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The Optimistic Workplace

Creating an Environment That Energizes Everyone

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

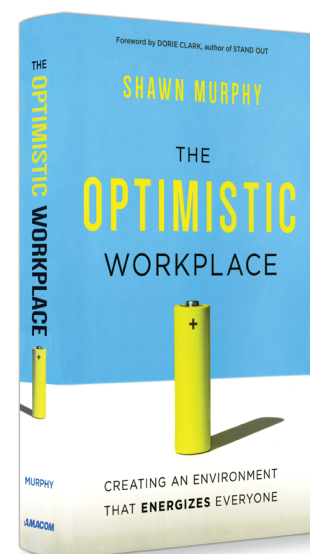
When it comes to work these days, we're expected to do more with less — but is this nose-to-the-grindstone philosophy the best way to run a business? Alarming low employee engagement numbers indicate otherwise.

So, if pushing everyone harder isn't the path to productivity, what is? Supported by the latest research, *The Optimistic Workplace* argues that our best work is the product of a positive environment. That's good news for you as a manager. While you can't personally transform the corporate culture, you can influence the workplace climate and create meaningful and lasting change.

Advocating a steward model of management, *The Optimistic Workplace* demonstrates how a people-centric focus ignites employee potential, increases innovation and catapults the organization to new levels of performance. Author Shawn Murphy reveals how to explore personal and organizational purpose and align them for astonishing results, build camaraderie and deepen loyalty, increase intrinsic motivation and more. Far from being a wish-upon-a-star discussion of workplace happiness, *The Optimistic Workplace* presents an array of surprisingly simple strategies to focus your actions and make employee optimism not just a worthy goal but a real and measurable result.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why workplace climate is easier to change than culture.
- The three dynamic elements of an optimistic climate.
- How to foster meaning and purpose at work.
- How to be a human-centered leader and cultivate optimism in yourself and others.



by Shawn Murphy

CONTENTS

The Future of the Workplace
Page 2

The Power of Contagious Emotions
Page 4

Values-Based Leadership
Page 5

We Must Change the Way We Work
Page 6

Human-Centered Leadership
Page 7

The Cultivation of Optimism
Page 8

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

by Shawn Murphy

The author: Shawn Murphy is an independent consultant with 20 years of experience helping organizations create workplace optimism. He is the co-founder and CEO of Switch & Shift, a company dedicated to helping leaders to create positive workplaces. He has been named as a Top 100 leadership speaker by Inc.com.

The Optimistic Workplace: Creating an Environment That Energizes Everyone by Shawn Murphy. Copyright © 2015 by Shawn Murphy. Summarized by permission of the publisher, AMACOM, a division of American Management Association. 240 pages, \$24.95, ISBN: 978-0-81443-619-6. To purchase this book, go to www.amazon.com or www.bn.com.

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Introduction

The Optimistic Workplace is about modeling the expectations necessary to contribute to the emergence of optimism in the work environment. Optimistic workplaces need diversity in perspective and in people from all backgrounds and inclinations. What unites them is a workplace mood that gives hope that good things are possible from applying one's experiences to ultimately help the organization create value for its customers.

Stewardship is caring for people and things that don't belong to you. Conversely, the term "management" is associated with control and dominance: "I need to manage you." Or, "You're my subordinate, and because of my years of experience, I know what's best. Do as I say."

You are the steward of your people, of resources and time, and of the business. The subtle shift is in the focus. It isn't about the control you flex, the dominance you project or the power you wield. It's about purposefully crafting a work environment that allows the human side of business to flourish. The shift is in caring for people in a way that improves their lives and positively influences the value they create for your organization.

The truth is, management has become soulless. It's rote. It's impersonal. Why is that important? Simply put, business has always been and will always be about relationships. We have veered too far away from hiring and treating employees as mature, fully functioning adults.

Stewards create workplace contexts that assume people can be trusted to do their best work and to do the right thing. The human-centered business is fundamentally built on a foundation of helping people understand and leverage their potential for good — a good that benefits

others. The good you can bring about is a positive work experience created through workplace optimism. ●

The Future of the Workplace

Culture is how things are done in an organization. It's the company's history, stories passed down over time. Yet what is equally important as culture is what it feels like to work day to day in the workplace. This is climate, and it's the element of organizational life that isn't discussed much. Harvard University psychologists Robert Stringer and George Litwin explain climate as the quality of the workplace environment and its influence on the work experience and team members' behaviors and perceptions.

