

Aw Shucks, I Have To Go To ...

By T. Scott Gross

If you finish this sentence, aw shucks, I have to go to...play, aren't you the odd duck! But ask people who are doing what they really want to do, and you'll discover that they often have great difficulty drawing a line between work and play. The nine-to-five crowd dismisses them as hopelessly type A, but the few of us who really have this work thing dialed in understand that when you are doing what you love, you love what you're doing.

What exactly is the difference between work and play? It's up to you to define.

Charles Coonradt, a friend of mine who wrote *The Game of Work* (Game of Work, 1997) says several things are universal when it comes to games. Games have a clearly defined objective, a readily visible score, and are usually played with kids you like. Work, says Coonradt, should be more like a game and then you might be inclined to say, "Hey everybody! I get to go to work!"

Here are a few ideas for making work more like play:

- *Decide if you are in a job you love.* Sometimes the best way to make your job fun is to get another one!

- *Be competent.* If you want the freedom to play the game your way, it helps to be a competent player. Bosses hate surprises and it's a known fact that nervous bosses aren't fun.

- *Play appropriately.* If you don't know when to be serious, the boss won't tolerate much that isn't squarely inside the box.

- *Build a team of winners.* It's no fun to play on a losing team.

- *Choose fun names that clearly identify people and things* in terms of what they really do.

Maybe the boss could become the Coach and the maintenance guy the Official Cleaner Upper! Do this for processes, products, and policies. At Southwest Airlines they have a People Department!

- *Schedule time for play.* Dream up reasons to celebrate, and while you are at it, party smart. All the time isn't the right time for play.

- *Learn the cues and clues* that let you know when customers and others are in the mood to play.

- *Keep score.* Make sure that players keep their own score, that the score is always visible, and that team performance, in addition to individual performance is rewarded.

- *Sign your work.* You won't believe how important this is. People love to show off and connect what they do with results in the real world. Anything you can do to connect workers with customers improves quality and gives work meaning.

- *Introduce complexity.* We've gone too far to dummy down jobs. Add complexity, and productivity will go up, not down.

- *Start the day with a briefing.* The best way to get everyone on the same page is to start each shift with a short briefing.

Best Job

I first encountered the *Jobs Rated Almanac* through an article in the newspaper during a time when I had been working with a wonderful crew of wildland firefighters, and we had just returned from a fire set by some loser in the wee hours of the morning. We returned to

the station smelling of smoke and sweat, still high on the moment. We returned as victorious warriors of a battle no one had seen other than ourselves.

As we gathered in the kitchen, the smell of frying bacon began to dominate and the crackle of eggs replaced the roar of burning timber. One of the firefighters picked up the paper and read an article that firefighting was one of the worst jobs you could have. A financial planner was number one, according to the article.

A freckled kid, young enough to be my son but sharp enough to earn my respect said, "This has to have been written by someone who works in a windowless cubicle!" Margy, the tough as nails Renaissance woman who was our captain, smiled from behind her mug of hot coffee.

Once back home, Margy and I exchanged a few e-mails. Below is her last. Notice her ending comment about her work, and ask yourself if you are so lucky.

Scott,

Honestly, I have no recollection of sending you a quote from my dad! But if I had sent one, it would have been this one, written by David Grayson (unknown date) and recorded by Dad in a worn three ring notebook:

"Happiness, I have discovered, is nearly always a rebound from hard work. It is one of the follies of men to imagine that they can enjoy mere thought, or emotion, or sentiment. As well, try to eat beauty. For happiness must be tricked! She loves to see men at work. She loves sweat, weariness, self-sacrifice. She will be found not in palaces but lurking in cornfields and factories and hovering over littered desks: she

crowns the unconscious head of the busy child. If you look up suddenly from hard work you will see her, but if you look too long she fades sorrowfully away.”

“There is something fine in hard physical labor. One actually stops thinking. I often work long without any thought whatever, so far as I know, save that connection with the monotonous repetition of the labor itself--down with the spade, out with it, over with it--and repeat. And yet sometimes, mostly in the forenoon when I am not tired at all, I will suddenly have a sense of the world opening around me--a sense of its beauty and its meaning--giving me a peculiar deep happiness, that is near complete content.”

That's the time on the hoselay when you look at your partner with a big grin and say “This sucks, doesn't it?” Ha, ha.

Thinking Point

Is there ever a time in your work when you can grin and say, ‘this sucks, doesn't it? Ha, ha?’