

“Enhancing performance through natural preferences”



Leslie Rose McDonald
President, Pathfinders CTS, Inc.

When we are doing work that is enjoyable and naturally suited to our talents and preferences, we tend to be successful at it. And the more successful we are at something, the more we tend to enjoy it for the satisfaction that it brings. Conversely, when we are doing work that is not in our preference/enjoyment zone, we tend to not do it as well. Profound in its simplicity, this Performance-Enjoyment theory can be effectively applied by managers to maximize the performance of their employees.

Some people will get inspired energy from analyzing data, planning a project, writing, brainstorming, or solving a problem. Others might enjoy organizing, collaborating, mentoring or teaching. It's about what makes them feel good at the end of the day.

Understanding that people will tend to be more successful and satisfied with work in their preference zone, it makes sense for managers to be more aware of their employee preferences so that there can be a greater focus in aligning preferences to job tasks and assignments.

Career development, therefore, is one area where the manager needs to know and understand what drives each person's job satisfaction, so that career potential can be realized. This can generally be accomplished through observation and open discussion. Here are some ways that you can be more aware of those strengths and preferences in your employees:

- 1) Observe them in action on a day to day basis. When a person is in their preferred “zone” – that is they are doing the work that inspires and fulfills them– they will exude a natural energy. You will be able to literally see or sense that energy radiating around them if you watch for it.
- 2) Notice what kinds of projects or situations your employees tend to gravitate to or volunteer for. Because people are drawn to that which is naturally fun and enjoyable, they will frequently offer to take on situations that they are attracted to, even when their plates are already overflowing. Why? Because being in their passion zone gives them energy and sustenance to do everything else!
- 3) Be aware of aspects of the job that the employee tends to avoid or procrastinate. Chances are, these are less preferred functions that the person probably does not perform well when they do get around to it.
- 4.) Initiate a conversation about their job satisfaction and career goals. Employees will appreciate the fact that you take the time and care enough to have a focused dialogue about it. It makes them feel appreciated and valued.
- 5) Ask: What aspects of your work are most stimulating and satisfying for you? How are they reflected in your job performance? What aspects of your job might you want to do more of? What kinds of things would you like to do that your job does not include right now? What aspects are the least enjoyable for you? What could make them more palatable?

While it is unrealistic to believe that each person can customize his or her job to do only those aspects that they love, a wise manager will do his or her best to be aware of employee preferences, and tailor the job or special projects toward those natural talents wherever possible. The result will be greater motivation and satisfaction for the employee, and higher performance for the business.

Adapted from the author's column, previously published in the Syracuse Post Standard