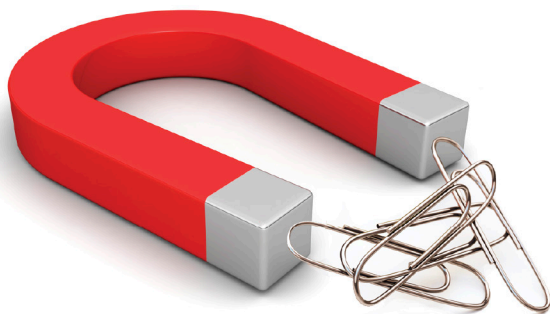


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The Art and Science of Creating
an Extraordinary Workplace

RON FRIEDMAN, PHD

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—Edgar H. Schein, professor emeritus at MIT Sloan School of
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continued . . .

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—Dean Keith Simonton, PhD, distinguished professor of psychology, University of California, Davis

“The Best Place to Work flows seamlessly and is filled with practical, accessible ways of seeing not only oneself in depth, but also the complex mosaics of workplace environments with pitfalls and opportunities galore. The principles that undergird a fulfilling and healthy life, with room for authentic, creative play, are infused into practical, real-life vignettes throughout its pages. Bringing the science of human innovativeness and productivity into focus, and combining these science-based truths with a life well lived, are what can be gleaned from its chapters.”

—Stuart Brown, MD, author of *Play* and founder and president of the National Institute for Play

“Ron Friedman **bridges the gap between cutting-edge science and the reality of the modern workplace in a way that is clear, sensible, and effective.** Friedman does more than offer recommendations—he provides empirically supported tools for turning most any office into a lively, engaging workplace. Written in a user-friendly style that will grab your attention, this book is **a must-read** for anyone who has wondered why workplaces can’t be successful and welcoming at the same time.”

—Harry Reis, PhD, University of Rochester professor of psychology, past president of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and winner of the International Association for Relationship Research’s Distinguished Career award

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For my grandfather,
who taught me that in the end
the only thing worth being remembered for
is kindness

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INTRODUCTION

A Tale of Two Menus

Near the heart of Silicon Valley, just a few miles south of the San Francisco Bay, sits an enchanting Indian restaurant called Baadal. It is run by Irfan Dama, an animated chef of forty-one, who designs three-course meals that alternate daily. Baadal is his first restaurant. Yet by all accounts, it is a colossal success. Within just days of opening, reservations were nearly impossible to secure.

Unlike more traditional Indian restaurants, Chef Dama's menus aim to demystify meals that often intimidate novice diners, by listing every ingredient included in a dish. The restaurant's decor also provides a range of dining experiences, from quiet booths surrounded by sheer curtains to open-space tables to a rousing Bollywood-themed room intended for group celebrations.

There's one other thing that's different about Irfan Dama's restaurant: It doesn't charge customers a penny. In fact, anyone who's had the good fortune of sampling Baadal's world-class cuisine has done so for free.

Baadal is owned by Google. It is one of the thirty gourmet restaurants that cater to employees at the company's Mountain View headquarters, known as the Googleplex.

At Google, eating is serious business. Every meal brings with it the opportunity to try over two hundred artisan-crafted dishes. Among the more recent offerings: roast quail, steak tartare, lobster bisque, black cod with parsley pesto and bread crumbs, and porcini-encrusted grass-fed beef. For lighter eaters, there is a salad bar, a noodle bar, a cheese and charcuterie bar, crudité platters, and seasonal sous vide vegetables. Between meals, Googlers are invited to visit one of the many microkitchens sprinkled throughout the campus, each open 24/7 and stocking organic fruit, yogurts, candy, nuts, and drinks. The goal at Google is for employees to be within three minutes of a food source at all times.

The vast and complementary food selection is one reason Google was ranked by *Fortune* magazine as the world's best place to work. But as far as Googleplex amenities go, it's only the tip of the iceberg.

Employees at the company are treated to massages, haircuts, eyebrow-shaping services, foreign language courses, and doctor visits, all on site and free of charge. They have access to three wellness centers, a bowling alley, basketball courts, a roller-hockey rink, ping-pong tables, arcade games, foosball tables, a rock-climbing wall, a putting green, and volleyball courts complete with actual sand. There's an indoor tree house, manicured gardens, apiaries for recreational beekeeping, a replica of Richard Branson's private spaceship, and the life-size skeleton of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Not to be forgotten: the heated toilet seats.

