Make Way for a New Corporate Title: Chief Fun Officer

How does a former elementary school teacher turned professional singer transition to the role of business consultant and CFO?

"I was living a double life," says Rebecca Binnendyk, a new breed of CFO, which stands for – get this -- Chief Fun Officer.

"I was living the glamorous singer life performing all over the world, but simultaneously found myself pulled towards exciting opportunities to volunteer in places like Uganda and Peru. What I realized was the experiences I was having all had a few things in common: They were meaningful, challenging and most of all, fun."

She learned that incorporating fun into everyday life is serious business, and creating a fun culture can completely transform companies and set them apart from their competition.



Rebecca Binnendyk

Rebecca Binnendyk leads the charge with her bold approach to leadership, culture and communication.

When we interviewed Binnendyk, we wanted to deep dive into the idea of a CFO and learn how they can add "a little fun" to every job description.

CBJ: First, what is a Chief Fun Officer?

RB: As a Chief Fun Officer, I work with CEOs and other executives to help them realize how vital fun and positive work culture is to their company or organization. This goes beyond adding a ping pong table to the office or having Friday lunches. This is about making real changes to their company or organization's work culture. It's about having a lasting impact. I create customized creative solutions to help leaders infuse fun into the lives of their employees and challenge them to up-level day-to-day life.

CBJ: So, when you start consulting with a new company and looking for ways to add fun, where do you start?

RB: There's a pretty straightforward sequence that takes about three months. There are four things to keep in mind. Get clarity on your vision. In order to reach your destination, you have to know where you're going. I help people identify their BIG picture dreams. Through conversation, fun interviews, games, and role play, we



figure out what you want to create for yourself, your business, and your customers. It's about what you WANT or have always dreamed of creating. It's about going deep in conversation and figuring out priorities. If they don't know, I help them discover what it is. It requires a person to be vulnerable, courageous, and ready to take risks. Once we figure out the big vision, we work out a plan for how they can achieve it based on daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual goals. A lot of this work is helping a person manifest what they want, be able to see what's right in front of them, and energetically align themselves with the vision they put forth.

We develop a strategic plan to help them get there. The strategic plan will put the vision into action so each day something is being done to reach the goal. We brainstorm all the ways action can be taken. These could be actions in personal life, family life, and work life. There are so many things we "could" be doing. Most high achievers are well aware of everything they "should" do and many are putting A LOT of things into action already, but they still find themselves feeling stuck in one or more areas of life. So, I identify where the sticking point is and then shift and maneuver the action plan so it resonates. Upgrade skills -- where needed. Bottom line: improvement could sky-rocket their business. The very successful CEO doesn't realize he or she could improve their communication skills; the public speaker doesn't realize their marketing skills need a serious revamp. Often, we are so caught up in our world of business, we either become stagnant and content or frustrated with lack of success or moving forward. This requires an honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses. This would start with the CEO but often the entire company ends up taking part in one or more assessments to determine where growth can happen.

Optimize your environment. The space in which you attempt to innovate, create and be productive is affected by physical, mental, and relational environments. Creating a space where you can thrive is key. From decluttering your desk to de-

cluttering your mind, I help you recognize whichever areas may be infringing on forward movement and preventing you or your company from achieving what it's truly capable of. Intelligent, driven people are so busy taking everything on their shoulders, and often still go home at night wondering if they've done it right. Mastering your psychology enables high-functioning individuals, to take action -- and with a CFO, you'll discover ideas you hadn't thought of.

CBJ: How can leaders of organizations make fun a practical part of work?

RB: Well, as I said, it's not about adding a ping pong table and a snack bar or beer on Fridays. Fun is serious business, and what's fun for one isn't necessarily fun for all, so it requires strategic communication. Many people are suffering as a direct result of their work environments. Unhappy, stressed or overworked people are scientifically proven to be less creative and innovative, so one of the first things I do is teach leaders how to authentically connect with their employees and colleagues. Leaders recognize that environment and culture affect everything from productivity to ROI's, but don't know how to implement the changes needed. This is where a CFO can help strategize. There are three key elements to this:

1. Create an environment where people have meaning.

2. Create an environment where people can have an impact.

3. Create an environment where people can excel.

CBJ: What is the number one mistake leaders make when it comes to creating work culture?

RB: They aren't listening. Employees often have ideas or complaints, but if no one is listening, nothing changes. Without being heard, employee retention and productivity decrease. If CEOs, executives, and managers LEAD by example and create an environment where employees feel free to laugh, to share personal stories, to throw out their wildest business ideas, everyone feels more valued and invested in the company's growth. Leaders must make time and be willing to listen and hear what would make their teams happy. It might be something as simple as providing free parking or allowing flexible hours or, in this day and age, the ability to work remotely. If you don't ask, it's unlikely your employees will bring things up. Instead, they'll just fall into the high percentage of Americans looking for another job that gives them more of what they want. Making change happen is the next step. The payoff is seeing improvements company-wide from increased productivity to retention of top talent to saving often millions of dollars for companies on an annual basis.

CBJ: Why is fun a serious business then?

RB: Let me share some intriguing stats. According to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace, only 15 percent of employees are engaged in their workplace. This means most people are doing the bare minimum in their jobs with little to no emotional attachment to the work outcomes. This costs an estimated $550 billion in lost productivity per year -- and this is just in the U.S. This is why it's serious business.

Most CEOs, execs and managers know the culture is a key element to company success and bottom-line revenue. Where they get stuck is knowing when, how and what to implement and how to measure and evaluate the overall impact the changes are having. There's just too much red tape to go through; they've done it the same way for years and it seemingly works, so this mindset stops them from moving forward. It's precisely why you hire a CFO. There is a huge opportunity for companies who want to be changemakers in their industry and lead the way. Look around. The companies that are thriving amidst a pandemic are the ones who invested in their people years ago. What do you want your company to look like in 1-2 years from now? Because what you chose to do now is certainly what will determine your future success. — By Dana Sullivan, California Business Journal

For more on Binnendyk's philosophy: rebeccabinnendyk.com / linkedin.com/in/rebeccabinnendyk/

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