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Never trust a manager who always loves what you do. The manager who is full of nothing but praise and “keep-it-ups” is either lazy or incompetent. It’s easy to be nice, to give high marks and move on. (Nobody complains about the teacher who gives all A’s.) But great employees want to be challenged, to have new and intriguing assignments.

“Put the fish on the table and let everyone smell it”. This term came from Roche, the big healthcare company, where a divisional CEO was frustrated that employees were so nice that they refused to confront the division’s mediocre prospects. One day he mis-remembered an odd expression from a Swiss psychologist and told his team, “Let’s put the fish on the table and let everyone smell it.” Using that sentence was just surprising enough to get employees talking about his worries, and we know this about organizations: “Change the conversation, change the culture.” It is now high praise at Roche to be introduced as “Someone who really puts the fish on the table.”

A Magnificent Intolerance. You don’t get what you want or what you need; you get what you refuse to accept less than. We now have a workplace where virtually all employees were raised on positive reinforcement. The unintended consequence is systematic self-satisfaction. Managers get positive reinforcement from giving positive reinforcement, creating a spiral of self-congratulation that tends to produce feel-good management that, sadly, often translates to soft, slow management. The antidote is to shove the organization along another axis, the competitive-surprise-experimentation one... and we do mean “shove,” for as Dale has concluded, the increase in performance in an organization is predictable: you get only as much as you demand.

The Generalist is Dead, or “Make yourself special”. Though most people don’t think see themselves as specialists, the Lovable Hard-ass insists that everyone must put the “special” in “specialist.” An example...When Jim Potts helped his son open Lewis & Clark Outfitters, a retailer of outdoor gear, the senior Potts didn’t have much product expertise, so he decided to focus his attention on the one product he did understand: socks. He called the company that makes SmartWool socks and told them that he intended to become their number one store. They told him that he’d do well to sell a thousand pair a year. His quixotic response: “I can sell that many in a week.” His record is 1320 pair in one weekend. How did he do it? He insisted on finding a way to make himself especially useful to customers and to the store by taking the mundane and making it exceptional. Mere effort isn’t enough. This is the standard: Make Yourself Special.

“Are you crazy?” In high-achievement organizations the response to new goals is often, “Are you crazy?” That the sound of leaders truly leading, taking their teams leaping into the future.

Why is it that a maker of horse blankets more than tripled prices and sales – not just dollar volume, but unit sales – went up?

How did a manager alter one sentence and cut his off-hours management time by 90%?

How is it that the economy is overrun with bureaucrats and yet no one ever set out to be a bureaucrat and no ever set out to hire one?

Why is it that the sentence “I have an idea!” is dreaded by most managers rather than welcomed?

How can it be that the country’s winningest coach insists that he never talked to his teams about winning?

