

Money can't buy happiness, but happiness can buy money

Over 2,000 years ago, Aristotle observed that “happiness” is the only end that is desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else. In other words, drinking a cold beer on a hot day, working hard to advance our careers, helping a neighbor move into a new house and engaging in the myriad activities that fill our lives are not ends in themselves. They are the means to achieve an ultimate end—happiness.

The paramount importance of happiness as an end in itself was expressly recognized at the time of our nation's founding in the most famous sentence in our Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

But according to the Rev. Robert Spitzer, the quality of happiness we achieve and the degree to which organizations succeed over the long term depends on the “level” of happiness we choose to pursue.

Spitzer, a Jesuit priest, scholar and author, retired in 2009 as president of Gonzaga University; he is the founder and president of the Spitzer Center for Ethical Leadership, as well as the chief curriculum officer and faculty member of the newly formed Ethics & Performance Institute.

According to Spitzer, there are four distinct levels of happiness that both individuals and organizations must understand to assist them in pursuing excellence. The Spitzer Center's website describes these levels:

Level 1, happiness derived from material objects and the pleasures they can provide. This is the most basic level, and it can come from eating fine chocolate, driving a sports car, taking a cool swim on a hot day or other forms of physical gratification.

Level 1 happiness is good but limited. The pleasure it provides is immediate but short-lived and intermittent. It is also shallow; it requires no reflection, and it doesn't extend beyond the self in any meaningful way.

Level 2, happiness derived from personal achievement and ego gratification. You



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feel this happiness when people praise you, when they acknowledge your popularity and authority, when you win in sports or advance in your career.

Level 2 happiness is usually comparative because the ego measures success in terms of advantage over others. You're happy when you're seen as smarter, more attractive or more important than others, and you're unhappy when you lose the comparison game. Level 2 happiness is short-term and tenuous. You can be happy that you won today and then anxious that you might lose tomorrow. Level 2 is not inherently bad because we all need success, self-esteem and respect to accomplish good things in life. But when the Level 2 happiness becomes your only goal, it leads to self-absorption, jealousy, fear of failure, contempt, isolation and cynicism.

Level 3, happiness derived from doing good for others and making the world a better place. This happiness is more enduring because it is directed toward the human desire for love, truth, goodness, beauty and unity. It is capable of inspiring great achievements because it unites people in pursuit of the common good, whereas Level 2 happiness divides people.

Level 3 is empathetic, not self-absorbed, and it looks for the good in others, not their flaws. It sees life as an opportunity and an adventure, not an endless series of problems to overcome. Because people have limits, Level 3 happiness also has its limits. None of us is perfect, so we can't find perfect fulfillment in other people.

Level 4, ultimate, perfect happiness. When others fall short of our ideals or we fall short ourselves, we're disappointed. This disappointment points to a universal human longing for transcendence and perfection. We don't merely desire love, truth,

goodness, beauty, and unity; we want all of these things in their ultimate, perfect, never-ending form.

All people have this desire for ultimacy, which psychologists call a desire for transcendence—a sense of connection to the larger universe. Some express this desire through spirituality and religious faith. Others express the same longing through philosophy, art or scientific efforts to solve the mysteries of life and the universe.

Spitzer observes that levels 1 and 2 are the default levels for most people and organizations. There is nothing inherently wrong with these levels, but Spitzer notes that a shift of orientation to those actions and objectives that lead to the higher levels of happiness is essential to building and sustaining high-performance teams and a successful business. However, because we tend to gravitate toward levels 1 and 2, the higher levels must be deliberately chosen over and over again.

A significant body of research supports Spitzer's thesis that leaders and organizations can and often do achieve a competitive advantage if they focus on achieving noble ends in an ethical manner. But Spitzer's observations go beyond answering the question of whether principle yields profits by providing a definitive methodology for making it happen.

According to Spitzer, building high-performance teams has less to do with well-designed organizational charts than it does with whether team members habitually choose to act in the best interests of others. Here he gets at the root of all productive human relationships.

The simple fact is that no one wants to work for or with people who are just in it for themselves. Conversely, people tend to willingly exert their best efforts and go above and beyond the call of duty for those who exhibit a greatness of spirit by acting for the benefit of others and for the common good. As a bonus, Spitzer asserts, those who habitually take such actions will achieve a greater degree of personal satisfaction and fulfillment in their lives.

Spitzer's insights into human nature and what really makes people and teams tick provides a blueprint for corporate lead-

ers interested in raising the level of their game. By helping managers and line workers understand the fundamental importance of empathy, seeing the good in others and pursuing goals greater than themselves, business leaders may discover that happiness can indeed buy money.

More information about the Spitzer Cen-

ter for Ethical Leadership, the Ethics & Performance Institute and the programs and services they offer to help corporations perform better can be found on their websites at www.spitzercenter.org and www.ethicsperformance.com.

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