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Home > Site Map > Publications > Newsletters > ASTD Links Plus Premium Content > 2011 > Jun > FISH

## FISH! Co-Author Stresses Workplace Appreciation, Engagement, and Fun

By *Cynthia Kimball*

A recent interview with *FISH!* co-author Harry Paul (otherwise known as "Harry the FISH! Guy") discusses the importance of workplace appreciation, engagement and fun.

Paul has more than 30 years of business experience in sales, marketing, and management training. He served as a senior vice president of the Ken Blanchard Companies, where he worked closely with Ken Blanchard, co-author of *The One Minute Manager*. His first book, *FISH! A Remarkable Way To Boost Morale and Improve Results!*, has been on the bestseller lists of *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *BusinessWeek*, *Amazon.com*, and *Publisher's Weekly*. His latest books, *INSTANT TURNAROUND!* and *REVVED!* show that employees and managers alike have the responsibility to create a dynamic, open, and fun workplace that fosters creativity and efficiency and values the people who make it all happen. This leads to an increase in productivity and fulfillment.

Paul can be reached by email at [thepauls@cox.net](mailto:thepauls@cox.net) or through his website: <http://www.harrythefishguy.com/>.

### **Q: How is *FISH!* relevant in today's economic reality?**

**Paul:** Today we're asked to do more with less. Staffs are shrinking, budgets are being cut, and yet businesses have to survive. They have to function and thrive. Companies must create a culture where people understand they are making a difference—that what they do matters and is fulfilling, engaging, and fun. Once companies have established this culture, people start to perform at a higher level.

There is a real disconnect between management and employees. We have to turn that around and make sure employees know how important they are, because right now a lot of them feel used and abused. As the economy starts to turn around, people are going to start looking for work elsewhere. This is one of the highest costs that a company could get tagged with—finding new talent, especially good talent. Once the market turns, the chances are good that the mediocre performers under the radar—those doing just enough not to get fired—are the ones that will stay with the company. The top performers will look for jobs elsewhere and at a tremendous cost to the company. So we've got to start creating workplaces where people feel appreciated and fulfilled. I think that's one of the key's to turning around the economy because when you look at the people who leave an organization many times it's not because of salary, certainly not because of benefits, but because they do not feel appreciated or believe they are making a difference.

### **Q: We just need to get that message out there right now?**

**Paul:** Right.

### **Q: Tell me a little bit about your book, *Instant Turnaround*.**

**Paul:** When my co-author Ross Reck and I started talking about this book project, we asked, "What's a real challenge in the workplace today?" People have been managed a certain way forever and it's not working—it's called "management by the numbers." In other words, the manager sets the goals, and you have to go out there and do it; and if you don't do it you get consequences. Well, that's a management concept based on fear. It's also a management technique that's based solely on the numbers and communicates that the numbers are more important than people.

In *Instant Turnaround*, Ross and I created a program called "Destination Work." Numbers are important, and people are just as important, if not more so. If you take care of your people and give them all the information, skills, and tools they need to be their best, they will take care of numbers. What you're doing is meeting their needs, and if they're getting their needs met, they will meet the needs of the organization. People have to want to do a good job, and the only way they'll do a good job is if you match their needs to your needs and you can't do that by only managing the numbers.

Second, you can't manage with fear. You have to manage with trust, and when you manage with trust, you are real with people. You must appreciate their hard work. Show interest in them, be nice, and communicate, "I care about you." If someone cares about me, I'm going to work hard and turn on the discretionary effort. Discretionary effort is like the spare change in your pocket. You get to spend it the way you want. If they're not turning on the discretionary effort, they're doing something else. That's why YouTube exists—so that people have something to do at work. Seventy percent of the workforce is not fully engaged at work, according to a Towers Perrin worldwide workforce study based on approximately 500,000 workers. No wonder productivity is down. If people are not fully engaged, they're not meeting the mission and goals of the organization. You're not going to get them engaged unless there's trust. Trust

and engagement go together.

Third, you have to make work a place where people want to show up every day. So you must bring in an element of fun.

And fourth, management must be visible, and they can't just swoop in and start yelling at people and criticizing them. A good leader is a supportive person who gives his employees everything they need to be the best they can be. That's their job.

**Q: *That's so true, but unfortunately, it's a rarity, isn't it?***

**Paul:** It really is. I recently read about Sir Richard Branson—whose company has 60,000 employees—and how he manages those employees. He says he never yells, criticizes, or gives negative feedback. He only praises because employees know when they messed up. They just need reminding of how good they are and how important they are. Wow! That's a very successful company and a very successful guy.

