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A Proven Way to
Boost Morale and
Improve Results



Stephen C. Lundin, Ph.D.,
Harry Paul, and John Christensen

Foreword by Ken Blanchard, Ph.D.,
co-author of *The One Minute Manager*™

Fish!: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results

Stephen C. Lundin , Harry Paul , John Christensen , Kenneth H. Blanchard (Foreword)

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Here's another management parable that draws its lesson from an unlikely source--this time it's the fun-loving fishmongers at Seattle's Pike Place Market. In *Fish!* the heroine, Mary Jane Ramirez, recently widowed and mother of two, is asked to engineer a turnaround of her company's troubled operations department, a group that authors Stephen Lundin, Harry Paul, and John Christensen describe as a "toxic energy dump." Most reasonable heads would cut their losses and move on. Why bother with this bunch of losers? But the authors don't make it so easy for Mary Jane. Instead, she's left to sort out this mess with the help of head fishmonger Lonnie. Based on a bestselling corporate education video, *Fish!* aims to help employees find their way to a fun and happy workplace. While some may find the story line and prescriptions--such as "Choose Your Attitude," "Make Their Day," and "Be Present"--downright corny, others will find a good dose of worthwhile motivational management techniques. If you loved *Who Moved My Cheese?* then you'll find much to like here. And don't worry about Mary Jane and kids. *Fish!* has a happy ending for everyone. --Harry C. Edwards

Fish!: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results Details

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From Reader Review Fish!: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results for online ebook

Lisa says

Fish! A simplistic yet overbearing, cloying, smiley-fish face concept guaranteed to annoy, yet not challenge, any employee forced to read it. And there's absolutely no getting around the immediate reaction to all things Fish: is this about Jesus Christ? It isn't, it's about soulful fish-flingers from Seattle leading lives of great fulfillment that we should all envy. Why? Because they choose happiness. Like we all should. All of us. People from all walks of life. From the humble to the mighty. In our jobs and in our lives. Be happy at work or leave. Shit or get off the pot. Fish or cut bait.

Evan says

A GR friend listed this, which reminded me that I "owned" a copy at one time. Actually what happened was this: My former employer was sending us office peons to a motivational retreat out in the country, which happened every other year or so to our great collective dread. Much forced teamwork joviality and irritating group exercises and presentations that reminded me of kindergarten ensued. The latest management fad of the week that was used to "theme" and structure one of these particular retreats was the "Fish" approach to management, based on the fish-tossing hijinks of the workers at the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle. The workers at the fish market, we were told, loved their jobs and gained customer loyalty by engaging the consumers in their energetic hijinks. Somehow an entrepreneur wanting to make a lot of money by selling a mass market one-size-fits-all program to ever-gullible managers had the brainstorm of packaging this "philosophy" into paid seminars and a companion book (which this is). What I just told you about the fish market hijinks pretty much constitutes the philosophy. Of course it's inane, crass, irrelevant to workplace realities and ultimately condescending to workers who rightly realize that their intelligence is being insulted by yet another lumpen metaphoric "lesson" barely better than those suitable for the comprehension of Mr. Rogers' audience.

I was given one of these books at the retreat and told to read it. I skimmed it and immediately put it up for sale on Amazon--in much the same way I immediately threw into my office trash each Christmas the Russell Stover sampler box given to me as a gift in lieu of an actual raise or bonus.

In other words, take this fish and shove it!

Kristen says

My boss gave me this book to read and tell her what I thought. My review here will be essentially what I told her.

The FISH concept is exactly that, a concept that has been heard before from countless speakers at every business conference you have attended. Chose your attitude, have some fun at work, pay attention to people, and be focused on the present. None of these are breakthrough concepts. The book itself is a quick read; I finished it on my lunch break after she gave it to me. Large font, large margins, and lots of wasted space

make and already thin book even shorter.

The biggest problem with this book is that it is written to be motivational, but not exactly helpful. Most people will read this book, and be very excited about what they have read, wanting to run right back to work and start implementing the FISH philosophy. By the end of the week this enthusiasm will be gone because, unfortunately this book does not give you the knowledge or the skills to implement their theories. The character in the book is fictional, and the results she achieved by implementing this philosophy are just as fictional. I would have been much happier to have read about a company that actually DID implement this philosophy, how they did it, and the true results they achieved. Certainly reading that a fictional person implemented it and it worked phenomenally can be motivational, but reality works differently.

