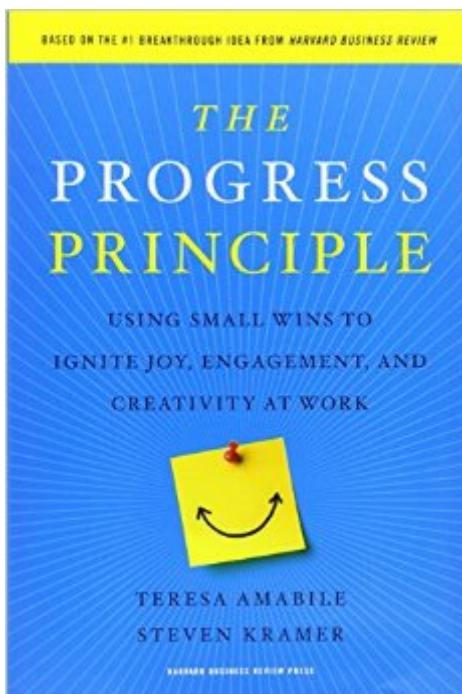


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# The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins To Ignite Joy, Engagement, And Creativity At Work



## Synopsis

What really sets the best managers above the rest? It's their power to build a cadre of employees who have great inner work lives; consistently positive emotions; strong motivation; and favorable perceptions of the organization, their work, and their colleagues. The worst managers undermine inner work life, often unwittingly. As Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer explain in *The Progress Principle*, seemingly mundane workday events can make or break employees' inner work lives. But it's forward momentum in meaningful work; progress; that creates the best inner work lives. Through rigorous analysis of nearly 12,000 diary entries provided by 238 employees in 7 companies, the authors explain how managers can foster progress and enhance inner work life every day. The book shows how to remove obstacles to progress, including meaningless tasks and toxic relationships. It also explains how to activate two forces that enable progress: (1) catalysts; events that directly facilitate project work, such as clear goals and autonomy; and (2) nourishers; interpersonal events that uplift workers, including encouragement and demonstrations of respect and collegiality. Brimming with honest examples from the companies studied, *The Progress Principle* equips aspiring and seasoned leaders alike with the insights they need to maximize their people's performance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read an advance copy of *The Progress Principle* several months back, and I just went back and read the book again. I am even more impressed this time than the last. Four things struck me in particular: 1. While most management books are based on anecdotes, the biased recollections of

some famous executives, or on research that is presented as rigorous (but are not... Good to Great is a perfect example), the Progress Principle is based on the most rigorous field study ever done of creative work. And it draws on other rigorous work as well. As a result, the overall advice about the importance of small wins may be known to many people, but once you start digging into the smaller bits of advice about how to keep work moving along, the evidence behind those is very strong. In my view, the Progress Principle is the best example of an evidence-based management book I have ever seen.<sup>2</sup> The authors didn't drown in their rigor and the details of their work. They worked absurdly hard to write a book that is quite engaging to read and chock full with one implication after another about what you can do right now to do more effective work and to motivate it in the people around you.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the main point of this book may seem obvious to some readers, but if you listen to most management gurus and fancy consulting firms, the approach that the authors suggest is actually radically different.

The researchers themselves never saw it coming. When Teresa Amabile of the Harvard Business School and her husband developmental psychologist Steven Kramer decided to collaborate on a study exploring worker creativity through the eyes of those in the trenches who actually perform the work they simply had no idea of the secrets they were about to unlock. Typically, studies are done exploring topics like employee productivity and creativity from the point of view of upper management. The methodology that Amabile and Kramer chose to employ for this project would prove to be a bit unconventional to say the least. The authors were primarily interested in determining exactly what it is that motivates top performers. They were able to recruit 238 people from 26 project teams in 7 companies in 3 different industries. The participants were professionals whose work required them to solve complex problems creatively. What made this study truly unique was that at the end of each workday the participants were e-mailed a diary form that included several questions about their work experiences on that particular day. Much to the authors' surprise an overwhelming majority of the participants responded on a daily basis. Furthermore, they recorded their experiences and impressions in a far more candid way than expected. Amabile and Kramer had unwittingly stumbled upon a previously unexplored world. The insights that they gained from this remarkable undertaking is the subject of their new book "The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work". Many business books can be rather dry and a chore to read. But much to my surprise this book was different. I simply could not put it down.

When I was an academic engaged in research, I was familiar with Teresa Amabile's work. She was and is a respected researcher who studies creativity in organizational settings. So I was eager to read this book and intrigued by the notion of small wins. The book shows the author and her team conducted impeccable research. They found that people who were fortunate to engage in work they found meaningful, and who were appreciated and valued for their work, also were productive and creative. They noted the importance of emotions during the day. They emphasized that organizations will, often unintentionally, kill creativity and create a workplace where people flee. My biggest question about the book was, "Who should read it?" The authors observe that an organizational environment is created by a confluence of forces coming together. It's rarely the case that one person can change the culture, although the CEO can make a huge difference, as shown by the story of Xerox's Anne Mulcahy. Yet will company CEOs and divisional VPs actually read the book and, if they do, will they have the skills and resources to make changes? Does the book provide enough direction to make change? In any company there are so many ways a company can create negativity; if nothing else, success can make a workplace stressful. I've met people who say the culture of Microsoft has become more like established business than a start-up. I once worked for a company where a new CEO wanted to create more employee involvement, yet many employees saw the new activities as intrusive; they wanted to do their work and go home and "bonding" was not important.

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