



# **Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun on the Job**

*Dennis W. Bakke*

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Imagine a company where people love coming to work and are highly productive on a daily basis. Imagine a company whose top executives, in a quest to create the most "fun" workplace ever, obliterate labor-management divisions and push decision-making responsibility down to the plant floor. Could such a company compete in today's bottom-line corporate world? Could it even turn a profit? Well, imagine no more.

In *Joy at Work*, Dennis W. Bakke tells the true story of this extraordinary company--and how, as its co-founder and longtime CEO, he challenged the business establishment with revolutionary ideas that could remake America's organizations. It is the story of AES, whose business model and operating ethos -"let's have fun"-were conceived during a 90-minute car ride from Annapolis, Maryland, to Washington, D.C. In the next two decades, it became a worldwide energy giant with 40,000 employees in 31 countries and revenues of \$8.6 billion. It's a remarkable tale told by a remarkable man: Bakke, a farm boy who was shaped by his religious faith, his years at Harvard Business School, and his experience working for the Federal Energy Administration. He rejects workplace drudgery as a noxious remnant of the Industrial Revolution. He believes work should be fun, and at AES he set out to prove it could be. Bakke sought not the empty "fun" of the Friday beer blast but the joy of a workplace where every person, from custodian to CEO, has the power to use his or her God-given talents free of needless corporate bureaucracy.

In *Joy at Work*, Bakke tells how he helped create a company where every decision made at the top was lamented as a lost chance to delegate responsibility--and where all employees were encouraged to take the "game-winning shot," even when it wasn't a slam-dunk. Perhaps Bakke's most radical stand was his struggle to break the stranglehold of "creating shareholder value" on the corporate mind-set and replace it with more timeless values: integrity, fairness, social responsibility, and a sense of fun.

## **Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun on the Job Details**

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# From Reader Review Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun on the Job for online ebook

## Kaan Ak?it says

The book introduces a new way on a biggest part of our lives: "Work", in which you will find an interesting inspirational point of view. It simply questions starting from virtues such as "honesty" and "culture", extend the definition to a point by highlighting every job is or should be in a constant state of change. The audience that this book targets is simply everyone and everybody... You may ask why giving 3 rather than 5 stars; It is quite simple, please please please remove the religious parts from this book --oh the last chapter!-- and accept the fact that virtues are not the monopolies of a certain belief system --simply cut the crap of my religion is awesome--. I would like to summarize lessons that I learned as in below:

- Leadership is about humility and serving others,
- If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with kings-nor lose the common touch, If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, If all men count with you, but none too much,
- Corporate values are worthless unless they are: (1) shared by the majority of people in the organization, (2) lived with some consistency by leaders, (3) considered at least equal to economic criteria in all major decisions of the organization, (4) taught to employees by senior leaders at every opportunity, and (5) constantly communicated to people and stakeholders outside the organization, including shareholders,
- A person with a servant's heart is dedicated to serving others and bringing out the best in them,
- Methods are many, principles are few. Methods change often, principles never do,
- Because our central values and principles were derived from mainstream values practiced by billions of people around the world, we hoped that most of our people could bring the key elements of their personal philosophies into the workplace,

This example was a summary of every fault in human history:

- At age 10, I learned that when the river flooded at a 100-year level, it didn't matter how well our house was constructed. It didn't matter whether I did my homework or whether our family values were strong or whether my father was home or working in Alaska. It didn't matter whether I was smart or whether my little brother was a good athlete. If the house was anywhere near the river, it was going to be damaged by the rushing water.

My findings and lessons that I learned from it not limited to this one. I recommend to read this book if you can withstand religious parts, and want to understand the new face of multicultural workplaces.

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## Kristen says

An interesting read, if a little rah-rah and self-righteous. Excellent book for a manager. Knowing how successful his company was, and understanding how he built it and tinkered with the "traditional models", you become really impressed with his ability to stick to his guns and to think outside the box.

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## Brittany Shears says

This was an incredible read. Great for anyone who struggles with the idea of how they can serve God while working in a secular world. Provides great insight into leading and practicing business while maintaining closely held values and morals. Bakke's work is not only educational but also uplifting and encouraging. Highly recommend.

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## **Michael says**

"Same Sh#t, different day"

Hear people say that? Maybe said it yourself?

What a sad way to live!

