



John's Story—Short Version

FISH! is an 18-minute documentary shot at Pike Place Fish Market, in Seattle, Washington. Through the words and actions of the fishmongers, filmmaker John Christensen illustrates the four practices of The FISH! Philosophy. These fundamental elements—Be There, Play, Make Their Day and Choose Your Attitude—show up in interactions with customers, tourists and one another. The film is a model for what an engaged and alive workplace can be.

John's Story—Long Version

NOTE: If time allows and you are a good storyteller, this can be an effective way to set up the film. For more on storytelling ideas and techniques, see page 95.



John Christensen, who is responsible for creating FISH!, is the son of a filmmaker father and Sunday School teacher mother. In college, he considered becoming a teacher, but ultimately chose to follow in his father's footsteps and to make films that enrich the human spirit.



John had been searching for examples of workplaces where people were really engaged and alive, and happened to be out in Seattle shooting a film about a poet named David Whyte.

David Whyte is a fascinating guy. He uses poetry in corporate America to improve organizational culture. One of the things David points out is that we spend the majority of our waking hours at work—more time than we spend with our families. If that time is unfulfilling or miserable, the majority of our lives is unfulfilling or miserable. On the other hand, if our work is engaging and enjoyable, the majority of our lives is too.



After spending a few days with David, John had a free morning in Seattle and went out to see the sights. Someone recommended that he visit Pike Place Market.

Has anyone ever been there? (If yes, let them take a moment to describe the scene—and skip the next paragraph.)



It is an open-air market with flower stalls, coffee counters, vegetable stands and several places to buy fish—each of them selling the same fish from the same ocean. But only one of them, Pike Place Fish Market, had a crowd of people three or four deep.



As John approached, he saw fish being thrown over customers' heads. He heard people yelling and laughing. There was a lot of excitement.

As John watched, this scene unfolded. One of the fishmongers—that's what they call themselves—grabbed a crawfish from a barrel (for added effect, act this out using one of the participants near you as the little boy), snuck up next to a little boy, and clipped the pincers on the little boy's jacket.

When the boy saw that creature from the deep attached to his clothing, he screamed and grabbed his mother's leg.

(Continue to act out the scene as described.) The fishmonger grabbed the crawfish, ran and put it back in the barrel. Then he crawled on his hands and knees across the fish market floor, looked the boy in the eye and said, "I am so sorry. Can I have a hug?"

(Stand up and pause as you offer the following...)

A quick aside. John has two daughters. One of them, Kelsey—who was around six years old at the time—suffered a bad asthma attack a few weeks earlier. John brought her to urgent care, and she was greeted with (don't make eye contact while pretending to type): "Kelsey Christensen. Have a seat over there (point). Someone will be with you shortly."

A few minutes later another nurse came by and escorted her to a sterile room where she sat waiting for the doctor.

Here's a six-year-old girl struggling to breathe and she's getting (re-enact the no eye contact moment)... John thought, "This is our health CARE?"

Now, he's at a fish market watching, "Can I have a hug?" And that kid was not even a customer!



John finally got up the courage to talk to one of the fishmongers...this guy. His name is Shawn Roe and you'll meet him in a few minutes.

Anyway, John asked Shawn what all of this was about. Shawn responded by framing their faces (place your thumbs together, with both index fingers facing up, as if you were making a goalpost) and saying, "This is our moment, just you and me.... How can I serve you?"

"How can I serve you?" Something different, something unexpected, was going on at this market.

Eventually John met Johnny Yokoyama, the owner, and learned that several years earlier the market had not been such a great place to work. But Johnny had made a decision and invited the rest of the crew to join him.

The decision was that they were going to intentionally create a better way of being. Together, they declared the intention of being “world famous,” figuring that would lead them to behaviors that were more fulfilling for them and more memorable and engaging for their customers. (As an added note, should it be helpful later, it was a younger fishmonger who suggested that they strive for “world famous.” It wasn’t a mandate from above. At first everyone thought the guy was nuts. Then they all let it sink in and thought, “Yeah that would be cool!” And that’s exactly what happened. What a great example of the power of intention and follow through.)



John Christensen knew he had found the example of the engaged, alive workplace he had been searching for.

Even with 12 to 14 hour days, arms elbow deep in ice, nowhere to sit and the aroma of fish and seafood all around, these guys loved their work and created an incredible experience for their customers.

John brought out a crew, filmed for several days and, together with his team back at ChartHouse Learning, named the practices he saw in action at the market—Be There, Play, Make Their Day and Choose Your Attitude. They called it The FISH! Philosophy. Now, several films and books (in many languages) later, the Pike Place Fish Market is world famous and The FISH! Philosophy is impacting organizations and individuals around the globe.

As we watch, ask yourself, “How does The FISH! Philosophy relate to who I am and what I do every day?”