

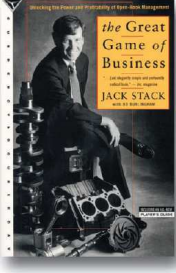
## Chapter 3 The Feeling of a Winner

How do you start The Great Game of Business? By creating a series of small wins-by showing people how it feels to be a winner. Believe me, that's one of the rarest feelings in business today. Even successful companies are filled with people who are depressed, scared and dissatisfied. Such feelings are symptoms of a serious business disease, one that can quickly become life-threatening.

I am a great believer in judging a company by its financial statements, but you don't need a balance sheet to tell the difference between a healthy company and a sick one. In many cases, it's the difference between going to a ballpark and a funeral home. In a healthy company, you can see and feel the enthusiasm. People nod and smile and look you in the eye. There are often banners around, or balloons. Something is always being celebrated-a birthday, an anniversary, a new record, whatever. The bulletin boards are fresh with the latest news. In a sick company, on the other hand, the bulletin boards are filled with announcements required by law-OSHA directives, anti-discrimination regulations, and so on. People don't look at you. They aren't happy to see you. The premises are run down. The stock is disorganized. No one is having fun. Everyone seems depressed. It's as if people are going to a funeral every day, and it may be their company's.

That's pretty much the situation I found when I came down from Chicago to take charge of the Springfield Renew Center, as it was called back in 1979. The previous plant manager had been overwhelmed by problems, and he'd let himself become remote and isolated. People were literally standing around on the shop floor because they lacked the parts and tools they needed to do the job and nobody in corporate management seemed to care. The employees were so fed up that they were ready to bring in a union to light a fire under their bosses. The only real question was whether they'd go for the United Auto Workers or the Teamsters. If I'd told them I was there to get them involved in The Great Game of Business, they would probably have run me out of town.

You can't just walk into any company or any factory and start teaching people how to read financial statements. I couldn't have done it then, and I wouldn't suggest that you do it now without first taking a good, hard look at your organization and the people who work there. There are at least two conditions that *have* to exist before people are ready to learn about business-about making money and generating cash, about using the numbers to follow the action and keep score.



**1. Management has to have credibility.**

Without it, people won't listen to you, and they won't believe the numbers you give them. If you set up a bonus program or some other game, they'll think it's a gimmick, a trick, a scheme to get them to work harder for less money, so that you can get richer and they can get screwed. There must be a minimum level of mutual respect and trust. People have to feel that, whatever your faults, you have some sensitivity to them and their problems, you value their contribution, you'll offer them a fair shake. At the very least, they have to be willing to give you the benefit of the doubt.

**2. Employees have to have some fire in their eyes.**

No company can play The Great Game of Business with people who feel like losers. Even if people believe the numbers, they won't respond to them if they don't care about what they're doing. To play a game--any game--you have to be in a game-playing frame of mind. You can't be demoralized and cynical. You must have enough self-esteem and pride to think winning is important, to want to have fun. I have always felt that having fun should be a job responsibility. Nobody can do a job well if he or she doesn't have fun doing it. Winning is a lot of fun, but people may not know how to be winners in their jobs. So you have to show them.

There are all kinds of techniques you can use to build credibility and light fires in people's eyes. Where you begin will depend entirely on your circumstances. When I came to Springfield, there was so little mutual trust and respect that I had to start at the most basic level--listening. In my first couple of months, I met with every single one of the hundred or so employees. I brought them into the conference rooms in little groups, three, four, five at a time. I asked them what they wanted, what they felt, where they wanted to go, what they wanted to do. We talked about life. We talked about dreams. We talked about winning. I asked them what tools they needed to do their jobs. People talked very freely, and they had harsh things to say about management. I asked them just to give us a chance.

Of course, most companies aren't in as bad shape as we were. Yours may not need the kind of intensive treatment we had to administer to the Renew Center before we could start teaching people the numbers. But there is no such thing as a management team with too much credibility or a work force with too much enthusiasm. The truth is that we still use many of the techniques we developed back in those days, and we are still guided by many of the lessons we learned then.

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