

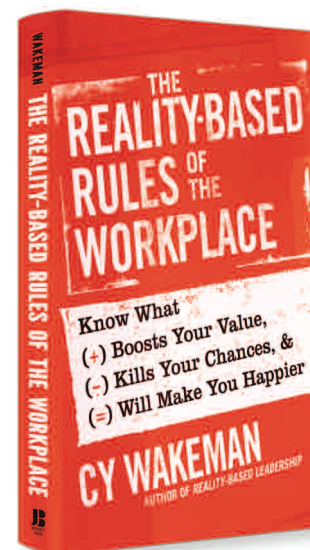


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The Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace

Know What Boosts Your Value, Kills Your Chances, and Will Make You Happier



by Cy Wakeman

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many employees feel unrecognized and under-rewarded, and studies show that workplace dissatisfaction is at record highs. But what if the things that are currently making you unhappy simply lost their power over you? What if you could go to work feeling energetic and excited regardless of any external circumstances? What does it take to become valued and appreciated at the office?

The Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace reveals a formula for understanding how your manager calculates your value to the organization. Based on research with more than 50,000 people, Cy Wakeman reveals a formula for measuring your current performance, your future potential and your “emotional expense” — the toll your actions and attitudes takes on the people around you, which is your single biggest detractor. Only when you know your true score can you improve it.

The Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace is the essential guide for boosting your value, owning your career, and becoming the kind of employee no organization can afford to lose.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to accurately evaluate and boost your performance.
- Why workplace dissatisfaction is optional.
- What actions at work make you more valuable at work.
- How to face workplace change head on.
- How to succeed in the face of extenuating circumstances.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE REALITY-BASED RULES OF THE WORKPLACE

by Cy Wakeman

The author: Cy Wakeman is a dynamic speaker, business consultant, author and trainer. Her first book, *Reality-Based Leadership*, is a straightforward and practical guide for leaders who want to reduce office drama and improve personal accountability with their teams. She holds a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation from the National Speakers' Association and received the 2012 Outstanding Leadership Award from the World HRD Congress in Mumbai.

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Introduction

Your true value as an employee is not dependent on economic conditions — good or bad. It is based on the value that you bring to your organization, the market value of your work, and the return on investment that you deliver both economically and emotionally now and into the future. Nearly all of these factors are within your control. You must get clear about the value you truly bring to your organization by using the New Value Equation:

$$\text{Your Value} = \text{Current Performance} + \text{Future Potential} - 3 \times \text{Emotional Expensiveness.}$$

PART I: THE NEW VALUE EQUATION

Your Current Performance

The main reason I believe performance reviews as they are used in most companies are an inadequate measure of true value is that they seem to create an alternate reality that is divorced from companies' actual results. In other words, in most organizations, there is no correlation between employees' yearly performance ratings and the results that the company is experiencing.

I'm going to show you how to give yourself a true rating.

How to Rate Your Current Performance

Consider the following questions honestly, and rate yourself from 1 (lowest, not true) to 5 (highest, very true). Base your ratings on your actions, not your intentions.

1. I am on track to deliver on every goal outlined for me by my boss this year.
2. I am consistent in my attendance, my work and my results.
3. I improve each year as a matter of course to keep up with changing expectations — without expecting more in return.
4. I am moving forward with purpose and not still taking credit for the accomplishments of years past.
5. The people I spend the most time with at work are top performers.
6. I have recently added to my job description on my own initiative.
7. I set goals for myself beyond the goals my supervisor sets.
8. I regularly ask for feedback on my performance from my boss and my peers.
9. My performance compares favorably with that of my peers both in my company and in my industry.
10. I collaborate well with others and have good professional relationships.

Now, take the number of total points, and divide by 10. That is your number for Current Performance. This can be a tough reality check if you have not been evaluated according to tough criteria like these in the past.

Based on the assessment above, you fall somewhere on a continuum from 1 to 5, where

- 1 = Not meeting expectations
- 2 = Sometimes meeting expectations
- 3 = Fully meeting expectations



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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 500 Old Forge Lane, Suite 501, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2013 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®.

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4 = Exceeding expectations

5 = Far exceeding expectations

Got Your Number? Now Raise It!

