"Steve Farber makes a clear case that 'operationalizing' love as the core principle of your business will bring people together and produce powerful results."

—Jack Canfield, coauthor of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul*® series and *The Success Principles*™

LOVE IS JUST DAMN GOOD BUSINESS

Do What You Love in the Service of People Who Love What You Do

STEVE FARBER

Author of *The Radical Leap* and *Greater Than Yourself*

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Do What You Love

in the Service of People

Who Love What You Do

STEVE FARBER

NEW YORK CHICAGO SAN FRANCISCO ATHENS
LONDON MADRID MEXICO CITY MILAN
NEW DELHI SINGAPORE SYDNEY TORONTO

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ISBN: 978-1-26-044123-9
MHID: 1-26-044123-7

The material in this eBook also appears in the print version of this title: ISBN: 978-1-26-044122-2, MHID: 1-26-044122-9.

eBook conversion by codeMantra
Version 1.0

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To my late brother, Bill Farber.

He was always my biggest fan.

I'd like to think he still is.

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10

PICTURES OF RECIPROCITY

You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.
—John Bunyan

THE ENERGY, AUDACITY, AND PROOF

The entire premise of this book hinges on the final element of my LEAP model for Extreme Leadership. That element is proof. If there's no proof that love is just damn good business, then what's the point, right?

Remember near the beginning of this book when I talked about the three typical reactions I get from leaders when I bring up the idea of love as a business principle? Some leaders, whether they openly admit it or not, believe love has no place in business. None. Others see love as valuable in business because love, as a concept, is intrinsically important; therefore, the business must sacrifice at times to honor the high principle of love. And then

there's the group that sees love as both intrinsically a good thing *and* actually good for business.

If there's no proof, then the first group is right, the second group is honorable albeit a bit naïve, and the third group, which includes me, of course, is both naïve and wrong.

So how do you prove that love is just damn good business? Well, it's not easy, but few things of great value are. Love isn't easy, so why should measuring its value be easy? But it is possible, and hopefully, you've already picked up on a few of the ways you can do it.

I've already mentioned that using a variation of the Net Promoter Score is a good way to measure the degree to which you are doing what you love in the service of people who love what you do. But it's also an obvious tool that helps measure how much others love what you do.

Elay Cohen, the SalesHood CEO I've mentioned a few times in this book, is an avid fan of the NPS. He doesn't check his sales pipeline multiple times a day, he told me, but he looks at his Net Promoter Score every chance he gets. He learns what he and his team are doing well and, more important, how they can improve.

"When we get a zero score from someone—because it happens, people give you zeros—they write something down," he told me. "No matter what they say, they get an e-mail from me and a handwritten thank-you note. 'Thank you for taking the time to tell us we can be better. We'd love a chance to learn from you.' People are floored. They think, 'Holy cow, you just did what? Who does that? Do people even read this stuff?'"

Cohen gets hundreds of pieces of NPS feedback a month, and he never sends handwritten thank-you notes to the customers who give him a 10—just the ones who fired a zero in his direction. If he can make those customers feel good—if he can regain their

trust and love—then, as he said, "they become a friend and a customer for life."

SalesHood, of course, has plenty of raving fans, and the evidence isn't just found in its NPS feedback. It's also found in the powerful testimonials that, to me, are the most valuable proof we can get to show the power of love in business. He calls them "Hood Love" stories, and many can be found on the company's website and YouTube channel.

"Literally, it's our customers saying what they love about working with SalesHood," he said. "And you can't make this shit up. They love us. They believe we're here to make them successful. We celebrate them; we help make our customers' careers because they can scale."

Internally, surveys that measure employee engagement provide a great measure of how well your team loves what you do. But in 2018, Cohen went a step further by hiring a seasoned human resources executive, Anne-Marie Canter, to interview all of the employees individually and record their feedback on what they loved about working for the company and where they saw areas for improvement. There were 44 comments about what people loved, and 10 about opportunities for improvement.

"There's a lot of love in there," Cohen said. "There's a lot of love and gratitude."

