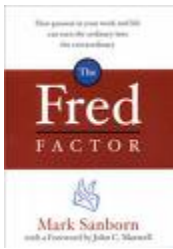


The Fred Factor Mark Sanborn



I met Fred Shea, the postal carrier, when I first moved to Denver, Colorado. Apart from the fact that he was the first postman to personally welcome me to a new home, he appeared unremarkable. However, Fred the Postman was quite remarkable in attitude with a warmth and sincerity that were apparent immediately. And his dedication to serving his customers made him extraordinary. Over the 10 years that Fred Shea served as my postman I observed him daily put into practice the principles that became the foundation for my best selling book, The Fred Factor, namely that:

Everyone makes a difference
Success is built on relationships
You must create value for others and
You should reinvent yourself on a regular basis

Fred the Postman taught me that by bringing passion into our work and life we can all turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

~ Mark Sanborn

The Fred Factor Mission

“Be a Fred...continually create new value for those you live and work with through dedication, passion and creativity. “

Principle number 1: Everyone makes a difference.

It doesn't matter how large or even how screwed up an organization is. An individual can still make a difference within that organization. An employer can hinder exceptional performance, choose to ignore it, and not adequately recognize or encourage it. Or, an employer can train employees to achieve exceptional performance and then reward it. But ultimately, only the employee can choose to do his or her job in an extraordinary way, either because of, or in spite of, circumstances.

Think about it. Do you add to or take away from the experience of your customers and colleagues? Do you move your organization closer to or further from its goals? Do you perform your work in an ordinary way or do you execute it superbly? Do you lighten someone's burden, or add to it? Do you lift someone up, or put someone down?

Nobody can prevent you from choosing to be exceptional. The only question at the end of the day that matters is, "What kind of difference do you make?"

Fred Smith, the distinguished author and business leader, has noted from his years of leadership experience that, "Most people have a passion for significance."

I agree, Consider what Fred did. He delivered mail. Where others might have seen monotony and drudgery, he saw an opportunity to make a greater difference in the lives of others.

Martin Luther King said, "If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"

Fred understood this. He is proof that there are no insignificant or ordinary jobs when they're performed by significant and extraordinary people. Politicians are fond of telling us that work gives people dignity. I don't disagree. Having work to do, and the means to make a living for ones self and family, is important. But that is only half of the equation.

What we haven't been told nearly enough is that people give work dignity. There are no unimportant jobs, just people who feel unimportant in their jobs. That's probably why B.C. Forbes, the legendary founder of Forbes magazine, said, "There is more credit and satisfaction in being a first-rate truck driver than a tenth-rate executive."

I have personally met a cab driver or two more inspired in how they performed their work than some upper level managers who seemed to have lost any inspiration for excellence. Still, while position never determines performance, ultimately performance determines position in life. That's because position is based on results, rather than intentions. It's about actually doing what others usually only talk about.

Setting a higher standard is more challenging than simply achieving the status quo. Ignoring the criticism of those who are threatened by the achievement of others depends not your title, but your attitude. Ultimately, the more value you create for others, the more

value will eventually flow towards you. Knowing you've done your best, independent of the support, acknowledgment or reward of others, is a key determinant in a fulfilling career.

Principle number 2: Everything is built on relationships.

Most of the mail sent to me has ended up in my mailbox. The service was performed by the U.S. Postal Service, which gave me what I paid for—nothing more, nothing less.

In contrast, the service I received from Fred was amazing for many reasons, but the biggest reason was the relationship I had with Fred. It differed from the relationships I've had with any other postal carrier, before or since. As a matter of fact, Fred was probably the only postal carrier I felt I ever had a personal relationship with.

It's easy to see why. Indifferent people deliver impersonal service. Service becomes personalized when a relationship exists between the provider and the customer. Fred took time to get to know me, and understand my needs and preferences. And then he used that information to provide better service than I had ever received before.

Fred is proof that, in any job or business, relationship building is the most important objective because the quality of the relationship differentiates the quality of the product or service. That's also why:

Leaders succeed when they recognize the human nature of their employees.
Technology succeeds when it recognizes the human nature of its users.
Fred the Postman still succeeds because he recognizes the human nature of his work.

Principle number 3: You must continually create value for others, and it doesn't have to cost a penny.

