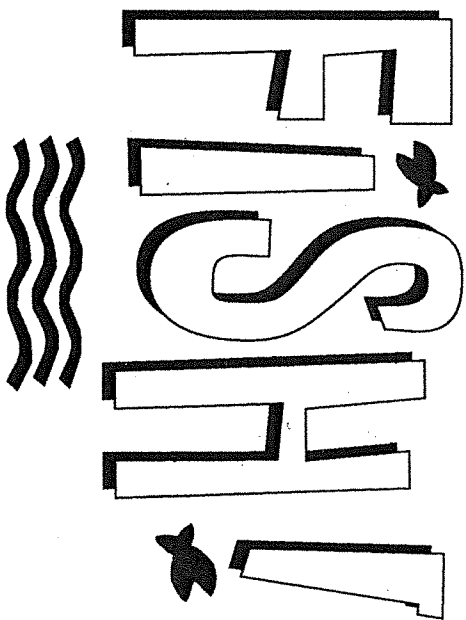


**A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale
and Improve Results**

FISH!



by Stephen C. Lundin, Ph.D., Harry Paul,
and John Christensen



Hodder & Stoughton

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Dedication

This book is for the millions of workers who relish the thought of having a more playfully productive atmosphere at work and for the billions of fish who would rather not find themselves flying through the air at the world famous Pike Place Fish market.

Enclosed are the keys to creating an innovative and accountable work environment where a playful, attentive, and engaging attitude leads to more energy, enthusiasm, productivity, and creativity.

Foreword

by Ken Blanchard, Ph.D.,

co-author of *The One Minute Manager*,
Raving Fans, and *Gung Ho!*

Fish! is an incredible story that John Christensen first caught on film. He and his company, ChartHouse, produced an amazing video on the world famous Pike Place Fish market in Seattle. I have been showing this video at every one of my seminars to illustrate what happens when you create *Gung Ho!* employees—you ignite your workforce and create *Raving Fans*®.

Now Stephen Lundin, and long-term colleague of mine Harry Paul, have teamed up with John to bring the *Fish!* story to print. In whatever media it appears, it's a fabulous love story. As the book suggests, "When we choose to love the work we do, we can catch our limit of happiness, meaning, and fulfillment every day."

How important is that? Incredibly important, especially when you consider that people spend about 75 percent of their adult wake time doing work-related

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activities—getting ready for work, traveling to work, working, contemplating work, and decompressing after work. If we spend that much time in that part of our lives, we ought to enjoy it and be energized by it. And yet, too many people are trading time on the job to satisfy needs elsewhere; “Thank God It’s Friday” is still a way of life for many people.

Those days can stop now—if you read *Fish!*, share it with everyone with whom you work, and implement the four secrets and suggested strategies that Lundin, Paul, and Christensen give you. I guarantee that every manager will benefit from *Fish!*, because it will not only increase employee retention, it will motivate people to take pride in what they do. People like to work in an environment that is fun, energizing, and where they can make a difference. The *Fish!* philosophy will also benefit every employee, because it prevents burnout and will keep you excited about what you do.

As you can tell, I’m excited about *Fish!* I think this is a marvelous book. The story of the world famous Pike Place Fish market is fantastic. But this book is not just about selling fish; it’s a love story that can happen in your organization, too.

LOVING WHAT YOU DO

It is fashionable today to believe that we should not settle for anything less than doing what we love. Write poetry, travel the world on a sailboat, paint—do whatever you love, and the money will follow. We tell ourselves that life is too short to spend our working hours doing anything less than the ideal, and we continue our search for the perfect workplace. The danger is that if our quest for ideal work focuses us on the future, we will miss the amazingly wonderful life that is available today, in this moment.

The fact is that in the real world there are conditions which prevent us from chasing the perfect, ideal job. Many of us have significant responsibilities to family members or to a way of life. For others, a true calling hasn’t made itself visible yet. Some of us are under so much stress in our personal lives there is literally no time or energy to seek a new line of work.

Fish! is a parable, an invented story about finding the deep source of energy, creativity, and passion that exists inside each of us by learning to love what we do, even if at the moment we may not be doing exactly what we love.

