

Healthy, Happy,  
Productive Work:  
A Leadership Challenge

# *Healthy, Happy, Productive Work:* A Leadership Challenge

JAMES CAMPBELL QUICK

JONATHAN D. QUICK

*Libor Rostik grew up in Eastern Europe and through determined effort came to Texas by way of London and Canada. Libor was a engineer by professional training and became part of the corporate rebels under the leadership of Gordon Forward, Sc.D., who designed and built world-class Chaparral Steel Company. By 1988, Libor was the chief engineer for Chaparral. He was one of 10 officers and 25 employees who were interviewed as part of an organizational assessment conducted on the company. At the conclusion of the interview, Libor was asked what was the best aspect of his job. He launched into an excited 15-minute oration about how exciting, interesting, and satisfying his job was for him. The interviewer observed the next day to the vice president for human resources that it appeared as though Libor Rostik brought most of his own excitement with him to the job. The vice president laughed in affirmative response.*

This vignette illustrates that we cannot always make a clear distinction between (1) our history and experience that we bring to the workplace and (2) our response(s) to what is already within the workplace. This is a chicken-and-egg dilemma that we cannot resolve in this special issue on healthy, happy, productive work. However, we do want to go back to the beginning of an examination of the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance—a relationship with which the field of organizational behavior has wrestled for decades. In addition, we want to revisit the origins of our preventive

management approach to health and well-being in organizations. From there, we want to fast forward to our own leadership experiences during the 1990s, and finally overview the present contributions which address the domain of healthy, happy, productive work. In addition to drawing on our own experience as professional practitioners as well as research scholars, we have engaged both academicians and leading executives in the seven contributions that follow.

## IN THE BEGINNING

Ever since the Hawthorne Studies in the early 20th century (1920s and 1930s) spawned the Hawthorne Effect – whose twin effect in medicine is called the Placebo Effect – there has been a debate in management and organizational behavior concerning whether happy workers are more productive workers. As the 20th century wore on, health became an increasingly major concern in many organizations because of the rise in health care costs. Therefore, we have expanded the domain of happy/productive work to the larger domain of healthy, happy, productive work. Let us begin by considering the comparatively recent origins of these issues.

## The Happy/Productive Worker

Barry Staw was asked by the American Psychological Association to deliver an address at its 1985 Annual Convention in Los Angeles, California. Within the domain of

organizational psychology, he chose to address the pursuit of the happy/productive worker, later turning his invited address into a now well-known journal article. At the heart of the dilemma with which Staw wrestled were the consistency of job satisfaction, or more broadly job attitudes, and the intransigence of job performance. While some might accuse him of being a pessimist in his perspective, he argued for a lowering of what some see as euphoric expectations within the psyche to have it all—to fulfill Abraham Maslow's concept of self-actualization, in which executives and workers alike are entirely satisfied with how they feel and what they produce. Staw viewed job satisfaction and job performance as laudable objectives and focused on what was realistically achievable in addressing both concerns within organizational psychology. His self-assessment was what he identified as realistic (i.e., neither idealistic and optimistic nor darkly pessimistic) in addressing the happy/productive worker thesis.

His realism led him to be skeptical of the wave after wave of approaches and interventions for achieving both happiness and productivity, from the early worker participation movement following the Hawthorne Studies, through the pursuit of excellence craze, to the high-performing systems approach. However, through three targeted systems of organizational change, Staw concluded that it was possible to overcome the inertia that historically had prevented much movement on either the job satisfaction or job performance meters. His three alternatives were to build a strong individually oriented system, or to design a group-oriented system in which satisfaction and performance are derived from group participation, or to use an organizationally oriented system for organizing work. Staw concludes that these three motivational systems have the potential to overcome inertia and can spur us to action, rather than accepting in resignation the difficulties in moving both satisfaction and performance. Hence, happy and productive work is achievable, despite difficulties to that end.

## **Preventive Medicine and Preventive Management**

About the same time that Barry Staw was wrestling with the happy/productive worker conundrum, we were busy building a bridge from public health into an organizational context, aiming to apply the public health notions of prevention to the chronic problems caused by organizational stress. Using ideas from preventive medicine and translating them into an organizational context, we framed our early notions of preventive management to address stress in organizations. We and others later applied this same set of ideas to other chronic organizational problems such as workplace violence, suicide, and sexual harassment. The core of our concern was health-related. That is, how do we reduce the burden of suffering in a working population while we improve their health and well-being? We frame our preventive stress management framework on five guiding principles, the first two of which are:

Principle 1: Individual and organizational health are interdependent.

