



# Ideas **The Welch Way**

BY JACK AND SUZY WELCH

## The Whining Game

**I run a 14-person business, and we look after our people very well—parties for birthdays, babies, and marriages, and a real interest in each individual, both personally and professionally. Still, people complain incessantly: too much politics, not enough appreciation, and so on. I'm about to tear my hair out because nothing seems to make them happy.**

—Anonymous, Cape Town, South Africa

Stop trying. With the best of intentions, you have created a classic entitlement culture in which your people have the deal exactly backwards: They think you work for them.

This phenomenon is not uncommon, although it tends to be more prevalent in small organizations where employees can easily develop casual, familial relationships with their bosses, and bosses often blur professional lines themselves. In the end, such familiarity can backfire, as is happening with you and your moaning, groaning employees.

It's irrelevant how you got yourself into your predicament, though. What matters is that you get out quickly. And the first person you need to get straight is yourself. You are running a company, not a social club or a counseling service. Your No. 1 priority is to win in the marketplace so that you can continue to grow and provide opportunities for your people. Of course, you want your employees to be happy. But their happiness must stem from the company's success, not from their every need being met. When the company does well because of their performance, they will thrive, personally and professionally. Not the other way around.

Consider that your new creed. Next, gather your people together and let them know about your epiphany and your plan to convert them, too. Together, you and your staff will need to create a list of behaviors that will make your company a winner. These behaviors will become your new company values—guidelines, if you will, to live by. For instance, one value could be: We will respond with a sense of urgency to customer requests. Or we will only ship products with zero defects. The point of this process is simple: to help your people understand that work is about...well, work.

Oh, you'll hear yelps as you dismantle your entitlement culture. Some employees you like and value may even leave in

protest. Take the hit and wish them well. They will soon find out the grass is not greener on the other side, and you will discover how much better your company operates when your main concern is not whining, but winning.

**"It is not sufficient that I succeed. Everyone else must fail" is a line attributed to Genghis Khan and sometimes quoted by the moguls of our own era. In the cutthroat, hypercompetitive business world today, what is your take on this attitude?**

—David Ho, Stillwater, Okla.

It's nonsense, of course, because it's just not the way business usually works, or should. Obviously, you're not going to sit around wishing your competitors well. All tough-minded businesspeople want to win—they want the most sales, the biggest market share, the highest profit margins, and so on.

But tough-minded businesspeople also realize that competitors, for all their aggravation, serve a purpose. They sharpen your focus. They keep you fierce and hungry. And the best of them raise the bar on every aspect of performance, from innovation to delivery.

Without competition, companies usually get fat and lazy. Case in point: all the bureaucratic monopolies out there that have foundered largely because of the self-satisfaction and arrogance that came with the very success they sought.

Look, you may not want your competitors to win, but unlike Genghis, you want them around. It's good for customers, it's good for you (albeit sometimes painful), and it's good for business overall.

Now take the quote to the individual level: wrong again, even for the most ambitious among us. We're not going to deny, of course, that schadenfreude exists: It's human nature to feel a twinge of happiness when a colleague screws up. But the most successful people fight that instinct with everything in them. They know that if someone else's candle goes out, as the old saying goes, theirs doesn't burn any brighter. It just makes the whole room darker.

As with tough competitors, you learn from your colleagues and improve because of them. When they do well, so do you, either by their example or by being part of their team. Maybe Mr. Khan was on to something when he was fighting warlords with spears and clubs on the plains of Mongolia. But for today's world, his advice seems about 750 years out of date. ■

*Jack and Suzy Welch look forward to answering your questions about business, company, or career challenges. Please e-mail them at [thewelchway@businessweek.com](mailto:thewelchway@businessweek.com). For their weekly podcast, go to [www.businessweek.com/search/podcasting.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/search/podcasting.htm)*



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