Here are five questions to ask to help get and keep high, truthful and sustainable performance numbers:

1. Who are the top performers to emulate? Find out who the top performers are in your company — those seen by the organization as curve-breakers. If you want what they have, go do what they did. Study them! Ask them to mentor you.

2. What are your goals? Get clear on the expectations of your position. Your job description represents the bare minimum expectations for your position — not what you need to do to succeed but what you need to do not to fail.

3. Where do your goals fit into the big picture? Now that you have clarity on your individual goals and role, get your organization's strategic plan, and study it. Make sure you understand your organization's goals, challenges, industry, environment and how your goals fit in.

4. Why keep your eyes on the prize? Most people only look at their goals twice a year — when they create them and when they are about to be measured on them. Set yourself apart by reviewing yours often.

5. How will you reach your goals? What exactly has to happen by when and to what standard? Don't leave your success to a strategy of hope — track it. That which gets measured, gets accomplished. Last, be consistent. True value and trustworthiness are the result of consistent attendance, great attitude and results with no surprises or let-downs. ●

Your Future Potential

You can — and should — be aiming higher than survival of the next round of layoffs. Instead of trying to protect yourself from changing circumstances and expectations on the horizon, you need to grow into them.

How to Rate Your Future Potential

Consider the following questions honestly, and rate yourself from 1 (lowest, not true) to 5 (highest, very true). Base your ratings on your actions, not your intentions.

1. I make an effort to learn as much as I can about changes that will affect me.
2. If I want something, I work hard to get it.
3. When something good happens to me, I feel it is because I've earned it.
4. Failure is a great teacher, and I work to extract its lessons.

5. I am an early adopter of new technology that can help me do my job better.

6. A person can change his personality and behavior patterns.

7. I work to change or improve regardless of whether my boss has identified a need for development.

8. For the issues that have come up in the past three months, I can identify specific things I could have done differently to change the outcome.

9. I am involved in mentoring others.

10. I have participated in a development experience that was not funded or arranged by my organization in the past year.

Now, take the number of total points and divide by 10. That is your current number for Future Potential. Does it seem fair to you? If you're thinking you're overrating or underrating yourself, rest assured that the marketplace will let you know when you have it right.

Based on the assessment above, you fall somewhere on a continuum from 1 to 5, where

1 = Being quickly outdated

2 = Complacent, not trying hard enough

3 = Keeping up with expectations

4 = Exceeding expectations

5 = Leading the pack

Maximizing Your Future Potential

Following are five tactics for improving your future potential:

Tactic #1: Get Reflective. If you have scored a 3 or lower for Future Potential, look back at what it would take to score a 5. Make a list of where you're falling short. How do you compare to people applying for similar jobs to your own right now? Would you be the top candidate if you were interviewing for your job?

Tactic #2: Get Beyond the Baseline. What are you doing with the opportunities you have? If you are offered extra training by your company, consider it part of your education. Show willingness and really put that opportunity to use. Before any course, set yourself a goal for what you intend to take away from it — the way you intend to change your behavior. Seek out your own opportunities. To truly get ahead of the curve, you must get zealous about learning and growth.

Tactic #3: Get Challenged. Your Future Potential depends on your learning agility and your passion for your own evolution. When was the last time you learned a new skill? Subscribed to a journal that was not required reading? Tried something new that you could

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fail at without fear? Get interested and evolve both inside and outside the workplace.

Tactic #4: Get Connected. Sometimes it's necessary to go through a few months of adjustment and growing pains just to stay current. New technology in particular gets integrated without much discussion these days. You have a choice to lean forward into it and bond with your colleagues over a shared challenge, or resist. Resistance takes longer. It holds you back in your career and can make you less employable on a skills level and in terms of your attitude.

Tactic #5: Get Multigenerational. At this point in time, three generations coexist in the workplace, and each has its strengths and weaknesses. Get clear on what your generation brings to the table and what you need to learn from the other two.

Those of you nearing retirement have experience to offer. Pass on your trade secrets, the knowledge and unique skills you have perfected over the years. Stop judging the younger generations, and teach them instead.