I've been wrong on many things in the course of six-plus decades of life. But I *know* I'm not wrong about the power of love as a business principle. I hope you've seen plenty of proof along the way, but I want to offer up just a little bit more, especially as it relates to reciprocity on investment. That's the kicker in our credo statement. Do what you love in the service of people *who love what you do*. If people love what you do, then you've elevated your game to a place that's undeniably, unequivocally . . .

damn . . .
good . . .
business.

I know this because I've seen it in companies all over the world, including all of the examples I've referenced previously in this book. Here are four more—a startup founded out of love, an established company that used love to avoid complacency and grow stronger, an executive who has witnessed the power of kindness, and a company that emerged from bankruptcy and used love to energize its failing culture. All are now experiencing record growth by operationalizing love in the way they do business.

BRYON STEPHENS, PIVOTAL GROWTH PARTNERS

Bryon Stephens believes love is damn good business. Not just because it *sounds* like a great idea, but because putting it into practice for decades has produced undeniable results. It's the foundation, he will tell you, of the formula that took a working-class kid from Logansport, Indiana, with a high school education and a job washing dishes to top leadership positions in the restaurant industry, including president of one of America's fastest-growing pizza chains.

"Everybody likes to feel good about love," Bryon said during the 2018 Extreme Leadership Experience, a three-day event we put on in San Diego. "But as a CEO, as an executive in an organization, I can tell you that . . . here's the bottom line: If this can't deliver results, radical results, then it's just a fun idea. It's not

going to be one where businesses step up and take it, because it has to deliver results. And this is proof—the career I've been lucky enough to have is proof that this delivers results."

Bryon worked with me as CEO of the Extreme Leadership Institute during our company's formation. He is now the cofounder of Pivotal Growth Partners, a consulting group that helps up-and-coming franchise brands scale. Before that, he spent 14 years helping grow Marco's Pizza from a regional chain in Ohio to more than 900 stores in 35 states and four countries. He rose to the position of president and chief development officer (you might remember him from an episode of the TV show *Undercover Boss*) before he retired from the company in 2017.

It's been an incredible journey for a guy whose mom worked three jobs when he was growing up and whose dad was raised as an orphan and never went to college. Bryon's parents, in fact, pushed him toward a job at a local factory rather than a university education, and before he turned 20, he had earned enough money to take out loans on a house, a truck, a camper trailer, and a boat. He was living the good life, at least that's what he thought. Then the factory workers went on strike, the paychecks stopped coming, and the bills continued to show up in his mailbox. That's when he took a job washing dishes at a Holiday Inn.

"I didn't get that job because I was saving up to go to college," he said. "This was my job. That was the job I got with the skills that I had and what was available."

When he bemoaned the turn of events in his career to his father, he got some profound advice: "It's not what a man does for a living that brings him honor. It's how he does what he does." His father suggested that Bryon "get out there and be the best dishwasher that they've ever seen and see where that takes you."

That's exactly what he did. Bryon came to that sink with a great attitude, worked hard each day, helped the cooks when they needed something, sang songs out loud, and occasionally danced while he did it, all with the hope of getting a promotion with slightly better pay. It wasn't long before the owner of the hotel took notice and offered him something even better: a management-track position with his company. It paid less than the factory job, he was told, but the long-term potential was much better.

Bryon's career took off as he realized that injecting love and enthusiasm into his work led to some amazing opportunities.

"The thing it did was put into me the love of four things," he said. "The love of restaurants, the love of franchising, the love of leadership, and the love of learning."

Restaurants? He loved cooking, serving the staff and the customers, the marketing, the training, the entertainment, and the energy created by his passion for it.

Franchising? He loved the opportunity it gave to local entrepreneurs with a dream, the ability to help those owners build a business and take pride in it, and the fact that it changed people's lives—just as it had changed his life.

Leadership? He loved being a trainer, coach, and teammate, the idea that he got to quarterback the team, the pressure of delivering results, and, yes, the accolades that came with success.

