



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

Fever Pitch

By Stuart White
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There's an energy crisis around. We're practically running on empty but this shortage has nothing to do with fossil fuels or load-shedding. Millions of us get up each morning already weary over what the day might hold. "I just can't get started," people say. Or, "I feel drained just thinking about the long hours ahead." But it's not physical energy that most of us lack. Sure, we could all use extra sleep and a better diet but in truth the problem is not with your body and it can't be cured with a long lie-in and a high-carb breakfast.

What you're seeking is not the adrenaline-filled, caffeine-fuelled, bounce-off-the-walls kind of energy. It's emotional energy. It's an aliveness of the mind and spirit that connects you to the vitality and fun of life. Yet, sad to say, life sometimes seems designed to exhaust our supply. We work too hard. We fight fires. We have family obligations. We encounter emergencies and personal crises. No wonder so many of us suffer from emotional fatigue, a kind of utter exhaustion of the spirit, a sense that we're just going through the motions. We get it at work and we get it at home and we're enervated and energy-sapped. But then suddenly something happened to temporarily change all that. The FIFA World Cup quite literally kicked off in South Africa and all of a sudden in the words of that old song, 'everyone's gone Fitba' Crazy'. People are driving around with little flags fluttering on car roofs or covering their wing mirrors with flag cosies and team shirts are being worn everywhere.

Vuvuzelas are blown on the streets on match days, the talk is all about player and manager competencies and national pride, sales of decoders have gone through the roof, work and social schedules have been re-arranged to ensure no games are missed – football has taken over! Now, I have never been a football fan. I can't say I don't like the sport. I understand it, know the rules and objectives of the game and have a rough sort of appreciation why it has a loyal fan base. I just don't watch much and participate even less but even I knew this was a pivotal event as it had been talked up on every television sports news update and every newspaper for months. Even so I wasn't expecting quite so much animation and excitement as was suddenly created nor to find myself as much caught up in it as the next man or woman.

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If we can take some of the principles of the vitality and shared excitement of this world cup and transfer it to a work situation I am convinced we would have a lot more energized workforce. The reason the event has engaged us so much is because we understand the challenge and it is real and immediate. So far we're only in the early group stages but each match is crucial – win, get the points and go through, lose too many and it's on the plane back, ignominy and disappointment. At work we only have a vague idea of the goals and targets. Most of the time the information we get is not up-to-date and oftentimes reporting, especially if it is financial, we get weeks later. All this means we fail to sense the urgency in what we do on a day-to-day basis. We don't get that feel of there only being 10 minutes left on the clock, two goals down and needing to work some magic. But we aren't going to get the adrenaline and excitement if we don't see the situation as make-or-break and time-critical.

Watching the matches we are seeing the drama unfold right before our eyes. Too often we don't get to see all the moves in the business game because it is played out behind closed doors – millions of tiny victories that we don't get to hear about or understand. It's as though you pass the ball to the executive team and it vanishes, only to appear a week later in the same position but with all the momentum lost.

Football is more clear-cut. I understand the rules, I know about fouls, off-sides and corner-kicks and I grasped the vital implications for each team and their opponents. At work too many rules don't make sense or are unclear and fuzzy. And as a result, instead of declaring a penalty shot we spend days in the board room arguing the correct procedure and process time after time but never really implementing it so that we have the same debate week after week. Watching a great team play, seeing the ball being skillfully passed from player to player with commitment and energy is an energizing experience whilst at work so many people are not doing the team thing. Instead they are trying to trip you up with the ball, or holding on to it, failing to pass it along its journey. It's as though your colleagues are on the opposing team.

We are a great footballing nation – it's our national sport and our national passion. So let's use this world cup fever to recognise that our co-workers are not the competition and instead started working as a team. Think of the place of work as the pitch, the ball as our product, the staff as our team, the Board as our backers and the customers as our supporters. We need to win those smaller matches every day to maintain our fan base and win all our group stages to ensure a place in the final, keep our sponsors happy and still shelling out, and make our country/company proud.

In this World Cup, we've already seen some unexpected failures from the big guns – England drawing against the US, France losing badly to Mexico, Spain being beaten by Switzerland. And because of that some players will be dropped and replaced but whoever's on the squad, they'll still be expected to play as a team, with energy, passion and a will to win.

So when you go back to work tomorrow take some of that football fever and excitement with you. Energize and enthuse your team to give of their best, play to their strengths and above all work together so that when you do score, it's not a self-destructive own-goal.

Agree or disagree with this? Don't twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana

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