

Defining the FISH philosophy, and how store managers can effectively implement and maintain this philosophy in Curry's stores.

This dissertation introduces and explains the rationale behind the FISH philosophy and examines the ramifications of its implementation in the High Street brown and white goods retailer Curry's.

Introduction - where it originated

The FISH Philosophy story begins in 1998 with John Christensen, Current Chief Executive Officer (or "Playground Director" as he likes to be referred to) of Charterhouse Learning visiting the Seattle's world-renown Pike Place Fish Market. He was overawed as to how involved and happy the workers in the fish market were, taking into account the rather mundane and repetitive nature of their job. They gave total commitment to their customers, throwing fish to one another in response to customer orders. They often involved the customers, and it was an altogether happy and animated environment for both worker and customer alike.

How the philosophy germinated

It seemed to John Christensen that making the workplace a fun place to work, for workers and customers alike, can be almost contagious for all involved. The positive and happy environment creates improved commitment from the staff to the customer, increases belonging for staff members, and consequently increases loyalty to the company on the part of the customer.

And as 'the word' spreads, so does productivity and profitability.

It had been John Christensen's lifelong ambition to find a way to convert the workplace into a happy, creative and productive environment, and his experience of the Seattle Fish Market led to the four principles of his FISH Philosophy

- i. Choose your Attitude
  - about having a positive approach, feeling valued and be able to accomplish goals
- ii. Be There
  - attendance at work in body, spirit and mind
- iii. Play
  - people may think play is the opposite of work, but by engaging in workplace fun and laughter, work becomes more enjoyable, less of a chore and more productive
- iv. Make their Day
  - encouragement, praise, freedom of practice, increased responsibility (with appropriately added accountability) and appreciation leads to positive response and a happy and fulfilled workforce

Could the FISH Philosophy help in a retail electrical environment?

Electrical retailers, in particular the multi-national chains, have, by and large become infamous for their cavalier "pile them high, sell them cheap and bolt on an expensive warranty" attitude with consumers. The trend seems to be to treat the customer as a number, and a disinteresting one at that. This attitude is

subsequently carried over to inter-staff relationships where colleagues simply compete for target-related sales at the expense of good team spirit.

Staff morale suffers, and this in turn manifests itself in a less than satisfactory level of customer service.

The competition on the high street, dominated as it is by about six major players, faces further competition from supermarkets where consumers prefer to serve themselves than be served by someone with a lack of commitment to customer service. This customer indifference leads to a further lack of differentiation on the part of what has become an increasingly discerning consumer, who will quickly turn to the local family run electrical store (where they may pay a higher price to obtain better personal service), or choose to have no contact at all with a living person by using the internet (as a more convenient and cheaper method of completing a purchase).

There can be no doubt that applying the FISH Philosophy in the retail electrical sector, it could help engender greatly improved inter-staff and customer-facing relationships.

Therefore, it must be concluded that the implementation by management of any technique, as in the FISH Philosophy - where Choosing an appropriate Attitude, Being There, Play, Making their Day - brings improvement and will help take personal, business and sales activity (and subsequently, profitability) to "the next level".

Much can be learned from the FISH Philosophy, and while the four defining principles seem easy, they can, in practice, sometimes be hard to implement. As far as a retail electrical store group like Curry's is concerned, there must be a firm element of two-way traffic.

Aside from watching the video and reading the relevant documentation, management need to pro-actively encourage their staff to live the FISH Philosophy. The principles must be incorporated into shop-floor store life in order that work becomes a form of daily reward rather than just an incentive to daily remuneration.

In order to practice the FISH Philosophy, managers will have to have to learn to:

- increase energy and morale in the workplace
- to use the four principles of the FISH philosophy to manage change and stress in the workplace - offering "power without paralysis"
- be a creative and innovative team-builder by connecting with their team members (employees) at their level
- use the FISH Philosophy to improve trust and develop integrity in the workplace and business
- reduce staff turnover as a result of a heightened moral
- encourage communication of this new-found enthusiasm to customers through positive interaction

Implementation at Curry's

There can be no doubt that there are serious challenges to face in implementing the FISH Philosophy. Store managers will have to make serious considerations and undertake a degree of change in order for it to work.

Embracing the Philosophy will have to be directed from the upper echelons of the company - the directorate of the Dixon Group. The directorate will in turn cascade it down, via the human resource and training function, to regional and subsequently local management.

It should be implemented nationwide across all 380 Curry's stores to ensure all staff are aware of it - it is important not only for all staff, but also for the customer. There should be no differentiation in good customer service across any of the branches nationwide otherwise customer loyalty to the brand would be affected.

Implementation would necessitate the showing the FISH video and utilising the other training and case-study material (which also demonstrates the diverse range of business types embracing the FISH Philosophy) available from Charterhouse, initially at management level. The company would need the support of its managers for this to work. This would be organised via the HR and training department which already makes a considerable investment in staff training. The initial training should be in established FISH format, as a hands-on introduction. Any barriers to its introduction would be assuaged by practical example and case-study, although it is likely that the benefits of its introduction would be quickly realised by management.

Managers, having learnt how to 'sell' the idea to their teams will then cascade the FISH Philosophy training downwards at either regional or store-level training sessions, and follow-up to help deal with any changes they may encounter. They must also promote continual involvement to ensure momentum of the new-found Philosophy is maintained.

Any changes necessary require steerage from above. There is no doubt that anything contributing to lower absenteeism from work, greater enthusiasm and motivation on the shop floor and ultimately greater productivity and profitability will be actively endorsed by directorate and management alike.

An example of applying the four FISH principles in the Curry's workplace:

1. Choose your Attitude
  - encourage team members to think positively before arriving at work - perhaps arrange a pre-shop opening breakfast with team pep talk
2. Be There
  - ask staff members to act on something immediate - perhaps a stock update or managers special re-price - don't leave something for tomorrow that could be completed today
3. Play
  - instigate a game during opening hours - each member of staff to move a piece on a checkers board each time they make a sale and award a small token for "taking a piece"
4. Make their Day
  - do something nice during the day - compliment a team member in earshot of a customer

Post-implementation

The directorate and management have to ensure that the implementation of the FISH Philosophy does not instil any barriers between staff. They also have to ensure the smooth transition from any previous practices, while at the same time not discounting existing good practice which may 'work' to a lesser or greater extent than the FISH Philosophy. It is not, and must not be viewed as a competition between staff to gain extra recognition that they would otherwise have not earned.

Checks also must be made that where some staff may appear more enthusiastic than others, team spirit is not compromised.

No new practice in the workplace can succeed without tangible and measurable results for both management and workforce teams alike.

Internal communication must be fully maintained in order to avoid staff 'making up what they perceive not to know'.

Following its introduction, it will be necessary to measure:

- whether it has worked and made a positive difference
- if there has been a subsequent personal commitment on the part of all involved to maintain the momentum
- whether everybody is sharing the success
- if staff retention is higher
- that customer satisfaction is higher
- that customer footfall and sales have actually increased

#### Bibliography:

John Christensen, ChartHouse Learning "Playground Director" biography on-line; Charterhouse Learning; 17 May 2004; Burnsville Minnesota; Available from: [www.charthouse.com/charthouse/media\\_kit\\_jcBio.asp](http://www.charthouse.com/charthouse/media_kit_jcBio.asp) [Accessed 17 January 2005]