**Q: *Yes, Branson definitely "gets it". I would love to work one day in his culture just to have experienced it first-hand. Harry, tell me a little about your book, REVVED!***

**Paul:** *REVVED!* is a recognition book, and it's based on how to keep your workplace revved up and working hard. The *REVVED!* model is helping people be their best by recognizing and appreciating them when they go the extra mile. The first secret is "winning them over." Show people you care about them without a hidden agenda. Sounds simple. However, sometimes when someone approaches you, they're nice because they want something from you.

The second is "blow them away." After someone goes the extra mile, how do you recognize and appreciate them? Do you leave a trail of gratitude? Send a written note, not an email. Send a note to the person's boss and their boss. Leaving a trail of gratitude makes that person feel 10 feet tall. Employees say, "Wow, is there anything else I can do for you?" because they want to work hard again because they know they're recognized and appreciated. Other people see this and say, "I want some of that recognition too!" Suddenly, you have an army of advocates willing to help you simply because you left that trail of gratitude.

The third secret is keeping them "revved." Always look for opportunities to make someone feel good. Constantly look to see if someone did something well or went the extra mile. Make sure we do whatever we need to do to keep them all revved up, productive at work, and happy.

**Q: *I think we have a tendency in the workplace to assume the worst in people and distrust them, but when you're looking for the good and assuming the best, you find it. It's there.***

**Paul:** Exactly. You've also got to make sure that your workplace is consistent, dynamic, and fun.

**Q: *With all the speaking you've done, are there any significant ways you found organizations are having fun?***

**Paul:** Over the years I've learned there's no one definition of fun. People are having fun in such unique and different ways. In an organization, everyone's definition of fun must be considered to keep it useful, dynamic, and fresh. Fun really comes from within and is a part of the work process. It's not a decoration on a wall. It's not crazy shirt Friday. It's not we're going to have fun between the hours of 2 and 5 on Thursdays. It's a culture where people are allowed to have fun doing what they are doing and enjoy being at work. It keeps the energy up. It keeps people engaged and working hard and smart. We need to recharge our batteries; you can't just constantly work, work, work. Productivity will suffer. Organizations need to do this. One of the sayings we have in the *FISH!* book is, "Work made fun, gets done!" This is absolutely true. Southwest Airlines has figured out how to allow people to be themselves. Have fun, take care of the customers, and look what happens—they've had profitability for more than three decades.

**Q: *I love Southwest especially when they sing and tell jokes. I've never had a bad experience on Southwest. As a matter of fact, they've created for me a memorable experience.***

**Paul:** They even have the rapping flight attendant giving the safety briefing in rap. Interestingly, people pay attention.

So, it's very important to understand that work made fun gets done. The fish market threw us the fish. It's great. People want to see it; people want to catch it. But it's also efficiency at work because it keeps the fishmonger next to the customer while the fish is being prepared for the customer. The fish is thrown over the counter while the fishmonger yells the order and it's repeated by everyone working so there's no chance of the order getting messed-up. The relationship between the customer and fishmonger continues to build. So it's very efficient work and fun too.

**Q: *What do you say to those workplaces that say, "We can't afford to have fun? We don't have enough people as it is to get the work done."***

**Paul:** I hear this all the time. This is about attitudes. It could be something as simple as titles. Change your title and change your perspective?and that changes your attitude. Are you a receptionist or a director of first impressions? How do you answer the phone? How do you deal with customers? How do you engage them? If has to fit into your workplace. You just have to look at Southwest. They figured it out in the airline industry. Zappos figured it out in the online shoe business. Amazon sure made it easy to buy things on line.

**Q: *So more and more organizations just need to "figure it out" in their own industries, or more specifically, in their own organizations?***

**Paul:** Exactly. Zappos is an excellent example because the CEO is all about fun and the fun-culture they've created there is better than most. So we've seen it in small companies and large companies. How do we keep people engaged by making things fun? By keeping the energy up—that's what fun does. It

keeps the energy up, and that leads to increased productivity and profitability.

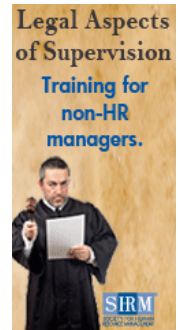
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