

Greater IBMer Ruth Gerath Publishes "From Hired to Happy: The Secrets to a Vibrant Career and a Fulfilling Life"

Do you know what it means to be a professional? Are you sure?

Wherever you might be in your working life – from just starting out in your first job to the very peak years of your career - it's important, if not critical, to know how to be professional. But what does that mean, exactly?

Greater IBMer Ruth Gerath had the same question, so she wrote a book about it, titled "From Hired to Happy: The Secrets to a Vibrant Career and a Fulfilling Life". She sat down with The Greater IBM Connection to tell us more about it, and here's what Ruth had to say:



The Greater IBM Connection: What inspired you to create *From Hired to Happy*, etc.?

Ruth Gerath: One motivation was...what I saw time and again in working with clients in a variety of industries. Today, even in the largest companies, there is very little professional development training. People are expected to know how to behave in a professional manner, but no one says exactly what that means.

The result is that many very talented, intelligent, well-educated people end up shooting themselves in the foot at work. I wanted to write a book that would be enjoyable, easy to read, fact based, story enhanced, and a go-to resource for how to develop strong professional skills.

Your site's page about *From Hired to Happy* reads, "Because you are not two people". Can you elaborate?

Let me give you an example: If you take responsibility for what happens to you at work, are pragmatically optimistic, and you build strong relationships with others, you are in a good position to be successful in your career. And these same skills are essential for personal well-being.

And there's another, deeper connection between who you are at work and who you are outside of it: your thoughts. We have thousands of them every day and most simply run through our heads on autopilot. So, if someone does something to annoy you at work or in the grocery store, you'll probably think the same thoughts in either situation, *how rude, doesn't she see me standing here?*, for example. And from our thoughts come our emotions. In this example the emotion you might feel is anger or frustration. Then, from our emotions, we act - often not in our best interest.

From Hired to Happy shows you how to get a handle on this cycle so that you can act from a place of awareness, and stop being on autopilot – at work and in life.

By many assessments, the recession continues. Given that, is it realistic - is it a

viable goal - to want to be happy in your job? Shouldn't people be happy just to HAVE a job?

This is a fantastic question because it gets to the heart of the matter. Let's start with some background and then I'll tell you a story. First the background:

There are three levels of happiness: 1) hedonic (think about how you feel when you get a new car), 2) engagement – leading to what psychologists call *flow* (when time passes quickly because you are fully engaged in what you are doing), and 3) meaning (when the work you are doing has meaning beyond yourself).

The hedonic level can lead to spikes in happiness – up when something good happens but quickly going back to your baseline level. So, looking for things that enable you to spend more time in the levels of engagements or meaning lead to greater happiness.

Research shows that we have control over 40% of our happiness. The rest is a result of genetics and environment. But 40% is a huge amount and many people don't have any idea how to tap into it. The good news is that there are many things we can do to increase our lasting happiness. They include activities like writing down what you are grateful for each day, exercising regularly, helping other people, and making conscious choices about your thoughts.

Research shows that doing these, and other activities, regularly can have an enormous impact on your level of happiness. And happier people are more resilient. That is, they bounce back from life's challenges more quickly than unhappy people.

Now for the story: First I should say that I am a very healthy person but last year I was in the hospital for a few days. On the second day of my stay, a man came into my room and started cleaning the bed next to mine in preparation for a patient who had just had surgery. His name was Louis.

Louis' job was to clean hospital rooms. He was cheery and friendly and proudly explained to me how important his work was because the rooms had to be cleaned with great care so the patients would not get infections. He also talked about his children, particularly his daughter who was in a wheelchair because of a spinal condition.

I'm sure that in this economy Louis was happy to have a job. After all, he was the sole breadwinner for his family. His wife couldn't work because she had to be home with his daughter. But Louis, doing what others might find uninteresting or worse, was proud of his work. He felt it was important – that it had value – and it does!

Louis was engaged in his work, and he felt his work had meaning. So, yes, even in this economy, wanting to increase your happiness in your work is a realistic desire, and for many people, an achievable one. But first you have to know what happiness really is, and then look for ways to create it. And people who do that are happier.

And there's another important point. People who are happy at work enjoy many benefits including greater support from the organization, better reviews, stronger relationships with their colleagues and bosses, they earn more, they are happier outside of work, and they are healthier.

I wanted to help people become happier – in a realistic way – in whatever jobs they find themselves in. That’s what I hope to do in *From Hired to Happy*.

What do you see as the biggest mistake that people commonly make in their work lives?

Expecting others to make things happen for them. Research shows that people who are naturally happy, even in very difficult circumstances, take responsibility for their actions, seek mentors, are helpful to others, and focus on their strengths. From this perspective they are able to create far more success than if they simply waited for things to come their way.

You're an author, entrepreneur, an executive coach and more, with a long string of successes to your name. If you could share with our community one piece of career advice that has served you well, what would it be?

Take the long view. Not everything has to happen immediately.

Go easy on yourself. Have goals - stretch yourself. And if you are doing that, it’s a sure thing that at some point something is going to go wrong. So what! There is no learning without some failure along the way.

Thomas Edison, depending upon what legend you subscribe to, conducted 1,000 experiments that did not result in electricity. If he had beaten himself up because of all the experiments that failed, we might still be sitting in the dark.

Learn to see the good in other people.

Help others when you can.

Ok, that’s four things...

Tell me about the IBM phase of your career. What did you do with the company?

I started my career with IBM in 1982. I was a Systems Engineer in the Office Products Division. A highlight for me was when I had the privilege of demonstrating an IBM Displaywriter (word processor) to Julia Child and her husband. They were very gracious, curious, intelligent, and respectful to the young woman who was using her best IBM training to show them the wonderful features of our latest product.

I worked for IBM for 12 years. During that time I held a number of positions as a Marketing Representative in Boston and Waltham branch offices. At one point I managed a joint program to study the use of technology to aid the pedagogical environment between IBM and The Harvard Business School’s Advanced Management Program. After that I was a Headquarters Representative covering New England and Upstate New York specializing in an early decisions support products.

In your book you mention the training programs you went through at IBM. What did you take from that experience?

What I learned through IBM training was how to be professional. That became the key for me to take on more responsibility and work with very large clients and engagements because I had, in essence, a roadmap for how to behave. It gave me confidence because the skills I learned were well tested by what is one of the best companies in the world.

Professionalism is not about being stuffy or formal. There may be a bit more formality in some business situations than in others, but that is just the nature of the organizational culture.

What professionalism is really about, in my opinion, is respecting everyone you work with. If you take the time to prepare for meetings with colleagues or clients, research situations fully, listen carefully, speak clearly, ask for clarification, know and stick to your company's code of ethics and your own; if you do all those things, you are going to treat people with respect and people will respond in kind. The result is a civility that makes all your interactions more pleasant and more productive.

How did your time at IBM prepare you for the next steps in your career and for ultimately beginning your own company? What did you take from IBM into your next opportunities?

For me, I cannot imagine my career without the extensive training I received when I first started working for IBM. I spent much of two years in Dallas and then Atlanta, where IBM had training centers. I had the added benefit of a second year because I moved from the Office Products Division to the Mid-range Products Division and that required training on those platforms. We were educated in everything from technology, to how to speak with customers, demonstrate products, business ethics, and dress for success.

I have always said that IBM is the best finishing school on the planet.

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