Learning? He made up for his lack of a formal education because he loved learning from every single person with whom he came in contact. He loved reading, preparing, and walking into the boardroom with the confidence that he was as well informed as anybody else in the room.

But here's the critical piece of his story: Bryon began to manifest all of that love in the way he managed and led others. In turn,

that love caused his team to love what they were doing, and his businesses to prosper in ways that exceeded everyone's expectations, except Bryon's.

Early in his budding restaurant career, Bryon's first management position was at a Ponderosa Steakhouse. This wasn't just any Ponderosa Steakhouse—it was one of the *lowest-performing* Ponderosa Steakhouses in the entire chain. In fact, he took the job knowing the owners already were planning to close it.

In his first speech to his employees, Bryon told his new team their Ponderosa was ranked as one of the worst in the company.

"Every store in the country serves the same food," he told them, "has the same marketing, has the same carpeting, has the same roof. Everything about it is the same. There's one difference. You know what that is?"

No one knew.

"It's the people," he told them. "When they say this is the worst store in the country, they're saying you guys are the worst in the country, and I don't buy it. I think we can show them that we're the best in the country."

They set a goal of going from worst to first within two years.

Bryon gave the team a vision, and he made sure they knew he believed in them and their ability to take the store to No. 1. Then he backed up his words with actions. He worked tirelessly, seldom taking a day off. And when a district supervisor toured the restaurant and took off points because of the worn carpet that the corporate office wouldn't replace, Bryon took his entire $100 a month in discretionary manager's money and, without getting approval, spent it on a new carpet that he ordered from a local merchant.

Then he looked at all the rules he was supposed to follow and figured out how to make them work for a store operating in a

low-income, inner-city environment. For instance, many restaurants have a rule that if you don't show up on time, you're fired. Makes sense, right?

But instead of jumping straight to punitive measures to discourage tardiness, Bryon asked a very simple, often-overlooked question: "Why weren't people getting to work on time?"

The answer, in retrospect, seems obvious. And it had nothing to do with people's attitudes.

Most of his employees, as it turned out, didn't have cars. They either walked to work or rode the bus, and public transportation in Gary, Indiana, was notoriously inconsistent.

"If I wanted people there on time," he said, "I needed to set up a system to allow them to be there on time." That meant Bryon sometimes would get in his car, drive to employees' homes, pick them up, and bring them to work.

Now ask yourself this question: "If my restaurant employees were consistently showing up for work in dirty uniforms, as many of Bryon's were, what would I do about it?"

Again, Bryon asked why. And, again, the answer was simple.

Many of his employees didn't have washers and dryers at home. So Bryon collected their uniforms and washed them himself.

Then he set up a "safe zone" in the store where employees who were in school could do their homework, which he and others helped them with. He went to their weddings. He went to the funerals of their friends and family members. He even loaned them money from his own pocket to help them do things they otherwise couldn't afford.

"What we did was demonstrate love for them," he said.

Rather than leading with the carrot (rewards) or the stick (fear) or by lighting a fire under his employees, Bryon stoked the

fire burning inside his employees' hearts by believing in them and caring for them in deeply meaningful and tangible ways.

One year later, Ponderosa Steakhouse 319 in Gary, Indiana, was voted the best steakhouse in the Ponderosa system, and Bryon was promoted to area supervisor, the fastest ascension to that position in the history of that company.

"We made sure they knew we weren't posers," he said. "We loved them, and what we got back was tenfold. The happiest moment of my life was not winning the award. Three of the young people who didn't know where their lives were going—they were just people like me, a dishwasher at a Ponderosa—became managers within the Ponderosa system the year after we won that award. That's what caring about people can do."

SHAWN MAHONEY, OAC SERVICES

What's the most dangerous threat to a thriving business? That's a tough question, and, frankly, there might not be a definitive answer. But I can tell you that complacency is right up there near the top, not just because of the damage it causes but because it's so hard to spot until long after the damage is done.