The flaws in the concept can be overcome, but the book itself does not help you to achieve this. The employees have to trust their management, the management has to both trust their employees and also have employees in place that can be trusted to want to do their job to the best of their ability. Also, you have to assume that the work that the employees are doing is actually value added work. In the day and age of lawsuits over everything, trying to add "fun" to the workplace can be a terrifying thing to management who has been trained over the years that anything out of the norm can result in a lawsuit of one type or another. The suggestion of beach balls and throwing footballs around the room (from the second book "Fish Tales") is any safety manager's nightmare.

In the end, this is a weakly written book about a philosophy that is motivational, but of more use in your personal life than the business world.

Trisha says

Suckiest book ever! This was an obligatory "work read". It was the classic corporate mumbo jumbo. Imagine a sucky group of employees with bad attitudes...in walks this great boss. With only the tap of a wand and a field trip to a local fish market she transforms this group of losers into productive happy cogs. With really clever phrases like "choose your attitude" this sage was able to get her team back on track and loving their jobs, life and each other. Wow! Not once did they explore what made those poor saps so ineffective or consider that perhaps there were some structural changes that could have perhaps contributed to the "attitude" problems on the gig. I would much preferred to have read skymall magazine on the plane or chatted with the stranger sitting next to me...but no, I was held hostage to the fish story. I believe fish was an appropriate name because when I finished with it, I wanted to wrap it up in newspaper and put it out with the trash!

Cheryl Durham says

Loved. Loved. Loved.. Who Moved My Cheese was a great fable to address change. Fish went a step further. Mr. Lundin helped us to see that boosting morale can be done in such a fun loving and remarkable manner. Moving on to Gung Ho. Getting better....means doing better....by all!

Jacqueline Koyanagi says

This was required reading for my day job. While I appreciate what the folks at my job are attempting to do, and am always on board for being as positive and present-minded as one is capable of being, therein lies the rub--this book did not account for individual variation in ability whatsoever. I wasn't surprised in the least to find that a book used as corporate motivation would be extremely ableist, erasing the reality of physical and mental disabilities as an involuntary factor in whether a person is capable of being--for example--"energetic" or "fully present."

Tell someone flashing back from PTSD that they're not being "present enough." Tell someone with depression caused by seasonal affective disorder that they're not being energetic or "choosing a positive attitude." Tell someone with a chronic illness that they're not doing the work with "enough energy."

Yes, this book is primarily about choosing your attitude, and one can choose one's attitude up to a point. A person with a chronic illness may not be able to be as energetic as their coworker, but they can give what they're able to give. I'm on board for giving what energy you're capable of giving, being as positive as you're capable of being, and being as present-minded as your brain will allow.

But that was not the message of this book. This book promotes the message, "choose your attitude." Full stop. It utterly failed to acknowledge that disabled folks exist, and that disability and neurodiversity have serious impacts on just how feasible it is to "choose" your mental state.

Ron says

I really liked this book when I first bought it, in 2001. Back then, I was a young and idealistic 23-year-old, so I pretty much assumed that a corporate culture could be changed by smiling and being nice to the customers. Of course, I've since learned that it's not nearly that easy. The book's message is simple enough; it's a cross between the Serenity Prayer (don't dwell on what you can't change) and the Franklin or Eleanor Roosevelt quote to "do what you can with what you have where you are."

The book's parable is simple enough to not alienate the reader, but there are many times when it clearly takes place in an ideal world; the only people who don't appreciate and embrace the Fish Philosophy are those who haven't heard it yet. Once the main character introduces the Philosophy to her department, everything gets better automatically.

One place where this book is sorely lacking is in suggesting how to implement the Fish Philosophy in one's workplace. Basically, they just say that employees have to choose to be happy and productive, and they will be. The book doesn't provide any advice to managers for improving the environment, or leading the way by accentuating the positive, or rethinking business processes so employees don't waste time on pointless tasks; just Choose Your Attitude(tm) and it'll all take care of itself.

Basically, this book is best suited to optimists, people who already come to work in a good mood no matter what. Those who feel justified in their disgruntlement will just see this as another attempt by management to avoid addressing their own problems. This book could be used in a bigger program, however, wherein managers are taught how to demonstrate, encourage, and reward positive attitudes and exceptional customer service.

Jennie Damron says

My CEO asked my coworker and I to read this book. At first I was like, really, I have to read a morale book for the office?!? But, I am so glad I read this book. I loved the concept of choosing your attitude and being there. So many times I feel my choices are robbed from me, but that is not the case. I can choose my response and in turn how I treat people in my day to day life. Yeah this book is for the work place, but I can apply this to my every day life and I think it will improve the quality with which I choose to live and see even the small things that happen in the day to day aspects of life.

