



Problem-Free Is Not Good Enough

*Using Personal Passion and a Bigger
Purpose to Drive Peak Performance*

BY FRED JEWELL

THERE ARE SITUATIONS IN LIFE when simply being problem-free is a worthwhile goal. When you're injured, for example, you just want to get back to normal. If you break your leg, your doctors and therapists focus on that break and the healing necessary to get you back to a state where you can walk around the block pain-free. Regular functioning feels like progress.

We are all familiar with this “fix the problem” mindset. Leaders focus on solving problems and improving performance to a level that is satisfactory – to bring processes, systems and teams to a state where each is no longer hindered by bottlenecks, glitches, and frustration. They'd be so happy with simply *normal* that they don't dare think of how their organization could be *extraordinary*.

To follow the metaphor we started with: we believe leaders and the experts they empower to drive change should serve not just as physical therapists helping to restore basic functionality, but as personal trainers helping their organizations find ways to reach new heights of strength and speed. But how?

How can you move your business and your workforce beyond merely the absence of problems? How do you, your team, and your company move to a place where you're performing significantly better than the average? What does it take to get better, to constantly move forward?

Dramatically improve performance by adding two new ways of thinking into your strategy. First, help your employees discover what it is that they love to do and then work with them to shape their roles to fit that passion. Second, position the overall purpose and mission of your business in a way that shows how you help people live better lives.

FINDING THE PASSION

Many businesses have begun to set aside time for their employees to work on projects that are completely unrelated to the work that they are assigned to do every day. 3M's "15 Percent Program," in which employees may use 15% of their work time to innovate, create, and brainstorm on new products and services has led to some of the company's best-selling products. Google's "20% Time," with similar goals, has led to innovations and new products including Gmail. At our Firm, we ask each of our employees, "What could you become famous for?" and we help them develop that "personal platform." They are not just allowed but encouraged to actively develop the areas of expertise and skills they most enjoy.

Most people – especially those who have many strengths – need some coaching and mentoring to help shape their goals and see where their true passions lie. A good coach or mentor will ask what kinds of activities generate "flow" for their mentees – what tasks do they get lost in, where time stands still and progress is made with seemingly little effort? The coach or mentor can also offer observations about key strengths and apparent emotional investments in work that mentees might not recognize on their own. Tools like 360-degree surveys and behavioral assessments like Trimetrix, DISC, and Myers-Briggs can also be helpful in this process.

To capitalize on those personal passions, leaders should then follow through with shaping roles and assignments to them. Optimal performance of a business comes from the intersection of the personal passions of the individuals in the workforce and the organizational structures that produce products and services for customers.

DEMONSTRATING THE PURPOSE

Another key motivational factor for excellence in an organization, team, program, or project is the framing and presentation of the purpose in their overall mission. Since the dawn of the industrial revolution, businesses have managed their workforces with a motivational combination of "carrots and sticks." Daniel Pink, in his book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, calls the system of carrots and sticks "Motivation 2.0." (Pink defined our basic drives as humans – desires tied to thirst, hunger, lust, etc. – as Motivation 1.0). But smart companies have found a way around the limits of carrots and sticks and have moved on to what Pink calls Motivation 3.0. Pink believes an important component of Motivation 3.0, one that leads companies and individuals towards performance significantly above the average, is purpose. Purpose, as he describes it, is tied to the idea that all of us are motivated to be a part of something that is greater than ourselves. He offers research which shows that, often, what we think will make us happy has only a short-term effect. What we really need, and what great companies offer their employees, is a purpose that's bigger than just a salary.

Most businesses fall back on performance reviews, salaries, and bonuses as their primary means of motivation. Those are great

PERSONAL PLATFORM

"What could you become famous for?"





benefits, but they neglect the innate human desire to do good, to grow personally, to accomplish things, to have meaningful relationships, to help other people, and to leave a positive legacy. The best companies find ways to drive all of these things.

To do that, business leaders must look beyond financials to understand their products and services and the impact those products and services have in the world. What do those products and services do for people? What does the organization enable people to do that they couldn't do before? How does the product or service change lives, create more time for people to spend with their families, empower positive change, minimize tedium, improve the environment, enable others to do good, or otherwise increase happiness? Being able to articulate that to your employees is critical to improving their engagement in your mission and their desire to innovate.

Cynics, take note: building an engaged workforce that serves its customers in a meaningful way is also the best way to build an enduring enterprise that generates consistent profit.

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PINK, D.H. (2009). Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us. New York: Penguin Group.

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