

Pollyanna is Not for Sissies

Do your employees feel they've found their dream jobs? Are they exuberant at work? Are they passionate about their careers? If not, join the club. It's clear misery loves company. In their book *Now Discover Your Strengths*, authors Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton Ph.D. cite a Gallup Organization poll of 1.7 million workers confirming that only 20 percent of employees feel their strengths are used on the job every day.

The Greeks defined happiness as maximizing one's self along the lines of excellence. If this is true, we are looking at the most sorrowful workforce since the 1929 depression. So what are leaders and workers to do?

Get more Pollyanna.

As Johnny Mercer said, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative." This is no easy task, however. Living the dream takes courage, strength of conviction and unbridled optimism. Pollyanna, the heroine of Eleanor Porter's novel of the same name, is known as a person characterized by irrepressible optimism and a tendency to find good in everything. *Pollyanna* tells the story of a young girl who is sent to live with her selfish, rich Aunt Polly Harrington. The elder Polly is an unhappy and frustrated woman who tries to control the entire town and win people's affection and gratitude with her so-called charity work.

Despite her difficulties in life, young Pollyanna is always cheerful and optimistic. Her vivacity and tenderness are antidotes for everyone's ills. She even teaches the local pastor how to preach the good things found in the Bible rather than constantly highlight people's faults in an attempt to control them.

Eventually, Pollyanna's optimism "infects" the entire town. Her good energy changes the world, and it can change your company. There's proof this really works. Gallup data shows that people who have the opportunity to shine at work are 50 percent more likely to work in groups with lower employee turnover, 38 percent more likely to work more productively and 44 percent more likely to work in business units with higher customer satisfaction scores.

To be a modern day Pollyanna, we must shed the collective taboo against tenderness in

America's corporate vulture culture. Instead, we need to be our authentic selves and be comfortable with that. Anyone can prance around in their underwear singing in front of the mirror but few of us will ever get out of step at work, fearful that we might be judged "inappropriate." Courage is called for to be the optimist, to sing, not just inside the shower but outside as well. It is time to unlock our talents, unleash our passions and stop living in boxes.

If your job is too small for your spirit, dare to be yourself. If your job fits, it is because a kinder and wiser management has the courage to be genuine in the moral and ethical sense. They know that human resources means allowing humans to use all their resources.

Pollyanna is the new leader, too. She has traded in knowing it all for learning from all. She has exchanged autocratic control for authenticity and given up on her steely-eyed, tough love, take no prisoners-attitude. Instead, she has what Harvard Professor Robert Heifetz calls the "Sacred Heart." Curiosity, innocence and compassion are the virtues, he says, that are pumping new life into organizations, debunking the old school of muscling.

These new companies are built with heart instead of blood. The absence of mercenary leadership creates an abundance of missionary zealots. Cheerfulness is their currency. Employees are their banks, and financial and emotional wealth is their dividend.

The new Pollyanna chief executive wields a wand, not a sword, as she demonstrates the powers of aspiration, inspiration and motivation. She does not fire people, only fires them up. She is not a puppet of the street, but a conductor of a symphony. The real value she creates is the enlightenment for people and the evolution of business. If shareholder value is all that you value, you are already bankrupt!

The new company is diverse in people and divine in cause. Being the best is not enough. A company must be good, too. If the idea behind your organization does not illuminate its staff, its leadership and its customers, Darwin is on his way. What once was considered a pejorative is now a restorative. Pollyanna's optimism is essential for success. **BtoB**



Joey Reiman is CEO of BrightHouse Consulting in Atlanta, adjunct professor at The Goizueta Business School at Emory University and author of the bestselling book *Thinking for a Living*. He can be reached at jreiman@brighthouse.com.