Google is far from the only organization investing heavily in the comfort of its employees. SAS, a business-analytics software company that earned more than \$3 billion in 2012, provides its employees with access to tennis courts, saunas, a billiards hall, heated swimming pools, and work-life counseling, which includes confidential professional advice on financial planning, elder care, and family issues. At Facebook, employees can ride company-provided bicycles to the campus barber, drop off their dry cleaning, grab a latte, raid the free candy shop, and, conveniently, visit the on-site dentist.

And it's not just companies in high tech. Wegmans, a northeastern U.S. grocery chain, has consistently appeared near the top of *Fortune* magazine's list of 100 Best Companies to Work For over the past fifteen years. During that same time period, annual sales have nearly tripled. While many retail operations have tried growing earnings by reducing labor costs, Wegmans has steered in the opposite direction, offering its supermarket employees (many of whom are still in high school and simply glad to have a job) wellness programs, pretax spending accounts, 401(k) plans, life insurance, and education scholarships.

What's the rationale behind all this lavish spending? For many companies on *Fortune*'s list, the basic calculus is simple: *Happy employees mean bigger profits.*

The more invested and enthusiastic people are about their work, the more successful their organization is on a variety of metrics. Studies indicate that happy employees are more productive, more creative, and provide better client service. They're less likely to quit or call in sick. What's more, they act as brand ambassadors outside the office, spreading positive impressions of their company and attracting star performers to their team.

The bottom line for many of the world's most profitable organizations is this: Investing in workplace happiness doesn't cost their company money—it ensures they stay on top.

It's a perspective backed by some compelling data. Research conducted by the Great Place to Work Institute—the organization that compiles an annual list of leading workplaces in conjunction with *Fortune* magazine—reveals an eye-opening statistic: The stocks of companies on the Best Companies to Work For list outperform the market as a whole by a stunning factor of 2 to 1.

Investors are catching on. Around the time the Googleplex opened its doors in 2004, San Francisco-based Parnassus Investments launched a mutual fund comprised exclusively of companies with outstanding workplaces, like the ones on *Fortune*'s list. Since the fund's inception,

it's recorded a 9.63 percent annualized return. In comparison, the overall S&P index during that same time period was a considerably more modest 5.58 percent.

The evidence is clear: Creating an extraordinary workplace can pay significant dividends.

So how do you do it?

Google, SAS, Facebook, and Wegmans certainly set a high bar. But what if you don't have the budget of a multinational corporation? What if you're struggling to find room for a bigger copier, let alone the space for an on-site wellness center? What if the closest thing your office has to a gourmet restaurant is the vending machine at the end of the hall?

What then?

This book happened by accident.

It came about after I left academics, where I'd spent years studying human motivation in the lab and teaching psychology at colleges and universities. Shortly after earning a doctorate in social psychology and settling into a teaching position, I found myself restless.

I'd planned on spending my life as a college professor. But the moment I stepped into the role, I began itching for a new challenge. I wanted to do something practical. Something applied. And so I entered the business world, where I was hired to measure public opinion as a pollster.

Not long after I arrived, I noticed something unexpected. As a social psychologist specializing in human motivation, I'd read countless studies on the factors that promote productivity, creativity, and engagement. Yet to my surprise, very few of these findings were being put to use. Much of what I observed—from the way organizations hire to the way leaders motivate to the layout and design of most office spaces—appeared blind to a wealth of research on how we can build a better workplace.

Over the past decade, advances in brain imaging, data-gathering methods, and behavioral science experiments have produced powerful insights into the conditions that help us work more effectively. We now know how to build a room that boosts creativity, how to turn workplace colleagues into close friends, and how to make any job more meaningful. We know that decorating your office can make you more productive, that going for a walk can lead to better decisions, and that embracing failure can actually help you succeed.

Yet most of these findings have remained trapped in library stacks, collecting dust on university shelves.

