

## Creating Confident Organizations

A CEO to CEO Quarterly Newsletter



FROM THE DESK OF BOB WILSON

### A Best Friend at Work

Dear Fellow CEO:

If you haven't read the 1999 Buckingham / Coffman bestseller, "First, Break all the Rules", I strongly encourage you to do so. It's a terrific read and full of information that you can put to use immediately to improve your efforts as a leader.

Here's the premise. The authors went through research they had done with the Gallup Organization to determine if there were employee survey questions whose answers actually differentiated company performance. They found 12 that qualified. It's a sound premise that Buckingham and Coffman built a book (and now a series of books) around giving managers insight into how they could become more successful. The logic is impeccable.

In conversations with leaders about the book, it's not uncommon for them to agree with the relevance of each of the questions – often finding errors in their own ways and looking to change some of their behaviors as a result of the insight. However, many leaders just don't get why one specific question belongs. "Do I have a best friend at work?" That question is, by far, the most controversial. A typical leaders' response is, "Why would that matter?" I can't say my response was a whole lot different. But, now I know why it matters. And I thought you might want to know why as well.

To start out with, friendship can be a difficult thing for me, especially as seen by outsiders. From my perspective, I've always thought I had just enough friends – neither too many, nor too few.

Looking back, I think I had the normal amount of friends in high school and college. When I was single and in the work force, I seemed to have plenty of friends too. Once I got married and especially after having children, our circle of friends seemed to decrease with each passing year. There were friends we made that were in similar stages of life, who had similar interests and shared proximity of habits. Investing in and keeping those friends through moves and changes didn't seem to matter all that much to me as our life, outside of work, seemed to focus predominantly on family.

Once I started the business, even less time was available for friendship. My hours were long and the time that wasn't spent working was spent being a husband and father. Occasionally, Dana and I would get together with another couple or go to a party, but, the reality was, we had so little time to spend together without kids that we were jealous of it. We really didn't want to spend time with other people just to spend time together.

I spent eight years working by myself before hiring the first Advisa employee. Sure, during that time, I made business friends both within our client base and among the network of P. I. licensees and consultants. But, as both the business and family grew, the time available to invest in those friendships became more and more limited. It only seemed natural to make investments of time and emotion in family. As a result, now that the kids are all out of the house, I can look back on my time playing the roles of business owner / father / husband and can comfortably say, "I don't regret a thing." I don't have the guilt of having missed games or teacher meetings or father son talks. I was there. The other side of that was that outside of family, I really didn't have many friends. And other than family, I really couldn't say I had a best friend. Oh well.

In 1994, when I hired my first employee, friendship wasn't part of the picture. I was looking for people to help grow the business. And I knew that there would be times when hiring mistakes would be made that would have to be rectified. I knew that at some point, I'd have to fire somebody for some reason.



And I have – several times. It didn't seem like a good thing to create situations where friendship could become a barrier to making performance based decisions.

It's been fourteen years since that first employee. Of our 16 employees, tenure includes people of 13, 10, 9, 8, 7, 5 and 4 years. We hire with the intent of creating career opportunities and we've been fortunate with those we've brought into the business. I've come to know all of our employees well. We've lived through births, deaths, operations, marriages, divorces, sadness, happiness – the gamut of life's curveballs that create, through the shared experiences, something beyond business – real friendship.

Over the last couple years, the business has had a series of difficult challenges that we've needed to address as a team. We've gone through a branding / name change. We've created a new strategic plan. We've had changes in the management of PIWW (our licensor) that have driven changes in our operations. We've determined that our organization structure needs to better reflect our objectives. These all have been tough issues that have raised tempers and emotions. We got through them all.

And, as each obstacle is overcome, the team seems to function better. As we continue to grow as a company, we do grow stronger as a team. And as the team bonds tighten, friendships grow stronger as well.

Will I someday have to terminate another employee? I hope not, but that hope is likely misplaced. The time will eventually come. Will I have to bring bad news to people? No doubt about it, that time will come too.

But, as we finished a recent meeting with lots of raw issues and emotion, the end result was an excellent one. We accomplished what we had set out to do and it felt good. And, as I looked out to the assembled Advisa team I saw not just a group of employees. I saw a group of friends who also worked together. And even a few best friends.

Now I know why it matters to have a best friend at work. Having a best friend at work makes the satisfaction of accomplishing work much more gratifying than the work itself. It allows the heart and mind to meld in accomplishing a task. Having a best friend at work takes work to another level – it gives us the opportunity to truly love our work in a way we can't without having a best friend there to share it with – it satisfies the mind and the heart.

I hope you have a best friend at work. Then, you have a better chance to love your work too. And that's a newfound discovery I felt obliged to share.

Sincerely

Bob Wilson, President

ADVISA

P.O. Box 3039  
Carmel, IN 46082  
Phone: 317-574-1550  
Fax: 317-844-6267  
www.advisausa.com