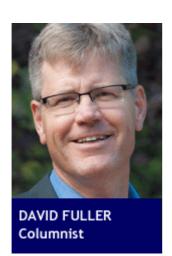The Haskayne School of Busine
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Putting fun back into business brings big payoffs

By David Fuller on January 24, 2020 · No Comment

Creating a fun culture in a business environment starts with the leader. When employees enjoy their work, they'll be more productive and satisfied

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Columnist

We were down by 14 points at halftime and the team seemed defeated. Our star player was frustrated. Her shots weren't going in and neither were her teammates' shots.

As a coach, I was unfazed. Having been irritated with the refereeing in the first couple of games, I had decided that my fuming wasn't going to make the situation any better. I could see that the team was tense and this anxiety was putting stress on the players.

I knew we were playing a good team but we still had a chance if only the girls would loosen up, have fun and start playing as a team.

Basketball teams aren't much different than organizations. We get ourselves into tough spots. Perhaps it's cash flow issues, people problems, communication or competition challenges. We seize up. I've been there!

As team leaders, we become tense, freak out, jump all over the place and make a lot of noise because we feel we need to wake up our team to the severity of the situation.

What happens next is almost comical. Our staff crawl under their desks with their heads down or head for the door with colds, the flu, sick days or holidays. They get out of our way and hope to come back when the office attitude changes.

As leaders, we're left thinking we have to do it all ourselves and so often we do, putting in extra hours trying to figure things out and get through the next few days, weeks or months.

A study of over 700 workers by the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom found that happy employees were 12 per cent more productive than others. Sad employees were 10 per cent less productive. This would go a long way to explaining why my basketball team wasn't producing. They weren't happy. In fact, they were angry at themselves, the refs and each other.

Studies have also shown that we need a certain amount of stress to have productive employees. This stress is often suitable when we place an emphasis on achieving realistic results in a timely manner. In cases like this, employees often respond well and not only feel good about their success but tend to produce the required results. When stress levels – either externally or self-imposed – are too high, productivity drops significantly.

More often than not, the pressure we put on ourselves to get jobs done, to be successful, make money or to be perfect, is incredible. We place unrealistic expectations about what we can get done.

Frequently, we have no concrete plans to achieve our goals and the result is often failure and significant disappointment. We start to feel irritated with ourselves and others because we aren't producing. We aren't having fun and everyone around us can sense it.

So what difference can fun make in business and life?

While fun can be interpreted differently by each of us, when we enjoy something, we're generally having fun. Creating a fun culture in the business environment starts with the leader. When our employees are enjoying their work, they get more done in shorter periods. This is good for business and will be more satisfying for staff.

It's true that businesses need to make a profit and need cash to ensure their longevity. However, I know of many companies where the culture of the business is focused solely on profits and making

money. These businesses often don't retain their employees for long because when money is the only reason for existence, the joy of working quickly disappears. Not only do employees burn out, but because the focus is on profits and not the customer, the long-term success of the business is often in question.

As coaches, we were able to get our team to relax and as they did, the ball started going in the hoop. We chipped away at the score, eventually winning by three points.

Managing people is as much about managing emotions and team dynamics as it is about focusing on the results. Balanced approaches to leadership that ensure happy employees often result in much happier stakeholders!

Troy Media columnist David Fuller, MBA, is a certified professional business coach and author who helps business leaders ensure that their companies are successful. David is author of the book Profit Yourself Healthy. Not having fun? Email dave@profityourselfhealthy.com

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