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The Pursuit of Happiness: 3 Keys to Sustainable Job Satisfaction

HOW TO LEVERAGE THE SCIENCE OF POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY IN THE WORKPLACE





Live to work, or work to live? It's a question many people reflect on. Whatever your philosophical take, for many of us, our career is a means to the same end: happiness. Given we spend, on average, one-third of our lives at work, it plays a large role in our emotional experience as humans.

The power of happiness at work matters beyond an individual's values. Research shows happiness leads to improved wellbeing, engagement, performance, and job satisfaction. A recent study published in Management Science found that **productivity, measured by the number of sales employees made, increased by 12% for every one-unit increase of happiness on a scale of 0-10. Moreover, an organization full of happier employees is healthier and higher performing.**

Though momentary happiness may lead to momentary sales or successes, the rush isn't everlasting. Fostering sustainable, consistent happiness among employees requires organizations to implement future-proofed strategies – ones that promote emotional agility and resilience.

Martin Seligman, aka the father of positive psychology, defines happiness by its ingredients: positive emotions and relationships, engagement, meaning, and appreciation. Based on his model and other research, we've compiled three core pillars to a happy workforce.

ONE

Cultivate healthy positivity through genuine engagement.

Engaged employees are happy employees, and happy employees thrive – along with the organizations of which they're a part. People who are happy at work show up with passion, purpose, presence, and motivation. On top of that, research shows that not only do happy people make others happy, but making others feel better increases feelings of happiness in the do-gooder.

The positive energy and gratitude happy workers exude flows into their behavior and interactions with others. In fact, a Workhuman® iQ study found that employees who have shown thanks by giving recognition to their colleagues in the last two months are more likely to:

Love their job

75% vs. 48%

Identify as highly engaged

89% vs. 64%

Recommend their company

83% vs. 63%

Say they have a positive work experience

82% vs. 58%

However, it isn't realistic to expect sunshine all the time, nor is it maintainable. Avoid a culture of toxic positivity, one which depletes energy and is not sustainable, by building a more natural foundation for driving the domino effect of connection and gratitude in a genuine way. A solid recognition program, support from people leaders and managers, and inclusive practices are key to developing a healthy culture at work.

TWO

Promote autonomy.

A Workhuman iQ study of 4,100+ full-time employees in the U.S., U.K., Ireland, and Canada revealed that **the 20% of the survey sample who did not have as much autonomy scored lower on every single positive workplace outcome** studied, including emotional wellbeing and feelings of accomplishment – two integral aspects of happiness.

Organizations can support employee autonomy by offering flexible work schedules, remote work options, and opportunities for personal growth and development. In cases where on-site flexibility is not as feasible, encouraging employees to set personal goals that align with the company's mission can foster a sense of purpose, which positive psychology indicates is integral to productivity and job satisfaction.

Autonomy is also achieved when organizations make space for employees to take on new initiatives, work with cross-functional teams, or learn new skills of interest. This empowerment leads to higher levels of creativity and innovation because employees feel trusted and valued. Research shows how significant a role people leaders play in employee happiness, so it's vital they are trained to recognize and instill these behaviors.

THREE

Be grounded in gratitude and humanity.

Countless studies identify gratitude as a powerful driver of happiness and its outcomes. And we know that companies thrive when human-centric cultures meet employees' core needs and support work-life harmony.

So, how do you jump-start gratitude at work? Our research with Gallup found recognition that is **fulfilling, authentic, embedded in the culture, individualized, and equitable** has the greatest impact. Take Arkansas Children's, Inc., for example:

"The program launched on January 17. On January 18, our CIO went into the platform, recognized one of her vice presidents who was celebrating 41 years of service with Arkansas Children's. I spoke with that vice president on January 23. During that conversation, he shared with me that that was the best service award he had ever experienced in 41 years, because he had been recognized by his leader, his peers, and others that he had worked with across the system in that one moment. This was the experience that we wanted to have with our program."

Janis Williams
Director, Compensation & Benefits
Arkansas Children's, Inc.

Source: "A New Era of Recognition: Arkansas Children's Workhuman Experience," breakout session, Workhuman® Live, 2024



Everyone should be empowered to express authentic appreciation for a peer’s effort or behavior, up and down the organization. This means not only saying “thank you” when colleagues help out on a specific project, but also noting when a person goes beyond their job expectations, reaches a career milestone like a promotion or work anniversary, or is celebrating a big life event.

Workhuman® can help bring joy to your workplace, impact job satisfaction, and more. See for yourself.

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