Principle 2: Leaders have a responsibility for individual and organizational health.

These two principles are broadly applicable to issues around health in organizations.

Human suffering, health disorders, and illness are the antithesis of health, vitality, and well-being. Further, suffering and health problems can drain positive energy otherwise used to achieve happiness and productivity. While organizational psychology has been concerned with the core issues of motivation and leadership over the decades, medicine and clinical psychology have been concerned with healing the damage done to body, mind, and spirit by accident or intentional harm. Despite the presence of many bright, enlightened, and humane leaders through the years – such as Dr. Gordon Forward who led the building of world-class Chaparral Steel Company – there are also Neanderthals in some organizations.

These latter leaders can cause real damage at work, as Peter Frost so well points out in bringing attention to emotional toxins at work. While our preventive management model makes provision for treatment and therapy by way of tertiary prevention to address emotional toxins and other damage to people at work, the preferred point of intervention in public health, and for us, is always primary prevention. That is, we would rather address the cause of a problem than keep repairing damage the cause produces. Alternatively, secondary prevention is preferred to treatment as well and aims to address how we can change our responses to inevitable causes of problems to avert their negative outcomes.

### **Authentic Leadership, Positive Psychology, and Positive Organizational Behavior**

Principle 2 in our preventive management framework focuses on leaders and the role of leadership in enhancing individual and organizational health. What is new since we framed our prevention model is an emerging confluence of the stream of science and practice in authentic leadership with positive psychology. Positive psychology acknowledges the two historically well-executed missions of psychology, which are to care for the suffering and to prevent mental health problems. However, positive psychology brings powerful attention to the third mission of psychology, which is to build on strength and competence. The emphasis on this third mission is an exciting new mainstay of psychology that blends well with authentic leadership, focuses on competence, character strengths, and personal integrity. Positive psychology has been extended into the emerging domains of positive organizational behavior (POB) and positive organizational scholarship.

Leaders' historical challenge has been to keep themselves and those with whom they work healthy, happy and productive in the service of the organization. Douglas McGregor's focus on the human side of the enterprise always acknowledged that the primary

function of leadership, whether organization leaders made Theory X or Theory Y assumptions about people, was to manage the enterprise. McGregor considered both Theory X and Theory Y assumptions valid, but not universal. That is, it is essential for a leader or manager to correctly assess which set of assumptions apply to which individual(s). A new challenge for leaders is to help each other and their employees to grow, develop, and build on their core strengths, competencies, and virtues.

### **LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE**

Theory and research are the life-blood of the research scholar and academician. Practice is the life-blood of the professional leader. In addition to our body of philosophical, theoretical, and scientifically empirical books, articles, book chapters, and clinical monographs, we each have been engaged over the past two decades in professional practice in public service. By the mid-1990s we had each risen to senior leadership positions respectively in military service and international public health. As a result, we were in positions to put into practice some of our core notions about who leaders should be and how they should lead. We leave to those with whom we served to report on how each of us performed in our respective leadership roles and take for ourselves to make some comments on the leadership challenges we faced concerning healthy, happy, productive work. Our responsibilities were far more than academic exercises or case studies, and we each were privileged to serve with and report to leaders of great character and personal integrity. For us, the "rubber met the road" in the World Health Organization and in the United States Air Force's San Antonio Air Logistics Center.

### **World Health Organization**

Shortly after Jonathan became a program director in the World Health Organization, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland became director-general of W.H.O. with a mandate to lead

major organizational change and transformation. The executive directors and the program directors compose the leadership core of W.H.O. through which actions occur worldwide. However, being an international drug logistics professional for 20 years did not necessarily make Jonathan qualified for a senior leadership position. The international public health community is like too many business organizations that do not systematically groom their mid-range professionals for senior leadership. The functions and behaviors of senior leaders often differ markedly from those of professional experts, as well they should. All too often organizations thrust leading professional experts into senior leadership positions without systematic grooming and preparation for a very different kind of responsibility. Thus, for Jonathan, the assumption of a program directorship began a crash course in accelerated development to transform a public health professional into an effective senior leader within a several year period. At the core of the transformation were a strong, positive motivation to grow and three key mentoring resources providing information, emotional support, rapid feedback, and guidance.

