

SUMMARY

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JOY INC.

BY RICH SHERIDAN



Summary of “Joy Inc.” by Rich Sheridan

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How to fall in love with what you do.

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Introduction

Would you describe your office as your happy place? Do you leap out of bed every morning and exclaim, “Yay! I get to go to work!” Probably not, right? In fact, if you’re like most people, you’d do almost anything to get out of going to work, whether it’s calling in sick or claiming you can’t go in because you’re attending the funeral of your cousin’s hamster. In fact, you might actually rather be sick than spend one more day at your job! But why do we hate work so much? Is it because we’re all so lazy that we truly just want to play all day? For some of us, that might be the case-- after all, unlimited free time is pretty fun!-- but in most cases, it’s not because we hate the work. It’s because we hate our company culture.

That’s what the author found when he was the manager of a software development firm. And that’s why he started dreaming about a company that was founded on joy. A company whose top priority was employee satisfaction. A company where people really did look forward to coming to work! And that’s how he decided to take the plunge and create one. This book tells the story of his journey and how you can find joy in your job too.



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Why You Need More Joy in Your Workplace

As we established in the introduction, most people aren't too excited to be at work. As a result, they often let their displeasure show. But while this can be inconvenient and upsetting for your co-workers, another significant concern is the impact that your mindset can have on you. After all, the human mind is a powerful thing. Although you can't make things happen simply by thinking about them, you do have the power to influence your mood, your confidence, and your productivity through the things you tell yourself.

So, if you constantly tell yourself, "I hate this, I don't want to be here," and other negative things, this will affect your mentality, your mood, and your job performance. And that's why the author wants to start this chapter by asking you a few important questions that will require you to do a bit of soul-searching. Who are you when you're at work? Are you friendly, approachable, and kind? Or do you try to project what you think is a professional persona? For many people, their professional image differs wildly from the way they'd behave in a setting they enjoyed, like hanging out with friends, for example. That's because people often assume that professionalism equates to being aloof, distant, and unapproachable. The temptation to put on this mask is usually driven by a desperate desire to be taken seriously or to put forth an official "I'm at work" vibe.

Unfortunately however, this is problematic on a couple of levels. For starters, it creates an uncomfortable environment at work and reinforces an us/them mentality, with employees thinking of the manager as an aloof authority figure with whom they can neither relate nor connect. And secondly, it generates undue stress as employees and managers alike feel pressure to pretend to be someone they're not. And as you might imagine, this lack of authenticity and personality generates a sense of tension that makes it difficult to do your best work. So, how can you alleviate that sense of tension in the workplace? Well, it's no surprise that the author's starting suggestion is to infuse your environment with the two things it's lacking: authenticity and joy. In practice, that means that managers and employees alike need to

begin with a foundation of openness. Showing your emotions and admitting when you're stressed, scared, or overwhelmed might not feel very professional, but it actually does more for your workplace's development than you think! By being real and showing your genuine self to your colleagues, you'll be setting the tone of your company culture. And your example is even more powerful if you're leading as a manager!

So, start by embracing your vulnerability. Communicate to others that it's okay to be overwhelmed and it's okay to ask for help. In so doing, you'll show your co-workers that you want to live and work as a team-- and that a real team supports every player. And if you're in a management position, don't lead with the assumptions that some jobs are "too small" for you. For example, the author often cleans up after luncheons or helps wash dishes in the breakroom to remind his employees that they're all on equal footing. And as a result, his team is not only stronger, better, and more productive-- they're happier. Put simply, the key takeaway from this chapter is that joyful leaders are authentic, vulnerable, and humble.



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Your Space Impacts Your Joy

Have you ever seen those heartbreaking pictures of chickens who are raised on meat farms? Crammed into tight, crowded cages in gray, dimly lit warehouses, your heart breaks as you imagine what their daily life must be like. Even for a chicken, it's pretty hard to have any hope or joy in your day when your physical surroundings are so grim. The author observes that your physical surroundings in the workplace can have a powerful affect on your mental health, your joy, and your job performance. And that's why he believes that creating a positive workspace is one of the most vital things you can do.