My advice to those of you mid-career is to be bridge builders. You raised the younger generation, and you were raised by the older generation. You have great translation skills to offer, so step up and adapt. Don't be afraid to give feedback to both generations. Adopt the newest members of the workforce. Let them teach you, in particular when it comes to technology. This generation will remind you that work can include play.

To the new generation: We love that you come with great new skill sets and shortcuts made possible by your fluency in technology and creative new ways of approaching work. Share your optimism and your exuberance for finding new and better ways, but don't dismiss the old ways. Be careful what you think you know for sure. Get adopted quickly by mentors who will fill in the gaps in your knowledge about the history and complexity of your organization. And don't skimp on the basics like attendance and consistency. Regardless of the high-level contributions you make in other aspects of your job, without building this foundation, you won't get the credibility that allows others to trust you with bigger and better projects. ●

Your Emotional Expensiveness

Almost all of you are familiar with the concept of "high" versus "low" maintenance when it comes to relationships and would be capable of categorizing your friends and family according to this rubric — who's bringing drama, who's not: who, in aggregate, is more of a "taker" than a "giver."

Emotional Expensiveness Is Costing You

While she excelled in customer service because of her focus on staying neutral and keeping boundaries, Carol assumed that inside the company and with some members of her team, she could vent or show her feelings of being rushed and overwhelmed.

As Carol moved up the organizational chart and her duties became more demanding, her dramatic ways began to take a toll on her perceived value in the company. She gained a reputation as a drama queen that outshone her current results, and she could no longer rest on her past achievements. Carol said, "My first clue that something was wrong came when I and two other VPs were given a new supervisor. The two others got the same supervisor — a senior executive. I was told to report down the chain of command to someone else — actually, someone I knew quite well and considered a friend. I felt comfortable asking her, 'Hey, what's the deal? Didn't the SVP want me as a direct report?' I was half-joking, but my new supervisor became serious. 'Carol,' she said, 'drama comes with you.'"

Carol's credibility was eventually so eroded that her numbers could no longer protect her, and she was let go.

Rate Your Emotional Expensiveness

As honestly as you can, rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 for each of the following signifiers of Emotional Expensiveness. On this continuum,

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely (one or twice per year)
- 3 = Sometimes (every couple of months or less)
- 4 = Often (monthly)
- 5 = Daily

Remember to base your rating on your actions, not your intentions.

1. I share my opinions regarding others' decisions and behaviors.
2. I need frequent encouragement to stick with a difficult task.
3. I tend not to be happy with my work until it has been praised by someone else.
4. I meet feedback with defensiveness or dismissiveness.
5. I believe I'm entitled to my opinions at work.
6. The way I'm feeling usually comes through loud and clear to my colleagues.
7. I spend as much time talking about my employer and colleagues as talking to them. I have good days and bad days at work.

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- I only support what I've been consulted on.
- When I get angry at work, I express it either directly or through passive-aggressive behavior.
- I share my personal and family problems at work.

Add your answers together, and divide by 10. Now, plug your numbers for Current Performance, Future Potential and Emotional Expensiveness into the new value equation to calculate your current value:

Your Value = Current Performance + Future Potential – 3 x Emotional Expense

If you come up with a negative number for value, congratulate yourself for being honest. If you are looking at a negative value right now, know that you are far from alone. In fact, 83 percent of those who have been receiving high performance ratings scored negative numbers when first evaluated with the New Value Equation.

PART 2: THE FIVE REALITY-BASED RULES OF THE WORKPLACE

Rule #1: Your Level of Accountability Determines Your Level of Happiness

So don't hope to be lucky. Choose to be happy.

Personal Accountability is the belief that you are fully responsible for your own actions and their consequences. It is a choice, a mind-set, an expression of integrity.

Your challenges are real — you're not imagining them — but they don't need to become your excuses. You will get results when you stop complaining, blaming and focusing on what is happening “to” you and focus instead on what you can do within your current reality and with your current challenges to compete, to deliver and to succeed.