Julian Barling at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada has concluded in his extensive leadership training work in a wide range of business and public settings that military organizations are about the only ones which uniformly do an excellent job of grooming their young and mid-career officers and noncommissioned officers for senior leadership positions. Thus, Jonathan's experience of being thrown into the fray based largely on excellent professional skills with the expectation that he would be an equally effective leader is not significantly at variance from much of corporate and public organizational practice. The intense, accelerated growth curve at work placed his personal health and family well-being in jeopardy. Fortunately, neither was lost, and he was able to experience an intense, positive, five-year growth period through which the director-general of W.H.O. was able to have him take on additional leadership

responsibilities in the service of the organization.

### **San Antonio Air Logistics Center**

Jim's experience as the senior reserve officer to the chief financial officer of the U.S. Air Force's largest logistics and maintenance depot, and later the senior reserve officer to the depot's commander, was somewhat different and posed a different set of challenges. With the signing of the base closure order by then President Bill Clinton during the summer of 1995, the San Antonio Air Logistics Center (SA-ALC) began a six year closure process that was the largest federal military closure in U.S. national history. How do you keep over 13,000 federal civil servants and military personnel healthy, happy, and productive when their jobs are going away and their workloads are being transferred to Georgia and Oklahoma? An \$8 billion business enterprise at the beginning of the closure process, the SA-ALC carried 40% of the active U.S. Air Force logistics and maintenance workload. Major General Lewis E. Curtis, center commander at the outset of the closure, told Jim he had one big case study in preventive stress management over the next six years.

While the years were challenging and difficult at times, the center's great leaders and leadership left a very positive benchmark for the closing of a large industrial organization, a much more positive legacy than the sad and painful demise of Eastern Airlines and its dozens of suicides. There was not a single life lost to suicide or workplace violence as a result of the closure process at the SA-ALC. There were no major workforce disruptions. There was over \$33 million in cost avoidance as a result of complaints that never happened—the result of systemic prevention initiatives. The prevention of negative outcomes in a difficult context may itself be interpreted as positive and was largely attributable to the outstanding work of great leaders at all levels in this organization and to the prevention initiatives of the commanding general's organizational clinical psychologist, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Klunder,

Ph.D. "Doc" Klunder coordinated initiatives from the base chaplains and counseling resources to public health and civilian personnel. As Executive Director Phillip W. Steely said throughout the process, expect great things from a great team. When the Air Force Materiel Command's General Lester Lyles and Texas's U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson officiated the closing ceremonies on 13 July 2001, a positive if sad chapter in U.S. Air Force history came to a close.

## **PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER**

Healthy, happy, productive work is neither a myth nor a fully achievable reality. We may think of it as an elusive goal for leaders and followers in organizations. It is a worthy target for which to aim, with the understanding that we cannot necessarily turn it into a metric and then check off that we have achieved it. This elusive nature of the age-old quest is first addressed in the lead article in this special issue. Thomas Wright and Russell Cropanzano pick up where Barry Staw left off in 1986. Each of the seven contributions offers a unique perspective or addresses a specific dimension, adding textural depth to our understanding of healthy, happy, productive work. We put the pieces together for the reader in this overview of the set of articles.

### **The Holy Grail**

Thomas Wright and Russell Cropanzano pick up Barry Staw's age-old quest for the "Holy Grail" of management, the belief that happy workers are productive workers. Staw's original conceptualization and measurement focused on defining happiness as job satisfaction and productivity as job performance. Wright and Cropanzano take the quest in a somewhat different direction, suggesting that happiness should be conceptualized not as job satisfaction, but rather as psychological well-being. They have developed a stream of research that does support a positive link between psychological well-

being and performance. At the core, the important questions to think about are: Are we defining happiness and productivity correctly? And, once we do, are we measuring them accurately?

## **Unintended Consequences**

Jerald Greenberg brings our attention to the darker side of the issue. Specifically, how do unfairness and injustice in the workplace serve to cause stress, unhappiness, negative affect, and – in this stream of consequences – ultimately cause health and related problems that interfere with productivity and job performance? Greenberg's approach offers executives and managers ways to avoid these unintended consequences of organizational actions. Open systems are healthy systems; when organizational justice processes are based on accurate, unbiased procedures that are transparently implemented, it goes a long way toward avoiding stress and mitigating negative outcomes. The remaining issues not resolved by these mechanisms can be positively addressed when leaders give employees voice and then listen carefully to that voice.

## **Politics and Women at Work**

Pamela Perrewé and Debra Nelson bring attention to issues where voice is important. Politics has historically been one of the more important soft-copy topics in organizational life with an underdeveloped research base. Perrewé and her colleagues have addressed the importance of political skills to avert negative outcomes and to enhance positive ones at work. Nelson and her colleagues have focused attention on women's professional stress and executive health. Together, with their unique interests and streams of research, they show how political skill can enhance the performance, healthy success, and health of women in the workplace. As women continue to break through the remaining glass ceilings that exist in organizations, political skills become an essential part of the toolkit for success on the other side.

