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## Six-Year Anniversary Celebration

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(These are the polished notes and most important slides from the short talk Peter gave on Amida's 6th Anniversary.)

Amida's values, which we post on our website, are [Joy, Excellence, and Impact](#).

I remind us every week at our "All Hands" to do "stuff that matters with people we care about." It's the transcendent goal of a good life; it's almost the only thing, besides our integrity and our dignity, that we have any control over.

In the real world, it's hard to achieve joy, excellence, and impact every day. Some days it seems especially hard to fit "joy" and "excellence" into the same box. The ecology of our company – our values and our culture – sometimes collides with (how to say it?) the realities of PowerPoint and projects with folks who are unreasonably hard to please.

As soon as any enterprise starts to cut corners – write things that don't make sense or contain errors of fact or reason or clarity, miss delivery dates (to themselves or to customers), or bring anything less than A-game quality – it will show, and it will damage their reputation. That slope is steep, and it is irredeemable.

On the eve of our sixth anniversary, I am very proud to tell you that in 72 months of operations, we have had only one customer, out of dozens, who we can't use as a reference. I used to think it was two, but the other one just asked me for a favor; I guess we did better there than I thought. 😊

Today is a good day to talk about "joy." It is such an intrinsic, implicit, irreplaceable part of why I am here – I hope why *we* are here – that I think it may inadvertently get less attention than impact and excellence.

So let's focus on joy for a few minutes.

## Mac Donald on (Amida's) goals

*This is one of the world's most enviable companies, whose technological splendors lie open and unrestricted to all its colleagues.*

*We may never again be in a position to connect such a rich experience, and professional exposure, to positive impact on society. We should exploit the privilege; we should exploit the opportunity.*

*We are supervised by well-meaning, compassionate leaders whose highest purpose is our long-term interests, and who only want to help the company to thrive.*

*We should code, write, and study, and immerse ourselves in the knowledge that surrounds us. We should apply ourselves with everything we have, so that we, too, can be even-better prepared for a productive and intellectually rich life.*

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*Figure 1: A repurposed excerpt from "The Diversity Delusion," a book by Heather Mac Donald. I don't always agree with what she says, and we probably vote for different people, but I respect her a lot.*

I've thought about this a lot over the last few months.

Knowing that each of us experiences joy differently, here is the best way I know how to describe my highest joy for Amida, which I've "sampled" heavily from a writer named Heather Mac Donald.

Now, you can kick back and say "okay, Mr. Big Mouth, show me how you're living those values." That's one way to approach it. I know there are many honorary citizens from the show-me state of Missouri here.

But let's not forget, in fact let's *celebrate*, the fact that we're all people. I know that most workplaces expect us to leave our emotions outside. To a certain extent, that's probably good advice. But not only is that impossible all the time, I think it is undesirable. I know it is impossible for me.

Those emotions include, of course, irritation and frustration. But they also include joy and appreciation, especially when we've achieved something excellent, which is to say: accomplishing something worthwhile with people we care about.

Maybe the most important outcome of joy at work, just like joy outside of work, is how we feel when we can help each other achieve something together.

In any case, as David Brooks wrote, "Joy is not a feeling, it is an outlook." And the outlook I always seek, try to create, and occasionally find, is the joy of great teams.

## Lencioni on “most teams”



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Figure 2: Taken from Patrick Lencioni’s “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.” This is an example of exactly how not to create commitment and trust at work. Any of these dysfunctions is toxic to a great outcome.

The Lencioni framework is a great example of what not to do when you’re trying to build a great team. His book is one of my all-time favorites. I read a lot; I read this one like a bible.

This slide reminds me of the Tolstoy quote from Anna Karenina, edited for the work life: “Good teams are all alike; every dysfunctional team is unhappy in its own way.”

There are a lot of ways companies fail; I’ve seen it happen. Honestly, most teams I know don’t work. Good companies have a lot in common, and succeed mostly by maintaining the discipline and persistence to work on *exactly this framework*.

It’s the tip of the pyramid that I am focused on today. The outcomes. The results. It’s not only the place that ultimately decides the success of our business; it is the place of maximal joy. If we do everything else perfectly, and our work product is imperfect, we will not succeed. And not succeeding is no fun.

Those other qualities, those other processes, are there to help us achieve great results. So be accountable, be committed, embrace disagreement, and share personal imperfections and deficits so that others can help you. They lead to great results.

These are the qualities and processes that lead to winning teams. Winning, and winning the right way, is the most fun of all.

## Brooks on Mentors

*The mentors who really lodge in the mind are the ones who were hard on us – or at least were hard on themselves and set the right example – not the ones who were easy on us.*

*They are the ones who balanced unstinting love with high standards and relentless demands on behalf of something they take seriously.*

*In this way, a lot of what mentors do is to teach us what excellence looks like every day.*

*Mentors also teach how to deal with error. [They] give us a sense for how to do the second and fourth and tenth drafts, and, in the process, give us the freedom to not fear our failures; to proceed with confidence that invites them . . .*

verbatim quote!

*[Mentors] teach us how to embrace the struggle – that the struggle is the good part.*

*Figure 3: Knowing what you want is only half the battle. Everybody – no exceptions – needs help getting there. This repurposed quote is from David Brooks' book "The Second Mountain."*

One way we can learn how to overcome our fears, vulnerabilities, deficits, and doubts is with a good coach, with a good mentor.

