Happiness Is a Full Bucket


Sometimes, it takes a book to serve as a reminder of what is important in the day-to-day business of life: Celebrate what is good; accentuate the positive; lift people up.

Using the metaphor of a dipper and a bucket, Rath and Clifton theorize that everyone—including principals, teachers, children, and parents—has an invisible bucket that is sometimes full, sometimes empty. When the dipper is used to deplete others’ buckets through poisonous remarks, attacks on their self-worth, and hostile acts, the buckets of both parties empty. The authors blend personal stories, research-based studies, and easy-to-use strategies to help readers understand the power of being a bucket filler. By riding the recent tailwind of the re-emerging positive psychology movement, this national bestseller seems to garner allegiance more on concept than on literary merit. Some stories drag needlessly and many of the strategies would be useful only for those wholly unaccustomed to giving even remote amounts of praise and recognition.

Without doubt, though, the idea that living positively and focusing on people’s strengths is essential. Our daily contacts with others give each of us the profound opportunity to fill the buckets and build the self-esteem of those around us.

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Sailing Unpredictable Waters


How can sailing and being a principal be alike? In Lessons Learned, Roland Barth manages to link the two. With style and wit, Barth combines his many years as an avid sailor and school principal to give us 24 rules for creating a healthy and positive workplace culture.

Barth tells many stories about his misadventures, both at sea and at work, and the “cruising rules” he derives from each sailing story turn into “working rules” he suggests principals follow. When Barth got lost while attempting to navigate with an old Esso map, he and his friend read the map wrong, then compounded their mistake by ignoring landmarks and navigation aids. They eventually found themselves sailing into a harbor some two miles south of their destination. “That moment I was reminded of the words of Albert Einstein: ‘Only two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity.’”

Barth turns this into Working Rule 10—“Mistakes rarely become problems unless compounded by more mistakes”—and illustrates the analogy by telling about the time when, as a principal, he violated school policy by accepting a gift from a student’s parents. When the parents later requested a particular teacher for their child, Barth had to decide whether to compound his mistake by acquiescing or risk an uproar by holding to school placement policy. He concludes, “Unless there’s a darn good reason not to, ‘attend to policies’—and landmarks and navigation aids—even when they are contrary to what you wish they were—and where you wish they were.”

I found Barth’s comparisons of the principal’s workplace to a boat trip poignant but a little too exhaustive for those of us unfamiliar with sailing. If you know the terminology—and enjoy sailing—you will understand this book at a much deeper level. However, if you just want to listen to an old friend’s pearls of wisdom, this is the book for you.

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