In the workplace, who has the greatest influence on the climate? According to Hay Group's research, it's the immediate leader — you. You set the mood in the work environment. In fact, your leadership style impacts climate by up to 70 percent.

It's the words you use and the tone of your interactions with your team that influence climate. Purpose influences climate. Stringer and Litwin explain that clear role definitions help to positively shape climate. High performance expectations are also essential. Autonomy shapes climate. Trust and a sense of belonging are also key to a positive work environment. These are all elements within your control. This is what makes climate a powerful influence.

From a leadership perspective, climate is easier to influence than culture and is useful in creating lasting change necessary for the organization to create value. Culture is embedded deep into the bedrock of the organization and is hard to change. It can take years to shift culture.



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SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

Through your leadership style, you can shape the climate to positively influence how team members perceive, experience and respond to work.

Workplace Optimism

Workplace optimism is a characteristic of climate and is the belief that good things will come from hard work. Research shows that you can transform the work experience by focusing on the best positive, potential realities. You can position employees to believe that work is a bright spot in their life. The following beliefs are essential to helping create a positive work experience:

1. The team is more important than any individual.
2. There's value to experiencing joy at work.
3. Doing good is good for business.
4. Relationships with employees need to be richer.
5. Work should align with purpose and meaning.
6. Leaders need to actualize human potential.

Origins of Optimism

Optimistic climates don't follow a people-first philosophy. They don't follow a profit-first philosophy either. Instead they follow a dynamic exchange among three elements that create a motivating environment: purpose, meaningful work and extraordinary people. These three elements are the Origins of Optimism.

The dynamics among these three work like this: Purpose informs employees' work, at the same time influencing a community of people to align with its own aspirations. The work directs what extraordinary people focus on. Simultaneously, the people influence what work needs to be done, how and when. Both extraordinary people and the work advance the purpose. The Origins of Optimism interact with each other in one dynamic exchange. There is no number one. The three elements are interdependent. ●

Destructive Management

Destructive management is really a collection of symptoms of ill-fitting practices for the modern workplace. They result from misjudged or uninformed choices. Mostly the symptoms present themselves when a steward doesn't shift along with the demands of today's workforce and workplace expectations. If you think of destructive management like a disease, people and the organization can't perform at their peak potential. Both are often distressed.

Along with distress, a host of unpleasant outcomes dominate people's experiences. Recovery from problems is slow. In severe cases, people just can't seem to shake the feeling that things just won't get better. The negative feeling of the workplace is alienating. Optimism is choked before it can even emerge. Ultimately, the impacts from destructive management can be traced back to six symptoms:

Symptom 1: Blind impact. A leader who is unaware of how her actions, attitude and words impact others, and damages any opportunity for workplace optimism.

Symptom 2: Antisocial leadership. This symptom is all about one's inability to encourage, build and evolve a community of people united by a shared purpose.

Symptom 3: Chronic change resistance. The seduction of the status quo overpowers rational thoughts and actions. With this leader in charge, only incremental change is possible.

Symptom 4: Profit myopia. The outdated belief that profit is the only success measure.

Symptom 5: Constipated inspiration. The leader is unsure of how to inspire people on her team. Often she is too focused on her own needs, giving little attention to what her employees experience when at work. At the core of constipated inspiration is ignorance of personal values.

Symptom 6: Silo Syndrome. Silo syndrome afflicts a leader when he cannot see beyond his immediate responsibilities. Also, silo syndrome blinds a leader from seeing the impacts of work on other people's lives.

Gallant Acts

If you are to move past the adverse effects of some decisions and create workplace optimism, you will need to face reality as it is and take action to move your team closer to optimism. Here are some leadership actions you can take to set you and your team down the path to the optimistic workplace:

- Bring your team together, and demonstrate that you understand how the team has been negatively impacted by management decisions.
- Meet one-on-one with members of your team, and learn what's important to them in terms of the workplace.
- As you continue to discuss what a positive work experience means with individuals and with the team, begin to talk as a group about what the team can do to support the goal of working in an optimistic workplace.
- Reduce the effects of blind impact by exploring what your team's purpose is.

SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

- Participate in a 360-degree assessment. The goal is to learn how your leadership style positively and negatively influences people. ●

The Power of Contagious Emotions

Our emotions are contagious and influence how people feel. How people feel influences the quality of their work. The emotions people experience shape their willingness to connect and deepen relationships. It's a powerful insight for leaders to leverage when working to shift to the optimistic workplace.

Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson's research reveals that positive emotions broaden our "ideas about possible actions, opening our awareness to a wider range of thoughts and actions than is typical." In other words, we broaden our capacity to act positively based on the good actions of another person. The positive emotions we experience then help us build new skills, connections and knowledge, and have a positive impact on other people.

Pause long enough to understand the influence positive emotions can have on you and those on your team. Own the emotions that you're spreading. As the steward of your team, expressing such positive emotions as joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and, yes, love can positively influence how others feel and experience work. You get to help your people achieve their greatest potential through their work. Model what you want for and expect from your team, and grow from the effort. ●

The Downside of Optimism: Missteps and Excess

Even though the positive climate helps employees do better work and creates joy, your team is not impervious to the downsides of work life. So it is important to know the potential missteps and excesses that can surface when cultivating optimism in the climate.

Misstep 1: Believing it's somebody else's responsibility. Invariably the point is made that workplace optimism must start at the top. This belief lets us off the hook from doing something about the bad vibe hovering over the teams.

Misstep 2: Failing to build alliances to support your effort. Here are a few essential things to consider

when identifying allies: You can have honest conversations with them. They are comfortable challenging your thinking. They believe in action and are not all talk. They genuinely believe the Origins of Optimism.

Misstep 3: Assuming you know how your team members feel about the climate. The best place to start is to have conversations with your team.

Misstep 4: Assuming people understand the importance of their work. Help employees understand their purpose in the organization: why their roles exist and why they matter to the team's and organization's success; how their strengths and talents influence outcomes and other people.

Misstep 5: Unknowingly over-promoting individualism. Not only is team cohesion compromised but so is a shared mood, both of which are vital to a positive work climate.

Too Much of a Good Thing?

What are the signs and outcomes of an excess of optimism?

Sign of Excess 1: The struggle from the balance of opposites. When only good news is shared and leaders don't acknowledge the influence discord has on the climate, employees' well-tuned BS detectors signal "fraud." Instead, assume that people have the skills to handle difficult conversations or conflict.

Sign of Excess 2: The country club effect. In the context of the workplace, when a team becomes isolated from the realities of business, the country club effect emerges. Keeping people "happy" becomes more important than holding them accountable for commitments and results. Unleash employees' potential by finding opportunities that deepen their skills, and build a relationship with each person on your team.

Sign of Excess 3: Overreliance on advocates. Advocates can fall into the trap of blindly promoting its importance, ignoring contrarian perspectives. The solution for this sign is in building and nurturing authentic relationships with peers and team members, relationships where confidants can freely share their thoughts, even if unpopular or difficult to hear.

Sign of Excess 4: Inflexible methods. Inflexibility is a result of too much comfort with the way things are. You should identify the inflexible methods that might interfere with your work to create an optimistic workplace and see if you can influence changing the rules and policies that cause them. ●

SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

Values-Based Leadership

To know your values is to have insight into why you make decisions, with whom you make friends or the type of work you pursue or don't. Knowing your personal values helps you know where your line in the sand is — what you'll tolerate and what you won't.

Identifying, knowing and showing your values help prepare you to be a more effective, compassionate and understanding steward. In short, you are more relatable because of a deeper, evolving awareness of what you stand for, which attracts and appeals to others. To identify, know and show your values helps guide your decision-making process.

Values work begins with identifying values, such as accountability, achievement, collaboration, competence, creativity, decisiveness, fairness, generosity, integrity, joy, justice, loyalty, resourcefulness, stability and so forth. Select the top five that resonate most with you.

Now that you've identified your values, it's important to know what they mean to you. Take the time to define carefully for yourself your top five values. Use your life's events to define each value. Imagine explaining the value to other people. Would they associate the value with you?

