

## **I Love My Job!**

By Bette Price, CMC

It was September 11, 2002, and Tom Brokaw was hosting a Town Hall television program, paying tribute to the many New Yorkers who were personally touched by the horrific events of 9/11 one year before. All were compelling in their stories. Yet one stood out because of his incredible passion for his job despite his personal loss and an unending pain.

Recalling a conversation on the cell phone that tragic morning, a grieving fireman shared moments from his last conversation with his twin brother. “Hey, how’s it going?” he playfully asked his brother during the early morning call. His brother’s response was stunning. Unaware that a plane that had just struck the World Trade Center, this fireman quickly learned that his twin brother, also a fireman, was now enroute to the scene of what would become the gravest attack ever launched on America. Quickly the fireman’s mood changed from one of playful chatter to one of angst and concern. That was the last time they talked. To this day his twin brother’s remains have not been found.

Here was a man who had every reason to question his own future as a fireman. Staying in a career that had taken the life of his twin brother and caused him incredible personal pain. Yet when Brokaw asked, “How do you feel about continuing to wear the uniform?” this grieving fireman shifted his body, pulled his shoulders back and proudly responded, “I’m proud to wear this uniform. I love my job!”

What was it about this fireman’s attitude that allowed him to set aside the tragic loss of his twin brother, knowing that at any time he too could face the possibility of injury or death? As he elaborated on his passion for his work, one thing stood out – the loving, caring supportive environment in which he works. The environment made the difference.

### **Lessons to be learned**

Today’s leaders can take a lesson from this fireman. Research tells us that 70 percent of one’s work environment is directly attributed to the employees leader. Here, we saw demonstrated the powerful impact that a leader has on creating an environment where despite difficulty, bad times, even tragic times, the people who come to work every day are still committed and *love their job*. Leaders must accept the task of inspiring the many whom they serve by creating caring, trusting, and supportive environments that enable people to withstand the greatest challenges ever imagined. Then, and then alone, will they garner the loyalty and commitment of employees who despite great obstacles, persist, because they love their jobs. This kind of leadership exists, but we definitely need to see more of it in the coming years.

At Radio Shack’s corporate headquarters in downtown Ft. Worth, Texas, this kind of leadership exists. Walk down the halls of this corporate office and you will feel a strong, positive emotion the moment you encounter an employee in the hall. The feeling gains momentum as you move from one department to another. People smile, engage one-another, and you get a strong sense that at this company, people like coming to work. Oh, things aren’t always perfect there. The company is not void of any challenges. But you do find that people who work there seem to face their challenges with an attitude of teamwork

and team resolve. There is a culture of support that flows throughout and embedded in that culture is a commitment to work as a team to help break through the tough times and share the good times. It's a feeling of trust and support that comes straight from the top—from the company's Chairman and CEO, Len Roberts.

When Roberts joined the company several years ago he told managers, "From this day forward there are only going to be two jobs in this company. You either serve the customer directly, or you serve someone who does." This was Roberts' way of letting everyone know that to work at Radio Shack, you served one another—customers, whether internal or external. He demonstrated from the start that the environment would be one of caring and support. "You can't fake caring," Roberts says. "If you really understand why leaders fail, it's because they are unable to care." That caring environment has been an integral part of the company's competitive advantage.

An opposite approach can be found at some of the other Fortune 500 companies, better left unnamed. But, you see it reflected in employee turnover and in falling stock prices. And, you'll feel it if you ever walk down the halls of their offices. Somber faces on the employees who fail to look up to nod or say "hello," and in their slumping, un-energetic posture. You can feel the stress, the pressure, and tension. It's so strong you can cut it with a knife, and everybody knows it.

### **Going Forward**

Today's leaders who have created an uptight, careless environment are in for a tough time in a short time. Sure, there's work to be done and times are tough. But, when your best employees feel overworked and undervalued, guess who will be the first to leave when the economy takes an upward turn. And it will. Sooner than some think, and when that happens, those are the companies that will suffer an incredible negative impact. Jack Kahl, founder of Manco, says, "People feel the coldness and the non-appreciation, so the good people leave, and what you end up with is that there are not enough good people to keep your company together. You end up down there with the dregs and eventually you end up in bankruptcy." He's seen it. That's why when this successful entrepreneur is asked to speak to his peers, his favorite speech is one he calls *Don't Park Your Heart at the Curb*. Many leaders fail to develop themselves from a human perspective, Kahl says. He doesn't understand their fear. "The greatest corporations in the world and the greatest passionate military or spiritual leaders are the people that touch your soul, not your head," he says. In business people can sense that "this is a human being, not just a being, not just a bottom-line person."

The difference, therefore, is all about leadership. And now, more than ever before in the last decade, it is time for a shift to a leadership that cares about people as well as profits. Corporate scandals have eroded trust and sucked the passion out of employees who once believed that their contributions mattered. As the economy strengthens, companies with value-balanced leadership will be best poised to rebound quickly. They will be the companies best positioned to hire the best talented, committed employees needed to rebuild and sustain the kind of long-term growth that will ensure future profitability. They will be the leading companies of the future.

As a leader, this is your moment of opportunity. Are you prepared to meet the challenge? Have you created an environment in which despite all difficulties, your best people will be as quick as the fireman to say, "I love my job?" Let's hope you have because it will determine your company's resilience and serve as a predictor of your potential for the future.

**Give us your feedback. What are you doing to ensure that your best people love their jobs? Go to [www.PriceGroupLeadership.com](http://www.PriceGroupLeadership.com) and tell us what you're doing.**

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