

Preface

There are places that make us feel great every time we visit or even just call them. Sometimes we know exactly what makes us feel that way; other times we may not be able to identify it, but something's definitely there. It's in the way the place looks and feels, the way everyone who works there treats us and, just as importantly, the way they treat each other. The place is clean and neat, associates know what they're doing and seem happy to do it, and there's an air of camaraderie and respect that just doesn't exist everywhere.

This doesn't mean everything is perfect. Just like the rest of us, they're still dealing with human beings and humans aren't perfect, so these places have their issues, too. But they work through their challenges quickly and respectfully to all parties. Leaders openly respect their workers, and workers respect their leaders because of it. These companies have created an atmosphere of trust and appreciation where associates want to create **WOWs** for each other and are rewarded for doing so. This atmosphere spills over into the customer environment, as associates are inspired to treat customers the same way.

It is when all of this comes together and adds up to a whole lot of **WOW** for associates and customers alike that we realize we've created a **WOWplace**.

WOWplaces don't just happen by accident. They are created out of careful and deliberate planning, training and execution with the ultimate goal of creating and sustaining a culture that is focused on

and delivers what is most important to every human being: the desire to be valued, listened to and respected.

We have all seen companies that are great to work for; then a new person or two comes in and everything changes . . . for the worse. As a result, one by one, the caring and compassionate people begin to leave until no one is left except those who either tolerate the bad behavior of the new associates or become like them. We've also seen the reverse, where a company may not have the most competitive wages or benefits, but the people and the important work they are committed to doing make it all worthwhile . . . and they stay.

That is because making a place great is not about “flash” or power; it's not even about money. It's about the way we communicate and interact with each other and let others know they are valued, listened to and appreciated.

It's about VALUES.

It's about TRUST.

It's about RESPECT.

It's about COMMITMENT to an ideal.

In essence, it's about CARING.

It's about caring more about others than about yourself – not to your detriment, but certainly more with their benefit in mind than your own.

The Amazing Impact of Caring About Others

Have you seen the YouTube video about the Piano Stairs? At a subway station in Stockholm, Sweden, it was observed that the people climbing the stairs were far outnumbered by those making the easier but much less healthy choice of taking the escalator. The question was

posed, *“Could people be encouraged to engage in healthier behavior by making it fun?”*

To put this question to the test, an initiative was commissioned by Volkswagen to install a set of “piano keys” on the stairs by attaching sensors to the stairs and covering them with white and black materials in a pattern that resembled the keys of a piano. When anyone stepped on a sensor, a sound was played that corresponded with the sound of the piano key being stepped on. Climbing the stairs played a musical scale.

This was so interesting to look at, and so much fun to try, that 66 percent more people began climbing the stairs versus taking the escalator! Video footage actually showed people engaging in their normal behavior pattern by heading for the escalator, and upon noticing the stairs, turning away from the escalator and climbing the stairs instead.

Lone walkers climbed the stairs; parents helped children climb the stairs; pet owners climbed the stairs with their pets. People climbed the stairs in pairs, “playing tunes” together as they went – some even jumped and danced together on the stairs to have more fun together! Everyone laughed, smiled and encouraged each other to engage in new and healthier behaviors because they were having so much fun doing it!

Volkswagen’s objective in creating this initiative was to help people engage in activities that would improve their lives – in this case, get more exercise. Done solely for the purpose of helping others and creating fun, an added benefit for Volkswagen was that the brand was brought to mind in a fun and positive way due to their concern for the population at large. This cannot help but enhance their image, and could positively affect their sales and profits, as well.

This concept can be translated to the workplace. If people are having fun and enjoying their workplace, they are inspired to encourage others to have as much fun as *they* are having, even going so far as to help them do so. Conversely, if they hate their jobs, hate the people they work with and are generally miserable at work, they are “inspired” to help others be as miserable as they are – proving the old adage that “*misery loves company.*”

As a society, we spend a lot of time and effort thinking and talking about the need to make things better. It is time for each of us to take personal responsibility to commit to doing something about it. It is time for us to encourage, inspire and demonstrate how we can all take the small, everyday, consistent actions necessary to continuously create **WOWs** for each other and our customers on a daily basis.

With this in mind, let’s begin our journey together to Turn Your Workplace into a **WOWplace!**