Now it's time for you to think of ways to bring your values to life. List behaviors or ideas that bring to life your values. For example, for relationships, you might list "Block time on my calendar for one-on-ones with each employee to learn what or who is important in my employees' lives," or, "Each quarter take my team to coffee to discuss success and lessons."

Getting Employees to Think the Same Way

What would it take to begin integrating values-based conversations within your team? Tell the team why it's important to you to know your personal values. Open up by explaining what insights you got from doing the values exercises. Encourage your employees to complete the values exercises. Hold a team meeting to discuss insights.

Ask your team members how knowing and living by their personal values could be helpful to them in their work. In your one-on-ones with employees, explore more personal ways they can live and work by their values. Help employees identify where their values aren't present in work and where they are. Build a plan to strengthen the alignment.

The outcome of knowing and showing your values is a greater awareness of who you are. The awareness significantly influences how you show up as a leader. Consequently, you begin to create the stickiness that holds

your team members together and helps them begin to see a positive picture of the workplace and of their team. Connecting the dots further, this helps shape the climate and supports your effort to create workplace optimism. ●

It All Starts With Purpose

The first element of the Origins of Optimism is purpose. Purpose is the reason you do something. It might be a calling. It might be a matter of ethics. Purpose calls each of us to act in a way that may be unpopular or different from what most would say, do, think or feel. Deeply personal purpose can and should be shared. It is the ultimate guide to your way of living. In the business world, it guides your stewardship.

Personal purpose has been segregated from the business world for too long. It's an unnatural bifurcation of your two worlds. Clarifying your purpose is essential to your leadership. It's no longer enough to focus on *what* you do as a leader. It's *how* and *why* that rounds out your effectiveness and your ability to work alongside people.

These questions are designed to help deepen your awareness of the role that purpose has in your life:

- Write down the meaningful or rewarding behaviors from your work. From the meaningful or rewarding behaviors, what new insights do you notice about yourself?
- When in your life were you most energized? What were you doing? For whom were you doing the energizing activity? What value did you get from the activity?
- What themes do you notice underlying your responses? What insights do the themes hold?
- What values of yours do you see in your examples?
- Now consider who was involved in your examples. What role did each person play? What support did they provide?
- What did you learn about yourself from the examples you referenced?
- What makes your heart sing? Are you doing enough of that in your life? How could you increase doing more of what makes your heart sing?

Aligning Purposes

The following questions are designed to help you connect your purpose to those of your organization and your team.

- What is your organization's purpose?

SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

- What is your team's purpose? How does your team support the ultimate purpose? Where is there alignment between the organization's purpose and your team's? Where can you tighten the alignment?
- What evidence is there to show alignment between your purpose and your organization's? What about alignment between your purpose and your team's?
- What immediate next steps can you take to make alignment stronger?
- Who are allies who can help you better align your purpose with those of the organization and your team?
- What themes do you notice in your answers? What is the significance? Does the significance change your immediate next steps? ●

The Meaning Makers

We all want to be touched, moved and inspired by life. Meaning is a source not just for life but for work, too. As a steward of unlocking human potential, meaning is an opportunity to turn your people's work efforts and interest into something that matters. Meaningful work is the second element in the Origins of Optimism. It's also your shot at helping people see how their work contributes to a bigger picture and to feel connected to a group of like-minded people. Your part is to help shape the context for meaningful work to emerge. Let's look at the key actions of meaning makers:

Meet people's basic needs. You help employees meet their physiological and safety needs by paying them enough to have a roof over their heads and food on their tables. In terms of how employees perceive the climate at work, safety needs are key: Do employees feel secure in their work? Are expectations clear? Is there consistency in how you show up as a leader? Are your expectations of people clear and consistent? When basic needs are met, your team members can shift their focus to higher levels of functioning, helping them to do their work better, experience higher levels of happiness, and uncover meaning in what they do.

Make room for autonomous work. Today, having autonomy means team members can rely on their experiences and use their ideas to leave their mark. The intrinsic motivation inherent in autonomy is a source of fulfillment and helps employees find meaning.

Invite people to be in on things. Employees want to believe they are in on decisions and hear news in a timely manner. You can loop employees in on important

ideas and considerations sooner to get their input before decisions are made.