Bakke explores the meaning and purpose for work through his own leadership of AES (ranked #151 on Fortune 500, ahead of Duke Energy). Though many find their jobs a drudgery, there are some that love their jobs and are empowered by their work. What makes the difference? And are their principles that can be applied to any company to make work a place of challenge and fulfillment vs. real life Dilbert?

Yes. Dennis Bakke helped found AES on the principles of responsibility (letting employees take ownership and key decision making choices), integrity and honesty, and yes - fun and joy at work. When employees actually make decisions and have their choices and opinions \*really\* matter in daily operations, it builds engagement far more than tired incentive programs.

Definitely challenged my own perspective, prompting me to think further how I can encourage and grow my own team at work.

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## **Philippe says**

*"A special workplace has many ingredients. The feeling that you are part of a team, a sense of community, the knowledge that what you do has real purpose—all these things help make work fun. But by far the most important factor is whether people are able to use their individual talents and skills to do something useful, significant, and worthwhile."*

This is the extraordinary story of a guy who left his government job to set up a successful energy company that for decades pioneered a innovative workplace culture based on radical empowerment. More than thirty years later, the company still ranks amongst the Fortune 200 but Dennis Bakke has disappeared from its management and its organizational model has been reshaped along more conventional lines.

The story of empowerment in large organizations has been told a few times, but not very often and as far as I know not at this scale. Not even Ricardo Semler's Semco has every operated at the scale of Bakke's energy giant. Another key difference is the fact that Bakke ran this radical experiment in a publicly traded company. This also became his personal undoing. When the stock market collapsed in the wake of the Enron scandal, company shares plunged to fraction of their peak value and Bakke was taken to task by his board for the debacle. Soon after he left the company to pursue other goals. It is a cautionary tale that reflects the true face of capitalism and explains why, as a rule, working conditions in large organizations today are no more

exciting, rewarding, or fun than they were 250 years ago.

*Joy at Work* tells a subtle and profound story about forging community in a business context. The book is free from the hyperbole that mars most management literature. The author's voice sounds authentically humble. He is unwaveringly loyal to his belief in people's potential to take responsibility and be mindful of the interests of every stakeholder. But he is not afraid to suspend judgment and question some of his decisions. *"Where there is success, let there be humility."*

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## **Bill Pence says**

The author, who was CEO of AES, an energy company, writes that his passion is to make work exciting, rewarding, stimulating, and enjoyable. He states that this is a book for people who want more from their jobs than a paycheck and a benefits package. He believes that the workplace should be fun and fulfilling. He writes that joy at work gives people the freedom to use their talents and skills for the benefit of society, without being crushed or controlled by autocratic supervisors or staff offices.

The author strongly believes that people should be able to bring many of their basic beliefs about life into an organization. He believes that there is a transcendent truth behind principles like integrity and justice that does not and should not change over time and should certainly not be adjusted because of economic setbacks. While our understanding of the values may change with time, the values and principles themselves are timeless.

He writes that there is little disagreement that the corporate values at AES arose out of the personal values of the co-founders. He discusses how the transformation of personal values to organizational values is accomplished with the word "shared." Shared implies that members of an organization agree on the definition and importance of a value.

He states that the values articulated by many companies have only a minimal effect on how they conduct their businesses. But values and principles mean something only when they affect everything we do, every day of the week. He believes that we should attempt to live according to a set of unchanging shared ethical principles, because it is the right way to live.

He believes that for the most part, we have made the workplace a frustrating and joyless place where people do what they're told and have few ways to participate in decisions or fully use their talents. He, and I agree, states that the label "human resources" has a dehumanizing connotation. We have financial resources, fuel resources, and human resources.

He states that in his experience, most people don't believe that fun and work can coexist. But he writes that the key to joy at work is the personal freedom to take actions and make decisions using individual skills and talents. The author tells us that a special workplace has many ingredients, with the most important factor being when people are able to use their individual talents and skills to do something useful, significant, and worthwhile.

He shares some of the practices he followed at AES in an effort to make it a more fun place to work, beginning with the belief that joy at work starts with individual initiative and individual control. They attempted to design a workplace where the maximum number of individuals have an opportunity to make important decisions, undertake actions of importance to the success of the organization, and assume responsibility for the results.

AES was organized around multi-skilled, self-managed teams. The primary factor in determining whether people experience joy or drudgery in the workplace is the degree to which they control their work. By "control," he means making decisions and taking responsibility for them. The amount of fun in an organization is largely a function of the number of individuals allowed to make decisions.

