

Revised and Re-Energized!



Book FISH!

A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results

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Recommendation

Mary Jane Ramirez has just been put in charge of Hell. That’s how bad her new assignment seems, before she stumbles upon the inspiring management secrets of The Pike Place Fish Market. This effective little tale introduces readers to "Fish!" - the authors’ prescription for boosting employee morale and productivity. The fish-tossing, joke-cracking camaraderie of the market serves as the workplace ideal in this book, which is easy to read but carries a lasting punch. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to executives, change agents, managers, staff members, and students. Whether you are trapped in a bad working environment or trying to improve a mediocre one, this book will inspire you to get up and change your surroundings. Fish! will be one of the most influential books you read all year.

Take-Aways

- After her husband’s sudden death, Mary Jane Ramirez found herself living in a new city, managing the worst performing unit of First Guarantee Financial.
- Ramirez knew that she had to turn the unit around, or risk losing her job.
- Poor employee morale and shoddy customer service were the problems in the unit.
- Ramirez found the methods to inspire her employees at The Pike Place Fish Market.
- The "Fish!" philosophy recognizes that work often is not exciting, but people are.

- The Pike Place Market has four secrets that create a positive, productive environment.
- Secret One: You always have a choice about how you do your work.
- Secret Two: Play!
- Secret Three: Make their day.
- Secret Four: Be present.

Summary

Mary Jane and the Toxic Waste Dump

Mary Jane Ramirez lived in Southern California with her husband Dan and their two children, Stacy and Brad. Everything was good. Then one day Dan came home with a dream job offer from Microrule, a Seattle-based company.

Soon thereafter, the family moved to Seattle. Dan settled into his new position and Mary Jane went out to find work. She landed a pretty good job herself. She was a supervisor at First Guarantee Financial. Even the kids were happy.

“The boss went to one of those touchy-feely conferences on spirit in the workplace, and he’s all fired up.”

One day while at work, Mary Jane got a phone call that Dan had been rushed to the hospital with a burst aneurysm. Dan died before Mary Jane had a chance to get to the hospital. The family had been in Seattle less than a year.

Mary Jane settled back into work but she still thought of Dan and the life they were going to have together in Seattle. Even two years after his death, she still felt a surge of emotion whenever she thought about him. She knew that it was important to move on, but she couldn’t help think that life shouldn’t be this hard.

“When we choose to love the work we do, we can catch our limit of happiness, meaning and fulfillment every day.”

Luckily, Mary Jane’s work life was good. She was a respected supervisor and her team’s reputation was excellent. People knew they could count on her employees. Mary Jane thought about her team when she had to go down to the third floor. The third floor was known as the "toxic waste dump," because it seemed so devoid of life. The employees there were known as unresponsive, unpleasant, slow and negative.

“The danger is that if our quest for ideal work focuses us on the future, we will miss the amazingly wonderful life that is available today, in this moment.”

Mary Jane was taken by complete surprise when her boss told her she was being promoted to manager of the operations group on the third floor. After the initial shock wore off, a sense of dread swelled inside of her. She knew that she was the third person to have been "promoted" to that job in two years.

The Third Floor

The first five weeks Mary Jane spent on the third floor were difficult. She became convinced that the floor earned its reputation. She compiled an inventory of the obvious "zombie" activities carried out by her staff:

- She saw Bob let the phone ring seven times before unplugging it.
- Martha placed requests for expedited processing under her out basket by "mistake." * Employees slept in the break room.
- The customer service phones rang unanswered as late as 9:30 a.m. because staff members came in late.

“Life is too precious just to be passing through to retirement.”

This was just a sample of the behavior of the 30 employees she managed.

Mary Jane knew that the employees she managed were similar to her in one major respect. Most of them needed the job. She then thought even more deeply about their motives. Most of them, she thought, were there for three reasons: salary, security, and benefits. She scoffed at the idea of security in the workplace. She asked herself several questions about her employees:

- Do they "know that the security they cherish might be just an illusion?
- Do they realize the extent to which market forces are reshaping the industry?
- Do they understand that we all need to change in order for this company to compete in a rapidly consolidating financial services market?"

“There is always a choice about the way you do your work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself.”

Sadly, she thought, no. But even more importantly she knew that she had no idea how to make them understand.

Mary Jane was about to go out to lunch when her new boss, Bill, called her on the phone. He had just returned from a leadership group meeting where the third floor was singled out as the company’s biggest management problem. The big boss himself called it a "toxic energy dump." Bill wanted to know if she had solved the problem yet? He asked her to come up to his office at 2:30 p.m. to discuss the problem.

“We can choose the attitude we bring to our work.”

She had no idea what she would say at her meeting with her boss. The only thing Mary Jane could think about were the words "toxic energy dump." Her own job was clearly on the line. She decided the only reasonable thing to do at that moment was go to lunch.

The Pike Place Fish Market

Mary Jane decided to forgo the cafeteria and instead go for a walk down Pike Place to the world-famous fish market. She was startled to find a "large crowd of well-dressed people clustered around one of the fish markets." Before she could leave, she heard a fish monger yell out, "Good afternoon yogurt dudes!" Suddenly dozens of smiling people were hoisting yogurt cups into the air. "My goodness," Mary Jane thought, "What have I stumbled upon?"

