

CHAPTER 1

Creating a Fun, Rewarding School Climate

An essential element for successful schools is a fun, rewarding climate. Think about where you do your best work. Is it in a place where your efforts are recognised and you feel appreciated? Do you have fun when you are there? Recognition, appreciation, fun, laughter, collegial sharing, celebrations—these contribute to the quality of our lives and to those of the people around us. On the other hand, how many of you are sick of all the recognition you receive at work? How many of you say, “I wish my boss would stop telling me what a great job I am doing so I can actually get some work done” or “If those parents would just stop calling me every day to tell me how much I am appreciated . . .”?

You probably don’t experience that enough.

“You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world,” Walt Disney said, “but it requires people to make the dream a reality.” A school’s most valuable resource leaves each night and returns the next morning. A school can have the newest state-of-the-art facility and the best curriculum, but if it doesn’t have motivated staff members to meet the students’ educational needs, then those assets don’t mean anything.

Careers have a cycle. For those of us in education, it typically began in uni when we majored in subject areas, took our methods courses, worked as a student-teacher and so on. Then we received our first job offer. Think back to that moment. Remember the excitement you felt? Who was the first person you called? Do you remember how thrilled you were that you were going to actually *be* an educator and make a difference in the lives of your students? Do you remember how energised and motivated you were?

Men and women want to do a good job, a creative job, and if they are provided the proper environment, they will do so.

—Bell Hewlett

Shortly after we began those first jobs, we discovered that we hadn't learned all of the skills necessary for success. We then got some on-the-job training, sought coaching from mentors and principals, and developed new skills. As we gained competencies, we also gained confidence. This combination put us in the career cycle of being *enthusiastic* and *growing*. Wouldn't it be great if we spent our entire careers being enthusiastic and growing—if we loved what we were doing so much that we greeted each day with energy and a positive attitude and we continued to try new things and to make an effort to become better every day?

At some point, everyone experiences *career frustrations*. Have you been there yet? If not, you will get there eventually. Your enthusiasm, and perhaps your energy, will diminish. The goal in this situation is to get back to being enthusiastic and growing. However, people can sometimes move into a stage of being *stable* and *stagnant*. Being stable might be OK for a while because you are at least maintaining the status quo, but stagnating is not good. Look around your school. You can probably identify which staff members are in that stage of the career cycle. They are the ones who are unwilling to try anything new or serve on a committee.

When an unmotivated staff member is not using their full potential, consider that person's supervisor. Has the supervisor helped the staff member reach their full potential in the job? It is incumbent upon the supervisor to establish or allow a supportive environment where people can be their best. If someone is not enthusiastic about work, it is the supervisor's responsibility to find out why and to determine how to best help that person regain their lost enthusiasm. If someone has reached the career frustration stage, how do you get that person (or you) back to being enthusiastic and growing? First, you have to ask if it is an achievable goal. I used to tell my staff, "If you can't whistle on your way to work, you don't belong in that job." And I believe that not all educators should be in education. We need to help them into other careers, year levels, job assignments—whatever it takes to get them whistling on their way to work. It is important to ask, one on one, "What do you like doing? What lights your fire?" If the person is feeling burned out, then they must have been lit up at some time. What did that look like? What was the person doing? During this career development process, it is important that the person understands that the lack of enthusiasm might be caused by a mismatch between their skills and the job requirements, or a mismatch of personality types with the supervisor or coworkers—all of which could be resolved by a different setting or career area.

There's a big difference between getting people to come to work and getting them to do their best.

