards.

Choose your attitude. The people who work at Pike Place Fish have also discovered that there's an exhilarating freedom in taking responsibility for one's choices. You can choose an attitude. If you don't like it, you can choose another one.

A street performer and motivational speaker at our company suggests that we use the phone as a tool to remind us of our choices. When it rings, do an attitude check. Ask yourself if the attitude you're about to convey is truly the one you choose. If it isn't, change it.

Commit. What are you committed to?

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Be there. The fish sellers have discovered the power of focusing on one person and one thing at a time. They might do many tasks at once, but they're not distracted when they're engaged with other people.

Poet and business consultant David Whyte writes that the antidote to burnout isn't necessarily rest; it's wholeheartedness. Working on one task while juggling others wears you out. Focusing on what you're doing and the people you're doing it with is a great way to practice wholeheartedness and fight burnout.

At one ski company, employees are known as "Ambassadors of Fun." The company's CEO says it's not enough to be polite to customers and say, "Have a nice day." He encourages all 3,400 employees to engage customers and colleagues on a deeper level, getting to know them as people. Taking part in

At Pike Place Fish, each employee is totally aligned with and committed to the company's overall mission and vision, which is to be world famous. Each employee is personally committed to living that mission in his or her unique way.

When a company has that level of commitment, powerful things happen. Employees trust each other, feel as if they are all "in it together," and thus help each other achieve their common goals. That's the fuel that keeps the vision's flame burning.

Find opportunities for conversations with your colleagues about what you're committed to. You may uncover inspiring possibilities that lead you to new actions. The dialogue itself can create a work atmosphere that is more focused, honest, and alive.

Be it. Each person who works at the fish

market accepts responsibility for re-creating and renewing the market and its vision by the way he or she works. Each person is ever alert for vision moments—opportunities to “be” the vision he or she is committed to.

Every moment you’re awake is an opportunity to “be it”—that is, to be what you want to create in the world. As you put into practice the vision of your company and yourself, you discover that a vision’s power is in the choices available at each present moment. What actions and attitudes will you choose? How will those reflect on your vision? How will those contribute to the way you want the world to be?

Coach it. Always mindful of the commitment that each person has made to the company’s vision, the workers at Pike Place Fish coach each other. As one fish seller explains, you act differently when you’re “being” world famous; you coach each other differently. Any action that’s inconsistent with the vision—being grouchy or pessimistic, leaving a knife on the counter, becoming distracted, or throwing a fish improperly—is reviewed in light of the vision and coached accordingly.

Everyone coaches and everyone, including the owner, can be coached, even by the newest employee. It’s not just about making Pike Place Fish a better place; it’s also about becoming people of integrity. The fish market employees respect and care about each other enough to remind each other continually of the possibilities and purpose they’ve declared for themselves.

You’ll know you’ve been successful in creating a liveable workplace when you go home at the end of the day and you’re energized, not drained—when you find you not only have time for the rest of life, but also have abundant energy to live it. The amazing thing is that this energetic and satisfying work life is only a few choices away from where you are right now.

Steve Lundin is “the Weaver” at ChartHouse Learning, where he helped create two films about Pike Place Fish: Fish! and Fish! Sticks. He’s also the author of FISH! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results (Hyperion, 2000); Lundin can be reached at 800.328.3789 or slrunner@aol.com.

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