Shawn Mahoney, managing principal of Seattle-based construction management, architecture, and engineering firm OAC, recognized that he worked for a great company with great people and a great history, but he was determined to build on that success and not take it for granted. He became passionate about helping OAC create a more formalized understanding of its values and its culture so the company could more intentionally avoid potential pitfalls while growing as an organization.

"My frustration as an emerging leader was that it was one thing to say internally that we had a great culture, but if we weren't showing it, we had a problem," he told me. "To grow our enterprise, we needed to identify our foundation and our soul."

OAC, a privately held firm founded in 1955 that provides architecture, engineering, and construction management services, has weathered all sorts of storms, and it has evolved to meet the changing demands of the marketplace. Until a few years ago, however, it had no framework for aligning its mission, vision, and core values around the strengths of its culture. Mahoney used my LEAP model for that framework, but it wasn't something the company adopted overnight. In fact, it took several years.

Mahoney heard me speak in 2013 at the Construction Management Association's annual convention, and he intuitively knew that love, energy, audacity, and proof would have an important role in OAC's future. The company already operated on those values, but he couldn't just return to Seattle and send out a memo announcing that OAC was becoming a LEAP organization. First, he needed the company's other six principals to unanimously embrace the idea, and some of them had an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mindset. Second, he needed to sell it to the 70-plus employees, most of whom had an understandably low tolerance for flavor-of-the-month management best practices.

Since the company was doing well and had a healthy culture, Mahoney took a slower approach to formalizing love as a key component of their business. First, he and five other OAC leaders attended the Extreme Leadership Summit in 2014. Then he and a few others participated in an Extreme Leadership Certification Program. By January 2015, when Mahoney was named the firm's managing principal, he felt there was enough momentum to test the message more widely throughout the organization. They

organized a series of events that May—LEAP Week, they called it—to share the big ideas around love, energy, audacity, and proof, and then they began exploring ways to adopt them as a framework at OAC.

The measured rollout of the program allowed for an organic experience. They began by announcing that management was committing to a more inclusive, open-door leadership approach. They told employees this would begin with a survey to learn what employees valued. They would then form four employee-led committees that would help determine the direction of a new framework.

"We are no longer just going to make all the decisions at the top and push it down," they said. "We aren't going to be in a secluded room where you have to make an appointment to make an appointment to see us. We are going to get your feedback and love and care enough about you to value what you think."

OAC had used committees in the past, often without the best of results. That's because the committees were run by a member of the leadership team.

"It was like saying, 'I'm empowering you to do everything, but check with me first,'" said Mahoney.

This time, they took a different approach. The new committees—culture, communications, talent, and growth—were led by employees, who established key objectives and results that were measured against cultivating love, generating energy, inspiring audacity, and providing proof. They made recommendations for everything from community service projects to policies that would shape the way OAC operated. And they regularly reported on the plans and progress of their work.

For the first time, the employees felt like they were making the decisions. They not only bought into LEAP as a framework

but they also adopted a modified version of the credo you've been reading about in this book as their vision statement: "We do what we love in the service of people who love what we do." And their core values? Cultivate love, generate energy, inspire audacity, and provide proof. Eventually they crafted a mission statement that spoke to their values and was supported by the framework: "Serve our clients and communities as trusted partners to design, build, and improve where people live, work, learn, and play."

It took nine months to come up with the mission, vision, and values, but Mahoney said it was worth the wait.

"Every single person felt part of it, and they all were embracing it," he said. "If we had just rolled it out at LEAP Week, there wouldn't have been any steam. Now there's ownership in it."

Because of that ownership, LEAP is incorporated into nearly every aspect of the business—including performance reviews, the hiring process, internships, and community service.

Mahoney originally felt an immediate connection to the LEAP model in part because he could see those components in the people who worked at OAC. It wasn't something he had to create so much as bring out of the shadows and into the light.

"The love and the energy were a slam dunk," he said. "And in our business, as in any consulting business, providing proof is the deliverable you have to have."

Formalizing it and embracing LEAP has helped them bring those values to life in more notable and measurable ways. As a professional services firm, for instance, OAC always has recruited and valued people who value relationships. But like many organizations, they never used the word *love* to describe how they operated as a business.

