

# Reconnecting Employees To Their Life And Work

by *Jim Bird*



**O**n September 11th terrorists declared war on American values. Our military has launched its initial response. Our grief for the victims and their families now merges with our hopes for the success of our troops and concerns for their safety as well as our own. What are our individual roles in this battle? As a manager, how can you help your employees with a meaningful response to the question, "What can I do to defend my family, my values and my country?"

To determine those answers we first need to understand the nature of the blow we have taken. It is clear that on September 11, 2001 a symbol of American Achievement was attacked in New York. What is not as clear is that another equally important value was targeted – Americans' everyday joy of life. Our ability to laugh at a joke, sing our favorite song at embarrassingly high levels, savor every greasy splurge of a double cheeseburger, celebrate our achievements at work, feel the love in a hug, the beauty of a fall day, or the warmth of a sunset, both on our bodies and in our souls. Our enemies want to take away from us that wonderful human ability to just grin and glow, sometimes a little, sometimes from ear to ear, inside and out, that is our everyday enjoyment of life.

Achievement and enjoyment, every day. What a great way to live.

Before September 11th too many of us didn't realize how great it was – how important these everyday values were to us. Too often we were caught in the "as soon as trap". "As soon as I get that raise, then I'm going to enjoy my work more." "As soon as I get the promotion;" or "As soon as the kids get through college; or "As soon as I get married, then I'll be happy" or sometimes, "As soon as the divorce goes through..."

Today, more than ever, we realize life does not work that way. There will always be another project, another desire, another challenge you want or need to pursue. And now we face the disturbing expectations of other attacks in an ongoing war. If you let it, this As Soon As Trap will keep you, your co-workers, your family and friends constantly out of focus and stressed for months or years to come. As a manager, what do you do?

Lead! You have an important opportunity to lead everyone in your organization to being an everyday hero in this effort. This is not rhetoric, this is reality. There is a horrific evil loose in the world. We will win this war with an overwhelming force for good. Achievement and Enjoyment are good! Your job, your joys, the happiness and prosperity of your family and friends are powerful forces for good. As individual citizens, as a company, and as a country, we can best respond to this attack on our values by living them more fully than ever.

But as a manager you must recognize that this is not an either/or equation. Summoning your troops to pride in quality, productivity and record achievement at work is only part of the solution, and will not stand alone. Even before September 11th, many were frustrated by an approach that valued achievement at work above all else. You need to emphasize that all of us need to reconnect to the achievement and enjoyment elements of life that we cherish with our family, friends and selves too.

Think of it this way. Imagine holding a coin between you thumb and forefinger that represents these everyday values in American life. Turn it front to back, Achievement on one side, Enjoyment on the other. To exist, that coin must have both that front and back. Eliminate either of those sides and the entire coin vanishes. Its value ceases to exist. Just as you can not have a coin without having both sides, you and the individuals in your organization can not get the full value from life without both. Achievement and Enjoyment are fused together, and together they create value we celebrate as individuals throughout the civilized world.

We all need to start earning more of those coins by the trillions. We need to get back to work now, engaging at the highest levels our hearts and minds. We must also simultaneously get back to celebrating the every day joys and pride in our achievements on and off the job.

And what of our grief for past and future sufferings? It will not go away soon. But the way we remember and respond to our sorrow can add a deeper meaning to our lives and to the memories of those we've lost. Let us salute their memories and lead the world to freedom by exemplifying the values that freedom allows us to create.

Here's what you can do now to help both yourself and your employees:

- **Communicate high achievement expectations.** America's economy is the key engine powering the progress of freedom in the world. Our families, our companies, our country, and indeed the world need each of us to be achieving at high levels, starting now.
- **Make everybody proud.** Whether you serve up technology wizardry or fast food convenience, everyone in your firm should know from you that what they do is important.
- **Respect hearth and home.** Demonstrate that you value our need to stay solidly connected to family and friends. Implement or emphasize some practical work-life balance policies or training.
- **Emphasize personal health.** Rest, exercise and a good diet are weapons that sharpen the mind, prepare the body and make us much happier people. Lead by taking care of yourself.
- **Smile and laugh more.** Promote more time for fun, free of major decision topics, not just at work but also with family and friends.
- **Celebrate the small stuff.** Initiate more thank yous, congratulations, and celebration of small wins. Dwell on the little pleasures longer. Life is the small stuff. Enjoy it!

By taking such actions you can make it clear that this battle is ours and we are in no way helpless. We will not be waiting for what happens next because our roles are clear. It is time for all of us to be heroes by radiating values held deep in the hearts and minds of individuals and cultures around the world. Your job as a leader on a day to day basis is to make this happen for yourself, your company and for all the people you care about. No matter what the future brings, everyday, for the rest of your life, achieve and...enjoy!

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