

# **Employee Motivation: Six Reasons Teams Are Underperforming**



**By Patrick Healey**

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**The Employee Attraction™ Workbook**]

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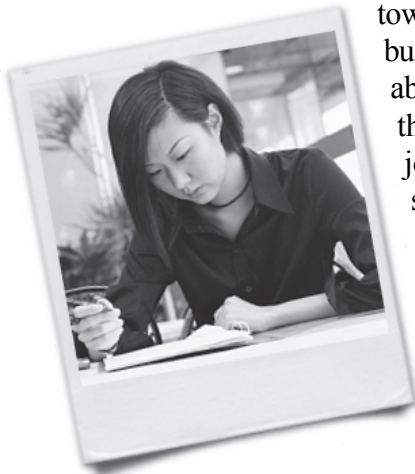
# Catapult Your Team From Surviving To Thriving



## Say cheese!

A key component in employee attraction is making sure that you have enthusiastic brand ambassadors in your employees. When job candidates arrive for interviews, your current team members can make or break the deal just by their attitudes. That's why before we discuss ideas about hiring new people, you need to be sure the ones you already have are thriving.

If you took a snapshot of your business on a recent day, what would it capture? Are you excited to get to your office and interact with your team? Are you making steady progress toward your goals? Is your business growing? How about your team—are they eager to do their jobs and do you all have some fun in the process? In short, where would you fit on a continuum that runs from just holding it together to hitting all your targets and having a fabulous time doing it?



## Of course there are many ways to define thriving. Here are some of mine:

- You are fulfilled in your career and you've connected to a real purpose for what you do.
- You are meeting your own goals for production and business growth.
- You enjoy the respect of colleagues and members of your community, and you have time to participate in activities beyond your own sphere.
- You value your time away from work and schedule plenty of Wow Days to renew yourself.
- Your team is a high-functioning group of wonderful people you have carefully selected for the jobs they perform.
- Your team enjoys the responsibilities you delegate to them and they are fully capable of running the ship when you are away.
- You have well-established procedures to handle the unexpected, so when that inevitability happens, you are not thrown into crisis mode.
- Your team understands your big vision for your business and has also bought into it; they appreciate their roles in making it real. (The next strategy is all about your big vision.)
- Your team radiates the good will that derives from your steady and thoughtful appreciation of them.

# WORKSHEET

## Do A 360 On Your Team

Do a 360 on you and your team—where are you all right now on the surviving to thriving continuum? In the first column, note five things that are working well for you. In the second column write five things that are not working.

### What's Working

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

### What's Not Working

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now, write a brief summary of your situation—what did completing this exercise tell you about the effectiveness of your team and your interaction with them? How does this compare to how you may have thought you were doing previously?

## Now look in the mirror



If your results were not what you'd like them to be, then it's time for some honest reflection. In my experience, teams are most often thrown into survival mode

because of leadership

issues. Now this can be tough to admit, but the good news is it's all fixable—so set aside your pride and your need to be “right” and consider these scenarios. The tool of choice for this exercise will be a mirror, not binoculars. Sure, your team needs more evaluating, too, but right now it's your turn.

**Here are six of the most common reasons teams are underperforming.**

### **1. Your team may be underperforming because you have an antiquated management style.**

You probably don't realize it, but just about everything we've ever been taught about managing other people comes from principles developed by Frederick Taylor and Max Weber a hundred years ago. Here are some highlights:

- Labor and responsibilities should be clearly delineated for every member of the organization.
- Positions should be organized into a hierarchy resulting in a scale of authority.
- Employees should be selected based on technical competence or education.
- Managers work for the owners, but are not owners themselves.
- All employees are subject to strict rules that are impersonal and uniformly applied.

While society has rocketed from the horse and buggy era to the space age, while technology has changed so fast our heads spin to keep up, management styles remain mired in wildly outdated ideas. As bosses,

many of us are literally stuck in the mud of old-fashioned notions of how business owners should act. It's an ongoing challenge for me to let go of these ingrained antiquated ideas. I'm getting better, but I catch myself slipping back at times and I have to make corrections. As business owners we need to believe we are right, that we make correct choices and we have our experience to back up our beliefs. Yet sometimes it's more important to allow an employee to discover on his own whether or not an idea is viable. Besides, he might just surprise you.