The author believed in decentralization, limiting the number of people in the home office, central staff, and

senior executive offices. He believed that every decision made at headquarters takes away responsibility from people elsewhere in the organization and reduces the number of people who feel they are making an effective contribution to the organization.

He believes that moral leaders serve an organization rather than control it, with their goal being to create a community that encourages individuals to take the initiative, practice self-discipline, make decisions, and assume responsibility for their actions.

He writes that one of the most difficult lessons he had to learn is that leadership is not about managing people. He writes that a leader's character is far more important than their skills. He states that the most important character traits of a leader who embraces the principles and values championed in the book are humility; the willingness to give up power; courage; integrity; and love and passion for the people, values, and mission of the organization. He states that humility is at the core of a leader's heart. He states that the most important aspect of this leadership style is letting others make important decisions. When that happens, leaders dignify and honor their subordinates.

He writes about love in the workplace. He states that love pushes us to do whatever it takes to help others succeed, and that leaders who create dynamic, rewarding, enjoyable workplaces love people. He believes that love is the final and crucial ingredient in a joy-filled workplace.

He states that being passionate about your people and what they do is a key characteristic of a leader who can make work a joyful experience, and that the key to a great workplace is the freedom to make important decisions and take responsibility for the results.

He writes that most AES board members loved his approach primarily because they believed it pushed the stock price up, not because it was the "right" way to operate an organization. Throughout the book, the author is open about mistakes he made as the leader of AES.

He writes about the importance of our work, stating that the idea that daily secular work is spiritually inferior comes to its ultimate destruction in the person of Jesus of Nazareth—the Carpenter. He indicates that nearly every kind of work is significant, if it is consistent with the person's calling and the person is working to glorify and worship God.

He writes that Biblical leadership requires those in authority to serve the people they lead. Leaders do whatever it takes to allow followers to use their talents effectively. Good leaders delegate decisions and create an environment in which others can manage God's world.

He writes that he can recall only two or three visits to his place of work by one of his pastors in 30 years, and doubts he is an exception. He writes that if our daily work is a sacred calling from God, pastors and priests should come to the workplace often.

You may not agree with how the author defines joy at work, but I believe you would benefit from reading this book.

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## **Michael says**

Good book for a perspective on the differences that exist for people who have joy in their work vs. people who feel opposite of joy in their work. It is geared more toward managers or those who may have more control over their work environment than those who work for the man. If you work for the man, it makes you wish you didn't.

The premise of the book is that people who are given authority/responsibility to make important decisions in their area of expertise and then in turn are held accountable for those decisions find much more joy in their work. This is even more valuable than salary, perks or any other compensation people get from their work. Micro-management is a philosophy from the industrial age that makes people feel like an asset instead of an able, reasonable and skilled human. Bakke advises that phrases like "our most valuable asset is our people"

perpetuate the notion that people are no different than expensive equipment. You've got to allow people to do important things and see the true joy of their labors. Bakke is a religious man and also includes some religious examples that are interesting. His principles can be applied to managing any kind of organization...church, sports, etc. Anyway, I'm not going to rewrite the whole book.

It was very helpful for me to use in identifying the things I dislike about my work and why and also helped me put my finger on those aspects of work I enjoy and why. My approach to lots of things has improved.

Oh, by the way, Harry dies at the end.

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### **Clare Cannon says**

By helping people at all professional levels find purpose, Bakke aspires to a world of work which values each person and the unique contribution they can make. Based on solid principles of leadership and values-based character development, he shows how treat people as people, encourage workers to form goals and set out to achieve them, and to deal with the crises which form part of every functioning workplace. As he says in the introduction, this is a book for workers, students, managers, leaders, presidents, directors, scholars and writers, and all who realise the importance of the occupation in which one spends so much of one's time.

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### **G Stephen says**

This is an incredible story of leadership and how values shape an organization, business, school, church, mission or government. This book will help people who want to know how decentralized organizations like YWAM are successful and why young people are so attracted. Dennis is a Christian with a biblical based view of the world, a Harvard Business graduate that put this into practice with his work in government services, an energy company and now one of the largest chartered school systems in the USA.