"It took some time for people to recognize that love is an essential part of how they do business and then just to get used to

saying the word," Mahoney said. "I think the first couple times, it feels a little funny, right? Especially for engineers, architects, contractors. But they are the first ones to give their colleague a hug after accomplishing a major task. So once you take a little while to socialize it, they get it."

OAC had workshops with exercises that helped employees personalize the values so they could see, for instance, what love meant to them when it came to clients, vendors, partners, and, most important, each other. They realized, for instance, that love encompassed values like trust, respect, listening, and caring—all things they already believed in.

Putting terminology and language around their values helped OAC incorporate them into their formal awards and recognition programs, and it also helped them become more intentional about sharing their values outwardly. They started by putting the mission, vision, and values on the internal website, then on the public website, and more recently, in their proposals to clients and on social media sites.

"It's definitely making a difference," Mahoney said. "There's a firm in Seattle, Big Fish Games, for example, that's really committed to their mission, vision, and core values, so they are looking for other companies with similar values and the same discipline. Facebook [which is another OAC client] is a great example of where it really resonates with them."

The feedback, internally and externally, is providing proof that LEAP is working for OAC. The survey conducted in 2017 showed marked improvement from the initial baseline survey in 2015. OAC asked employees for feedback on a number of statements grouped into 12 categories, and only those who strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed were considered favorable responses when tabulating the results. In every category, the percentage

of favorable responses increased from the baseline survey. By industry standards, a 5 percent increase is considered difficult to achieve and therefore quite significant. Yet 9 out of 12 of the categories had an increase of at least 5 percent. Culture (plus 11.60 percent) and workplace environment (plus 14.22 percent) showed the biggest increases, and the average increase was 6.75 percent.

In 2016, *Seattle Business* released its list of best companies to work for in the state of Washington, and OAC ranked No. 14 among midsized companies. By 2017, OAC had shot up to No. 2. Those rankings are more than nice ego biscuits. They also have led to new relationships with other leaders of companies on that list, which has expanded OAC's business opportunities. And, of course, they've provided proof that what they are doing is working.

Jenna Lynch, president and chief client officer of the Extreme Leadership Institute, who worked as a consultant for OAC, said OAC provides a prime example of how a great company can proactively identify and build on its strengths.

"I work with a lot of companies, and OAC was not a toxic company when I came in," Lynch said. "I don't want people to think that they only need LEAP if they are in a dismal state of business and about to close the doors. That's not the case at all. It's really important to know that companies can come in that are already great but that could be exponentially better. Shawn was an emerging leader who wanted to get in front of this, and he built a structure that made OAC even stronger and better."

OAC is experiencing unprecedented, explosive growth. When Mahoney and I first met in 2014, OAC was a company with 50 people in three offices that did $9.8 million in annual revenue. By the end of 2018, they employed 148 people in seven offices and had $28.5 million in revenue.

"Since Leap Week," Mahoney told me, "we have grown 142 percent, and revenues have increased 150 percent. We are a $40 million company now annualized."

JILL LUBLIN, AUTHOR AND PR EXPERT

Jill Lublin arrived in Las Vegas for a speaking engagement only to discover that the hotel where she had booked a room didn't have her reservation, nor did it have an available room. It was late and she was tired, but things got worse before they got better. She called 18 hotels before she found a room at the Marriott Renaissance, and it was 2 a.m. by the time she walked through the front doors and up to the check-in counter.

The clerk at the desk had talked to her on the phone and already had given her a discounted rate, but she took one look at Jill's face and made an executive decision.

"You know what, forget $169," she said as she checked Jill in. "Let's make it $129. I can tell you've had a tough night."

For the rest of her stay—which turned into three nights because she never went back to her original hotel—Jill was treated with respect and kindness. It earned the hotel two more nights worth of business, but it also gave Jill an example of kindness that she shares when she speaks to groups or to friends such as me.

That clerk's act of love provided real business value for her employer because it created a customer who loved what she did and loved the fact that the hotel had empowered her to do it.

