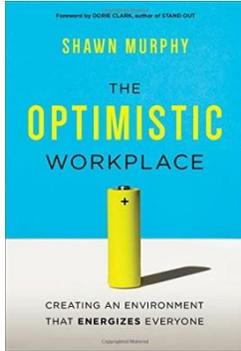

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***The Optimistic Workplace***

Author: **Shawn Murphy**

Publisher: AMACOM

Format: Hard cover; 224 pages List Price: \$24.95

Publication Date: 2016 ISBN: 978-0-8144-3619-6

Reviewer: ***Nazanin Mehrooz, PMP, CSM, SA, SCP***

Review Date: August 2015

Introduction to the Book

I have often read and heard about the importance of an optimistic work place and the positive effects it has on people and organization. This book shares what you are likely to see when this optimism isn't in your workplaces and guides leaders towards changing the climate where people feel autonomous, creative and energetic and are able to accomplish amazing things.

Along the way, it teaches you how to be a better leader by developing people and deliberately building purpose and meaning into work and keeping it there. The end results are contagious optimistic people who care about what they do and how they do it. The beauty of it doesn't require you to be a manager to make this happen. Anyone can begin this process of becoming a steward. Even small change can have ripple effects as they are played forward to significantly impact the climate and eventually lead to positive changes in the overall culture.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book contains 11 chapters and a few appendices around the following:

1. The Future of the Workplace – The culture of a company can take years to influence and change. However, the climate you work in can be influenced pretty easily by focusing on creating happy teams, building positive relationship, aligning work with purpose and developing people.
2. Destructive Management – Misuse of power, autocratic management style and change resistance all negatively impact optimism. Leaders should focus on

creating an environment where employees feel autonomous which leads to energy, vitality and optimism instead of distress and apathy.

3. **The Power of Contagious Emotions – Unplanned giving** has many positive influences to the climate. Something as small as helping a coworker out on a task can build strong working relationship, trust and motivate others to do the same. It should starts with understanding yourself and how to feel fulfilled in what you are doing before you can help others achieve the same.
4. **The Downsize of Optimism:** Believing it is someone else’s responsibility to create optimism, failing to build alliances to support it and assuming you know how others feel about the climate can all lead to missteps. It’s important to understand that impact and how to prevent them.
5. **Value-Based Leadership – Knowing your personal values and consistently applying them** will help people build trust in you, seek you as a guide and inspire the similar patterns. In time, this also breeds optimism.
6. **It All Starts with Purpose – Purpose helps people be more resilient when faced with difficulties.** Unfortunately many people don’t feel alignment with their personal purpose and what they do at work. To narrow this gap, you have to build awareness of what gives you purpose and develop it.
7. **The Meaning Makers – Stewards use meaning to personalize the work experience.** They say things like “I want to make things better for people” or “I want to connect with people”. To help meaning emerge, learn what each person’s strength is and how to leverage it, express genuine appreciation for them and focus on their potential. Meet people’s basic needs, make room for autonomous work and invite them to be included in things.
8. **We Must Change the Way We Work – More people are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, burned out and don’t believe they can positively make a difference through their work.** Leaders can improve how people relate to and go about doing their best work by focusing on better understanding of how to approach them and influence their development.
9. **Human-Centered Leadership – Leaders should understand how they can positively influence health, friends/family, work, identity and purpose of the people they lead.** The climate will suffer when employees don’t believe their leaders have their back. Building relationship which foster a strong support system can prevent that.
10. **Next Comes Trust: Creating Community – No one enjoys connecting with a selfish person or someone who is always takes.** When working for someone you

don't care for, cooperation and collaboration are limited and there is less desire to form a community with them. This reduces potential of building an optimistic work places because people won't pull together as an effective community when challenges occur. Leaders who build trust, become givers and understand how to help people fulfill their needs build strong communities which pass the test of time.

11. The Cultivation of Optimism is required – This isn't an easy task. It often requires humility, honesty, reflection and resilience. Start small and take time to build towards reaching your full potential of an effective steward. Utilizing the guides in the appendix of this book can help you get there.

Appendix 1: The Optimistic Planner – Week by week activity and question guide to provide guidance on how to tap into the optimistic workplace climate.

Appendix 2: One-on-One Format – An aid to better understanding your employee and tapping into their potential.

Highlights: What's New in this Book?

The Author introduces a new kind of manager who doesn't lead in a command-and-control style, but is a steward and servant to the team. These stewards deliberately create an environment where people feel happy and perform their best. By doing this, they are contributing to positive changes to the climate which in time can lead to organizational culture shifts. The other message which is new in this book is anyone can lead this change by building awareness and making small changes in their approach to become more optimistic and by doing so can lead others to doing the same.

Highlights: What I liked!

As a change agent, I'm passionate about creating excitement and helping others. While reading this book, I was amazed that only 22% of employees felt like their managers had their best interest in mind, while 68% felt their managers were more focused on their own development. Only 38% of employees felt like their boss had established an effective working relationship with them. It's no wonder that many people aren't feeling passionate about their work. What I liked about this book was guidance on how to prevent destructive management and in place drive change which can lead to optimism and empowerment.

The other thing I liked was that this book has an optimistic planner in the appendix with week by week exercises as a guide to lead this change. Using this planner and committing to development of your own skills is the first step and in time you will be

helping others achieve their goals and becoming a better coach, mentor, leader and steward in the process.

Shortfalls: What was Missing?

I found myself wanting more guidance on difficult cultural and climate challenges which weren't mentioned in the book. For example, how would a mid-level manager address the demand for immediate productivity and profit required by their leadership team against development and optimism of their teams?

Organizations are having to make difficult choices in competitive demanding markets and they often have to prioritize one against the other to keep the lights on. How would a steward address such challenges to develop such a climate?

Another area I thought was missing was more detailed case studies which could influence leaders that investing time and energy in an optimistic workplace approach will eventually result in less turnover, higher productivity and an energized workforce.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Reading this book is likely to benefit any leader. This includes project or functional managers, change agents within teams and individual contributors who want to make their workplace more optimistic.

Conclusion

This book does a good job of highlighting factors that lead to optimistic workplaces. It starts with understanding yourself and how you can feel happy and fulfilled in what you are doing and then purposefully becoming a steward to help others achieve the same.

As a steward, it's important to create a balanced work environment where people have more purpose, meaningful work and autonomy to do it. This will result in people feeling more creative and passionate about how they do their work and energize them to play it forward and lead to more positive climate changes.

With any change, there is often potential missteps which can be prevented by being aware and working to ensure challenges don't impact the positive gains made. This book shows the path which will eventually lead to closer alignment and optimistic workplace and offers a planner as a tool to get there.

The Optimistic Workplace, by Shawn Murphy, published by AMACOM; 2016, ISBN 978-0-8144-3619-6; 224 pages, hard cover. More at <http://www.amacombooks.org/book.cfm?isbn=9780814436196>

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About the Reviewer



Nazanin Mehrooz, PMP, CSM, SA, SPC



Nazanin Mehrooz is a certified project manager, scrum master and SAFe Program Consultant. Nazanin started her career as a software developer and transitioned to leading mid-size teams as a functional manager, senior project manager, release train engineer and SAFe instructor. Her background includes managing a portfolio of 30+ projects with budgets exceeding 15 Million USD and most recently leading an agile train containing 6 scrum teams. Nazanin is an active volunteer for the PMI Dallas and Fort Worth Chapters.

Email: nazi_mehrooz@yahoo.com