Don't have enough money? The necessary training? The right opportunities? In other words, do you ever complain that you lack resources? Have you started believing that "more with less" is impossibility?

Then consider Fred. What resources did he have at his disposal? A drab blue uniform and a bag. That's it! He walked up and down streets with that bag full of mail, and his heart and head full of imagination. That imagination enabled him to create value for his customers, and he didn't spend an extra dollar to do it. He just thought a little bit harder and more creatively than most other postal carriers.

By doing so, Fred mastered what I believe is the most important job skill of the 21st century: the ability to create value for customers without spending more money to do it. You too can replace money with imagination. The object is to outthink your competition rather than outspend them.

Over the years I've met many people who were concerned that they might lose their jobs and become a victim of downsizing. They were worried about whether or not they would be employed in the months ahead. I always tell them to quit worrying about it. That usually gets their attention. Of course, they are shocked at what seems to be my

indifference. In reality, I am just trying to refocus their attention from being employed to being employable.

A high school or college graduate today can probably count on being unemployed a few times during his or her career. But that unemployment will be brief, as long as the individual is employable. To be employable means having a skill set that makes a person desirable to any employer, regardless of industry or geographic location.

So what makes someone employable? There are many skills that contribute to employability, but I am convinced that the most critical skill is this: the ability to create value for customers and colleagues without spending money to do it. The trick is to replace money with imagination, to substitute creativity for capital.

Sanborn's maxim says that the faster you try to solve a problem with money, the less likely it is the best solution. Anyone can buy his or her way out of a problem with enough money. The challenge is to outthink, rather than to outspend, the competition.

This raises an interesting question: just what competition did Fred face? For many of us in the world of business, the competition is either inside or outside our organizations, and sometimes both. For example, you may be competing for a better position in your department or company. While professional decorum might prevent you from describing it this way, you hope that the best man or woman for the job will be the one who gets it, and you're working to prove that you're that person.

Often there is an identified competitor in the marketplace, too. When I spoke at a conference cosponsored by a delivery service that considers the U.S. Postal Service a rival, I was forbidden to use the story of Fred in my presentation. (It struck me as odd that the company wouldn't want me to use Fred as an example of the kind of service it aspired to and encouraged all of their employees to deliver.)

Because the Postal Service competes for revenue against alternative carriers, employees like Fred can help or hinder the cause. Most employers recognize that Fred is the kind of employee who could give them a competitive advantage, whether or not Fred thought in those terms.

I'm not sure that he does. I think Fred is proof that there is another, less tangible competitor in the world. That competitor is the job we could have done. In a manner of speaking, we compete against our potential every day. And most of us, myself included, fall short of what we are capable of doing or being.

I don't assume to understand all that motivates Fred, but I suspect the gratification he gets from excelling in his work is a big factor, just like the happiness and service he consistently delivers to his customers.

But, at the end of the day, Fred has beaten a silent opponent that threatens his potential, just as it threatens yours and mine. That competitor is mediocrity, a willingness to do just enough and nothing more than necessary to get by.

And while this competitor may not beat you out for a job promotion or take away corporate market share, it will just as surely diminish the quality of your performance and the meaning you derive from it.

Principle number 4: You can reinvent yourself regularly.

The most important lesson I've learned from Fred begs a question: If Fred could bring such originality to putting mail in a box, how much more could you and I reinvent our work?

There are days when you wake up tired. You figure you've read the books, listened to the audiotapes, watched the videos, and sat through the training sessions. You're doing everything you can possibly do but you're still fatigued and unmotivated. So when life is at low tide-when your professional commitment is wavering and just getting the job done and going home at the end of the day becomes your primary objective-what do you do?

Here's what I do: I think about the guy who used to deliver my mail. Because if Fred the Postman could bring that kind of creativity and commitment to putting mail in a box, I can do as much or more to reinvent my work and rejuvenate my efforts. I believe that no matter what job you hold, what industry you work in or where you live, every morning you wake up with a tabula rasa, a clean slate. You can make your business, as well as your life, anything you choose it to be.

Information taken from Mark Sanborn's The Fred Factor. Visit the Fred Factor website at <http://www.fredfactor.com/befred/principles.aspx>

Are you a Fred?

Take the Are you a Fred Assessment at <http://www.fredfactor.com/test/test.aspx>