### **2. Your team may be underperforming because you are burned out.**

Your team may be able and willing to perform well, but if you're exhausted or demoralized, you may not know how to regain your desire to lead and succeed. Some agents are not reaching their full potential simply because they have become a little lazy and misdirected. In other cases burnout can be the result of the perceived pressure you receive from

corporate. You know the refrain:

“You're not doing enough” or

“You have to get your

numbers up.” Some of us

suffer from constant

comparison to the best

with no acknowledgment

that we are actually

doing our best.

In many companies this

takes the form of

exclusive clubs for the

best performers. Then

other layers of

excellence are added,

representing the best of

the best—and then

some. All of these

winners are rewarded

with exotic prizes and

acclaim, while hard

working business

owners who didn't

make one of these

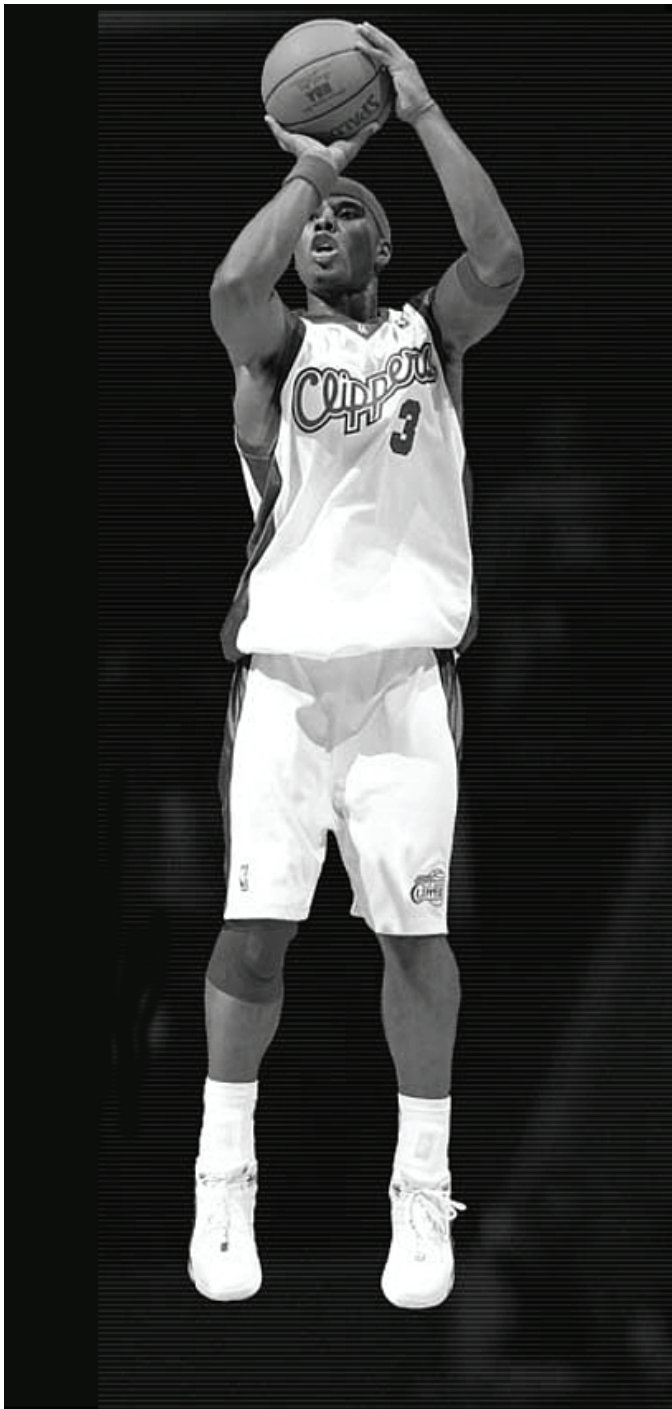
groups are considered

losers by management.



This is true even if they are actively and effectively running their agencies and returning a profit to the company. Of course, few of the winners can sustain that level of performance—certainly not with any quality time left over for a personal life. As soon as they slip off the lists, they, too, are suddenly perceived to be slacking off.

