
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: TURNING AROUND LOW MORALE

This month, a subscriber asked, "Do you have any past newsletters regarding employee morale? In our finance department our morale is terrible; we have an overwhelming amount of work and have lost some valuable and experienced staff recently." The writer made me realize that I have no newsletter editions specifically about low morale in organizations, and what to do about it. So, this month, we'll take a look at causes of, and cures for, low morale.

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES:

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time." -- Sir John Lubbock

"Everyone wishes to have truth on his side, but not everyone wishes to be on the side of truth." -- Richard Whately

"Few persons have sufficient wisdom to prefer censure, which is useful, to praise which deceives them." -- Francois De La Rochefoucauld

1. TOP CAUSES OF LOW MORALE, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

BLAME THE BOSS? (SOMETIMES YES, SOMETIMES NO)

Most people who experience low morale in the work environment blame leadership, or their immediate boss. Guess what? They're often right. Studies of people who leave jobs consistently show the most likely reason for quitting is a bad relationship with a direct superior. Authority does not rest well - or wear well - on many people, even good people. Some people become responsible to promote and direct the productivity of others, but are not well suited for it or well enough prepared. What's more, an entire organization may develop a culture that is insufficiently attendant to the needs of employees for satisfactory working conditions and an environment where they feel they can grow personally, while becoming part of something that has purpose and direction. A loss of confidence in leadership follows when people believe that those in charge either don't really know what they're doing, don't care about employees or are fundamentally dishonest. To turn this around, individual leaders need to look in the mirror and get good, sometimes anonymous feedback from employees about what they really think about the leadership of the company, and make necessary adjustments. Even so, leadership factors do not account for all of the causes of low morale.

TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR (ARE YOU THE PROBLEM?)

Sometimes, those who complain most about low morale in the office are really the unhappiest of people even outside the office. They don't like the work they do (no matter where they may do it), they don't like their relationships outside the office and they derive little joy from living. Is this the company's fault? Obviously not. As I'm a firm believer in the responsibility, and the power, of individuals to create their own quality of life (which is not to say that everyone can or should aspire to be a millionaire), people who are just unhappy people should not deceive themselves that their jobs are the cause of their unhappiness. It's not fair to themselves to look outside themselves for sources of their own satisfaction. The trouble is, most of these people feel powerless to be able to change their lives in any meaningful way. Left to their own devices, they probably can't. All human growth happens in the context of positive relationships. If the people in your life do not bring you up, then you have to recruit new people into your life. That may mean finding new friends, a new worship community, joining a new club or a finding a good therapist: take your pick, or choose all of the above. The point is, the decision to change one's circumstances begins with each individual.

I'M DANCING AS FAST AS I CAN. . . (OVERWORK)

Overwork, in and of itself, is seldom the cause of low morale. Exhaustion, yes. Low morale? No. However, when people are working very hard over and extended period of time and feel no hope for reward or a break, then morale suffers. This again brings up leadership issues: people who are working very hard need to feel a sense of confidence that their efforts are making a difference, and that they and/or the organization are growing and getting better. People who have hope can and will work very hard for a very long time. People without hope will not, and when they feel forced by circumstances to work long and hard, their morale will be low. And so, extended, hard work, per se, is not a true cause for low morale. Sometimes a lack of enough work causes low morale! How? When people don't feel challenged and don't feel they are growing, they more easily become seduced by negative thinking. I included this idea of "overwork" as a potential cause for low morale because most people believe it is a cause. But it's really not. Lack of hope is a more genuine cause of low morale. If you think morale is low due to overwork in your office, ask yourself, is the amount of work really the issue? And, if the root cause is really a lack of hope, what are the causes for that lack, and how can they be addressed?

