

sense a new level of energy on three. Keep up the good work and let me know if there is anything else I can do.”

She was a bit nervous. Each of the teams had asked her to meet with them at least once, and she had done her best to be helpful and supportive without taking control. Although she had been asked for reading material and the use of a conference room in the last two weeks, none of the teams had requested more than that. She really didn't have a clue about the specifics of any of the four presentations. And today was the day they would go off-site to hear the team reports.

At nine in the morning, they all walked down to the Alexis Hotel as Bill and the other volunteers arrived to cover the office. “Good luck,” he said.

They arrived at the Alexis and were directed to the Market Room. *Appropriate*, she thought. She had decided that the Choose Your Attitude Team should present last. She had explained to each team: “I want the ingredient that underlies all of the others to be the last thing we consider.”

She felt a surge of emotion as she entered the meeting room. The room was a sea of color, music, and energy. Balloons were attached to each chair, and col-

orful flower arrangements brought the room to life. *They have responded to the challenge*, she thought. *Their clocks are wound up again*. The biggest surprise of the day was sitting in the back of the room in his full fishmonger outfit. It was Lonnie. She took the seat next to him as things began.

The Play Team

One of the members of the Play Team called the room to attention and asked the whole staff to come up front. As directions were given, everyone stood around rather awkwardly. “Our report is in the form of a game which we'll all play,” said Betty, the Play Team spokesperson.

The Play Team had designed a game using a path of circles cut from colored paper and arranged on the floor so you could step from one circle to the next as the music played. Each circle had written on it a key point from their report. When the music stopped, the person standing on a specific circle was asked to read the text on it. It was sort of like a cakewalk. There were two groups of items. One was a list of benefits and the other a list of implementation ideas. *Great work*, thought Mary Jane.

Benefits of Play

- Happy people treat others well.
- Fun leads to creativity.
- The time passes quickly.
- Having a good time is healthy.
- Work becomes a reward and not just a way to rewards.

Implementing Play on the Third Floor

- Post signs saying, THIS IS A PLAYGROUND. WATCH OUT FOR ADULT CHILDREN.
- Start a joke-of-the-month contest with its own bulletin board.
- Add more color and make the environment more interesting.
- Add more life with plants and an aquarium.
- Special events such as a lunchtime comedian.

- Small lights to turn on when it is time to lighten up a bit or when you have a good idea.
- Instruction in creativity.
- A designated creativity area called the Sand Box.
- Form an ongoing play committee to keep the ideas flowing.

The Make Their Day Team

The Make Their Day Team was next. "Go out into the hall and have some coffee while we set up," was their first instruction. When everyone was called back into the room, the staff was divided into small groups with a member of the Make Their Day Team in each group. Stephanie described the assignment as everyone milled around.

"I want each group to take fifteen minutes to develop a list of strategies for supporting and enhancing the work of a key group of people, our internal customers. But first I want to introduce some data. These are the findings of a customer survey we performed.

Take a deep breath because you aren't going to like what you see." A slide went up. A wave of shock passed through the room; there was actually one audible gasp.

RESULTS OF CUSTOMER SURVEY

1. Our customers dread working with us. They call us "the sleepwalkers" because we seem positively sedated to them. They would prefer a good fight than the impersonal treatment they receive.
2. The work we do is adequate, but we rarely offer to extend ourselves in order to help them serve the external customer. We do our job, period, and no more.
3. We often treat our customers as if they are interrupting us.
4. We frequently pass our customers around from one person to another without ever conveying an interest in solving the problem. We appear to be attempting to avoid responsibility.

5. Our customers joke about our response, or lack thereof, to a problem which arises after 4. They laugh about the stampede to the elevator at 4:30.
6. Our customers question our very commitment to the enterprise.
7. We are referred to as the "last stage of decline."
8. Discussions have started concerning the possibility of replacing our department with an outside contractor.

Stephanie said, "Our team was first shocked and then angered by these findings. Slowly we came to realize that the customers feel how they feel. No matter what excuses we offer or what kind of spin we put on it, it doesn't change how our internal customers feel. That's the reality as they see it. The question is, what are we going to do about it?"

