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FISH**A REMARKABLE WAY TO BOOST MORALE AND IMPROVE RESULTS**

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FIRST GUARANTEE.

Mary Jane was known for her great work ethic. She was a good manager who listened carefully to her staff. Her department at First Guarantee, a large financial institution where she worked, was known for its high quality of work. People could count on her department to get things done, and a atmosphere of camaraderie permeated through the air.

By comparison, another division on the Third Floor was thought about in the opposite terms. The people there were unpleasant and uncooperative. Staff in other departments seemed to revel in the details latest fiasco involving the Third Floor. It was said that life there ceased to exist. Unfortunately most of the work in the organization had to pass through the third floor at some stage and it was a major bottleneck for other departments.

Mary was offered a job as Operations Manager on the Third Floor. Although she was aware and anxious about the groups reputation, she felt she had to take the promotion due to her financial situation as a single mother and recent widow.

THE THIRD FLOOR

When Mary Jane was surprised that she actually liked the people on the Third Floor, while realising that its reputation was deserved. Phones were left ringing and unanswered. If the staff felt hassled to work faster they would make deliberate mistakes and give lame excuses. Mary Jane felt that the culture of the department was so overwhelmingly depressing that it would drag anyone down. She spent most of her time fighting fires and dealing with continuing crises crested by her staff.

Just as Mary Jane was heading out to lunch one day Bill, her boss called. He was an arrogant SOB who would often cut her off mid sentence. He had just come back from a meeting on with the Management Group where the Third Floor was singled out as being the biggest problem of the organization -- a toxic energy dump, it was called. Bill was grilled on the problem. 'So, have you solved the problem of the Third Floor yet' he asked Mary Jane, it had only been five weeks since she started, 'We need to fix it pronto'.

Mary Jane rushed out to lunch her mind ablaze with the problems she was having. She had been going out to lunch rather than using the cafeteria where her department was the butt of all jokes. Today, however she took an impulsive turn as she headed out and ended up at Pikes Place Fish markets.

THE WORLD FAMOUS PIKE PLACE FISH MARKET

Mary Jane looked around her, a huge crowd had gathered and there was a carnival atmosphere in the air. People were laughing and fish guys yelling out at the crowd. Even fish flying through the air! The guys would call out the orders to each other and then repeat the calls 'one fish flying away to Minnesota' they called.

Then one of the fish guys noticed her and asked what was wrong? She didn't mean to tell him but the whole story about the third floor seemed to tumble out. To her surprise Lonnie listened very attentively. He asked her how she liked the fish market. 'I love it, so much energy and enthusiasm', she replied. Lonnie explained that it hadn't always been like that, in fact, a few years ago they had their own toxic energy dump, but now he just loves working there and is spoilt for life. Lonnie asked if she would like to know how they turned things around. Mary Jane unsure if a fishmonger could help her with her problem, but agreed to return the next day.

RETURN VISIT

When Mary Jane returned Lonnie took her aside and explained some of the tedious tasks that a fishmonger does during the day. They discussed how any job can be boring to the person doing it, he said. Some of his customers travel all over the world for their job, which sounded exciting to Lonnie, but the customers say it gets pretty boring very fast. Just the same any job can be done with 'energy and enthusiasm'. Mary Jane decided that if Lonnie and his fellow fishmongers could make their job interesting that that was probably true. Therefore it is not about the job itself but the way we choose to do the job that makes the difference. You might not be able to choose your work, but you can always choose the attitude you bring to your work.

THE COURAGE TO CHANGE.

Mary Jane decided to ask Bill about the workshop his boss attended. Bill was argumentative but finally Mary Jane convinced him to help. As it turned out he had a tape of the workshop on his desk he could lend her. Mary Jane wondered where she found the courage to stand up to him.

On the way home as Mary Jane listened to the tape by David Whyte in the car, some of the phrases jumped out at her. 'The needs of the organization and our needs as workers are the same. Creativity, passion, flexibility, wholeheartedness...'

As Mary Jane listened she realised that leading change at work will be risky for her, both personally and professionally. There was no guarantee of success. But then she thought about living her life in the toxic energy dump and how life was too precious to let it be sucked out of her by the culture of the Third Floor.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

On Sunday afternoons MJ arranged a baby sitter for two hours so she could have some time to herself. Today she sat down at a cafe and took out a copy of Sarah Ban Breathnach's book Simple Abundance. In it she read '..each of us is an artist... With every choice, every day, you are creating a unique work of art.' That was food for thought. She then took out some notes from a seminar she attended on Leadership by John Gardner. In the notes Gardener spoke about how some people go to seed as they get older, that is, they stop learning and growing. Growing and learning is not only enjoyable it is the essence of life, stopping us from going stale. We have more energy, talent and strength than we even realise, Gardener said.

