

***The Progress Principle:
Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement and Creativity at Work***
Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer

SYNOPSIS

If you are looking for a book that provides managers with specific everyday actions they can take to improve engagement and creativity at work, this is a real treasure. The premise of this book is that inner work life is the single greatest factor in affecting people's attention to tasks, engagement in a project and intention to work hard. In other words, inner work life affects a person's perception/thoughts, emotions and feelings and motivation/drive. The authors go on to explain that the three greatest influencers on inner work life are:

- **The progress principle**, which are events signifying progress including small wins, breakthroughs, and goal completion.
- **The catalyst factor**, which are events supporting the work including setting clear goals, allowing autonomy, providing resources, helping with the work and allowing ideas to flow freely.
- **The nourishment factor**, which are the events supporting the person such as respect, encouragement, emotional support and affiliation.

Of these three, the progress principle by far has the greatest impact. Leaders need to create an environment where people can see that they are moving forward in their work, even with small wins. The book goes on to explain specifically what leaders should and shouldn't do to address each of these three influencing areas. It even includes a daily checklist to help leaders evaluate the impact they may be having on the inner work life of their employees.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research, the authors recruited 238 people in 26 project teams in seven companies in three industries. The teams were all primarily composed of knowledge workers who participated for approximately four months. Each day they were mailed a diary form. Most of the questions asked for numerical ratings about their inner work lives—their perceptions, emotions and motivations during the day. The most important question, however, allowed respondents free rein: "Briefly describe one event from today that stands out in your mind." Seventy-five percent of the forms were returned within twenty-four hours, providing about 12,000 diary reports, which were analyzed for this research. This type of access to people's workday in real time and over a period of time makes this research highly unique.

Review by Chris Gay, Bridge Consulting

SAMPLE LEARNINGS

It's the practical advice and specific actions for leaders that make this book the exception. For example, among the key learnings of this book are the four things that managers do to drain work of its meaning:

- Having one's work or ideas dismissed by leaders or co-workers
- Creating situations where a person loses their sense of ownership of the work; for example, having one person begin work and another finish it
- Making employees doubt that the work they are doing will ever see the light of day
- Giving people a large volume of tasks that they feel over-qualified to do

On the other hand, some of the things leaders can do to positively influence inner work life are to:

- Set clear short-term and long-term goals
- Provide sufficient autonomy without micromanagement
- Ensure people have the resources that they need
- Give team members help when they need it and encourage them to help each other
- Celebrate small wins
- Create situations outside of the work where people can get to know each other better