★ Seattle-Monday Morning

It was a wet, cold, dark, dreary, dismal Monday in Seattle, inside and out. The best the meteorologist on Channel 4 could offer was a possible break in the clouds around noon. On days like this Mary Jane Ramirez missed Southern California.

What a roller coaster, she thought, as her mind retraced the last three years. Dan, her husband, had received a great offer from Microrule and she had been confident she could find a job once they relocated. In

just four short weeks they had given notice, packed, moved, and found great daycare for the kids. Their house hit the Los Angeles housing market just at the right time and sold immediately. True to her confidence, Mary Jane quickly found a supervisory position in the operations area of First Guarantee Financial, one of Seattle's largest financial institutions.

Dan really loved his job at Microrule. When he came home at night he was bursting with energy and full of stories about the great company for which he now worked and the advanced work they were doing. Dan and Mary Jane would frequently put the children to bed and talk well into the evening. As excited as Dan was about his new company, he was always just as interested in her day, wanting to know about her new colleagues and the challenges she was facing in her work life. Anyone watching would easily guess that they were best friends. The spirit of each shined in the presence of the other.

Their detailed planning had anticipated every possible contingency but one. Twelve months after moving to Seattle, Dan was rushed to the hospital with a burst aneurysm—"a genetic oddity" they called it—and he died of internal bleeding while never regaining

consciousness. There was no warning and no time to say good-bye.

That was two years ago this month. We weren't even in Seattle a full year.

Stopping in mid-thought, with memories flooding her mind, a surge of emotion welled up inside her. She caught herself. *This is not the time to think about my personal life; the workday is less than half over, and I'm swamped with work.*

First Guarantee Financial

During her three years at First Guarantee, Mary Jane had developed a great reputation as a "can-do" supervisor. She wasn't the first to arrive or the last to leave, but she had a work ethic that almost always left her in-basket empty. The thoughtful way she conducted her work actually led to a small problem in the organization as others tried to make sure that their work passed through her part of the organization. They knew the work would get done on time and with the highest quality.

She was also a good person to work for. She always listened closely to the concerns and ideas of her staff

and was well liked and respected in return. It wasn't uncommon for her to cover for someone with a sick child or important appointment. And, as a working manager, she led her department in production. She did this in an easygoing way, which rarely generated any tension—other than tension to get the job done well. Her direct reports and associates enjoyed working with and for her. Mary Jane's small group developed a reputation as a team you could count on.

In sharp contrast, there was a large operations group on the third floor that was often the topic of conversation for the opposite reason. Words like *unresponsive, entitlement, zombie, unpleasant, slow, wasteland*, and *negative* were used frequently to describe this group. It was the group everyone loved to hate. Unfortunately for the company, nearly every department needed to interact with the third floor since they processed most of First Guarantee's transactions. Everyone dreaded any contact with the operations group.

Supervisors swapped stories about the latest fiasco on the third floor. Those who visited the third floor described it as a place so dead that it sucked the life right out of you. Mary Jane remembered the laughter when one of the other managers said that he deserved a

Nobel Prize. When she asked what he meant, he said, "I think I may have discovered life on the third floor." Everyone roared.

Then, a few weeks later, Mary Jane had cautiously and somewhat reluctantly accepted a promotion to manager of the operations group on the third floor of First Guarantee. While the company had great hopes for her, she had major reservations about accepting the job. She had been comfortable in her present job—and her willingness to take risks had been much higher before Dan's death. The group she had been supervising had been with her during the rough days after Dan's death, and she had felt a strong bond with them. It would be hard to leave people who had shared so much of themselves during such dark times.

Mary Jane was acutely aware of the terrible reputation of the third floor. In fact, if it hadn't been for all of the unforeseen expenses of Dan's hospitalization, she probably would have turned down the promotion and pay raise. So here she was, on the infamous third floor. The third person to have the job in the last two years.

The Third Floor

In her first five weeks on the job she had struggled to understand the work and the people. While mildly surprised that she liked many of the people who worked on three, she quickly realized that the third floor deserved its reputation. She had observed Bob, a five-year veteran on the third floor, letting the phone ring seven times before purposely breaking the connection by unplugging the cord. She had overheard Martha describing how she handled those in the company who "hassled" her to do her processing faster—she put their file under the out-basket "by mistake." Every time Mary Jane went into the break room there was someone dozing at the table.