MONDAY MORNING

Mary Jane called a meeting of her staff and decided to speak from the heart. She told them how the Vice President had called the place a toxic energy dump and how most people in the company hate dealing with the department and how she was determined to clean it up because, she didn't want to spend her life waiting until retirement. Some of the staff were startled by what she had to say and even wondered how the Vice President would be if he had to do their job. Mary Jane went on to talk about choosing attitude.

Over the course of the week, some of the staff spoke to MJ saying they were behind her and were tired of being under attack by other departments. When she got to work on Friday someone had put up a large poster -- Choose Your Attitude with a picture of a smiling face and a frowning face. It was then that she realised her staff had finally it.

SATURDAY AT THE FISH MARKET

Early on Saturday morning MJ took her kids, Stacey and Brad, to the Fish markets to see Lonnie. Lonnie got Brad to help him pack the fish in the ice and both kids had an absolute ball. Lonnie then explained that having fun was the second ingredient to running a successful business. Although Pikes Place fish market was a serious business needing to make a profit, they can still do that while having fun, and it has other more practical benefits such as they sell more fish that way and have lower turnover.

Lonnie then asked MJ to remember what her most memorable experiences were at Pikes Place, and she replied it was when there was a woman on the platform trying to catch fish. Lonnie explained that this was the third ingredient, called Make Their Day. It involves creating memorable experiences for others -- finding ways to include them in the fun.

Finally Lonnie asked MJ to look at the way the fishmongers were interacting with the customers and see if she could come up with the final ingredient. MJ noticed that the fishmongers were very engaged with the customers and even when between activities were alert for new opportunities. Lonnie recalled how not long ago he was at the supermarket meat counter and the staff were having a good time joking around with each other but ignoring him and making him feel irritated and left out. At Pikes Place the staff are present and focused on the customer, not on themselves.

MJ wrote down the three new ingredients she had learnt. They were:

Play
Make Their Day
Be Present.

Lonnie gave her one more word of advice and that was to let the staff find out about the fish philosophy for themselves.

THE FIELD TRIP

The next week MJ took her staff on a field trip to the fish market. She was glad to see some of her staff participating in the various activities and talking to the fishmongers. On Friday afternoon she met with the team and asked them if they wanted to make work as fun and interesting as it is at the fish market. While many of the staff didn't think it would be possible (they didn't have any fish to throw) they were definitely interested in making the work environment better and didn't think they had anything to loose. Mary passed around an outline of the ideas she and Lonnie had developed. It said

- 1) Choose your attitude -- you can choose to be bored or excited.
- 2) Play -- make work fun and interesting
- 3) Make their day -- find ways to make include others and create great memories

4) Be present - stay focused, not daydreaming.

Jane asked the staff to think about what they have learnt over the weekend and report back to the group at the Monday morning meeting. That weekend Stephanie, Steve and Randy decided to visit the fish market again. They spoke to one of the fish guys, Wolf, about choosing your attitude. Wolf was once a promising racing car driver until one day he had an accident and wasn't able to race anymore. Wolf told them how he had to learn how choose his attitude during his recovery.

At the meeting on Monday Stephanie, Steve and Randy told the group about the meeting with Wolf. They discussed some of the other things they learnt and at the end of the meeting suggested they form 4 teams, one for each of the four ingredients. Everyone agreed that that this was a good idea. Each team was to Study their topics and put together a presentation in 6 weeks.

The Presentation.

Six weeks later they were in an off site conference room. The Play Team were the first to present. Their presentation was in a game were the benefits of play (such as health and increased creativity) were spilled out and some suggestions to keep work interesting were put to the group. Some of the ideas were for having more plants and an aquarium as well as a joke-of-the-month contest.

The Make Their Day Team did the next presentation and surprised the group with some results of a customer satisfaction survey they did, which resulted in very poor results. They then brainstormed some ways to give better customer service with the idea to make every transaction a positive one. One idea was to stagger work start times to give better coverage.

The Present Moment Team. This team started with a guided visualisation after which John told how he never spent much time with his daughter when she was young. Now she is 15 and he is trying to make up for it and be present for his daughter as well as his job. Others told different stories about how being present had helped them.

Choose Your Attitude team. This team had a short presentation on the benefits of Choosing Attitude and then handed out copies of a book called Personal Accountability: The Path To A Rewarding Work Life and said they would be holding discussion groups later on.

One Year Later

A year later Mary Jane was reflecting on what had been accomplished. Even before the team had presented their final reports she had turned down a lucrative job with a competitor because she enjoyed her job at First Guarantee so much. Then she received the Chairwoman's Award for all of the good positive change she and her team had created. Her staff are still full of energy and enthusiasm. Just then MJ looked down at her coffee and muffin, it was at that Moment that Lonnie pushed a small diamond ring across the table.

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