Another team member continued with considerable passion, "I don't think we realize how important our role is in the business of First Guarantee. Many people count on us, and they look bad when we drop the ball or drag

our feet. The fact that many of us have other obligations and that we aren't very high on the compensation scale is not their problem. They're just trying to serve the customers who pay our salaries—and we're seen by them as an impediment to high quality service."

Then Stephanie said, "We need your ideas and need them badly. Please help us to take a step away from the dump and toward making our customers' day. Each group has forty-five minutes to come up with as many ideas as possible. Please find a seat and get started. The member of our team will serve as scribe." There was silence for a while. Then the groups began attacking the problem, still riding on the energy generated by the first presentation.

When the time had come, Stephanie announced, "Let's take a short break while the scribes integrate their notes." After ten minutes, she reconvened the staff. "Here's a quick look at the results," she said, "and this award goes to the members of the table four group." The people from table four came up to receive their Make Their Day buttons. Smaller buttons were passed out to everyone else. Attention turned to their summary report.

Benefits of Make Their Day

- It is good for business.
- Serving our customers well will give us the satisfaction that comes to those who serve others. It will focus our attention, away from our problems onto how we can make a positive difference to others. This is healthy, will feel good, and will unleash even more energy.

Implementing Make Their Day

- Stagger our hours so there is coverage from 7 A.M. until 6 P.M. This will be good for our customers (and may also be helpful to some of us who need different start times).
- Pull together some focus groups to study ways we can be of service to our customers. Should we have specialty groups, for instance, focusing on specific customer categories?

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- Have a monthly and an annual award for service, based on the recommendation of our customers who said their day had been made.
- Implement a 360-degree feedback process which includes our customers.
- Appoint a special task force dedicated to surprising and delighting our customers.
- Ask our key customers to “come out and play” once a month.
- Study what it would take to implement the “moment of truth” idea, which started at SAS, Scandinavian Airlines. We would try to make every transaction with our customers a positive transaction.

Mary Jane quietly rejoiced. “If they care this much, we can turn our department around. Stephanie is on fire and her group shows signs of catching the same enthusiasm. We can do it! I know we can!” Out of the corner of her eye she noticed that Lonnie had a pleased look on his face.

FISH!

The Present Moment Team

The Present Moment Team took an entirely different approach, which gave a welcome change of pace. With soothing music playing in the background, one of the group members said, “Close your eyes and relax for a minute. Breathe deeply as I guide you through a number of visualizations that will help us be fully present.”

When she was finished, she said, “Now listen as members of our group offer some thoughts. Stay relaxed, try to even your breathing, and keep your eyes closed.”

A number of inspirational readings followed. One of the readings went something like this:

The past is history

The future is a mystery

Today is a gift

That is why we call it the present

John offered a personal story. “I was living a busy life,” he said with sadness in his voice, “trying to make ends meet and working both sides against the middle. One day my daughter asked me to go to the park. I told

her it was a wonderful idea, but I had a lot to do at that moment. I said she should wait until later, after I had a chance to catch up. But there always seemed to be some urgent and pressing work to do and the days passed. Days led to weeks and weeks to months." With a choking voice, he said that four years passed and he never did go to the park. His daughter is now fifteen and no longer interested in the park, nor, for that matter, in him.

John paused and took a deep breath. "I talked to one of the fish guys about being present, and I realized how infrequently I was really present at home or at work. The fish guy invited me to visit the market with the whole family. My daughter didn't want to go, but I finally wore her down and she came along. We had a good time, and I worked on being present with my children. When my wife took my son down the street to the toy store, I sat down with my daughter and told her how sorry I was that I really hadn't been there for her. I told her I hoped she could forgive me and that while I couldn't change the past, I let her know that I was now dedicated to being present in the present. She said I wasn't that bad a dad—I just needed to lighten up a little. I've got a ways to go," he said, "but I'm im-

proving. Being present could help me recover something I wasn't aware I had lost: a relationship with my daughter."

After John was finished, Lonnie whispered to Mary Jane, "The fish guy was Jacob. He has been higher than a kite ever since. He's a new guy, and it was his first taste of really helping someone."