This reminds me of professional basketball. Virtually every player in the NBA was an All-American player in high school, but how many superstars are there in the NBA? Not that many. We forget that ALL



of these players are the best from all over the world. As we watch these games and playoffs on TV, we on the couch are quick to criticize them and wonder why they aren't trying harder. The reality is that they ARE giving their best effort. So how do we get the best out of our own people? It's easy for us to wonder why our employees aren't doing more. The problem is we expect people who are not wired for something to excel at it. (We'll go into that in Chapter Five: Master the Tools of Selection Perfection.)

It's easy to get frustrated with yourself if you play this game of needing to be on top of the heap. In my years as a business owner, father and business coach, I've learned many things. One of the things I learned to do as well as almost anything else was beat myself up. I became a master at being hard on myself and never being satisfied. These were traits taught to me, directly or indirectly, by those around me. I was told that if I was hard enough on myself and never got complacent, I would be successful in business and in life.

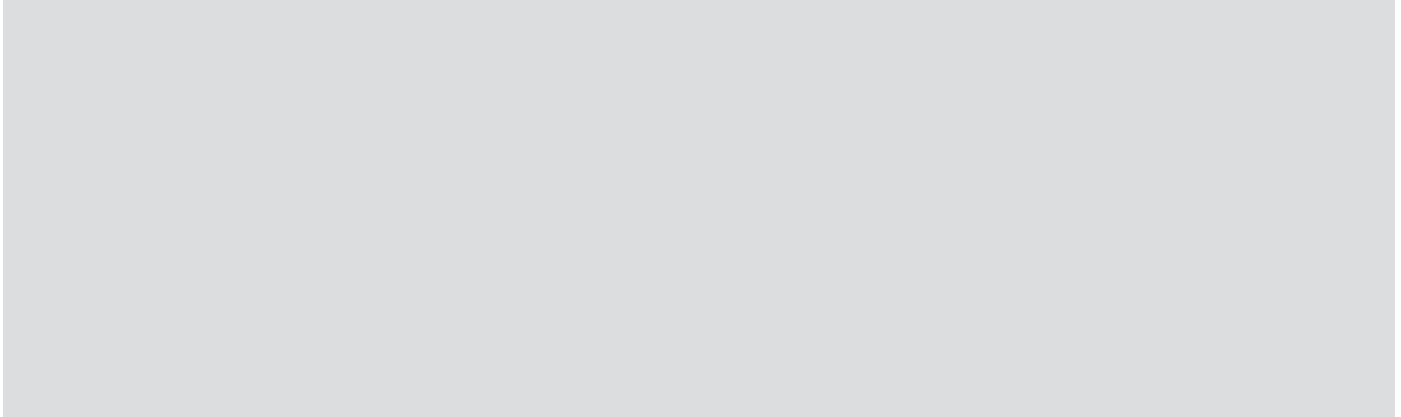
However, as my career progressed I realized I had one major regret. I had beaten myself up so much that I'd forgotten to enjoy what I was doing.

**My solution is to practice self-appreciation first.** In the midst of our busy lives, our struggles and even our successes, it's important for us to stop and truly appreciate ourselves. What does that mean? **It means that you need to remind yourself on a regular basis that you ARE doing well, that you ARE achieving your goals, that you ARE creating a quality lifestyle.**

