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It's play, work or hell

Workplace activity is either one of the three, and here's how to deal with them

If you believe, as I do, that the essence of good marketing is relationship building — inside the organization and out — here's something to think about. Consider that all activity in the workplace can be classified into one of three categories — play, work or hell.



LES LANDES

President

Landes & Associates provides management consulting services in the areas of organizational communication, employee engagement, marketing, public relations and continuous improvement systems. The firm is the creator of the "ImaginAction System," a tool for getting employees engaged in systematic continuous improvement.

Les is the author of the book "Getting to the Heart of Employee Engagement: The Power and Purpose of Imagination and Free Will in the Workplace."

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Play is the stuff that people love to do — the things they enjoy so much they'd do it without pay if they didn't need the money.

Work is the stuff that may not be great fun, but it's what they're paid to do. Sometimes it's even gratifying, and it's the kind of activity that people are willing and happy to do if they get something in exchange that they want and don't have — that's why we call it compensation.

Hell is the stuff that no one wants to do. It makes people cranky, and it's hard to pay them enough to do it — but it still needs to get done somehow.

How to get performance

So how do you get the best out of people?

First, whenever possible put people in a position where they can have some fun — not frivolous or silly things, but the kind of work that people find genuinely enjoyable. In part, that means finding what gets each person tuned in and turned on, determining their strengths and preferences, and then creating a culture to let people find work that suits them best.

Second, when it comes to run-of-the-mill work, it's pretty basic.

Compensate people fairly, and the vast majority will give you a fair day's effort in return. Just make sure you don't take it for granted, and check in with them periodically to see if they're getting what they need from the job to keep them engaged and growing.

Finally, for the stuff that makes work feel like hell, start by asking yourself if it really needs to be done. A lot of work exists only because it's been hanging around forever, and no one ever asks why. If the answer is no, stop doing it.

Look for options

If the work does need to be done, ask yourself if it can be done another way. If it can't be changed, and it still needs to be done, you play "Let's make a deal." Ask employees what they would need in return to do the work. Then negotiate until you get to a place that works for both of you.

If you can't come to a mutual agreement, you're always left with another option. You could resort to the traditional management method of just forcing people, telling them they have to do it or there will be ... well ... hell to pay. In fact, the question, "How can I motivate my people?" is often a cover-up for, "How can I tell employees to go through hell, and make them like it?"

If you do decide to take that approach, be sure to prepare yourself for the inevitable decline in employee performance and the quality of customer relationships. ●



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