Janet also became quite emotional when she described a coworker at her previous job. "This person kept trying to get my attention," she said, "but I was distracted by personal issues, and we never connected. Then all hell broke loose. It seems she was way over her head and was covering up the lack of progress by issuing imaginary reports. By the time it all came to light, it was too late to correct. She lost her job, the company lost a client and a great deal of money, and I eventually lost my job because we were unable to replace the work. All of this could have been avoided if I had been present for a coworker who was reaching out for help."

Then Beth told a personal story of riding on a stationary bike in front of the TV while trying to catch up on some reading, when her son came in and sat down on the couch. She could tell he was distressed. "A

mother knows these things," she said. "In the past I would have continued doing what I was doing while talking to him. But experience and a divorce have taught me that efficiency isn't always wise or nice with loved ones. So I turned off the TV, got off of the bicycle, set the magazines aside, and spent the next hour listening deeply as my son described the difficult time he was having just coping with life. I was really glad I made the choice to be fully present."

A few more members of the group told a mix of personal and business stories. Then they confirmed their commitment to being present for one another and for internal customers. "When you are present you show consideration for the other person," one of the team members added. They also committed to being fully present when discussing an issue, whether with each other or a customer; they would truly listen and not allow themselves to be distracted. They encouraged one another to ask, "Is this a good time? Are you present?" To support one another in asking these questions they established a code phrase. "You seem distracted," was chosen as a special code to signal a possible present moment issue. Everyone agreed to give it a try. And everyone also agreed never again to

read or answer e-mails while talking on the phone with a colleague or customer.

The Choose Your Attitude Team

Last came the Choose Your Attitude Team. Their verbal report was brief and to the point. "Here are the benefits our team identified as a result of choosing your attitude.

"First, by accepting that you choose your attitude, you demonstrate a level of personal accountability and proactivity which will fill the third floor with energy, all by itself.

"Second, choosing your attitude and acting like a victim are mutually exclusive.

"Third, we hope the attitude you choose is to bring your best self to work and to love the work you do. We may not be able to do exactly what we love at the present time, but any of us can choose to love what we do. We can bring our best qualities to our work—it is our choice. If we can accomplish this one thing, our work area will become an oasis of energy, flexibility, and creativity in a tough industry."

Implementing Choose Your Attitude

Margaret, the highly animated team spokesperson, suggested that the implementation plan for Choose Your Attitude was a highly personal one. "Many of us have lost sight of our ability to choose. We must be compassionate with each other but work together to nurture our ability to exercise free will. If you don't know you have choices or don't believe you have choices, you don't. There are people in our group who have had some very difficult life experiences. It will take some of us quite a while to be able to internalize this idea that we can choose our attitude."

Another team member continued, "We have identified two ways to implement Choose Your Attitude and have already taken some steps.

"First, we've purchased for everyone copies of a little book titled *Personal Accountability: The Path to a Rewarding Work Life*. Our group will organize discussion groups after you have had a chance to read it. If that goes well, we will follow with discussions of *Raving Fans, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Gang Ho!*, and *The Road Less Traveled*. All of these books can help us understand the concept of choosing an attitude.

"Second, we've prepared an attitude menu for everyone to use back at the office. You've seen a version of this before. We still don't know who put the first one on our office door, so we can't give credit. Now you have your personal menu for each day."

Mary Jane looked down at her attitude menu. It had two sides. On one side was a frowning face surrounded by words like *angry*, *disinterested*, and *bitter*. On the other side was a smiling face with words like *energetic*, *caring*, *vital*, *supportive*, and *creative*. At the top it said: THE CHOICE IS YOURS. It was a nice extension of the menu over the main door to the third floor. Mary Jane jumped up and set off to congratulate each and every member of her staff with Lonnie a few steps behind her, providing his own brand of encouragement. It was after lunch before she finished talking with everyone. She now knew they were well on their way to cleaning up the toxic energy dump.

Lonnie walked Mary Jane back to First Guarantee. It wasn't surprising that they attracted a few stares: a businesswoman and a fishmonger in full regalia. What was surprising was how many knew Lonnie.

