

SUMMARY

CHIEF JOY OFFICER

RICHARD SHERIDAN



Summary of “Chief Joy Officer” by Richard Sheridan

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How to lead by spreading joy.

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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.

The Qualities of a Joyful Leader

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.

What Color Are You?

That's probably not a question you're used to being asked, but psychologist and author Thomas Erikson believes it's important. That's because his groundbreaking study *Surrounded by Idiots* is founded on a color-coded categorization of the four personality types that influence human behavior. For example, according to Erikson, "red" personalities are characterized by dominance and aggression while "yellows" are bubbly, optimistic, and creative. Their green and blue counterparts, however, are driven by a need for stability, security, and attention to detail. Understanding your personality type-- as well as those of the people you work with-- is vital for success because it enables you to communicate effectively and avoid unnecessary conflict.

So, start by considering your personality type and how it impacts your leadership style or work ethic. How does it affect your communication with others? How does it influence your outlook on life? For example, do you prioritize clarity and directness? Do you feel like a little conflict every now and then is healthy? Would you describe yourself as aggressive? If so, you're probably a red personality. As a result, you might not have a lot of patience for yellows-- who are masters at small talk and funny anecdotes-- and who view it as rude if you just get straight to the point.

This means that if you're working with yellow personalities, you might need to consider relaxing your communication style so that it's more inclusive. Because although we need direct and ambitious people who aren't afraid to make tough calls-- and those qualities will serve you well as a leader!-- sometimes we need to take a walk on the optimistic side. So, take some time to connect with your yellow colleagues; they're experts at networking and collaboration, after all, and they have a special gift for making others feel welcomed and inclusive. That's why reds and yellows can actually work really well together, provided they operate on a foundation of inclusivity and mutual respect. Because a yellow can balance out a red's aggressive tendencies and make connections with others while a red can help yellows

be more direct and assertive. And-- perhaps most importantly-- yellows can help reds learn to embrace optimism.

And the same is true of blues and greens, both of whom likely feel a personal connection to the Winnie the Pooh character Eeyore. Everyone remembers Eeyore as the pessimist, the one who's always down in the dumps and looking at life through a glass-half-empty approach. Although that might be frustrating to yellows-- who prefer to walk on the sunny side of life, sometimes even to a fault-- but once again, mutual respect is required. For example, blues and greens view themselves as being realistic rather than pessimistic and this plays into their conflict-avoidant natures. Blues and greens are your detail-oriented people, the ones with backup plans for everything, and the ones who will always check everything twice. While their emphasis on caution, detail, and double-checking might be perceived as annoying, they can also model valuable examples for their brash red and yellow counterparts. And, once again, yellows can work with all other personality types to help them embrace positivity.

So, whether you're a manager or an employee, think about your personality type and how it impacts your work on a day-to-day basis. Take a moment for self-reflection and consider: do you need to temper your ambition with a bit of positivity? Would doing so help you lead with joy? You won't have to look too hard or too long to find that the answer is pretty much always yes!

How Can I Help You?

You sometimes hear this phrase thrown around in conjunction with, “Do you want fries with that?” as a means of mocking people who work in service industries like food or hospitality. The implication, of course, is that by working as a waitress or an employee at McDonald’s, you have somehow failed at life or education by not taking a more “impressive” job. And although we may not be conscious of the inherent classism and bias at play when we say this, what we’re ultimately communicating is, “Serving people is something to make fun of. Serving people is something you do when all the good options are taken.” But is that truly the attitude you want to define your business?

The author remarks that serving others-- enhancing their lives through positive contributions or sacrifices-- should be at the core of everything we do. And as such, it should especially be the foundation of a business. That’s why he takes care to lead by example through small acts of service like those mentioned in the previous chapter-- helping to clean up after client lunches or helping wash the dishes in the breakroom. In the earlier chapter, we discussed how this sets a standard of equality in the workplace. But it also goes the extra mile by communicating to your colleagues that you’re willing to connect with them through service. Leading by this example also indicates that you’re willing to challenge the status quo in a competitive market.

By practicing kindness, going the extra mile, and leading with a heart for serving others, you communicate that kindness is worth more to you than making a quick buck. And if this is the standard you practice in your workplace, that means it can also influence your transactions with your customers. So, as you move forward, start by asking: what is our company’s stance on service? How are we using our platform to serve others? And what can we do to create a company culture that’s grounded in serving others?