K.D. Absolutely says

Our company is using Fish! philosophy. I have been working for the past 27 years and all my previous three or four employers did not allow any of these: Halloween area decorations contest, global festival contest, monthly birthday celebrants dinner with the general manager, santacruzian (based on catholic religious festival), interest clubs (book club is one of these and I am one of the members and I will use Goodreads), etc. Honestly, I am not sure if they add value to the business (including the book club). But I can see that most of the employees are enjoying these and "Have Fun at Work" is part of the management philosophy that the company espouses so who am I to argue with that.

Because of our company book club, I am now in the look out for an appropriate books to read: one fiction and one non-fiction. I do not have any problem with the fiction because there are just too many available. The non-fiction is a different matter because most booklovers, at least most of my friends here in Goodreads, are not really into this. So, when I saw this hardbound book - pristine, clean and crispy - being sold for only P75, I bought it right away.

The fictional story revolves around **Mary Jane**, a mother whose husband just died so she has to support all by herself her two small children. She works as a manager in a fictional company called First Guarantee Financial. Because she works hard (as she is now the sole provider for her kids), her efforts are noticed and the company president assigns her to fix the operation on the third floor of the building. That operation is functioning so badly that it has earned the name: *The Toxic Energy Dump*.

One day, Mary Jane is walking and she heard a happy commotion - noise and laughters - from the direction of the market called *Pike Place Fish* where the fishmongers (salesclerks) are throwing the fishes, whole or parts, in the air. The buyers are enjoying the spectacle not only the throwing but also the full attention and friendly conversations they get from the salesclerks. That was how the idea of Fish! philosophy was born.

I remember my boss sent me a copy of the video before and I just brushed it aside thinking that we do not have anything to throw inside the office. The book explained other ways to have fun at work. It is only now that I understand exactly how can this work to boost morale, improve results and minimize resignations. Those decorating activities, the employees dancing inside the pantry, the ladies dressed up like *Reina Elena* walking in procession along the hallway, etc. are not to deviate their attention from work or to aim for a higher pay in the next annual salary increase. Those are, even how ironic they seem, to encourage them to be more productive. This book aims to tell the reader how this can be possible and I am stopping here so as not to spoil your fun.

My only comment is that the frame story is the suckiest story that I've ever read. It is mind-bugging (not mind-boggling). Having read so many fiction works, this one is like a bug, say a cockroach, that you want to step on until its intestines are spread on the floor. You have to step on it because the said cockroach can fly and it can go inside your ears and creep into your brain. That's how you'd feel reading that story. It is badly written that I felt insulted and afraid reading it. It seemed like the author thought that only stupid office people (or those who after reading the fairy tales while they were very young were not required by their schools to read another book) would have the interest to read his book.

Check the name and profiles of the 3 authors: Stephen C. Ludin, Ph.D. (a filmmaker, professor, speaker), Harry Paul (senior vice president), John Christensen (filmmaker, CEO, film producer). Not anyone of them had written a book prior to this yet!

Last night, I started reading the second book (yeah, this book is so successful it has a sequel!!!) and now there is the fourth author and he is -- a writer!

Yay, good thinking!

Ashish says

I don't want to be too critical of this book. After all, it's just a damn parable. I was surprised that this book was actually recommended by entrepreneurs and bosses to boost their employees' morale. HAHA! The way this book delivers its message is tad unrealistic, even for a parable. I understand the message that the book was trying to deliver was a noble one; get rid of "toxic energy" in the workplace. To achieve that purpose, the main character, Mary Jane took help from fishmongers who had a positive attitude in a fish market nearby. The four main things Mary learnt from those fishmongers were:

1. Choose a positive attitude at workplace
2. Have fun in work. Play a little.
3. Engage with your customers. Have fun with them as well
4. Stay focused. Always be "present" while listening to problems of customers, friends or family members.

That's acceptable. However, Mary Jane and all the other employees in the book treated the fishmongers as omniscient. The ending was even more extreme. Mary got so inspired by one of the fishmongers that she decided to marry him. This forced romance made the ending hideous.

Avery says

The book I read was Fish!: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results by Stephen C. Ludin. This book is about the fundamentals of boosting your team's morale. The main topic of this book is there in a business, and "the dump" is the work level that has all the older adults. It is a very dull place and not a lot is accomplished. Many ideas are brought up in this book about ways to improve morale. She tries to create a book structure where she sets up a situation then she explains way on how to solve and improve that situation.

The author achieved describing his topic very well. She set up many ideas and lots of different ways to

approach boosting morale. This book was very informative, by trying to make us try the ways to boost morale. Powerful, is one word I would use to describe this book. One strength of this book is that she formatted most of the chapters by putting many different ways of how to do just one thing. A weakness was that the hook of this book was very dull and boring. It did not grab my attention. Stephen the author is very qualified to write this book because she researched and studied this topic of morale. I agree with every idea in this book.