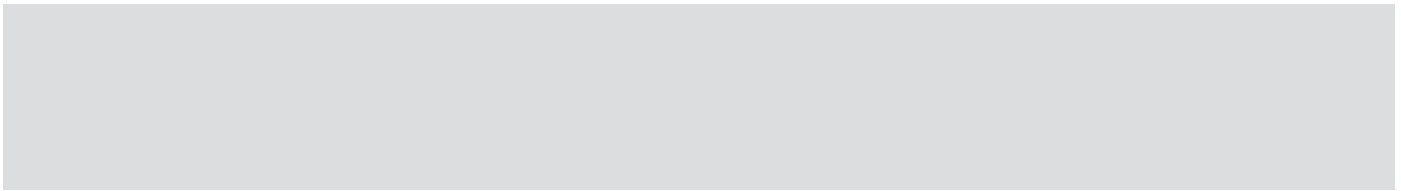
# WORKSHEET

## Applause, Applause!

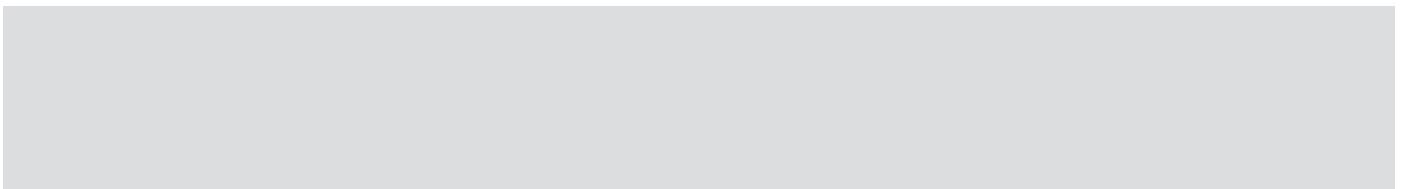
List your own accomplishments by your own standards. Do name your business achievements and quantify them, but also consider your larger influence.



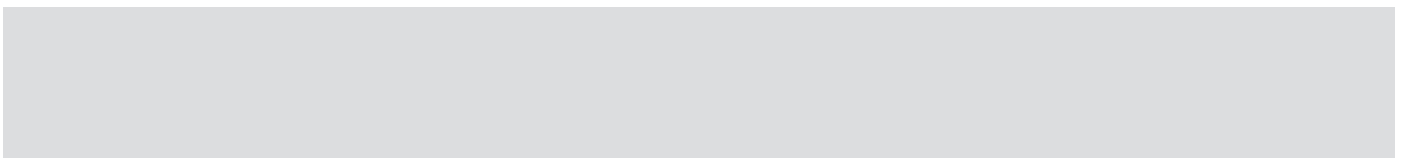
How many people does your agency support? How does their income affect their families' economy?



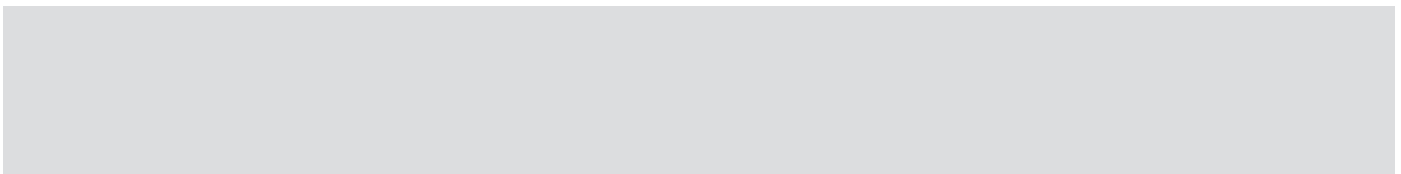
We forget the bigger economic picture of what we have accomplished and continue to accomplish. Do the bonuses you pay key employees have far-reaching effects?



How has your business impacted your community? Kids you'll never meet may have their lives changed because you donated to a summer camp for challenged youth.



How has your lifestyle as a business owner affected your own family and extended family? Do you loan a vacation home to friends and family, not realizing how those quality respites enhance and even alter their lives? Will your children and grandchildren have more opportunities and lead better lives because of your success?



### **3. Your team may be underperforming because you are overwhelmed with choices.**

In *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*, Barry Schwartz examines the burden of this trend. Think about it. Haven't you found yourself in a grocery aisle, stymied by far too many similar items and having no clue which product is best? The same is true today in insurance agencies. We are being asked to sell so many different types of products, and of course our managers want us to excel at selling ALL of them. Sadly, some agents have chosen to drop out of the field all together because of the number of things they feel pressured to master. They've never been taught to just pick a few things to do really well. You can choose to stop