Give people the freedom to express themselves. Meaningful work emerges when people know they can share what's on their mind and that a pink slip won't be on their desk the next day, or they won't be made to feel shame for speaking out.

Model values-based leadership. Learn what your employees' personal values are. Discuss how their personal values show up in their work and where they are absent.

Hold regular one-on-ones. At least monthly, discuss employees' progress in achieving their performance goals. Hold employees accountable to their growth commitments. ●

We Must Change the Way We Work

Employees are overwhelmed, stressed, burned out and disillusioned with their ability to positively make a difference through their work. Yet, the relationship employees have with work, the pace and quantity of it and how they achieve desired outcomes is central to cultivating workplace optimism. Leaders need to improve how employees relate to and go about doing their best work.

Work today needs a facelift, or a F.A.I.S.E. lift. F.A.I.S.E. refers to five domains leaders need to address when shifting how employees make sense of the importance of their work, how they approach their work, and ultimately how they generate value for the organization and its customers through their work. The F.A.I.S.E. domains are as follows:

Financial: Leaders balance long-term and short-term views on financial performance to determine work priorities.

Aspirational: Use of purpose and meaning help bring significance to work and how it's done.

Individual: Leaders leverage work to promote employee self-awareness. Work identity is important.

Social: Employees make sense of work by developing relationships within departments and teams as well as outside the organization.

Environmental: The conditions and climate of the workplace need to bring out employees' strengths and minimize distractions.

The domains are intended to guide you through how to identify and explain the value of work for both the organization and employees.

At PepsiCo, a program called Performance with Purpose shapes the work of employees. More than a program, Performance with Purpose is a set of beliefs. Whether PepsiCo is focusing on human sustainability (Social domain) or

SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

talent sustainability (Individual domain), it makes decisions to do good for its customers (Aspirational domain) and those who create the value for the organization — the employees. With a comprehensive set of initiatives — ranging from corporate governance to supply-chain diversity to workplace diversity — PepsiCo positions itself for financial performance. According to a 2013 PepsiCo report, 89 percent of the company's employees, including executives, feel pride in their work (Environmental domain) and in what the organization accomplishes through its many efforts to improve the communities it serves and create a workplace environment that motivates and inspires employees. ●

Human-Centered Leadership

Human-centered leaders believe that financial success is accomplished through genuinely caring about people. These leaders hold employees accountable to continuously develop their talents so they can advance the company's purpose. But human-centered leaders also want employees to become extraordinary versions of themselves.

Employees are expected to anticipate needs, explore alternatives, expand their talents and leverage their strengths, and connect with partners to achieve desired results, not planned results. The marriage of the two — business and human potential — is what the human side of business is about.

What does the human side of business have to do with your relationship with your team? Everything. The human side of business grounds your perspective in truly human elements that help you relate to your team members as people. It guides you to discover commonalities between you and your team that deepen connections. It helps you see where you can make a difference in your people's lives. Such insight is not possible when employees are seen as controllable resources that can't be trusted.

The Universal Elements

The universal elements of the human side of business are health, family/friends, work, identity and purpose. The first element, health, includes the physical, psychological and social health of your people.

The family/friends element places value on the quality of time your employees have with their family and friends when not at work. It has been found to be most associated with happiness and meaningfulness in life. You positively influence the family/friend element by helping employees manage their work-life mix. When you can strengthen family, employee participation at work strengthens.

At the heart of this universal element, work, is helping employees find meaning not only in what they do but in the outcomes they help create. Work shapes our identity. How employees relate to their work self influences their motivation, performance, even job satisfaction. Researchers also find that a healthy work identity helps employees find meaningfulness in their work.

The final universal element is purpose. Purpose, in conjunction with the other universal elements, positions employees to have a remarkable life — personally and professionally.

What can you do to foster positive relationships? Model bidirectional accountability (for positive relationships to flourish, you must be accountable, too), promote employee activism, have your people's backs and recognize employees. ●

Next Comes Trust: Creating Community

For optimistic work environments, cooperation or self-interest isn't enough for success. You'll have to create a more compelling climate that fosters collaboration. Through collaborative efforts, people generate new insights not possible when working solo. Through collaboration, resources and people are shared. The sharing of resources and people is done because what knits a strong collaborative team together are mutual aspirations and shared goals.