People who are accountable have an internal motivation to succeed no matter what their obstacles. It starts with a commitment to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Without a foundation of accountability, engagement fluctuates like the tides, rising and falling with the fortunes of the organization and the moods of its employees. Many companies have gotten off track by focusing on trying to raise your engagement when they should have been working with you on your accountability. As a result, many of you have come to believe that it is your leaders' job to perfect your circumstances in exchange for the gift of your work.

Factors of Personal Accountability

There are four factors that contribute directly to your level of Personal Accountability:

Factor #1: Commitment. Committed people are willing. They lean into challenges and do what it takes to get the results they committed to even if they don't have all the information or resources they think they need.

Factor #2: Resilience. When you are resilient, you feel calm, purposeful and confident in your ability to produce results regardless of your circumstances. Throwing up your hands and quitting at the first obstacle or resorting to excuses is not an option you consider. You are tenacious, and you bounce back quickly from setbacks.

Factor #3: Ownership. When you are feeling true ownership, you're able to give the gift of your work unconditionally. You don't look to others to validate your efforts or to give you the motivation to do your job. No one else has the power — or responsibility — to motivate you. A key part of ownership is the ability to clearly identify your part in your results.

Factor #4: Continuous Learning. Doing great work is not about never making mistakes or failing. It's about making sure that those mistakes have the minimum impact on those you serve and that your failures inspire and inform new strategies in the future. ●

Rule #2: Suffering Is Optional

So ditch the drama!

The first major source of drama in most workplaces is judgment. Our minds are prone to judgment, and left unchecked, they will use it as a continual source of fuel. If something happens outside the realm of our expectations or wishes, we start to critique, complain and defend our point of view instead of choosing a more productive reaction.

William, who worked in the shipping department of an electronic components manufacturer, was in one of my sessions, and I asked him what was causing him drama and frustration at work. Before the question was out of my mouth, his face clouded over, and he went on to describe the production line that put the finishing touches on each component before shipping.

They were incredibly slow — excessively picky, in his opinion. They held up shipping and caused delays that angered customers, and he was the one who had to explain and apologize. When he'd been in charge of that line, it had been super fast and customers had never complained. I asked him how much of his day was spent focusing on that group, and he said, “Probably about 80

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percent.” I asked him what he spent most of that time doing, and he admitted that he was mostly judging and critiquing them, complaining about them to others, stewing while he did his work, and bugging them to hurry up. He was asking himself, “Why are they so slow? Who is going to take responsibility for this? When will the powers that be figure it out and step in?” Very frustrating, unaccountable questions that were getting him nowhere except deeper into the drama about why he was right and how things “should” be.

Would You Rather Be Right or Happy?

If you want misery, stay connected to the belief that you are right — be the judge of the world. If you want happiness and efficacy, stop judging, and start helping. I asked William, instead of judging the other employees on the line, what could he do to help the line go faster? He came up with a list of actions he could take:

- He could check the tracking software instead of interrupting them with questions;
- He could update the checklist he created while he was on that line to accommodate the newest products and share it with them;
- He could share a technique he had learned in his days on the line that would speed up their decision-making process;
- He could change the way he pulled product from the line.

Some of these actions required more work on his part, but at least he would feel he had some impact on the situation. It turned out that there were a lot of actions he could take with the 80 percent of his day that had been given over to “shoulds.”

I saw William a few months later, and he had a big smile on his face. The line was going faster, the customers were complaining less, and he felt great because his actions had contributed to that outcome in a way that his complaints never had.

Edit Your Story. Respond to the Facts.

Any time you begin to experience stressful thoughts and feelings about an event or another person, pause. Ask yourself:

1. What story am I telling myself right now?
2. What do I know for sure? (only the facts)
3. How do I act when I believe my story?
4. Without my story, what would I be doing to help?
5. What is the very next thing I can do to add value right now? The answer to this question is your Simple Instruction — the next best action you can take to elim-

inate your negative feeling and move forward in a constructive way. Do your work, find the simple instructions, and go do that.

The point of this exercise is to make sure you are responding to the facts of a situation versus your story (all the thoughts you’ve made up about it). ●

Rule #3: Buy-In Is Not Optional

Your action, not opinion, adds value.

I have the opportunity to work with many people in support roles, such as information technology professionals, whose leaders are seeking to change the mindsets of their highly qualified employees from “order taker” to “solutions provider” so that they can bring more value to their organizations.