"YOU KNOW WHAT I HEARD ABOUT AJ?" (RUMORS AND NEGATIVE GOSSIP)

Rumor, negativity, gossip, and quiet character assassination kill organizations, kill productivity, kill morale and crush the spirit. I can't be plainer: when people engage in this kind of behavior, either as listeners or as poisoned whisperers, they damage their listeners, the subjects of their attacks and themselves. Hey, that's three for one! Rumor and negativity can spread quickly like an aggressive cancer, and will kill morale, no matter how good the leadership of an organization may be. Criticism is good and necessary, and if it's worthwhile, should be delivered to the person being critiqued in person, in private, and directly. . . even if that person is a leader or a boss. But indirect rumor mongering invites – no, it breeds – distortion and untruth, and actually has a chemical effect on the brain that inhibits happiness and human growth. All of us, no matter how "good," can fall prey to this activity if we're not careful. And some people are just unshakable carriers of this kind of intrigue, no matter where they go, no matter how good their environment may be. The only way to improve morale when you have a significant proportion of these people in an organization is not to hire them or, failing that, to let them go (for documented, job-related reasons). And if you're a member of an organization whose leadership is pretty good but where morale is low due to an environment created by people like this, then your only self-defense is to shun their company. Don't let them bring your mind down, simply because they thrive on spreading destruction!

And now, a brief word on behalf of my new book, before returning to our discussion of morale:

Want to improve your effectiveness and frame of mind? “99 Negotiation Nuggets for Winners,” my new book, offers quick shots of wisdom designed to help you get what you want and need in your life, work and career. This is not a book of theory. It’s a book of best practices distilled from many years of experience and from many experts in the field. The information is conveyed in quick bits, the way you might find in any edition of USA Today.

To purchase your copy of “99 Negotiation Nuggets for Winners” at a 10% Discount for “What’s Up, Doc” subscribers, just click [here](#).

STORMY WEATHER (THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IS BAAAAAD!)

Sometimes, conditions entirely outside of an organization’s control make for low morale. A sudden change in the market or in an economy can really hurt a business, and in spite of great leadership and positive people, the mood becomes dour. This happens, and it can be a legitimate source of low morale. The only solution is to change a business model to adapt to changing times, and the process of change can itself bring more low morale. People whose skills once fit an organization may no longer fit. The only way for individuals to get up off the mat and protect themselves when they find themselves in this situation, in an industry that is fading, is to get new education and training. Some people are resilient enough to do that, and some people fight the change tooth and nail. I’ve worked with people facing the threat of displacement when an organization reorganizes and some jobs will no longer exist, and I know how hard it is for people to make the transition, and to let go of what was comfortable and rewarding to them in the past. But the only solution is to take charge of one’s own destiny in the best way possible. To be sure, good businesses are well advised to help people make those transitions, and even find new roles for people in a new organization. But at the end of the day, we are all the ones ultimately responsible to create our own futures, making the connections and learning the things we need to create new opportunities.

“LET’S KEEP THIS PROFESSIONAL” (LACK OF PERSONAL OPENNESS BREEDS MISUNDERSTANDING)

Some organizations suffer not so much from low morale as from a sense of dull, stale numbness. People come to their jobs, and live and work in their own little cubicles, literally and figuratively. There is a school of thought out there that says people should not become too friendly at work, and that it’s best to keep a pretty clear, firm line between one’s personal

life and one's professional life. That works for some people, but it also brings with it a cost in the office environment if everyone adopts this stance. Friendship, and the enjoyment of others' company, quirks, talents and senses of humor all combine to make life interesting and enjoyable. If your office environment feels stale and if morale is low, ask yourself, "am I contributing to this, not by adding negativity, but by distancing myself from others, and contributing to a more cold, lifeless environment?" Too much "professional" distance among people who work together often keeps a team from reaching its peak of morale and productivity, and when you don't know or understand the people around you very well, it's much easier to misunderstand them. Sometimes needless resentments spring from just this gap in mutual understanding.

2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENT

BOOK: "Writing Nonfiction: Turning Thoughts into Books" by Dan Poynter, Para Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA, 2000.

Have you ever wanted to write a book? Do you think you have a book in you? If you've ever been curious about how to put your area of expertise into a format that others can digest, appreciate and understand, then check out Dan Poynter's book at www.parapublishing.com. This book, and some others among his works, have been helpful to me as I've ventured into publishing myself.