What can you do to boost collaboration in your team? Send employees to learn other parts of the business. Inquire regularly into the team's effectiveness. Screen for collaborative tendencies during new-hire interviews. Develop routines that reinforce collaboration, and make time for face-to-face meetings.

Equation for Community

When collaboration is combined with connection, a community emerges. All stewards need to remember that:

Collaboration + Connection = Community.

This is the Equation for Community. If the Origins of Optimism are the bones to creating workplace optimism, and purpose and meaningfulness are the heart, then the Equation for Community is the blood that oxygenates the entire system.

The three parts to the equation are important by themselves. When you combine them, their influence magnifies. Collaboration is the active participation of people working

SUMMARY: THE OPTIMISTIC WORKPLACE

jointly together. Connection is a relationship between people focused on and held together by evolving shared interests. Community is a unified group of people with a shared interest. Each part of the equation feeds naturally into the other.

While too often groups of people develop a self-interest in winning and success, the Equation for Community helps people move past it. How? The very nature of each element of the equation strengthens only when the focus is on the group, or the team. The Equation for Community reinforces achieving success for the greater good, not for the select few. ●

The Cultivation of Optimism

To create workplace optimism, start small and show you care. These two seemingly simple pieces of advice reflect a shift in the quality of relationship employees hope to have with you. It also sheds light on the skills you need to cocreate the optimistic workplace.

The following skills will help you achieve strong relationships with your team, create and shape an optimistic work environment and achieve desired results together.

Two categories of skills and traits are Self and Us. Those under the Self category are the highest-value skills or traits that are needed to bring optimism to the forefront of people's experience at work. Those in the Us category rely on skills or traits necessary to deepen connection among members of your team as well as to create a sense of belonging that people experience while working in your team:

Know Thyself

Humility. Humility helps keep you grounded. It helps you build stronger relationships, a key factor in fashioning the optimistic workplace. It's also key to seeing your flaws and strengths and appreciating them in others.

Honesty. Self-honesty helps you assess situations and your response to them realistically. Are you respectful but honest when sharing difficult feedback?

Reflection. Take time to reflect so you can connect the dots between people and events to make sense of what's happening around you.

Grit. Grit can help you endure hardships and find greater enrichment in living while pursuing meaningful personal and professional goals.

Resilience. Positive emotions like joy, interest and pride help build resilience. Resilience helps generate positive emotions.

Sense-making. By showing your interest in learning the meaning behind people's words and actions, you create a path for mutual understanding and greater chances for collaboration. This is invaluable for cultivating optimism.

Vulnerability. We can relate more deeply to people when we know they also have struggles.

For the Greater Good

Noticing. BambooHR co-founder Ryan Sanders explains this skill as paying attention to the overt and subtle ways people positively contribute to the team and its goals.

Connecting. Your relationship with employees needs to go from transactional to relational. A skill critical to such innovation involves connecting your people to the resources they need to reach their potential.

Experimenting. Shape the conditions in your team that signal to employees it's all right to experiment. Openly share what's working and not working.

Prioritizing. Your ability to prioritize individual workloads with each of your employees positions them to make progress on what matters.

What Self and Us skills and traits have in common is their humanity. They help you become more relatable and more understanding of your employees' aspirations. Cultivating workplace optimism is something you'll go through together with your team.

We are at a time in business when two paths have presented themselves. One path is business as usual: It's management. It's control. Its philosophy is fear of change; keep things the way they are. The other path is business transformed: It's human-centered and values-based. Unpredictability is embraced as an opportunity to maximize success even when its definition is unclear or unknown. This path may appear riskier given its nature, but it's the best path forward if you want to thrive in our hyperconnected, socially enabled, relationship-centric business world. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Optimistic Workplace*, you'll also like:

1. ***Thirteeners* by Daniel Prosser.** Prosser shares how to transform an organization's internal connectedness so it can create a workplace environment that produces breakthrough results.
2. ***Engaged!* by Gregg Lederman.** Lederman teaches how to design and implement a sustainable culture and customer experience.
3. ***Delivering Happiness* by Tony Hsieh.** Hsieh shows how using happiness as a framework can help leaders in organizations of all sizes and types produce profits, passion and purpose.