This book left me with the impression that I can use these ideas in my life. I hope to apply it to my work and teams. I recommend this book to Sophie Bell. I know she wants to start a business and this might be good for her.

Adriana says

Fish is a business book written as a parable. Its purpose is coach its readers into a new way of carrying out their business environment in order to make employees more productive. It does so by enlightening us with less conventional methods of expressing ourselves at work.

In order for employees to be more productive, they need not experience work as a hum-drum experience. After all, who gives their all when they are bored and disengaged? Cliche as this may sound, Fish claims that passion in what we do for a living is of ultimate importance. The significance of feeling alive and purposeful is necessary. The Fish philosophy considers it imperative employees get to know each other, that they be exposed to events and celebrations in which they can share with one another, and that some fun be brought into their work life. Some of the methods discussed are interest clubs such as book clubs, holiday celebrations, festivals, contests, birthday hurrah's, trips, winning a dinner with the boss, etc. These methods and others, are used as motivators for higher achievement at work.

Although I have never personally worked for a company that avails itself to the Fish philosophy, I do know of companies that have implemented Fish techniques with great success. I have also spoken to people who claim the Fish philosophy has made a difference as to how they personally approach their jobs.

For my part, I can only imagine (and this is simply a personal opinion), that employees who have a sense of belonging, who are encouraged to share with co-workers, feel they are a part of something bigger, and propelled to participate and voice their opinions, will experience a greater sense satisfaction in their work place. Thus making them more motivated. Which could serve to raise employee self-esteem and moral. I can see how this school of thought, if implemented properly, could provide employees with a more effective work environment.

Before closing off, I would like to clear something up about Fish. There have been some negative reviews. Many of them state what a horrible "story" Fish is. Fish is NOT a story. It is a parable used to coach it's readers as to the concept of running a business with greater impact by using unconventional methods. It is not a fictional read for entertainment purposes.

I gave Fish 3 stars.

Nicholas Karpuk says

I don't know if I've ever heard so much negative feedback on a book that no one's actually read.

A coworker cleaning out his desk handed me this slim hardback volume along with "Leadership and the One Minute Manager," both of which he received at some sort of managerial seminar. I'm usually up to give read just about anything, and neither volume extended much beyond 100 pages. When I asked him about fish, he casually explained that it was a book on how to brainwash your employees.

Not sure he read it honestly, but then again I'm not even sure the people who hand out these books actually believe its message.

I guess what I'm getting at is the corporate world is full of misanthropes.

While the notion of using a story as a framework for a message of corporate betterment probably didn't start with this book, it seems like it definitely gave it a bit more ground in popularity. It's a sugar pill meant to push about a page-worth of data down the throat of lower level management.

The issue I have with all these books is the same reason I couldn't stomach Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged." A fictional story is a great way to teach a lesson, or extol virtues and beliefs. It's rotten for proving that you're right. When you create the scenario you guarantee success for the avatars of your chosen methods. Everyone who disagrees becomes a straw man you can set ablaze. It's like CS Lewis saying there's a magic world through the wardrobe. It's FICTION! It doesn't prove a damn thing in and of itself.

Here's a spoiler for the book straight out of Wikipedia:

Play

Make Their Day

Be There [for Coworkers] (Often referred to as "Be Present" This is more to do with giving your full attention to a task or individual.)

Choose Your Attitude

What's funny is that most of the advice I've read in these sort of books just tell you to act like a civil, respectful human being. Being positive and trying to make your environment as good as it can be for your employees isn't really a feat of neurology. So what stops it from happening?

Well, it's easier not to. The well of positive energy is poisoned from above, not below. The example is set from a much higher point than the middle management this is aimed at. In a way it's sort of abrasive to have them throwing this book at underlings and saying, "Here, get a good attitude!" They themselves feel they don't need this attitude, the book is a pill for someone else's problem. The people with the power seem to feel they don't need to study anything at all, since their power is proof that they already know all they need to as is.

As proof of this, a friend of mine who saw the book mentioned that he got this book along with a write-up as his last job with ticketmaster. He of course did not read it, as being punished with a book on positive morale didn't sit well with him. The unwritten message of the book as its used in practice is, "Have a good attitude or else!"

It goes unread not because of its intended message, but because of the implied one.