## **Aristotle's Virtues at Work**

Joanne Gavin and Richard Mason bring to bear the philosophical tradition of Aristotle and his virtue ethics in addressing happiness at work. Two case studies, of The Container Store and TDIndustries, make their point that "virtuous" is a very appropriate, positive description of a healthy organization. They neither refer to happiness as job satisfaction in the organizational psychology tradition nor as humor in the lighthearted tradition. Rather, they take happiness more deeply in the Aristotle tradition of a virtue, an excellence, a worthy goal to pursue. Happiness is an authentic, holistic state of well-being; that is, both doing well and being well. For Gavin and Mason, happiness does not rest on materialism but rather on a deep sense of respect for the individual and his or her accomplishments.

## **One Strategic Virtue**

Within the tradition of virtues, Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez make the case for one of the virtues as having strategic value for organizations. Specifically, they advance the case for humility as a virtue that plays an important strategic role as a cornerstone for organizational learning, high-quality services to customers and employees, and organizational resilience. For Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez, humility is the antithesis of narcissism, the self-absorbed quality which in its extreme leads to lack of a secure grip on reality. Humility, as any virtue, can be overdone or underdone. Humility becomes an excellence in just the right amount and is a source of competitive advantage for strategic leaders and organizational cultures that possess it. Humility is highly compatible with health, with happiness, and with high performance.

## **The Great Texas Banking Crash**

The Great Texas Banking Crash wiped out the leading banks in Texas, as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) closed them down or transferred control to

non-Texans. Frost Bank was the one remaining bank in the state in which Texans were doing business with Texans. Joseph Grant and David Mack bring a highly charged account of organizational crisis into the picture, with the threat that crises pose to health, happiness, and productivity. As the chief executive officer (CEO) of one of Texas' largest commercial banks before the crisis, Grant experienced the crucible of difficult times and emerged as one of Texas' new banking leaders in the 21st Century. Grant and Mack tell the tale of how, through challenging experiences and personal insights, one of Texas' banking leaders stayed healthy through the crisis so as to again emerge as a happy, productive leader.

## **Balancing Work, Family...and Self**

Much has been written about work-family conflict, and there is the clear potential for such conflict for leaders, followers, and their families on today's highly competitive industrial battlefield. Jonathan Quick, Amy Henley, and James Campbell Quick address the work demands, the home demands, and the demands that leaders and followers alike place on themselves as contributors to the conflict. In addition to these basic structural demands that may cause conflict, there are accelerants that can add fuel to any work-family conflict. It need not be so! Balancing work, family, and oneself in a dynamic process may in fact lead to healthy, happy, and productive results. Rather than viewing this as a mathematical problem to be solved, we view it as a dynamic process in which balance and equilibrium are essential.


## **HAPPY/PRODUCTIVE WORKERS, POSITIVE/AUTHENTIC LEADERS**

The question we asked at the outset of this introduction concerned whether the positivism, the happiness, the excitement reported

by Libor Rostik was from within him or a reflection of his positive work environment at Chaparral Steel Company. Is it in the man (woman), or in the situation? We suggested that the pursuit of the happy/productive worker is a worthy one. That is, the pursuit of happiness is a worthy quest and, as Max Weber would argue, there is positive value in the pursuit of performance through productive activity.

In addition to the thesis of the happy/productive worker, we suggest adding the thesis of the positive/authentic leader. Positive psychology and POB bring new light to strengths-based management. Like the happy/productive worker, the positive/

authentic leader may be less an achievable goal than a worthy quest for leaders and executives alike. Character and personal integrity do make a difference. Character strengths are identifiable and measurable. Values, beliefs and attitudes do have consequences in actions and behavior. Therefore, leaders and workers need to examine themselves as much as their circumstances for the hallmarks of authentic transformational leadership include self-awareness... and a spirit of personal integrity.