For example, if you're cramped into an office that's basically a giant cubicle farm, you're not much better off than those poor chickens. Offices that are designed for maximum capacity are often crowded, dimly lit, and severely detrimental to employee morale. In fact, in many offices, it's possible to go through your entire work day without ever seeing the sun! So, the author recommends that you start by literally re-designing your offices. Try to go for an open design with lots of space, bright colors, and windows! Give employees the freedom to see, laugh, and talk with one another while ensuring that everyone can maintain their own personal space. Strive for a light, fun, and open atmosphere that encourages joy and productivity!

These physical updates might not seem like a big deal, but your physical surroundings have a powerful impact on your attitude. So, if you want to infuse your workplace with joy, it might be worth giving your office an update. The author found that his own redesign efforts completely changed the company culture at his small software company. Because once he redesigned the office, people looked forward to coming to work! So far from feeling oppressive, their workspace was a calm and pleasing place that they actually wanted to spend time in. Your office should be exactly the same.



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Communication is the Key

Would you say your workplace utilizes good communication practices? When you speak up at work, do you feel as though your thoughts are valued and appreciated? Do you enjoy a free and open exchange of ideas? Many people would say that this is not the case in their environments. However, the author believes that any workplace can and should establish strong communication practices! Here's how it works. For starters, the author's company-- Menlo Software-- employs a practice known as "high-speed voice technology." Although that might sound like something from Star Trek, in practice, it's really about simple and direct communication.

This communication style is also closely connected to the author's theory about open and joyful workspaces. Because Menlo's office is an open-plan design, everyone is free to move about and join other people's conversations as needed. This eliminates the division and competition of different departments being tucked away in aloof or unreachable spaces. It also means that there is no confusion about who works where or how to get in touch with a colleague; if you're a software developer and you need to talk to someone in marketing, you don't have to feel as though you're wandering onto another planet just to find their office. Instead, you can simply walk over to their desk in the same room! And because different departments are carrying on their own conversations in the same room, communication is increased. For example, if you happen to hear that a colleague has a question about a project you worked on, you can go over and help them out. This eliminates a great deal of confusion right away!

The author asserts that an increase in clear and open communication automatically increases your joy. And in order to facilitate this, the author has introduced another unconventional method: office buddies. Under this system, each employee has a partner with whom they work closely. In many cases, they might even share office supplies such as a computer. Sharing immediately necessitates communication and it also means that you have to get along with the other person. This working arrangement also necessitates

a mutual exchange; in order to work closely with another person, you must get to know them. And you also have to accept that each of you has something to teach the other. So, through this combination of sharing, open space, and direct communication, the author cultivated a joyful and harmonious office. And he firmly believes that you can do the same for your own workplace!



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Feel Safe and Fail Often

Do you feel safe at work? That might sound like a bit of an odd question because most people don't work in war zones. For the most part, we don't go to work every day fearing for our lives. But the author observes that there are other types of fears which can steal our joy and make us uncomfortable at work. For example, let's say you have to give a presentation at work and you're scared to death. You're afraid of being ridiculed by your colleagues. You're afraid that someone will pipe up with, "Why didn't you think of...?" or phrase a critical comment in the form of a question. You're afraid that your boss will encourage or engage with this criticism. So, before you give your presentation, you're a bundle of nerves. And because we often tend to create self-fulfilling prophecies as a result of our anxiety, there's a strong chance that you won't do your best or that you'll make a mistake that will trigger the cycle of events you fear. Needless to say, it's unlikely that you'll be at the top of your game.

But in contrast to this scenario, let's imagine a different outcome. Let's say that you feel comfortable around your colleagues and your supervisor. Perhaps you have an established pattern of open and constructive communication. You value their feedback and you trust them to give you honest and helpful critiques on your performance. How would that change your attitude going into your presentation? Would you feel confident and at ease? Would you be excited to debut your hard work and eager to discover new ways you can grow? It's easy to imagine that, if your presentation was characterized by these feelings instead, you would do a much better job! In fact, at the end of your work day, you would likely feel energized, encouraged, and accomplished!