"They've got policies and procedures that they have to follow," Jill told me, "but they're smart enough to give their people some decision-making abilities and possibilities."

Earlier I shared a formula: kindness + high standards = love at work. Obviously, I see kindness as a critical component to love in the context of business. Jill feels so strongly about kindness as a business principle that she wrote a book about it, *The Profit of Kindness*. And she teaches that there are seven key elements of kindness that create a positive return: treating employees, customers, clients, and anyone else connected to your business with respect, compassion, generosity, positivity, gratitude, flexibility, and patience.

Those acts of kindness, which I see as acts of love, will be returned in kind, so to speak. In practical terms, customers are more likely to recommend you, employees will complain less and work more, and everyone will simply be more forgiving during those inevitable times when you, because you are human, fail.

"When something bad does happen," Jill told me, "there is an opportunity to say, 'It's OK. I know this doesn't happen a lot.'"

In her book, Jill cites examples from Honda, KIND bars, Airbnb, CEO Space, Coca-Cola, Zappos, LL Bean, and Kleenex, among others, as companies that have operated with enough consistent kindness to earn positive returns for their businesses.

"Kindness is a currency," she said. "Imagine that your clients are referral partners, which, of course, is a kind thing that brings you actual currency—it brings you actual business. That is the ultimate kindness: referring someone. That's a currency and it results in true business."

When you invest in love as a business principle and in the kindness that comes with it, you reap the rewards—referrals, loyalty, employee engagement, retention, forgiveness, and on and on the list goes.

"It's the actual piece that will make a company stand out and be remembered, even more than annual reports and bottom-line P&Ls," she said.

MITCH LUCIANO, TRAILER BRIDGE

Trailer Bridge is one of those companies that has plenty of reason to toot its own horn. The Jacksonville, Florida, *Business Journal* uses anonymous feedback from area employees to create its annual list of "Best Places to Work," and Trailer Bridge has been in the top 10 in its category every year since 2016. In 2018, it won the Silver Bell Humanitarian Award for its contributions to relief efforts in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria. And on top of all that, the company is more profitable than it's ever been in its 25-plus-year history.

Not bad for a company that emerged from bankruptcy in 2012, went through four CEOs during the ensuing three years, and was only earning about a 1 percent return per year when Mitch Luciano took over in 2014. Luciano was given three directives: One, fix the financial bottom line by increasing profitability. Two, fix the culture. And three, don't let No. 2 get in the way of No. 1.

Luciano, who had been with the shipping and logistics company since 2012, knew the strengths and weaknesses of the culture, and he immediately began implementing a love-focused leadership approach that turned the leaky ship into a powerful force in its community and industry.

Previous efforts to revive the company had focused largely on processes—everything from expense reports to the equipment maintenance program. Those were important, but Luciano wanted to address the core problem, not just the surface-level symptoms. He wanted answers to deeper, more difficult questions, like these: "Why do people hate it here?" "Why do we have such huge turnover?" "Why is it like pulling teeth to get information out of people?"

"They didn't look into those things," he told me, "but I knew that's what had to be done."

The drastic changes that were needed wouldn't be easy to implement. Trailer Bridge employed about 110 men and women who ranged in age from 22 to 73 and who had very different cultural and economic backgrounds. Gaining alignment among such a diverse group was a challenge in itself. Plus, the company's employees—including the top-ranking executives on Luciano's team—had very little appetite for another change in leadership philosophy. They had grown accustomed to working in silos within a culture that focused on operational execution at the expense of relationships between coworkers or with customers.

Luciano understood that the power of love is found in the trust it creates over time, so he made slow, modest changes while focusing on the consistency of his leadership behaviors. Some of the initial changes were cosmetic, but meaningful. He wouldn't accept the CEO title, for instance, until he had earned more trust as the company's leader. He also lowered the walls of the cubicles so people could see each other and interact more naturally. He put in some new furniture and new carpeting. And he bought Ping-Pong and foosball tables. But he didn't stop with surface-level changes. To put it in shipping terms, he knew he needed more than a shiny deck. He needed to repair the hull as well. So he created a leadership team that embraced and modeled his approach for building a culture that valued loving one another.