 To order reprints of this article, please call +1(212)633-3813 or e-mail [reprints@elsevier.com](mailto:reprints@elsevier.com)



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a detailed treatment of the happy/productive worker thesis, please see Barry M. Staw's article entitled "Organizational Psychology and the Pursuit of the Happy/Productive Worker," in *California Management Review*, 1986, 28, 40–53. Three of the better works related to the Hawthorne Studies and the effects on workers are Fritz J. Roethlisberger's *Management and Morale* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), his book with William J. Dickson entitled *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), and Elton Mayo's *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York: MacMillan, 1960). For the original discussion of the preventive management model, see James Campbell Quick and Jonathan D. Quick's *Organizational Stress and Preventive Management* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1984) and our "Corporate Warfare: Preventing Combat Stress and Battle Fatigue" with Debra Nelson, *Organizational Dynamics*, 1989, 18, 65–79. The rubric "preventive management" had actually been used by Herbert B. Elkind in his edited volume entitled *Preventive Management: Mental Hygiene in Industry* (New York, NY: B. C. Forbes, 1931). Presented from a psychiatric perspective, the volume was an outgrowth of the mental health movement in America during the early 1900s. Elkind's volume was not positioned in the context of preventive medicine and public health, which is the context of our prevention model.

For a detailed treatment of authentic leadership, see the Gallup Leadership Institute website ([www.gli.unl.edu](http://www.gli.unl.edu)) and Bruce Avolio and Fred Luthans' chapter entitled "Authentic Leadership Development" in *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Founda-*

*tions of a New Discipline* edited by Kim S. Cameron, Robert E. Quinn, and Jane E. Dutton (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003). See also George R. Goethals and Georgia Sorenson's edited *Encyclopedia of Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004). For additional information on the emerging domain of positive psychology, see also Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman's *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (New York, NY: American Psychological Association and Oxford University Press, 2004). For additional information on positive organizational behavior (POB), see two framing articles by Fred Luthans, which are "Positive Organizational Behavior: Developing and Managing Psychological Strengths," *Academy of Management Executive*, 2002, 16, 57–72, and "The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behavior," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2002, 23, 695–706.

We would like to thank our mentors for their faithful efforts on our behalf as we grew and developed as leaders. Jim thanks the following retired U.S. Air Force leaders: Major General John Howard Burris, Major General Winfred "Chuck" Carroll, Senior Executive Service officers Phillip W. Steely and Tommy Jordan, Major General Paul Bielowicz, Major General William Cohen, Brigadier General Robert Murdock, Colonels Lloyd E. Milliman, Will Fagan, and Robert (Bob) Rasmussen, Captains Donald Blanks and John Kimmel, and Benito Cardenas. Jonathan thanks Dr. Robert Berg, Ron O'Connor, and Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland. For a more complete discussion of the closure process and the organizational health center concept pioneered by Colonel Joyce A.

Adkins, BSC, USAF, see James Campbell Quick, Lois E. Tetrik, Joyce Adkins, and Charles Klunder's "Occupational Health Psychology" in Arthur M. Nezu, Christine Maguth Mezu, and Pamela A. Geller's edited Volume 9, *Handbook of Psychology* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), which includes references to Colonel Adkins' earlier work as well as our own.

Jim thanks especially John and Judy Goolsby for the generous direction of a significant anonymous gift to the College of Business Administration, in concert with UTA Vice President Mark Martin and Dean Daniel D. Himarios, for the foundation of the Goolsby Leadership Academy. The Goolsby Leadership Academy's mission is to advance the knowledge and practice of leadership through students, scholars, and executives interacting with a spirit of personal integrity.

For a more detailed treatment of happiness and the virtues from an Aristotelian

perspective, see an English translation from the ancient Greek of his *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998) or Robert Solomon's contemporary interpretations of Aristotle in his *Ethics and Excellence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and *A Better Way to Think About Business* (New York: Oxford Business Press, 1999). For an in-depth examination of the value of a strong work ethic and performance orientation, see the English translation by Talcott Parsons from the original German (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*) of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, England: Allen & Unwin, 1930). For an examination of the importance of character and personal integrity for executives, see Joanne H. Gavin and colleagues' "A Spirit of Personal Integrity: The Role of Character in Executive Health," in *Organizational Dynamics*, 2003, 32, 165–179.

**James Campbell Quick** is John and Judy Goolsby Distinguished Professor and Executive Director, Goolsby Leadership Academy at the University of Texas at Arlington. His first *Organizational Dynamics* article with Debra L. Nelson and his brother won a 1990 Distinguished Professional Publication Award and it was reprinted by the U.S. Air Force Academy and the U.S. Army War College.

**Jonathan D. Quick**, a family physician and public health official, is president and CEO of Management Sciences for Health (MSH), a 1000-person nonprofit organization working to strengthen health systems in developing countries. From 1998 to 2004, he was director, essential drugs and medicines policy, for the World Health Organization, Geneva.