Sometimes that person can be your boss, sometimes it is somebody else's boss, or just another person on your team.

I've had on-paper subordinates who became my mentors; over thirty years, this has happened twice. They changed everything for me.

Knowing and learning excellence, just like teaching and coaching excellence – never mind enforcing the standard – is hard and messy work.

Quoting Brooks, "Mentors are the ones who balance unstinting love with high standards and relentless demands on behalf of something they take seriously."

To which I quickly add, "something they find joy in doing."

Remember, you're not in this alone. We work on things that change the world, and we work on them together.

Your mentor can help you see what you don't want to see, listen to what you don't want to hear, achieve what you never thought was possible.

Your mentor can help you find a joy you didn't even know existed.

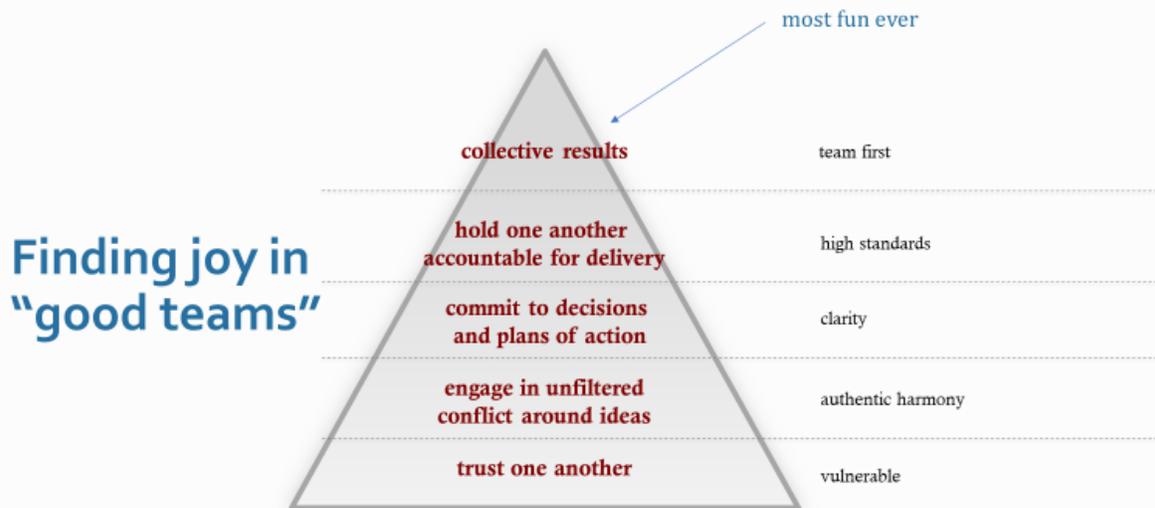


Figure 4: Also taken from Patrick Lencioni’s “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.” This team-first approach means that people subjugate their personal agendas to those of the team.

Joyful teams touch each other at their depths.

They create relationships and permanent bonds.

I know it is much easier said than done.

We’re looking for smart people who love what they do, believe in the mission, and find joy in our company. Those people naturally build relationships that last a lifetime. It’s about way-more than the paycheck.

There’s one person in the room right now to whom I’ve been bonded for almost thirty years. There are many others affiliated to Amida with whom I go back a decade, or two.

The best part of my day is when one of them calls me to say “hi,” sends me an email asking for or offering an update, or just invites me to cookies.

Perhaps you will find an authentically joyous connection with people here who share your values of transparency, trust, excellence, *interdependence*, the thrill of shared commitment, the fun of winning, and the joy of winning together.

## Thinking about our joy (Brooks again)

*Sometimes your life interactions don't leave a mark on you. At work, for example, you can show up, get paid, and leave.*

*Sometimes you can find a place – or create a place – that can touch people at their depths and leave a [positive] permanent mark.*

*Those places nurture real relationships and earn full commitment; they don't merely pay . . . they transform.*

*There are some people in the world, and there are some people in the room, who have sacrificed much and endured the unbearable just to get this far.*

*If nothing else comes out of today, be open to the inspiration of the people around you, and remember that a life of deep commitment is possible. My fondest hope is that we will build that joy together.*

*Figure 5: The most fun we can have in life is to win. To win at relationships (trust, commitment, loyalty), to win at business (excellence, impact, profitable growth), and to win “the right way,” with the highest integrity and fair play.*

I think of interviews as an opportunity; our first collaboration. Do we want the same thing? Can we work together? What if we disagree? How will you take feedback? How will you offer it? Will we enjoy being together?

For those of you who interviewed with me directly, you might remember that I told you, “I don't want this to be the best job you've ever had, I want it to be the best job you'll *ever* have.” I say it to anyone I've ever offered a job to.

I got a note last year from an Amida colleague who said that when they heard that, they thought, and I quote, “you were full of shit.” They certainly did not believe me in the moment (but, obviously, took the job anyway). The last line of the note said: “I stand corrected.”

My fondest hope is that, thirty years from now, you will be able to look back on your time at Amida and say, “it transformed *me* for the better.”

Shannon O'Brien spoke yesterday about the “impact of Amida,” and she was darn right. It is so easy to see what's in front of you, and harder to look up and see how it affects the world around you. But maybe the biggest impact of Amida will be on you.

Perhaps you will find something here, perhaps you will learn something here, perhaps you will create something here that will be a source of everlasting joy for our society, for our company, and for yourself.

While you're working on that: thank you for being part of *my* great joy.