As I lay out the fact that their role is one of support, they are eager to give me reasons why those they serve don’t deserve it. One woman stands out in my memory. She was extremely frustrated and came to me after our session, saying, “Cy, it isn’t my job to teach every employee basic computer skills. Some of them can’t even type. Others don’t even keep track of their passwords, let alone use the system we developed to its full functionality.”

She was probably right. But what she was doing was not helping.

I asked her about the mission, the role of her department as a whole, and she said it was to ensure that employees had the technology to facilitate their business goals and that they were getting the most out of it. Then I asked her what her individual role in this larger goal was, and that’s when the light bulb went on. If the IT department’s role was to help employees get the most out of the technology they were provided, employees’ basic computer skills were not beyond her remit. Far from it.

Meanwhile, her opinions and editorializing — about how everyone should be tested for technology skills prior to being hired and how the company was wasting money on IT systems that were over employees’ heads — were stopping her from fulfilling her role at work. She was adding little value, and her Emotional Expensiveness was through the roof. She made people feel so stupid that they were afraid to call on her for support.

One of the new realities in the workplace is that our opinions actually add very little value. If you are using your expertise to critique ideas, point out the pitfalls of every plan and the weaknesses of others, you are holding

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your company back. Top value comes from being able to deliver despite these challenges, not from pointing them out.

To succeed, your buy-in is not optional, and action, not opinion, adds value. ●

Rule #4: Say 'Yes' to What's Next

Change is opportunity.

It's not your boss's job to lead you through change. It's your job to get flexible and flow seamlessly into what is next.

Visionaries lean into change, push for it, and make it happen. Here are four capabilities that visionaries share:

Visionary Capability #1: Be Prepared

Resistance to change is very expensive — it's a drag on the system. Being bad at change can no longer be laughed off or excused as a personal idiosyncrasy. Employers need flexibility and a commitment to change when it's necessary. People who have a high score for Future Potential, who are developing more quickly than the demands of their workplaces or the market, are unfazed by change. Why? Because they live in a state of readiness. If you have not done what you needed to do to stay current, then you are backed into a corner, and your only option when responding to change is resistance.

Visionary Capability #2: Reframe

Mental flexibility is an essential attribute of a visionary. Reframing is choosing to see your situation as a great opportunity rather than a challenge or an assault, even when you are not sure what the opportunity is going to be.

One great way to reframe is to question what virtue your situation will help you develop so that you can improve. If fate lands you with an annoying intern whose foibles have stopped being cute, consider it your opportunity to work on patience. If your steak is too rare when you're out to dinner, practice courage in politely sending it back for more fire.

Another reframing technique is to see through people's behavior to their needs. People usually need your love the most when they deserve it the least. A manager raging about a dropped call is passionate about serving the customer (albeit in an Emotionally Expensive way). A coworker who is nagging you about a project deadline is probably getting pressure from her boss. She needs reassurance that you are on top of it.

The truth is, we know very little about how things should work out, so we need to be open and trust that we are capable of handling whatever is next.

Visionary Capability #3: Give Yourself Permission to Fail

Change means risk, and that's way too scary for people who are so captivated by their egos or their unrealistic expectations that they don't see failure as an option. But the truth is that we all tend to overrate the risk of change and underrate the risk of maintaining the status quo. The cost of doing nothing is often higher. One way to move into vision quickly is to analyze the risk of what you fear will happen. If the worst-case scenario occurred, would it really have the impact you are imagining? Or is your story about it what scares you more?

Visionary Capability #4: Move on From Your Mistakes With Confidence

The competency that allows you to succeed in new circumstances comes after confidence, not before. Confidence is what you build through thinking, changing your mind-set and inquiring about untrue stories. Competence is what you then build by doing. So when you realize something is not working, or you have made a mistake, do what you can to fix it, leverage your learning, move on as quickly as you can, and do better next time. Don't let your failures become your identity — either in your mind or in the minds of others. ●

Rule #5: You Will Always Have Extenuating Circumstances

Succeed anyway.

