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OJE: On the Job Enthusiasm
A Layman's Perspective

STATUTORILY EXEMPT

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On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,
Reason the card, but Passion is the gale.

Alexander Pope, Moral Essays I

People are by far the most important resource of any organization. Neither the one-child lemonade stand nor the multinational corporation can function effectively without human impetus. Indeed, people are the lifeblood of the organizations which they create, and that is why human resources management (HRM) is so vitally important. Enthusiasm, used as a motivational tool, can contribute substantially to management's goal of a thriving, efficient, enjoyable workplace. To be beneficial, the enthusiasm must be sincere on the part of management, it must be properly generated in employees, and it must be reasonably maintained by both. Otherwise, a manager could suffer the proverbial "backfire."

From an employee's perspective, an overzealous supervisor may rank as the number one management-relations nightmare, but an apathetic bore of a boss probably comes in a close second. Managers, then, must generate enthusiasm in the workplace. But to do so effectively, they must convey sincere enthusiasm of their own by demonstrating those personal convictions which inspire them to excel. Good managers need not dress up as high school cheerleaders or carry megaphones to work (although such an option should not be ruled out entirely), for enthusiasm can stem from many sources. Defined broadly as "rapturous interest or excitement" and "ardent fondness or eagerness," enthusiasm gives managers a wide angle of approach.[1] Artists strive to create, engineers to design – everyone has something he or she enthusiastically wants to accomplish. A manager must demonstrate that he personally wants to accomplish the goals he has set for himself and his employees. By doing so, he will be better able to convince his subordinates to share in his enthusiasm because he has established his sincerity toward achieving a common objective. Sincerity – the demonstration that a manager himself is truly enthusiastic about his work – is essential, for few would be inspired by someone apathetic toward his own responsibilities.

A manager's own eagerness, however, is not enough; he must generate enthusiasm in each individual employee. But what can create such an intangible quality in a person? Personal ambition is one such way – a desire to be powerful, popular, and prosperous. Of

1. William Morris, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Boston, 1982, p. 436.

course, there are also more altruistic reasons for working enthusiastically, such as a doctor's desire to heal the sick and injured, a politician's desire for better government, or a soldier's desire to defend his country. A manager must help his employees to make progress toward achieving their goals. As with any interpersonal relationship, communication is the key to success. A manager should establish a rapport with each individual employee, and from there determine how he can best meet that employee's needs. At the same time, the manager can demonstrate to the employee the benefits of putting a dose of enthusiasm into his work. Generally speaking, an employee who approaches his tasks with enthusiasm will find them more enjoyable to complete than one who goes to work grudgingly.

Employee participation is needed not only to create, but also to maintain enthusiasm in the workplace. In almost any job, salary is a prime motivational factor for employees. Many work settings, though, offer a variety of other elements which contribute to an employee's enthusiasm for his job. In a government intelligence agency, for instance, an employee's patriotism can be incentive for doing especially good work. The vital importance of intelligence to national security can also give employees a special feeling of worth that salary alone cannot supply. Recognition for a job well done is also important to employees, and the U.S. Government's cash awards and letters of appreciation are excellent examples of recognition programs. Other considerations include flexible working environments, educational opportunities, and the chance for an employee to become an expert in his field. All of these factors contribute to an employee's enthusiasm for his work. While larger organizations like government agencies are better able to provide such working conditions than smaller ones, they do have some drawbacks. Employees may at times feel unimportant or lost in the expansive complexities of a sizable business or government organization. It is not uncommon for a humorous, but potentially dangerous, cynicism to develop among employees in expansive bureaucracies. For example, the saying "good enough for government work" can generate an antiproductive "antienthusiasm" among federal workers by creating an atmosphere in which employees would be, to an extent, embarrassed to show enthusiasm for their work. Also, larger management organizations sometimes fail to realize that posters and pep rally style efforts to promote enthusiasm can overdo it, leaving employees bored with, or hostile to, a constant barrage of "Be Productive" propaganda. So while there are certainly plenty of incentives, maintaining enthusiasm is not necessarily easy for managers or employees.

With a little effort, though, enthusiasm can be an effective motivational tool for managing human resources. Enthusiasm is based on emotion, and as Neil Carlson states in *Psychology, the Science of Behavior*, "emotions are intimately related to motivation."[2] Life *is* emotion, *is* enthusiasm, and despite the tremendous emphasis on "professionalism" in business relations, so is work. Managers who are sincerely enthusiastic themselves, and who can generate and maintain enthusiasm in their employees, can expect a more productive and enjoyable workplace. Of course, human resources management requires much more than shear enthusiasm for the job, but without that enthusiasm, the task of HRM would be an impossible one.

2. Neil R. Carlson, *Psychology: The Science of Behavior*, Boston, 1984, p. 523.

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