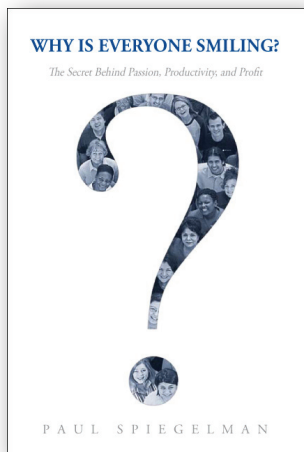


# THE NEW YORK ENTERPRISE REPORT<sup>®</sup>

AUGUST 2008



## HOW TO KEEP YOUR EMPLOYEES SMILING

The following adaptation from *Why is Everyone Smiling?* by Paul Spiegelman (Brown Books Publishing Group, 2007) includes three of the many actionable tips for improving the culture of any small to midsize company.

“OUR SIMPLE BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY IS CALLED the ‘circle of growth.’ If we gain our employee’s loyalty first, that will drive customer loyalty. Loyal customers will drive profit into our business. Our commitment is to invest our profits back in our employees to give them better tools and resources to do their jobs. And the cycle continues. Simply put, our company exists to enhance the lives of the people that work with us.” – Paul Spiegelman

Why “do” culture at all? What’s the point?

My brothers and I never set out to do it. And we’d been doing it for more than a dozen years before we even knew there was a word for it. We always sensed that how we treated our people made a big difference, but we didn’t start building up a program systematically until we saw results on the bottom line. After five years of double-digit revenue increases and a triple-digit surge in profits, we’re building on it with a vengeance.

Here’s a list of practical tactics and programs that have helped Beryl management create the great numbers. Variants of these strategies, applied consistently, can help turn almost any commodity business into a place where people really like to work – which, sadly, is almost never the case.

### Helping Those in Need

Our company, Beryl, started as a family business, and we readily extend that family sensibility to everybody who works with us. Reaching out to distressed coworkers is what we do. It’s definitely not a case of me taking care of them – the program is not a paternal or hierarchical thing. The idea is that everybody in the company needs to take care of one another in a true “family style” support network.

BerylCares is the name of the behind-the-scenes program that gathers information about events in our coworkers’ lives. We can’t recognize births, weddings and other joyful happenings and then turn a blind eye to personal calamities. I am notified of each case and can do any number of things: write a note card, call someone, make a hospital visit or attend a funeral. If our culture preaches taking care of our own, the caring has to start in my office.

All of these outreaches are memorable and they emotionally impact me as well as the people in distress. Not too long ago, a coworker got his knee crushed in a car accident. Our COO and I went to see him in the hospital and found out that his glasses got smashed in the wreck, too. The poor guy couldn’t tell who we were until he heard our voices, and he was having a hard time getting food

[MORE>](#)

from his dinner plate into his mouth. He was too preoccupied with all the pain in his leg to even think about his glasses, so we asked HR to see what they could do. Somehow, they tracked down his prescription, and with the help of a few coworkers on his team, they managed to get him a new pair the next day.

## Making it Fun

You can't have a good culture without having fun. We believe that so strongly that our Human Resources group is formally titled the Department of Great People and Fun. Beryl conducts many events throughout the year expressly for that purpose. On the simple side, we have themes like "Dress Like It's the '70s" and "Pajama Day" and "Crazy Hat Day". On "Ranger Night," we'll take another big group of people to watch the local major league baseball team (that is, the Texas Rangers; we are based in Bedford, Texas). Our schedule is changing and usually packed, and people really get into the events.

The last time I spoke to an MBA class about Beryl, students from companies like Lockheed Martin and Burlington Northern Santa Fe were strongly questioning the feasibility of doing all this stuff while trying to run a practical business operation. One student had some call center management experience and knew how important it was for companies like ours to keep people on the phones to maintain service levels.

He was particularly challenging about what he kind of derisively called the "strategy of fun." I told everybody, "Look, I don't run a theme park. First and foremost, we're in business to make money and perform. But we do have technologies that allow us to monitor performance and schedule people in a way that makes smart use of culture, training and development. And they pay off for us in a big way in terms of dollars."

I think they got the message. After all, a call-in center employee's state of mind has a direct connection with how we handle callers.

## Evangelizing the Values

In the early days of the business I was very cynical about mission statements. I never really understood them or believed that they had a tangible impact. However, after a while I realized that it would be much easier for coworkers to make daily decisions if the company had a simple code of ethics. A large group of people got together and hammered out a value system over the course of many long discussions. Once we rolled that out, I was impressed at how quickly the new value system became part of our culture. These are the values we named:

- Passion for customer service
- Never sacrificing quality
- Always doing the right thing
- Spirit of camaraderie

You can walk out onto the call center floor and ask any advisor what the official company values are and he or she will be able to tell you. They often analyze day-to-day decisions according to those values. Faced with a tough choice in some business situation, we might simply say, "Are we taking the high road and demonstrating integrity?"

When people have rules of thumb in front of them on their desks, it helps them keep decisions contained and helps Beryl grow its business in a more disciplined way. The values have become so important they're actually part of our performance appraisal process. Employees get graded annually on their adherence to the values, and that becomes part of their bonus potential.