

# Author Says It's Possible to Cut the Dysfunction in the Workplace

By Susan Todd | Friday, July 10, 2009

The recession is taking its toll on the office.

With managers and workers equally distracted by falling profits and revenues, businesses may be unwittingly making things worse for themselves.

Roxanne Emmerich, author of "Thank God It's Monday: How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love," has a game plan for chasing away the dysfunction that is hanging over offices like a stubborn storm system.



Emmerich, whose Minneapolis-based firm consults for businesses, said she was astonished by the appetite for the guidance she offers in her book. "There is such a desire right now for what will make for a healthy workplace, where we can stay sane and still make money."

Emmerich spoke recently to Your Business about how to change the culture of a workplace.

## MANAGERS TAKE NOTES

**Q: In an environment of downsizing, pay cuts and general uncertainty, how can managers minimize dysfunctional behavior in the workplace?**

**A:** We have a concept, calling it tight, which essentially means everyone is responsible to challenge one another to play by the ground rules. One of the ground rules, especially in times like this, is using advancing language. People will say, 'We've had layoffs and pay-cuts, what's next?' That does not advance the situation. What happens during times like this is that people go into a victim archetype and that's the worst thing. Someone needs to take charge. Let me give you an example. I have a whole division that works with community banks.

About a year and a half ago, the feds were predicting that banks would be taking big losses this year. I called all of our CEO (clients) and said, 'They're going to be talking about a recession. Tell your employees, we're not participating. This is the time we're going to pull ahead, get better customers, do more business. We're going to grow and prosper.'

Many of them are having record quarters and a record year. Now, people will say, yes, but that's banking, well, things are really tough in banking. The point is, there are major changes that can be affected by people who use language and move things along. Fortunes are made in recessions and depressions. The astonishing thing is that a leading predictor of success is culture and you can change that in a day.

**Q: A day? Is that how long it takes to transform the attitude of a company? How does it happen?**

**A:** There's something I call the Kick Butt Kick-off. We get everyone in the same room to make a commitment that they're up to a big game. I'll tell them, remember when you showed up for the first day of work? You wanted to set the world on fire and then you found yourself surrounded by people who were accepting mediocre standards and then you lowered your sights. What if you got back to your calling and back to your game and everyone decided to do it at the same time.

What would be the picture of the end result when we are wildly being of service to the world? The key part here is getting people to understand what commitment is. That's where brain science comes in because most managers and leaders don't spend a lot of time trying to understand how the brain works. You can massively reprogram a brain. Celebration is one of the most effective things. A business can define a couple of key deliverables and then have daily or quarterly rituals that celebrate along the way. That's when you get people to see that the recession is for other people and look what we're doing here.

**Q: Where did you gain your insight? Did you survive a bad workplace or learn from a good one?**

**A:** Both. When I first got out of college, I was a commercial lender. I remember going from business to business, getting a sniff for their culture and showing them how to shift it. Then I worked for a bank holding company and was put in charge of new banks and brokerages. The first bank we started, we set records in profitability. I was recruited after that to be president of a larger bank.

**Q: Give us one of the secrets to a "Thank God it's Monday" workplace.**

**A:** Celebration. Having daily huddles about the impact a company is having on customers. It's about positive stuff and most importantly, it's tied into what matters on the outside. It says, here are the values we stand for and here's an example of how someone lived this value. It teaches the why we're here. People keep thinking that fun does not have to do with the bottom line, but, really, only the fun are surviving. As a business, you should understand when the setbacks happen, say ouch and hold onto the stamina. Focus on the successes, so you can have more of them.