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Book Review: Managing for Happiness: Games, Tools, and Practices to Motivate Any Team

ARTICLE

By Steve Berczuk | August 24, 2016

SUMMARY

Jurgen Appelo's useful and fun-to-read book *Managing for Happiness: Games, Tools, and Practices to Motivate Any Team* gives you concrete tools to identify ways to help your team be happier and to create environments where people can thrive and be more productive. Despite the word *managing* being in the title, the book is a beneficial read for anyone.

You have probably seen the impact that poor morale (or an otherwise unhappy team) can have on productivity. People management is a complex task with challenging problems. While managers often focus on metrics that revolve around things like productivity, morale and happiness also drive the effectiveness of teams, but managers have a dearth of tools to measure and influence these qualities.

Management is important—as Jurgen Appelo tells us, too important to leave just to managers. Appelo's useful and fun-to-read book ***Managing for Happiness: Games, Tools, and Practices to Motivate Any Team*** gives you concrete tools to identify ways to help your team be happier and to create environments where people can thrive and be more productive.

Despite the word *managing* being in the title, the book is a beneficial read for anyone, from a senior executive to a new member of a team. While some of Appelo's advice involves corporate policies that few can directly influence, many of the practices and tools will be relevant to almost anyone on a team, such as how to better understand personal situations and introduce change in a wider context.

Aside from having useful content, this book is fun to read. The writing style is engaging, mixing a conversational style and humor with crisply presented information. Even the

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as to read linearly. The photos, drawings, and text elements highlight and emphasize key points and quotations. Even a small detail such as the color-coded chapters that match their corresponding pages in the endnotes keeps the text engaging and makes it easier to flip to the back of the book for more handy information.

Because of the care the author put into the design, this is a book to consider getting in paper form. While I am interested in management practices and enjoy learning more about them, I rarely find books on the subject to be real page-turners. This one, however, is surprisingly difficult to put down.

An inspiring book sometimes can also be disappointing when you leave it with no clear idea about how to put the ideas into practice. This is not the case here. You can use many of the exercises in the book immediately to identify paths to a better team. There were a number of times where I found activities I was able to use in a meaningful way the next day, with surprisingly good results. After reading this book, you'll feel that change is possible, no matter how stuck your organization seems.

Managing for Happiness builds on the work of Appelo's earlier book ***Management 3.0***. The numbering classifies the various generations of management as an evolution, from hierarchies (1.0) to fads (2.0) to complexity (3.0). While the ideas here are based on *Management 3.0* (which is **also a valuable resource**), this book stands on its own. *Managing for Happiness* is both a primer on managing people in a way that creates a motivating environment and a toolbox for measuring and improving your practices.

Many of the ideas in this book may sound familiar, but that is not a flaw. Even ideas that are common sense are not common practices, and we often need reminders of how to facilitate collaboration. Appelo has done a good job of reviewing a broad range of work, as evidenced by the long list of references. While I felt that I learned a lot reading *Managing for Happiness,* I also left wanting to learn more, and thanks to the endnotes, I now have quite a long "to-read" list, covering subjects from business to philosophy to organizational research to psychology. People are complicated, and people management needs an interest and skills in a wide range of disciplines.

The practical nature of the book is supported by stories in each chapter illustrating situations that may resonate with your work situation. As appropriate for a book that has managing complexity as its focus, Appelo acknowledges that each practice and exercise can be adapted to your situation. Each chapter ends with a "Tips and Variations" section that lists quotes from those who have used and adapted the ideas in the chapter, validating both that these are practical exercises rather than concepts, and that every situation is different.

Whether you are a manager or a member of a team, Appelo makes change seem possible, and reading this book may make you feel more hopeful about improving your processes. You may end this book with a very long list of things to try, and maybe also a long list of things to read, if you want to go deeper. Even though it would be great to have a quick read that solves your problems, helping to enable effective teams is hard work. *Managing for Happiness* will give you tools to make that work easier, and this is likely to be a book that you refer to again and again.

Topics: leadership, people management, teams, tools

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Steve Berczuk is a Principal Software Engineer with experience as a manager, Scrum Master and technical lead in Boston, MA. The author of *Software Configuration Management Patterns: Effective Teamwork, Practical Integration*, he is a recognized expert in software configuration management and agile software development. Steve is passionate about helping teams work effectively to produce quality software. He has an M.S. in operations research from Stanford University and an S.B. in Electrical Engineering from MIT, and is a Certified ScrumMaster. Contact Steve at steve@berczuk.com or visit berczuk.com and follow his blog at blog.berczuk.com.

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