So, what made the difference in this scenario? Does this mean that you and your colleagues have to be the best of friends? Do you all have to like each other well enough to go out for drinks outside of work? Do you have to love every single aspect of your job? Fortunately, the answer is no! That's because psychological safety isn't dependent on being best buds with your co-

workers. Rather, the difference is simply characterized by positive and effective communication practices. Many of the world's leading companies-- including Google-- have recognized the value of implementing psychological safety practices in the workplace. In fact, a 2016 article from the New York Times reported on Google's experiments with psychological safety and made an intriguing discovery. They observed that Google was doing so well that many leading sociologists and psychologists had come in to observe their team-building strategies. (And the same is true of Menlo Software!) At the end of the study, both the researchers and the Google employees concluded that psychological safety was the most important ingredient for crafting a healthy and effective workplace.

Why? Well, if you've ever worked with other people-- whether in a professional capacity or on a group project in college-- you know that working together can be hard! It can be difficult to blend a variety of different cultures, languages, opinions, and learning styles. And it's especially tough if some people refuse to pull their weight! Psychological safety practices work to eliminate these difficulties and replace them with open communication, mutual trust, and honesty. The author believes that feeling safe at work is crucial to creating a joyful environment and that's why he encourages a culture of openness and security that's founded on the freedom to look silly, to mess up, or to fail. Encouraging failure might sound foreign to us because we've probably never encountered that attitude before. You get congratulations cards and balloons and parties when you pass the test or graduate. But no one throws you a party for failing! And as a result, we internalize failure as being one of the worst things that can happen to us.

In fact, people often live in such crippling fear of failure that they refuse to try new things in case they fail. The author believes that this is one of the most toxic attitudes for a workplace to have. However, he's also quick to point out that encouraging failure is not the same thing as encouraging your employees to underperform. It's also not the same thing as saying, "We have no standards at our company! We never try to do anything!" Many managers-- and many highly motivated employees-- believe in this misperception, however. In fact, a lot of people misidentify failure as the number-one thing

to avoid at all costs. This is often what causes managers to promote highly competitive or fearful environments; without the presence of fear, they believe that people will slack off or lack the motivation to work hard.

But as we've seen in the previous chapters, that's not necessarily the case! Fear can also generate some truly toxic results, like poor performance, unethical decision-making, and an increase in depression and anxiety. That's why the author believes that we should learn to embrace failure instead. Because, even if failing is unpleasant at the moment, we almost always learn something from our failures. We learn what doesn't work. We learn how not to do something. And if we open ourselves up to embracing our failures, we can use them as learning opportunities! We can use our failures as launching pads to explore new possibilities and new avenues of success.

This means that if you encourage your employees to avoid failure, you're ultimately telling them to avoid learning. That's probably not what you want to communicate, right? So, the next time an employee makes a mistake or gets an answer wrong, don't jump on them or make fun of them in front of the entire office. Instead, praise them for speaking up or making a guess. Encourage them to keep finding a solution. And, as a manager, make it clear that you don't always have the answers! By showing that you're vulnerable and fallible too, you're communicating that it's okay to get things wrong sometimes and that it's safe to fail around you.



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Final Summary

The majority of people don't feel joyful or excited about coming to work. But the author believes that that can-- and should!-- change in every workplace in the world. That's why he encourages everyone to cultivate a joyful workplace by implementing a few key practices. For starters, it's important to understand why joy is the key to a successful and productive work environment. Next, you can begin to cultivate joy by restructuring your office. Your workplace should also combine open communication and open spaces so that people are encouraged to share, be direct, and break down the walls that divide them. And lastly, you can cultivate joy in your workplace by creating a culture of freedom and safety that enables everyone to embrace their full potential.



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