He shows how work is one of the ways we honor God. Work is worship. God set the example in Creation by working for six days, then resting for one day. He gave us a model to steward resources and meet other people's needs. Any work, even the least creative and inspiring job, that is accomplished for God, meets a need in society, honors God. "The key to joy at work is the personal freedom to take actions and make decisions using individual skills and talents." Thus, the key to good organizational leadership is restraint in making decisions of importance. A radical idea.

From the preface: This book is for you if you are,  
stuck in a miserable job, but motivated to do something about it.  
a student in management or leadership program not yet intoxicated by power over people.  
a high school or college student who wants to earn a living and have fun at the same time.  
a mid-level manager, who feels trapped by top-down, highly centralized organization.  
a government, business, nonprofit or educational leader,  
a president, director or CEO  
a scholar, researcher or writer,  
a priest, pastor, imam or rabbi who is looking for a better way to understand and explain faith and work.

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## **Scott Hayden says**

Bakke represents a integrated individual. He doesn't compartmentalize his beliefs, but lets them infiltrate his whole life. Though he does not overtly proclaim his faith in the main text, his faith is evident throughout. If you can't see that, read the appendix then go back and look for the quiet weave of worldview.

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## **Nathan Gray says**

This book describes the journey toward creating a work environment where people are more energized the longer they work there. Rather than causing me frustration that I don't work in a place like that, I felt healed as I read it.

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## **Andres says**

Un excelente libro, extremadamente recomendable. Esta revolucionaria manera de gestionar una empresa que propone Bakke es fascinante. Un historia contada con una pasión notable. Sin duda el éxito de una empresa es generar valor para todos la que la conforman, permitir que la gente se sienta parte de ella, tomando decisiones y haciéndose responsable de las mismas. Uno de los libros que más me ha inspirado a cambiar mi manera de ver el liderazgo.

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## **Juan says**

### **Podría haber sido más corto**

Me gustó que mostrara una visión más humana sobre negocios, buscando el entregar responsabilidad y decisiones a los integrantes de la compañía.

Encuentro que el libro es bien desordenado en las ideas (puede ser subjetivo) pero ha in historias innecesarias, y el epílogo ni siquiera lo leí.

Un resumen del libro estaría mejor.

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## **Donitello says**

There are “fun at work” books, and there are “inspirational leadership” books. But I’ve never read a book like this. Maybe there isn’t one.

In 1982, author Dennis W. Bakke founded AES Corporation, a global energy company with revenues reaching \$8.6 billion. Just your typical energy giant, but with one little difference: Their goal was to create the most fun workplace ever known!

This book is in the same category as BEN & JERRY'S: THE INSIDE SCOOP and NUTS: SOUTHWEST AIRLINES' CRAZY RECIPE FOR BUSINESS AND PERSONAL SUCCESS. The two things that make it unique are: 1) Bakke's thoughtful analysis of the conditions contributing to a joyful workplace (and the obstacles to creating these conditions) and 2) the fascinating fact that AES was (and is) a GLOBAL corporation.

Many people have observed that "humor doesn't cross boundaries." This is in fact true. But laughter, joy, and fun are another matter! As Bakke says: "'Cultural diversity,' it would seem, tends to melt away when it comes to basic human traits." In other words, you cannot fail by creating a positive workplace, no matter where on the globe you do it!

A must-read for anyone questioning the conventional wisdom of 21st-century corporate success.

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## Areski Stichweh says

- 4 stars for the message/idea
- 1,5 stars for the delivery

At first I wanted to give it 3 stars. Neutral book, good ideas but nothing too revolutionary I found. Especially because my boss read the book himself and incorporated the ideas in our business a while ago:

- have strong core values and always go by them (eg. in the book: have the work be **fun**, serve society, be financially stable or something along those lines)
- empower each person in the business to be *part* of the business and not "only" an employee (by taking decisions, seeking for advice but having the freedom to be creative and try things out and have a say in many – if not all – decisions made in the company, by having as few hierarchy as possible...)

But it's the typical problem of people feeling strongly about their message: they go on for a while, even though they could be a lot more succinct.

So anyway, 3 stars. Then there were moments in the books where I even thought of giving it 4 stars: the author is good at storytelling and is very inspirational and sometimes that worked and I was like "yeah, this is cool!". But the last chapter (50min in my audiobook version) only talks about God, which A) is not my thing anyway and B) in a way that was just annoying. As a non-believer, I felt excluded and had to roll my eyes quite a bit.

I recommend reading a good summary rather than the book. A few examples in the book are nice to listen to, but that's it.

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