Your reality is not the reason why you can't succeed. It is the circumstances under which you must succeed. Here are some of the most common barriers I hear about and how you can and should overcome them:

Excuse #1: My Boss Is a Jerk

Bosses come in all the varieties that humans do and you will have good and bad bosses. What's good about the bad ones is that you get really competent at managing yourself. Figure out your simple instructions — the next thing you can do to add value.

High-value players change their beliefs, not their bosses. If you believe that you can't work well for a bad boss, you are limited to only being able to succeed with a great boss, and those odds are not in your favor. If your boss is really bad, and you are considering calling the employee hotline to lodge a complaint, first

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make absolutely sure that your complaint is really about your boss and not a lack of accountability on your part. Ninety-nine percent of calls to employee hotlines are just people blaming others for their circumstances, essentially confessing their own incompetence. There are things you can change and things you can't. Part of being based in reality is knowing the difference between the two.

Excuse #2: My Coworkers Are Difficult/Bullies/Rude/Indifferent/(Insert Adjective Here)

At work, you have to spend a lot of time working closely with people you didn't choose. This leads to conflicts that may have you spending far too much of your time worrying about what is and is not under your control. When faced with a challenging situation, look first to yourself. Take a quick inventory of the things you are doing that may have exacerbated the situation and what you do to ease it.

High-Value Players Confront Coworker Conflicts. Unless there is a clear-cut case of bullying or a real power differential, you are better off resolving the situation directly than taking it to your boss, complaining to others, or creating a triangle of any kind: you know, those times when you are tempted to tattle or gossip instead of confronting the issue head-on. If you find yourself talking to others about the person with whom you have a conflict more often than you talk to that person directly, you are making the problem bigger, and yours is fast becoming the greater crime.

Excuse #3: My Team Is Really Dysfunctional

When you are struggling while working in a group, keep in mind this counterintuitive truth: Most conflicts do not come from personality clashes. They come from lack of clarity. The root cause of conflicts among people is ambiguity in goals, roles and procedures. If you have these three things clear, there is no such thing as "personality conflict." You can work with anyone.

High-Value Players Respect and Nurture Team Dynamics. Although success requires individual traits like gumption, initiative and resilience, its ultimate expression can only be realized in the context of a team.

A team player is often more valuable than a star. Whereas a star might have an inflated sense of his contribution, value independence over making it work, and expect to be asked his opinion before he joins the effort, a team player says "yes" early and often.

A team player builds on the accomplishments of others and shares information rather than hoarding it to protect his position. Team players compensate for one another's shortcomings.

If you want support, give support. If you want openness, be open. If you want cooperation, be cooperative.

Excuse #4: The Culture at My Company Is Hostile/Toxic

When people talk about the "toxic culture" at their organizations, they're really talking about their shared reasons, stories and excuses for their lack of results.

A company's culture may take years to turn. This has long been used as an excuse for not trying to change anything within a company. But within the larger culture are microclimates — anywhere you find 10 to 12 people working together — that are far easier to change. So get started changing that.

High-Value Players Know When to Walk Away. Whatever happens, it is important to know your worth — not just the dollar amount of your salary but your worth as a great employee and a human being. You are more than any job. If you are doing the things I advise and they are not working, it may be that you have a bad fit where you are, and it's time to move on.

The problem isn't really stay versus go. It's that you must not do what I call "stay and hate" or "go and blame." If you do either of these things, you will not be able to flourish in the job you're in or in your next job. Instead, you need to learn what you can where you are, and be so accountable that you mine the situation for every possible lesson.

If you do make the decision to leave, you will know you have tried everything and be confident that you're not simply running away from difficulty and taking your problems with you. If you stay, make it a conscious choice and not a passive one. Do it joyfully. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace*, you'll like:

1. **Linchpin** by Seth Godin. Linchpins are the people who are the essential building blocks of great organizations. Learn how to become one.
2. **Goals!** by Brian Tracy. Tracy identifies the self-imposed barriers that so many people put between themselves and their goals.
3. **You Already Know How to Be Great** by Rebecca R. Merrill, Alan Fine. Fine reveals his simple approach to achieving breakthrough performance through a process called G.R.O.W. (Goal, Reality, Options, Way Forward).