—Bob Nelson

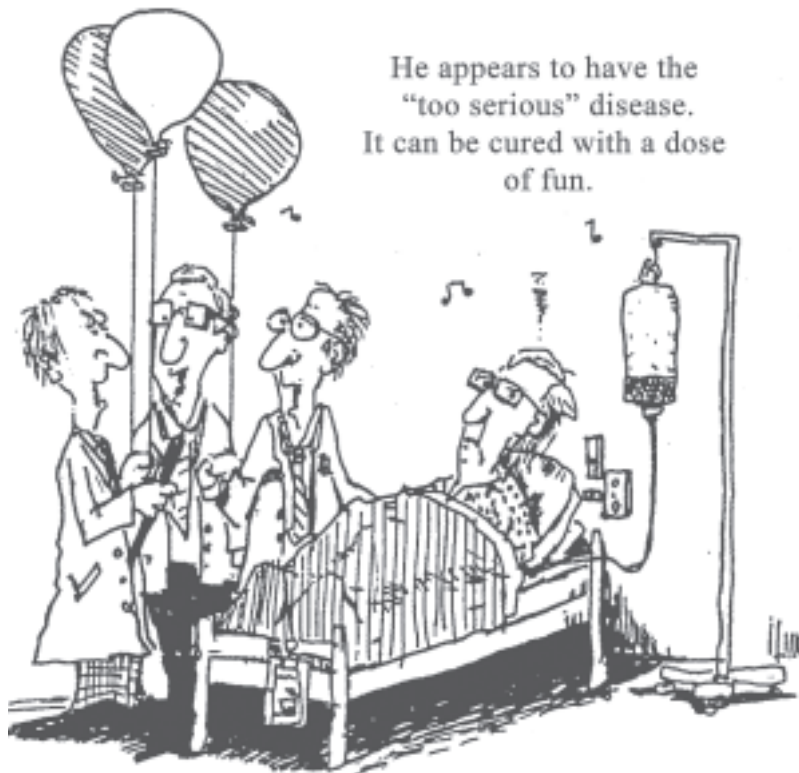


Keep the forms on file as a reference in an easily accessible location. Then, when you or other colleagues want to show recognition to a staff member, refer to the information to find the perfect way to do it. As new staff members are hired, include this form as part of the orientation process.

FUN



Another way to motivate staff members is to create a work environment that is fun. Dale Carnegie said, “People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.” A common misconception is that if you are having fun, then you aren’t working. I once heard a speaker say, “If you want to have fun at work, then work at Disney World—don’t look for it in a school.” Oh my! Many people suffer from the disease of being too serious.



It is possible to be professional, achieve goals and enjoy your way to success. Could it be that when you incorporate fun into the workplace, the result will be an increase in teamwork, a decrease in absenteeism (“Monday migraines”), reduced stress and an improved



Form the habit of saying “yes” to a good idea. Then write down the reasons why it will work. There will always be plenty of people around you to tell you it won’t work.

—Gil Atkinson

Choose to Fly

Choose to Fly is a theme based on the book *Dumbo*. Summarise the story of *Dumbo* for staff members: A baby elephant is born to Mrs Jumbo, a circus elephant. The baby has enormous ears and is teased and called “Dumbo”. His mother goes into a rampage trying to defend her baby and is locked away. Dumbo is left with his only friend, a mouse who uses a magic feather to convince the baby elephant to reach his full potential—to use his large ears to fly.

Give each staff member a feather and remind them that they, too, can fly this year. Incorporate the feather theme into awards and accomplishments throughout the year.

Work as a T–E–A–M and No Whining!

Set the expectation from the beginning that the goal for the year is to work together as a T-E-A-M (**T**ogether **E**veryone **A**chieves **M**ore). It is difficult to make a team out of a group of unique individuals. Just because everyone comes to the same school each day, wears the same school logo on their T-shirts, and shares the same mascot, that does not make them a team. You will need to practise being a team and helping each other achieve common goals.

One principle that will help the team process is *No Whining!* Often, there are toxic people in a workplace and a lot of nonproductive complaining goes on. I heard about a company that implemented a policy where employees could only complain to someone who had the knowledge or position to solve the problem. Violators would be terminated. So a person who had a problem with a colleague couldn’t just randomly complain to other staff members.

Set the expectation that during the year, nonproductive complaining is to be avoided. Some people just need to get their feelings out, so create a place for staff members to *whine down*. You could call it the *Whine Cellar*. Put white boards or rolls of paper and textas for staff to vent their frustrations, and have erasers and bins on hand. Put stress-relieving toys in the room and have nice music available. (Make sure you don’t make it nicer than the staff lounge or it may become the staff members’ favourite hangout!) Make admission tickets for each staff member to have on hand. When a colleague starts complaining, give that person a ticket to the *Whine Cellar*. You will be amazed at how much more productive staff members will be when there is not an undercurrent of gossip.

Attitudes are contagious. Do you want people around you to catch yours?

—Bob Moawad



Packet of Aspirin

Thank you for your hard work. I know it's been a headache.

You do more for my heart than taking aspirin. Thank you!

You are *aspiring*.

You take out the pain of _____.

Package of Batteries

Thanks for your enthusiasm. You really *energise* the whole staff.

Your *energy* keeps on going and going.

Your classroom was really *charged* today.

You really are an *ever-ready* teacher!



**Your classroom
was really
charged today.**

Snow Globe

I know you're really feeling *snowed* under. Can I help?

S'no secret what a great job you're doing!

There's *snowbody* like you!

You really *shake* things up!

Tacks

Great job! Thanks for the extra *push*.

Thanks for being so *tack-ful*.



**You more than
measure up!**

Tape Measure

By every *measure*, you're great!

You more than *measure* up!

Few *measure* up to you!

