

Will Monday be Great or Grim? Author Says it's Up to You

By Matthew Crowley | Monday, August 31, 2009

Even if the sports cliché says there's no "I" in team, author Roxanne Emmerich would remind you that there is one in "attitude." And in "Thank God It's Monday!: How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love," she explains how a room full of adjusted attitudes can point a company toward success.

Cynics may glimpse this book's title and say to themselves (or to anyone within earshot) "Yeah, sure." Work is called work and not Disneyland for a reason, right? Isn't it full of head-wrenching tasks, psyche-deflating co-workers and impossible superiors? Emmerich would say that these are names people choose to assign. She suggests that every situation contains options, and we can label something a problem and give up or see it as a growth chance and seize it.

In a rapid-fire collection of ultrabrief vignettes, Emmerich explains that change for yourself and for your company can start today if everyone commits to treating customers and co-workers with warmth and respect. People will need to commit to being honest with each other. They'll have to listen, communicate, keep promises and give and accept criticism, constructive of course.

There's no room for "no," Emmerich says. If workers won't commit to change, she suggests, companies will need the courage to let workers leave or the conviction to fire them.

In her stories, change starts with a "kickoff meeting," at which a company launches its plan. Other moves, including one-on-one boss-worker meetings, follow. When bosses meet foot-draggers, who probably precede kickers and screamers, they offer a choice.

"I'm so excited about where this team is going," the boss will say, "I could be wrong, but I sense you don't share this excitement, and that's OK. If this isn't your thing, you have to go find your thing."

Emmerich leaves "yeah, but" readers nowhere to hide. As they scan their offices, looking for the true source of their workplace misery, she follows their gaze, holding up the mirror. Hit an obstacle? Think through it and surmount it, she suggests. Have a disagreement? Write down what you think the colleague in the conflict said and repeat it to him. Often, Emmerich says, things get misinterpreted, and crossed signals can get uncrossed. Have a spirit-crushing disappointment? Choose to move past it; dwelling on it only hurts you.

Lest anyone think work is all sweaty attitude-tweaking, Emmerich stresses that workers should have fun. But, she suggests, fun's a natural byproduct of an honest, accountable workplace. People comfortable at work will want to cheer colleagues on, she reasons. And managers emotionally committed to their staffs will want to celebrate triumphs.

Enthusiasm, Emmerich suggests, will provide the energy to enjoy work and prosper. And, she adds, everyone has some.

"We come prepacked with enthusiasm," she writes. " ... Some of us choose to be in touch with our enthusiasm, while others allow it to go dormant or even mask it. But it's as essential to life as food and water. Enthusiasm is the essence of all success. Without it, nothing great happens."

Emmerich doesn't pretend that change will be easy. She'd probably acknowledge that workplace utopia with its perfectly positive work force is somewhere near Munchkinland, Brigadoon and SpongeBob's Bikini Bottom pineapple. However, her system sometimes seems overly optimistic about cooperation. Competitive workplaces can get nasty. It's hard to fathom that workers, some of whom will always care about themselves more than whatever company they work for, will play nice and avoid gossip. Furthermore, workers who know they may suddenly get laid off or furloughed may be less than willing to dedicate themselves to company-first thinking.

And expecting companies to drum out workers who won't fully adopt the "Thank God It's Monday!" program may be infeasible, given the monetary cost of training and the emotional cost of staff turnover.

Nevertheless, "Thank God It's Monday!" is winningly sincere and succinct. The book packs a reamful of wisdom into 192 pages. Emmerich doesn't try to dazzle with highfalutin jargon or bludgeon with bullet points. She tells her stories and leaves you thinking. The ideas hang in your head, glowing like a smile.