“The compelling reason to move forward comes from inside.”

The next thing Mary Jane saw was a fish flying through the air. One worker picked up a salmon, threw it 20 feet to a co-worker, and shouted, "One salmon flying away to Minnesota."

Mary Jane looked around and saw another worker teasing a small boy with the mouth of a fish head, making the fish "talk." She was astounded by the energy, by the joy of the workers and the laughter of the customers.

“We might as well clean up our toxic energy dump because there is no guarantee the next job will be any different.”

Then she met Lonnie. "First time down here?" he asked her. Despite her inner voice telling her not to tell a perfect stranger about her problems at work, she told him. When she finished, Lonnie told her that working at the fish market saved his life. He said his life was quite a mess before he started working there. He also told her something surprising, that the fish market was as dreary as her toxic waste dump when he first started. He told her there was a secret to the fish market. He asked her to come again if she wanted to learn more. He didn’t want to be impolite, but he had customers he had to get back to.

The Secret of Fish!

Mary Jane ate lunch with Lonnie the next day. He said that all work has boring parts, but the secret to doing exciting work was not the work but you. The most important lesson she could learn from the fish market, he said, was, "There is always a choice about the way you do your work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself."

“Choosing your attitude and acting like a victim are mutually exclusive.”

Mary Jane understood. It was all about attitude. She remembered childhood dinners at her grandmother’s house and how her

grandmother got all the grandchildren to help with the dishwashing. No one liked to clean dishes, but her grandmother made it so much fun that you felt left out if you didn't help. Lonnie told her the fish market's secret had three other elements, but attitude was the core of the philosophy.

Play!

The next time Mary Jane went to the fish market she brought her children. Lonnie treated them to a good time, but he actively involved her children in working at the market. After a while, they sat down to talk. When Mary Jane asked Lonnie when he would tell her the other secrets, he told her to ask her kids about their time at the fish market. When she did, her son Brad told her the second secret: Play! Lonnie told Mary Jane that with a little effort all businesses could learn to be serious about business but still have fun with the way they conducted business. She thought that the fish market reminded her of a "playground with adult kids at recess." She knew that she could try to get the third floor to play!

Make Their Day

Lonnie told her that the third secret was being customer-centered. The customers should feel just as good about the work environment as the workers, so the third secret was: Make their day. The key to making the customers' day, Lonnie said, was engaging them. At the fish market, the workers engage the customers by smiling, welcoming people to join in the fun, and throwing fish. Mary Jane thought this secret was going to be harder to introduce at First Guarantee, but she believed the third floor could do it.

Be Present

Lonnie told her the fourth secret over hot chocolate and sweet rolls at a cafe across the street from the fish market. The fourth secret, also customer-centered, required employees to be fully engaged in their work. But there was more, employees needed to focus on the customer while they were fully engaged. Mary Jane understood what Lonnie told her. She related her experience at a local supermarket where the employees were fully engaged and having a good time at work. The only problem was that they were fully engaged but with each other, but not her. The fish market's fourth secret was: Be present. Mary Jane now had the complete fish philosophy. The only thing left was for her to take it back and try it out.

Implementation

Mary Jane decided that the best way to implement the fish philosophy was for the people of the third floor to see it in action. She organized her staff into two groups for field trips to the fish market. Then, she organized staff meetings to discuss what they learned. Her employees told her they wished the third floor could be as much fun as the fish market. She approved, and then outlined the fish philosophy to them. She asked everyone to think about the four elements over the weekend and to bring their thoughts to the next staff meeting on Monday.

“Working here has literally saved my life.”

Monday morning Mary Jane was not surprised to hear that many of her staff members visited the fish market over the weekend. She was secretly pleased. At the meeting, she asked for feedback. An employee named Stephanie said, "We might as well clean up our toxic energy dump because there is no guarantee the next job will be any different." Mary Jane agreed that if the fish guys could do it, the third floor could do it, too.

The group decided to break into four teams. Each one took responsibility for implementing one element of the fish philosophy. Each team was given six weeks to prepare a presentation on their implementation ideas.

The Play Team presented first. They divided their presentation into two elements, benefits of play and implementing play. The benefits of play were placed on small circles on the floor of the meeting room and a game of "musical circles" was played, like the children's game, musical chairs. When the music stopped, whoever was standing on a circle had to read its contents. After everyone played, the team members presented their ideas for implementation.

The Make Their Day Team presented next and told the group that they conducted a customer survey to find out what customers

disliked about the third floor. The truth was startling. Then, that team also presented implementation ideas.

The Present Moment Team started with inspirational readings and explained that their team meetings had forced them to become present in their personal lives. The simple message was:

- The past is history
- The future is a mystery
- Today is a gift
- That is why we call it the present.

Finally, the Choose Your Attitude Team reported three benefits to choosing your attitude. The team then presented each person a book called Personal Accountability: The Path to a Rewarding Life. The team announced future group discussions of the book, and made plans to share other books if those discussions proved rewarding. They closed the meeting by writing out the challenge facing everyone as they left the conference room: The choice is yours.

About the Authors

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