In some ways, the knowledge gap between the worlds of business and psychology makes complete sense. Until recently, organizations have had limited need for the advice of psychologists. The traditional workplace, which evolved from the days of the factory floor, had been operating adequately.

But then something momentous happened: The economy shifted. And suddenly the workplace model we'd relied on for generations was no longer as effective.

Back in the days of the industrial economy, building a successful workplace meant finding efficiencies through eliminating errors, standardizing performance, and squeezing more out of workers. How employees *felt* while doing their job was of secondary interest, because it had limited impact on their performance. The main thing was that the work got done.

Today things are different. Our work is infinitely more complex. We rarely need employees to simply do routine, repetitive tasks—we also need them to collaborate, plan, and innovate. Building a thriving organization in the current economy demands a great deal more than efficiency. It requires an environment that harnesses intelligence, creativity, and interpersonal skill.

Businesses today need psychologists. In a world where productivity hinges on the quality of an employee's *thinking*, psychological factors are no longer secondary. They're at the very core of what determines success.

Which brings me back to how I unintentionally came upon the idea for this book: After academia I assumed my writing days were over. But as I experienced the business world firsthand, both in the role of employee and manager, and as I interacted with hundreds of clients, getting an unvarnished view of how their organizations operate, one theme kept resurfacing again and again: *There is a massive divide between the latest science and the modern workplace.*

This book is an attempt to bridge that gap.

In the chapters that follow, I am going to tell you about revolutionary findings in the fields of motivation, creativity, behavioral economics, neuroscience, and management, and show you how you can use them to create a better workplace. Each chapter will address a different aspect of the workplace, offering illuminating and often counterintuitive best practices for making you and your company more effective.

You'll learn how to motivate employees without relying on bonuses, how to choose between job applicants, and how to elevate pride in your organization. You'll discover how to reach better spending decisions, how to defuse workplace disagreements, and how to make yourself more persuasive.

Along the way, we'll meet some extraordinary individuals and hear their fascinating stories, each providing a unique lens for understanding workplace excellence. I'm going to take you behind the scenes of a hostage negotiation and demonstrate how verbal techniques used by the FBI can make you a better leader. I'll introduce you to the man who created the cubicle and explain why his vision for the modern workplace makes perfect sense. I'll show you what every organization can learn from the structure of video games, the design of a Las Vegas casino, and the hiring practices of a symphony orchestra.

We'll cover lots of ground in a short time frame. The work you're about to read fuses thousands of scientific studies in a way that I hope you'll find engaging and relatively jargon-free. I have attempted to

write the sort of book I'd want to read on a business trip. For me that means three things: fast-paced, entertaining, and actionable.

I designed this book with two audiences in mind. The first and perhaps most obvious are managers, owners, and CEOs—those with the ability to apply many of the research recommendations and immediately transform their team's workplace experience.

But this book is not merely a playbook for those at the top of the corporate ladder. It is also written for emerging leaders who want data-driven insights for improving their own productivity and lifting their team's performance. Regardless of where you sit on your company's org chart, if you are interested in reaching smarter workplace decisions, having better colleague relationships, and making yourself indispensable to your company, this book can help.

There are many business books that provide broad principles and few practical recommendations. This is not one of them. Throughout every chapter, you will find specific, evidence-based changes you can apply at your workplace, regardless of your industry. In addition, at the conclusion of each chapter, you will find action items that build upon the findings, offering three more applications geared toward managers and emerging leaders, respectively.

An unavoidable downside of writing about workplaces *in general* and offering lots of specific recommendations is that not all of them will be applicable to everyone. Every organization is different. What works for Google may not be ideal for Wegmans, and vice versa. In that vein, some of the suggestions in this book may be perfect for your company, while others may appear less relevant. My intention here is not to offer a one-size-fits-all approach for building a great workplace (because that would be impossible) but to provide you with a menu of proven ingredients, so that you can choose what feels right within the context of your organization.

By the time you reach the conclusion of this book, I hope to have convinced you of a simple fact: that psychological insight can transform any organization into a great workplace.

The secret to happy workplaces isn't spending more money. It's about creating the conditions that allow employees to do their best work.

And how exactly do you do that? Turn the page. The answers, I believe, are here.

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