Wikipedia has a counter-argument that sums it up far better than I could, so I'll end with it:

"In his book *Organization Theory: A Libertarian Perspective*, anarchist Kevin Carson calls FISH! "vile" and a "lesson from the powerful to the powerless", adding:

To grasp just how presumptuous Fish! really is, just try a thought experiment: imagine management's reaction if the circumstances were reversed. Imagine the bosses' reaction if you and your coworkers matter-of-factly announced that, henceforth, you would be working at a slower pace for the same amount of money, or that you would be receiving a higher hourly wage. Imagine telling the boss "you can't do anything about these changes, but you can choose to have a good attitude about them!" My guess is your boss would demonstrate in short order that he does have control over events, and that it's not his attitude that has to be adjusted. That's because, while you may be powerless, your bosses most certainly are not.

This asymmetrical power relationship is implicit in Fish! Philosophy. And you'd better believe that the people who push it are fully aware of their agenda. [...] They are the ones who do things. We are the ones that things are done to. Learn to enjoy it, or else. That's the message of Fish! Philosophy."

EDIT: The more I thought about it, the more my score dropped. I kept having "wait a damn minute" moments. It started out as a 3 and just slid downward. As one negative review pointed out, the book gives absolutely no consideration to dissent as a valuable part of office discourse.

Reading in Black & White says

This has a few ideas that I'll definitely implement at work. It's a nice, quick read that I would recommend to anyone that is looking to change the culture at their workplace.

Trudy says

I know it is a matter of perspective certainly, but I think a one star rating is missing the point of this book... It is absolutely not going to be winning any writing awards, but it contains lessons that I think we all need to be reminded of periodically. I always feel better when I read it and I always take something away from it. Quick read... an hour tops! Buy it for yourself, buy it for friends, buy it for coworkers... We can all benefit from the Fish philosophy!

- 1) Choose the attitude you bring to work.
 - 2) Play. (Every job may not be fun, but we can choose to have fun doing it.)
 - 3) Make their day (Engage customers - including them creates goodwill)
 - 4) Be Present (Be aware of those around you and be fully available)
-

Danelley says

I got called in as a temp today, and inbetween breaks of answering phones, I noticed this book sitting in the

office and I picked it up and read it. It's short and sweet and to the point, and a REALLY good book. It reminded me a lot of Victor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Happiness*, how even when our freedoms are taken away, we always have the freedom to choose our attitude toward things and events. This applies the choice of attitude to the workplace. Maybe you have a job that really sucks. This book will teach you how to have more fun at work, how to change things from being a toxic environment to a happier environment. And people will want to be around you when you're not moping around or making excuses! Can you believe it? Anyway, good book, funny and a really quick read.

Janelle Franco says

Good ideology, horribly written.

David Sven says

Read this for work. Easy and quick to read.

The Fish philosophy is modelled on the work culture of a fishmonger's at Seattle's Pike Place Markets.

Summarised

1. Choose your attitude
2. Play/Have fun (They threw fish around at the markets)
3. Be present (for customers and others generally)
4. Make their day

3 stars

Eli says

I gave this book one star only because Good Reads won't let me give it half a star. It was a work assignment. How do I loathe it, let me count the ways:

- 1. Abysmal writing.** *Fish* was apparently written in a land where contractions seldom happen, and the dialogue reads like a 1950s industrial about the perils of poor hygiene.
- 2. The "story."** Lundin et. al. felt the need to tack a "plot" onto their corporate philosophy book: a plot that was thin, forced, and, with the implausible love story stuck in for us working gals reading it, insulting.
- 3. The vilification of dissent.** The Fish Philosophy is presented as being so flawless and so delightful that no one could possibly object to it. And, indeed, the "protagonist" encounters no objections from her employees. What then can happen (it happened to my boss) is that managers who read the book and make their employees read it are unprepared for dissent. Legitimate concerns about the fundamental soundness and

applicability of the philosophy are swept aside without acknowledgement. Dissent is seen not as vital to growth (which I believe it to be) but as trouble-making and "not being a team player." The only appropriate response to the Fish Philosophy, in the Fish world, is complete acquiescence.

4. The co-option of message. The message I took from the *Fish* video is the importance of authenticity and individuality. The Pike's Place Fish Market is fun because each employee is encouraged to be their authentic selves, to contribute to the sense of fun in their own unique way. The fact that this inspiring message has been co-opted, in the book, into a worldwide message of corporate conformity and enforced "fun" imposed by the student-councilsque few on the unconsulted many sickens me.

Scott Smith says

I've been dipping into some management books with the new job and since this one has been on my shelf forever (and it's short) I gave it a read. It's a little simplistic (and honestly reads a little too much like a kids' book at times), but the maxims it uses (Choose Your Attitude, Be Present, Make Their Day, Play) are smart. Of course, figuring out how to implement them is the hard part, and the book doesn't offer much in the way of guiding you on that score.