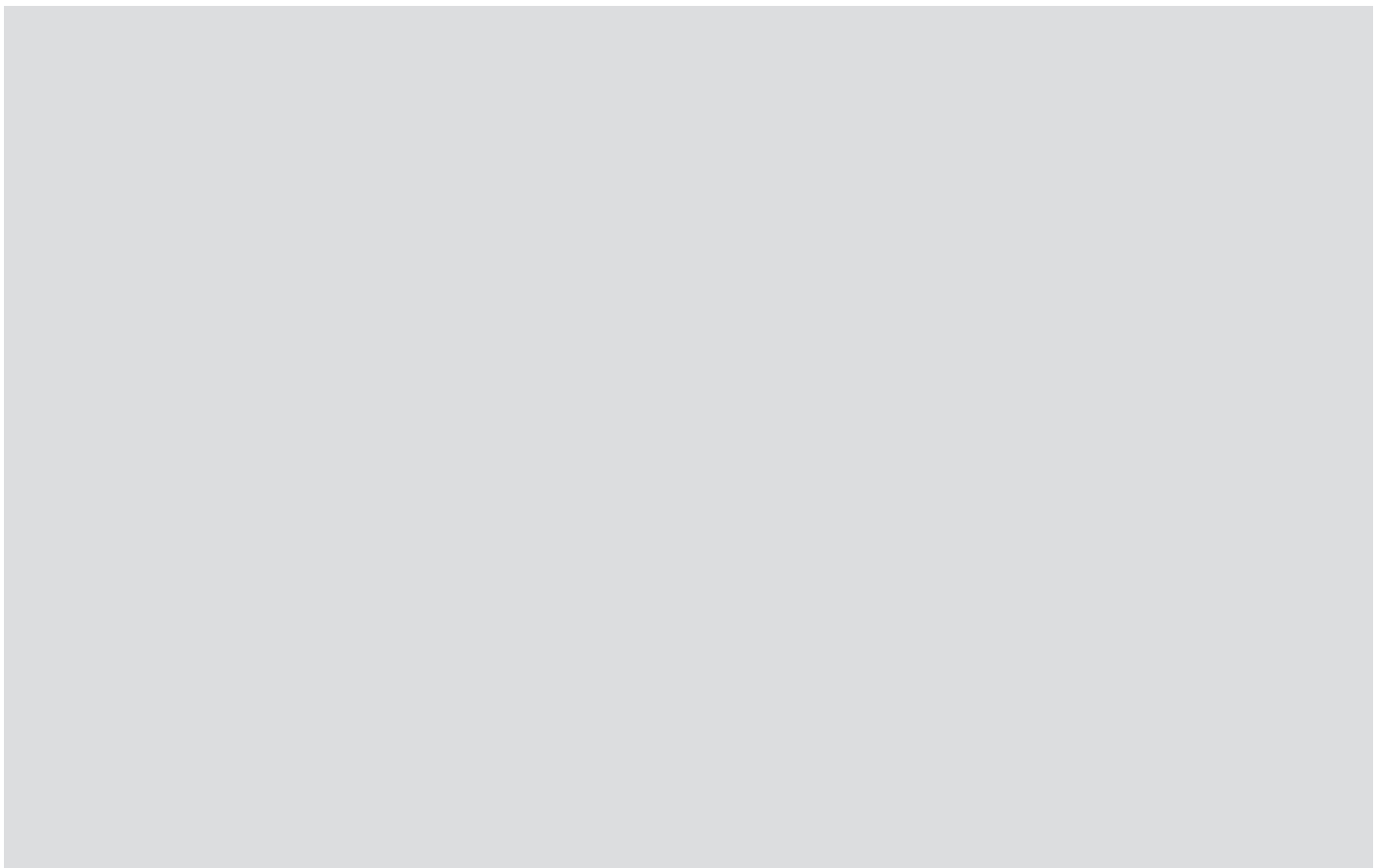
comparing yourself to the best of the best of the best. You can choose to measure your own progress from year to year against your own record—not the model of perfect agents in different parts of the country with perhaps different markets.

I believe your team would welcome the chance to deliver excellence in a few areas, rather than feel driven toward the impossible—being the best at everything. If I was going to kick start a business whose owner had fallen into this trap, I'd say: Pick one thing you're good at and focus all your attention on that. Then I'd tell him to identify one thing he loves to do outside of work and schedule some Wow Days to enjoy that. Knowing you've built in substantive and desirable rewards for yourself can revitalize your enthusiasm for your business.

## **WORKSHEET**

# **How Many Choices?**

How many things are we requiring our people to do? Think back over the last 60 days about all the changes and revisions to procedures, all the new products and guidelines your team had to learn. Do we give them too many choices so that they don't make *any* choices? List here as many of them as you can recall.