Most mornings the phones rang unanswered for ten to fifteen minutes after the official start of the day because the staff was still arriving. When questioned, the excuses were both abundant and lame. Everything was slow motion. The "zombie" description of the third floor was definitely deserved. Mary Jane did not have a clue what to do, only the knowledge and conviction that she must do something and do it soon.

The night before, after the kids were asleep, she had tried to work out her situation by writing in her journal. She looked down at last night's entry:

It may have been cold and dreary outside on Friday, but the view from my internal office window made dreary sound like a compliment. There was no energy there. At times I find it hard to believe there are living human beings on three. It takes a baby shower or a wedding for anyone to come alive. They never get excited about anything that's actually happening at work.

I have thirty employees for whom I am responsible and for the most part they do a slow, short day's work for a low day's pay. Many of them have done the same slow day's work in the same way for years and are totally bored. They seem to be good people, but whatever spark they may have once had, they have lost. The culture of the department is such a powerful and depressing force that new people quickly lose their spark as well. When I walk among the cubicles it feels like all

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the oxygen has been sucked right out of the air. I can hardly breathe.

Last week I discovered four clerks who were still not using the computer system installed here two years ago. They said they liked doing it the old way. I wonder how many other surprises are in store for me.

I suppose many back room operations are like this. Not much here to get excited about, just lots of transactions which need to be processed. But it doesn't have to be like this. I must find a way to convey how crucial our work is to the company. Our work allows others to serve the company's customers.

Although our work may be a critical part of the big picture, it happens behind the scenes and is basically taken for granted. It's an invisible part of the organization and would never appear on the company's radar screen if it wasn't so bad. And believe me, it is bad.

It is not a love for this work which brings any of us to this department. I'm not the only person with money problems on this floor. Many of the women and one of the men are also single parents. Jack's ailing

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father just moved in with him. Bonnie and her husband now have two grandchildren as full-time residents. The big three are why we are here: salary, security, and benefits.

Mary Jane pondered the last sentence she had written in her journal. Back room operations had always been lifetime positions. The pay was adequate, and the jobs were secure. Looking at the rows of cubicles and desks outside her office, she formulated some questions. "Does my staff know that the security they cherish might be just an illusion? Do they realize the extent to which market forces are reshaping this industry? Do they understand that we will all need to change in order for this company to compete in a rapidly consolidating financial services market? Are they aware that if we don't change we will eventually find ourselves looking for other employment?"

She knew the answers. No. No. No. No. Her staff members were set in their ways. They had been left alone in the back room far too long. They were just doing their jobs and hoping that retirement would come

before change. And what about herself? Was her view that different?

The ringing phone pulled her back into the present. The call was followed by a sixty-minute blur of "fire fighting." First, she found out that an important client file was missing and it was rumored to have last been seen on the third floor. Next, someone from another department was so sick and tired of being put on hold she came to the third floor in person and was creating an unpleasant scene. At least there was some energy to work with. Then someone from legal was disconnected three times in a row. And one of the many staff members out ill today had an important project due. After the last fire of the morning was extinguished, Mary Jane reached for her lunch and headed for the door.

The Toxic Energy Dump

Mary Jane had begun leaving the building for lunch during the last five weeks. She knew the cafeteria lunch group would be doing what they always did, discussing the sins of the company and moaning about the third floor. It was now too personal and much too

depressing to listen to their complaints. She needed some fresh air.

Most of the time she strolled down the hill to eat lunch at the waterfront. There, while nibbling on a bagel, she would gaze at the water or watch the tourists mill around the little shops. It was a tranquil setting, and Puget Sound provided her some contact with the natural world.

She had only made it two cubicles from her office when she heard the distinct sound of her phone ringing. *It could be the day care, she thought. Stacy did have a runny nose this morning.* So she raced back to her office, picking up the phone on the fourth ring. "This is Mary Jane Ramirez," she gasped.

"Mary Jane, this is Bill."

Oh boy, what now, she wondered, as she listened to the voice of her new boss. Bill was another reason she had thought twice about taking the job on three. He had a reputation as a real SOB. As far as she could tell, his reputation was deserved. He would issue commands, cut you off midsentence, and he had an annoying habit of asking about the status of projects in a paternal way. "Mary Jane, are you staying on top of the Stanton project?" As if she didn't have a clue. Mary