"I don't think we ever said we would change the culture," Luciano said. "We talked about improving the environment and their experience. The objective was to make it a great experience for people."

Soon, the culture began to change, and Trailer Bridge formalized Luciano's leadership approach. Indie Bollman, who took

over as head of HR in July 2015, worked with Luciano on a training program with the objective of creating a common leadership philosophy and building team unity. The first phase laid a foundation and included assessments that allowed each leader to receive anonymous feedback from others.

"It was difficult," Luciano said. "I got mine from 15 or 16 people, and it took me a while to swallow that pill."

One of the more challenging parts of the first phase came when Bollman and Luciano introduced the "love" component to a leadership team that included veterans of the Marines and the Navy. Luciano saw a look in their eyes that told him they weren't much interested in what they assumed would be a touchy-feely approach to leadership. The love component, he explained, might include a hug here or there if that fits your style and that's what someone needs, but it's really more about consistently respecting others and taking care of their needs.

"Kindness, to me, is love," he said. "I really focused in on the emotional side of love and things like respect, kindness, and loyalty. Those are all things that create love."

He also gave them tangible examples of what love looks like in leadership.

"Love is when people walk into your office and say, 'Do you have 5 minutes?' and you know it's not going to be 5 minutes—it's going to be 30," he said. "You know it as soon as they walk in, and you turn your computer off, and you look them in the eye, and you pay attention to everything they have to say, and you actually hear them."

The second phase of the Trailer Bridge leadership program promoted the idea of mentorship and helping others become their best. This was particularly important, Luciano said, because Trailer Bridge had developed a culture of information hoarding.

Some leaders hoarded information because they feared releasing it might contribute to their obsolescence. Others simply didn't trust anyone else to use the information correctly.

"We had to make them think about the people on their team they could teach and really share information with," Luciano said.

Then he promised them he wasn't asking them to share that information so he could dump someone with a $100,000 salary and replace her with someone making $60,000.

"That's not my goal," he told them. "Again, a moment of trust."

Most of the leaders who went through the program bought into the idea, but at least one resisted to the point where he was let go.

"If you're a hoarder of information, you're no longer valuable to me," Luciano said. "If you feed and educate those around you, then you're more valuable. Those who were hoarders, they're no longer a part of Trailer Bridge."

Tough love, in other words.

The third part of the training focused on customer relationships—using love as a foundational mindset for providing customer care.

The results of the changes at Trailer Bridge have been dramatically positive for the employees, for the customers, and for the bottom line.

The employees have gotten more from the cultural transformation than a chance to play Ping-Pong on their breaks. They helped define the culture they wanted, the type of leadership they needed, and the company's formal values—what they call "the Trailer Bridge 12," or the "TB12." Their feedback surveys and reviews no longer recommend the traditional "start, stop, continue." Now they focus on "love it, learn it, fix it" to plan their next steps.

Turnover at Trailer Bridge has decreased, more employees are recommending the company to their friends, and independent surveys are giving the company high marks on employee satisfaction. Luciano especially appreciates the firsthand accounts of how things have changed. Employees have told him they had been "hanging on for the paycheck" for 10 years, but now they loved their jobs and their coworkers, and their lives were better.

"Our employees are bringing us quality candidates," Bollman said. "If that's not enough, the people who apply on our website are quality talent. I didn't see that coming, but it's changed that whole process."

Customers, meanwhile, also are seeing Trailer Bridge in a new light. Surveys in 2015 painted a picture of the company as a bargain carrier that won business by competing primarily on price. Now Trailer Bridge is still seen as competitive on price but its advantage for customers is in its commitment to service.

Two years ago, for example, the company sailed to the Caribbean twice a week, but often they would simply cancel a trip if the ship wasn't at least 70 percent full. Why? Because, according to the balance sheet, the expense didn't justify the revenue the freight was producing.