Leaders Not Bosses

Remember that expression “like a boss?” Although it’s sort of fallen out of fashion, people used to say it all the time as a way to indicate success. To do something “like a boss” was to say that you had mastered something or were especially successful. To be “like a boss” was to be cool or admired. But that’s not typically how we think of our bosses at work, is it? No, when people talk about their managers, different terms get thrown around and they look more like the tacky t-shirts or mugs with slogans like, “A boss is like a diaper: full of crap and always on your butt.” And although that’s hardly flattering, the truth is that that’s usually how we feel about our employers. That’s why the author advocates a different approach: one that invites managers to become leaders not bosses.

So, what’s the difference? Well, as you might guess from the wording, “leader” implies that you take more of a guiding approach, leading your employees in the right direction. While “boss,” by contrast suggests that you’re more focused on the power aspect of your position and your ability to “boss others around.” Or if you want to simplify it even more, you could say that a leader inspires while a boss demands. And when we look at it that way, it’s not hard to see the difference! It’s also not hard to figure out which one we’d rather be. However, this upgrade to current management models has another side as well and that targets the position of a leader. This is critical because, when we think of a boss, we think of someone who has been put in charge. They might be someone with an office, for example, or someone with a certain title. They also typically have a higher pay grade.

But that’s not the case for a leader. By contrast, a leader can operate in any position in the company. They can be an average worker with no special promotions or responsibilities. That’s because your ability to be a leader isn’t defined by your role within your company. When a company culture is dedicated to promoting excellence through leadership, anyone can step up and be a leader. This in turn opens up the possibility for a variety of different people with different personalities to fill gaps and solve problems

by utilizing their unique skill sets. And in so doing, they can not only create a vibrant and collaborative work environment, they can inspire others! Because that's what happens when you remove "bosses" from the equation. If people are free to lead and grow instead of being bossed around, creativity and collaboration blossoms!

And as a result, your work environment will be infused with productivity and joy. People will feel free to try things, even if they fail. People will relax under the absence of pressure to "get things done or else." Colleagues who might never have interacted with each other under different circumstances will be free to form partnerships. And you might also find that the absence of bosses equates to the absence of blame culture as well. Blame culture runs rampant under a traditional structure because of the chain of command. The traditional chain of command we're used to-- which positions one boss or multiple bosses at the head of several departments-- is predicated on hyper-productivity and the completion of tasks. If someone fails to meet deadlines or messes up a project, it's quick and easy to say, "It's Julie from Legal's fault!" or "Ben from Communications screwed up!"

Unsurprisingly, the pressure to live and work in this environment is stressful for many people. It's so stressful, in fact, that some are afraid to propose new ideas, speak up, or challenge systems that are no longer beneficial. Why? Because they're afraid of hearing their ideas shot down by an egotistical boss. Or maybe because they're afraid of being blamed if their new idea flops. But if you don't have a boss calling the shots and you eradicate a hierarchy grounded in pressure, innovation will flourish. Although it might sound preposterous to assume that all of this can happen by simply removing bosses from your company structure, the truth is that-- at the core-- this is about restructuring your company's attitudes.

So, consider removing blame culture and bosses from your company culture and instead ask, "How can we work together?" Because if your company is grounded in collaboration and a sense of mutual accountability, everyone will be motivated to work together for the good of the group. And as a result, you'll eliminate resentment, competition, and stress.

Final Summary

Whether you're a manager or an average employee, dreading your work day is all too common. Sadly, most of us find our jobs dreary or torturous and as a result, we dread going. But Richard Sheridan believes that we can change that, because that's exactly what he did! Dedicating himself to rebranding his identity as his workplace's "Chief Joy Officer," Sheridan learned that it's possible to revolutionize your company culture simply by changing your outlook and instituting some new best practices.

For example, the author advocates instituting leaders instead of bosses, cultivating a culture of service, and replacing your company hierarchy with a spirit of equality. By breaking down the barriers between managers and employees and offering everyone the opportunity to lead through collaboration, you can eliminate the prevalence of stress and blame culture which so often characterizes our workplaces. You can also go the extra mile to do kind things for clients and customers alike, invite everyone to be authentic, and demonstrate the value of vulnerability in the workplace.



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