#### 4. Your team may be underperforming because you are bored with your business.

One agent I know thought he was creating an idyllic life for himself. He had reduced his own involvement in his business to half weeks and spent the other half of each week at his vacation home. All his employees worked part time, and his overhead and his stress were both low. This may sound good to some of you, but I just had to ask him: “Don’t you get bored? Aren’t your employees bored? How will you keep your top employees if they continue to be bored?”

My questions took him by surprise, but finally he nodded his head and admitted that yes, he was indeed bored out of his mind. He also acknowledged that perhaps his team was as well. He looked very concerned at the real prospect of losing his key employees.



All this fellow needed was to reignite his passion and connect to the deeper reasons he had wanted to own a business in the first place. I contend that we can still be **Employers Of First Choice™** even as we near retirement. Don’t we owe more to our team and parent company then to let ourselves slip into long term malaise?

#### 5. Your team may be underperforming because you are too hard on them.

No one wants to be thought of as a tyrannical boss, but it happens to the best of us. Marcie, one of my star team members, was supposed to set up the paperwork for me so I could review all the policies with an important customer. To my surprise and annoyance,

the folder was missing a few items. After the meeting I marched out of my office ready to read Marcie the riot act. Before I could get ten words out my mouth, she said, “Let me tell you about my Monday morning.”

“Our new puppy cried all night from Friday through Sunday. He peed all over the carpet, and the kids are going crazy with excitement over the new dog.



This morning while trying to get the kids to school, the dog escapes out the door—with one of my best shoes in his mouth—and hides under the house. I’m all dressed for work, but I have to crawl under the house while my kids are screaming at me not to hurt the puppy. And despite all that I got to work on time with my Starbucks in hand! And on top of that, I work my tail off for you.”



**I swallowed my anger, turned and slunk back into my office, humbled by the life of a working mom.** In truth, I could have done due diligence and checked the files myself before the meeting. But hey, in my office, I’m Da King and I want to be right all the time. Except when it’s clear I am not.

# WORKSHEET

## Are You Hard On Your Team?

Note what comes up when you contemplate these questions. Ask yourself: Are there times when you may have failed to do your part? Do you always take responsibility for your role in office procedures or do you imperially blame your team for every mistake?

Do you know what your team members have to do just to get to work on time? Write the answer for each employee.

Have you taken the time to understand each person in your office as an individual? It's your job to help them grow. (We'll give you great tools for this in Chapter Seven: Learn to Coach Your Team to Success.)

## 6. Your team may be underperforming because you have chosen the wrong career path.

It happens. You start out all excited, believing you want to run an insurance agency, but over time, you realize it isn't a good fit after all. Can you still create a meaningful career? Of course, but once you've been the boss, it can be tough to imagine going to work for anyone else. So what do you do? One solution is to find someone in the community who wants to do what you hate doing—find the very best surrogate you can find.



Her job is to be the acting agent in the office, and she'll be well compensated for it. Or you could go through a recruiting firm and find someone with specific experience managing an insurance office. Her job is to come in and get your business on track and flourishing.

An agent who doesn't like their situation still has an obligation to the parent company, so he or she has to figure out a way to meet that. Ask yourself: if you were to quit tomorrow and come back as a consultant, what would be the one thing that someone would be willing to pay you for? That's your core strength. Focus on that as a way back in, as a way to re-stimulate your interest in your business.

However, the honest reality is, there will always be a few people who really have chosen the wrong career and would be better off starting over doing something else. Take your time, talk it over with your manager, and don't make your decision in haste. Perhaps you'd be happier offering your skills as a manager in your company and releasing all the pressures of owning a business. Whatever your new path is, be consoled that remaining in a career you hate is a sure recipe for all kinds of disasters.

**There are two other reasons why your team may be underperforming, but we'll cover those in later chapters. They are:**

- You have the wrong people on the bus or the right people in the wrong seats. See Chapter Five: Master the Tools of Selection Perfection.
- You are spending more time on the daily realities of your business than on your dreams. You are always doing, doing, doing, not sticking to the fundamentals of your Big Vision. See Chapter Four: Attracting The Best With A Big Vision.

### What did you see in the mirror?

Note below any reactions you had to those six reasons your team may be underperforming. Which ones hit close to home? Which ones are you willing to work on?