As a customer, can you imagine booking a shipment to Puerto Rico and being told at the last minute that the boat was canceled because it wasn't full enough? That would happen frequently. As a result, customers lost faith that their cargo would arrive on schedule, and the service reviews were dismal, to say the least.

If the company really loved its customers, they would sail anyway—no matter how empty the ship, or how much of a loss they would take on that particular run. So the Trailer Bridge team decided to "always sail," regardless of capacity, because that is how you keep your word to the customer.

The employees of Trailer Bridge also are much more solutions focused. They might not be able to do exactly what a customer wants, but now they look for alternative ideas that will address the root problem, sometimes even when there's no direct financial incentive for the company. Because that's what you do when you love somebody.

One customer, for instance, arrived to pick up a dump truck that he bought and had shipped to Jacksonville from San Juan. When he tried to drive it away, he discovered that the truck was dead. Three Trailer Bridge employees helped him get it started, but the truck broke down on a nearby highway. So the Trailer Bridge mechanics went out and got it running. The customer sent Luciano a two-page thank-you note.

"Your angels saved my day," he wrote. "I didn't know what I was going to do. I was going to be stuck sleeping in a dump truck on the side of the highway. Instead, I called them, and they were there to help me. They had no reason to help me. They didn't gain anything out of it. I just want you to know what amazing people you have working at Trailer Bridge."

The letter brought tears of joy to Luciano's eyes.

"They went out and did their own thing," he said. "That's why I take pride in my team. They do these things on their own. A perfect stranger to them, but they did it, and that's what matters."

As customers realized they could trust Trailer Bridge with their shipments, business increased and the number of times they sailed at less than 70 percent capacity dropped dramatically. In 2015, they typically sailed at 75 to 80 percent full. Now their average ship sails at 95 to 100 percent capacity.

"That had a huge impact on our results," Luciano said. "That obviously had direct results on our bottom line."

They also have seen an increase in customer retention.

In 2015, Luciano's first full year as president of the company, the number of returning customers went up to 20 percent, a number they've matched or bettered each year since. The company has seen record profitability each year for four consecutive years, with earnings from 2015 through 2017 greater than the previous 23 years *combined*. 2018 yielded the greatest revenues and earnings in the history of the company, and they're opening new offices around the United States. The board and the owners of the enterprise are, as you can imagine, quite pleased, to say the least.

Still, Luciano sees Trailer Bridge as a work in progress.

"It takes years to build a culture, and you can tear it down in a day," he said. "You have to keep doing it. You have to keep focusing on it."

ABOUT STEVE FARBER AND THE EXTREME LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Listed as one of *Inc.*'s global Top 50 Leadership and Management Experts, Steve Farber is a leadership pioneer, strategist, keynote speaker, and bestselling author on Extreme Leadership. His expertise is in creating organizational cultures where leadership is an opportunity and obligation not just for those in authority but for everyone at all levels.

His accessible, deeply inspirational, and eminently practical Radical LEAP framework is widely used across the business, nonprofit, and education spectrum. Steve has been credited with redefining leadership in deeply personal yet practical terms and with reenergizing thousands of people to make a significant difference in their businesses, lives, and the world around them. Steve's Extreme Leadership Institute team develops programs with one thing in mind: radical results for clients. The institute's talented consultants have helped more than 20 companies achieve "Best Place to Work" status.

Steve and The Extreme Leadership Institute team can work with you in the following ways:

- Deliver practical, inspiring, and entertaining keynote speeches to your employees and colleagues
- Operationalize love in your business to earn a competitive advantage

- Embed the practices of Extreme Leadership in your organization's DNA
- Provide significant ongoing leadership learning and development
- Create and amplify deep employee engagement
- Develop your award-winning culture
- Help you achieve radical results

Steve has worked with Johns Hopkins, Cisco, Intel, TriNet, Hyatt, and hundreds of other organizations large and small. He has spoken to or worked with corporate clients in virtually every industry there is, from the tech sector to financial services, manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, entertainment, public education, retail, and government.

To book Steve Farber for your next event, visit www.SteveFarber.com.

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