

Enjoying What You Work On **(Influencing Others to Enjoy What They Work On)**

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Remember when you were a kid, and you were very much looking forward to some special outing that had been promised to you? You were excited, right? You had all kinds of imaginations about how much fun you would have! You couldn't wait for the time to pass.

I was reminded of this experience we all share as I observed my three-year old grandson awaiting Christmas. He repeatedly asked, "How many more days?" Ah, the power of anticipation is huge!

How often do you experience such positive expectancy in your work?

As we age, we learn to create "to do" lists. Concurrently, our excitement about executing those "to do" items sometimes wanes. Might it be possible to recreate the kind of excitement that I felt as I listened to my grandson express his eagerness regarding Christmas? His energy was infectious.

Would you like to "infect" individuals in your organization with similar excitement about the activities they face? Recent research by Richard Boyatzis indicates that might be possible!

My thoughts spring from a Harvard Business Review blog post by Daniel Goleman entitled "When You Criticize Someone, You Make It Harder for that Person to Change." Daniel Goleman is a science journalist, author in 1995 of *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*.

Goleman acknowledges that many organizations focus their developmental efforts for employees on their limitations, the behaviors they need to improve. Employees don't like to hear this supposedly constructive feedback, and they are rarely inspired to take the actions that will address the limitations.

Goleman references recent research by Boyatzis, a professor at the Whitehead School of Management at Case Western University. Based on focused studies of brain chemistry, Boyatzis suggests an intriguing new approach. Initiate your development conversations with a question like this one: "If everything worked out perfectly in your life, what would you be doing in ten years?"

Boyatzis used brain images to analyze how our positive and negative feelings affect our behaviors. Apparently, the impact is huge, with valuable implications for how you can best engage and inspire those under your authority--or yourself--to improve. His advice is to focus the person initially on his or her longer-term desires rather than on recent failings.

Focusing on how good it will feel to reach a goal stimulates dopamine and endorphins, "feel-good brain chemicals" that "fuel drive, energize us, let us focus better, be more flexible in our thinking, and connect effectively with the people around us." Understanding a person's desires for the future can open a conversation for what it will take to achieve these aspirations, leading to specific areas of improvement.

Initiating the conversation with what's wrong with the individual--what needs to be fixed--puts people on the defensive, causes anxiety and worry, and shuts them down. Framing a limitation as a personal flaw to be overcome creates subconscious resistance and defensiveness that makes improvement difficult.

We've all known this for years. It's just common sense, of course, but it's not common practice. We leaders are pressured with so many demands that we often take the most direct route, calling out the deficiencies as we see them. Boyatzis and Goleman are advocating for honesty within a framework important to the individual. With a little bit of time and thoughtful compassion, you can do that.

I've found that if I can imagine an undesirable task within a context of improved future circumstances, I can make the short-term action almost enjoyable--ranging from tolerable to even fun. I used to think this was playing mind games, but Boyatzis' recent research indicates a sound scientific foundation.

When I decide to enjoy the process, I can accomplish the short-term objective and even find the experience pleasurable. The movement toward my longer-term vision simply adds to the satisfaction! The key is imagining the longer-term desired outcome. You can do the same thing for those you serve.