ENTERTAINMENT: Music CD "Ella and Louis," Verve (a division of Universal Music Group) 1956 and 2000.

No good movies, as far as I'm concerned, these days, so I've decided to broaden this section from its focus on "films" to include other kinds of "entertainment. I'm a big jazz fan, and so I've selected a warm, terrific, classic album of duets recorded with Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald. When I first began collecting jazz records, I found it intimidating, because there were so many records and artists out there, and I did not know where or how to begin. To top it off, there are so many subgenres within jazz, from Dixieland, to early swing to big bands to vocalists to bebop to hard bop to Latin jazz to fusion. . . (ugh: I don't like fusion!). Let's call the whole thing off! No, really, you don't have to. If you think you might like to dip your toe in a little, then this disc is a nice place to start, with two of the greatest artists the United States has ever produced, working in the USA's only original art form. A pleasant, wonderful disc for the car,

for an evening with a book or over dinner with a few friends. A true classic.

3. CHUCKLES

A few sundry one-liners and nuggets of nonsense!:

Fifth Law of Procrastination: Procrastination avoids boredom; one never has the feeling that there is nothing important to do.

Finagle's Creed: Science is true. Don't be misled by facts.

Finagle's Laws: 1) Once a job is fouled up, anything done to improve it only makes it worse. 2) No matter what results are expected, someone is always willing to fake it. 3) No matter what the result, someone is always eager to misinterpret it. 4) No matter what results occur, someone believes it happened according to his pet theory. 5) If an experiment works, something has gone wrong. 6) In any collection of data, the figure most obviously correct, beyond all need of checking, is the mistake. 7) The perversity of the universe tends toward a maximum. 8) Do not merely believe in miracles; rely on them.

Finagle's Law Of Government Contracting: Dealing with the government is like kicking a 300-pound sponge.

Finagle's Law Of Military Superiority: The bigger they are, the harder they hit.

Finagle's Rules: 1) To study an application best, understand it thoroughly before you start. 2) Always keep a record of data. It indicates you've been working. 3) Always draw your curves, then plot the reading. 4) In case of doubt, make it sound convincing.

Horngren's Observation: Among economists, the real world is often a special case.

Hubbard's Law: Don't take life too seriously; you won't get out of it alive.

Hurewitz's Memory Principle: The chance of forgetting something is directly proportional to...to... uh...

IBM Project Management Axiom: Need for project modifications

increases proportionally to project completion.

Johnson-Laird's Law: Toothache tends to start on Saturday night.

4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

You don't have to live near the Schuler Solutions main office in Alexandria, Virginia to benefit from my coaching services. Great work can be done for your own growth and development over the phone and through document review via email. To find out more about your coaching options and available coaching plans, just click [here](#) now.

5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership, negotiation and organizational change, provides consulting services, keynote presentations and seminars for client companies. His trademark is highly personalized service that leads to measurable increases in productivity, profit and growth. He also provides personalized leadership education and coaching for highly motivated clients.

Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

If this e-Newsletter was forwarded to you and you would like to receive your own FREE subscription, just click [here](#) to become a subscriber. If you believe you have received this message in error, or to remove yourself from this mailing list, just click [here](#) to take your name from the “What’s Up, Doc?” distribution list.

7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

NEWSLETTER ETHICS: This e-Newsletter will be sent to subscribers only upon REQUEST, though subscribers may forward this letter to anyone they wish. Subscriber identities or contact information will NOT BE DISCLOSED to any other persons or entities under any circumstances. (An attorney friend recently pointed out that, technically, I'd have to give up my list if compelled to do so by a court of law. He's technically right, of course, but let's face it: that won't happen!)

Have a great month. . .

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D.

Schuler Solutions, Inc.

"I work with leaders who want to grow their businesses, and with meeting professionals who want to create great events for their audiences."

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“Make each day your masterpiece.” -- John Wooden

P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward this newsletter to at least one friend! Thanks . . . AJS