

# ENJOYING Your Job

Why work is intensely personal and workplace culture is your DNA.

By: Michael Kerr

I sometimes refer to myself as a “recovering government manager.”

Audiences laugh when I use that phrase, perhaps because they recognize the symptoms of being in recovery, or worse, are still patients of the asylum themselves.

Now, I should clarify something – I am, thankfully, no longer in recovery. But it took several years to completely heal.

Like far too many people, I worked in a workplace culture that slowly morphed into a soul-sucking, fun-sucking, Dilbert-like work environment. Bad hair days evolved into bad hair weeks. Brainstorming sessions became blame-storming sessions. The deep joy that I had once experienced in my work went MIA.

I felt like my work life had become an episode of the TV show “*Survivor*”. So I decided it was time to vote myself off the island.

Oddly enough, it took the absence of joy in my workplace to spark a deep interest in the topic of what truly drives workplace happiness. After watching too many people get swamped in a tsunami of stress, I decided to make it my mission to help change the way the world works and to help organizations, as my tagline trumpets, to “put humor to work for less stress and more success.”

As president of Humor at Work, I now travel the world researching, writing and speaking about what makes great workplaces so great, and how we can bring more joy and fun into our work lives.

As I continue to connect with so many people worldwide, I am consistently reminded of the enormous impact that our

work has on our lives. Work impacts our mental and physical health, our family life, our personal growth, our happiness, where we live, and who we socialize with. And, as you’ve perhaps noticed, it’s a wee bit of a time sucker. In fact, work consumes the biggest portion of our waking hours, talents, passions, and energy. It only makes sense that in order to build a more joy-filled life we all need to create more inspiring workplaces.

The second fundamental reason to bring more joy into the workplace is that, regardless of the size of your business or the nature of your work, culture drives success.

And by culture, I simply mean how you go about doing things in your work. Not what you do, but why and how you do it. Culture is your DNA, your brand, your written and unwritten





rules of the road. Establishing your culture is about answering the same questions I asked myself on my journey to regain the joy I had lost in my life. Those questions are:

**What legacy do you want to leave behind?**

**Are you proud enough of your work that you would recommend it to your best friend or a family member?**

**Do your “help wanted” ads live up to their hype?**

**Do you pass the “driveway test?” Are you excited pulling out of your driveway on a Monday morning?**

Building a career or a culture full of joy doesn't happen by accident. You can't buy your culture at Ikea (and even if you could, you'd have parts left over that you wouldn't know what to do with). The happiest entrepreneurs and the most joy-filled organizations I've spent time with focus intentionally on building a strong culture and bringing more joy to their work.

Beryl Health, a healthcare call center business based in Bedford Texas, has a full-time “Queen of Fun and Laughter,” whose mission is – at least in part – to remind the leadership team of the need to be intentional about their culture and to embrace opportunities to bring more joy into the workplace. Zappos, an online shoe business based in Las Vegas, Nevada, lists “Create Fun and a Little Weirdness” as one of their ten core values. Those values have helped drive their phenomenal success and earned them accolades as one of the best places to work in the United States.

Of course, prioritizing humour in the workplace becomes easier if you make good decisions in other areas of your work. I was reminded of this when I met Kim Axelsen, the CEO of AFA JCDcaux in Copenhagen, Denmark. He vibrated with energy as he generously shared the ingredients of success in his thriving – and fun – outdoor advertising business. Our conversation brought me back to something I had discovered on my own journey: There is a chicken-and-egg relationship to this topic. You need to be intentional about choosing your attitude and bringing your sense of humour along on the journey, but at the same time, you need to create an environment in your work life and make decisions in your career that will make it easy to bring a good attitude along for the ride.

In other words, as much as tapping into your sense of humour and maintaining a positive attitude can help you succeed, a great attitude and healthy sense of humour are also indicators and by-products of true success. The kind of success that keeps you thriving on whatever island you've built for yourself.

# Mike's 5 P's For Bringing

## PURPOSE

Understanding the “Why?” and having a clear, well-articulated sense of purpose not only clarifies your business goals, it is a powerful motivator. Yale researcher Amy Wrzesniewski studies how our mental conceptions of work impact our performance. She found that people fall into one of three categories in terms of how they define their work: as a job, a career, or a calling. The last group, with the “calling” orientation, tend to love their work for the sake of the work itself, not just because of any external rewards. Her research found that our attitude about the nature of our work affects performance: those people who view their work as a calling – with a deeper sense of purpose – tend to be happier and more fulfilled, and experience greater success in the workplace.

## PROGRESS

Studies show that people tend to be much happier on days when they can point to clear progress being made in their work. Celebrating small wins, writing down small victories in a daily gratitude journal, or holding a team huddle every Friday afternoon to review the top three plays of the week can substantially boost happiness levels by reminding people of the progress that they have achieved.

## PRIDE

External motivators such as money can work in the short term, but for sustained results and happiness in your work, you have to focus on intrinsic motivators such as a deep sense of pride. It might be a sense of pride in your purpose, your talents, your team’s performance, or the progress you are achieving. A study out of Brigham Young University found that sharing great news with supportive people (and thus tapping into your sense of pride in an intentional way) substantially boosts happiness levels for up to four weeks. Spread your joy around and you’ll experience even more joy yourself.