"So, your boss doesn't know about the job offer, does he," said Lonnie. Two weeks earlier, Mary Jane

FISH!

had received an unexpected call from First Guarantee's main competitor, making an attempt to lure her away.

"I don't think so. I believe the recruiter talked to my old boss. The woman who recently left First Guarantee for a wonderful position in Portland. I haven't said anything at work."

"I couldn't understand your turning down such a lucrative offer, but now I see why. You are committed to this process, and you couldn't let these people down, could you?"

"That was part of it, Lonnie. But after working so hard to make First Guarantee more fun and a better place to work, why would I leave? The good times are just starting."

Sunday, February 7: The Coffee Shop One Year Later.

Mary Jane opened her book, *Simple Abundance*, and turned to February 7.

This stuff is timeless, she thought. A year ago I was sitting here, wondering how I would ever clean up the toxic energy dump. In fact, it was here that I realized I was part of the problem and needed to lead myself before I could lead the group.

Those committee reports at the hotel were a great start. The staff had always been capable of much more—it just took

FISH!

some fish guys to bring those capabilities to light. The third floor is a different place now, and our new problem is all the people from around the company who want to work there. I guess the energy was there all the time.

And the Chairwoman's Award was such a nice surprise. I think the chairwoman was caught off guard when I asked for so many copies of the award. One for me, one for Bill, one for each employee in the department, and one for Lonnie and each of the other fish guys. I enjoy seeing it hanging above their cash register at the world famous Pike Place Fish market and displayed prominently in Lonnie's living room.

She opened her journal to one of her favorite sections she had transcribed, a piece written by John Gardner on the meaning in life.

Meaning

Meaning is not something you stumble across, like the answer to a riddle or the prize in a treasure hunt.

Meaning is something you build into your life. You build it out of your own past, out of your affections and loyalties, out of the experience of humankind as it is passed on to you, out of your own talent and

FISH!

understanding, out of the things you believe in, out of the things and people you love, out of the values for which you are willing to sacrifice something. The ingredients are there. You are the only one who can put them together into that pattern that will be your life. Let it be a life that has dignity and meaning for you. If it does, then the particular balance of success or failure is of less account.

John Gardner

Mary Jane was wiping tears from her eyes as she closed the journal where she kept her thoughts and inspirational "keepers."

"Lonnie, could I have a piece of that scone, before you finish the whole darn thing?" Lonnie had been sitting quietly across from her, reading. He pushed the plate over to her. When she reached down for the scone, she found instead a small diamond engagement ring sitting in the large open mouth of a fish head. She looked up at Lonnie, who had a large question mark on his nervous face. Choking with laughter, she sputtered, "Oh, Lonnie! Yes! Yes! I will! But don't you ever stop playing?"

It had been a cold, dark, dreary day in Seattle on the outside. But something far different had been chosen for the inside.

THE CHAIRWOMAN'S AWARD CEREMONY

The chairwoman came to the podium and looked out at the audience. She glanced down at her notes and then looked up again saying, "I can't remember a prouder moment in my life than tonight. Something very special has happened at First Guarantee. In a back room operation on the third floor, Mary Jane Ramirez and her team members rediscovered that satisfying, rewarding work can be a choice we make when we come through the door in the morning. It is as simple as asking, 'Is this going to be a good day?' And answering, 'Yes! I choose to make this a great day!'"

"Long-term employees have the enthusiasm of new hires and what was thought to be routine work has been transformed into value-added activity. I understand the ingredients for this trans-

formation were discovered at a local fish market. The team on the third floor observed that if you could make a fish market a great place to work, you could choose to make any department of First Guarantee a great place to work.

"The ingredients of this transformation are inscribed on a plaque which has been hung in the front entrance of our headquarters building. It reads as follows:

OUR WORKPLACE

As you enter this place of work please *choose* to make today a great day. Your colleagues, customers, team members, and you yourself will be thankful. Find ways to *play*. We can be serious about our work without being serious about ourselves. Stay focused in order to be *present* when your customers and team members most need you. And should you feel your energy lapsing, try this surefire remedy: Find someone who needs a helping hand, a word of support, or a good ear—and *make their day*.