



Creating a More Happy Work Environment

A Conference Board survey released in Jan 2010 reported that “only 45% of workers surveyed were happy at their jobs, the lowest in 22 years.” The problem today is that many companies are stuck in the old model for deriving happiness which held that it came from success. Data from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience are turning the tables on the relationship between success and happiness. A decade worth of new research is now showing that success actually comes *from* happiness rather than causing it. Valerie Sheppard, former corporate executive and Sherpa of Happiness offers these suggestions for leaders trying to create a more happy work environment.

1. **Put Some Heart Into the Environment:** Albert Einstein said “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that worships the servant and has forgotten the gift.” Workplaces are often very heady environments. People are mired in their analytical, logical left brains and totally disconnected from their hearts. Importantly, heart intelligence can aid people’s discernment and decision-making. The key is to integrate head and heart. Allowing people to engage at an emotional or feeling level while also bringing the rational, process-oriented intellect into the equation can bring more balance and fulfillment in them, while deriving better action plans for the organization.
2. **Cultivate an Optimistic Culture:** Research has shown that 90% of long-term human happiness is related to how we choose to interpret our experiences. Label something bad, our experience of it is inherently negative; label something good, and the same is true. Workplace culture leaders should bend over backward to find the positives in any situation. This doesn’t mean ignoring what needs to be fixed. Just actively look for ways to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate even the smallest of positive happenings no matter the gravity of any situation. Leaders would be amazed at how far a simple “That’s great!” or “I’m glad you’re on my team”, or “I’m fortunate to have your expertise working on finding a solution,” can go at boosting morale immediately.
3. **Resist Making Everything so Serious:** The Institute for Heart Math suggests that when we take the significance out of situations, we are able to see and respond to them more clearly, and with less anxiety, frustration and fear. A leader who can resist the temptation to make everything “urgent-important” or “mission-critical” can help diminish stress within the team. Create realistic timelines, let go of language that reinforces heaviness like “do or die,” and be willing to classify some items on the things-to-do list as not very important at all.
4. **Keep People in the Now:** Even though companies have to take action today with the future in mind, too much time spent in the future means opportunities for happiness are lost in the now.

Many present-moment fears are actually about things that *might* happen in the future. This can be especially true if business results are off, leadership is changing, or people have other reasons to feel stress on the job. So instead of deferring happiness until ‘the business turns around’ or ‘the recession is over’ or ‘we find the solution to this problem,’ keep staff engaged in the here and now. Meditation to quiet mind chatter and physical, breathing and sensory exercises are all ways to keep people more present.

5. **Make Your Staff Feel Heard, Seen and Regarded:** Be sure that despite having pressing deadlines and mountains of work, you make your staff feel like they *matter*. No one likes a toxic boss. Take care how you engage them when you’re feeling stressed or fearful yourself. Keep in mind, what and how you say things *to* them are important, but how you receive things *from* them can also make a difference. Three ways to leave a positive impression: 1) actively and *objectively* listen when they’re sharing ideas or concerns, 2) acknowledge their efforts *regardless of impact*, and 3) honor their uniqueness and allow them to be *authentic*.
6. **Create Opportunities for Giving:** Studies have shown that everyone benefits from acts of compassion and kindness – the giver, the receiver, *and* the observer. Enabling staff to be among each of these categories can help them feel more happiness. Allow staff to donate excess vacation or sick leave to colleagues who need it. Coordinate ways and means for staff to contribute to the community through tree planting, neighborhood clean-ups, adopt-a-family, or collectively offering pro-bono services to the disadvantaged or non-profit organizations.
7. **Create Opportunities for More Laughter:** Laughter has been proven to lower stress hormones, enhance teamwork, diffuse conflict, and improve resilience – all important elements of high-performance work cultures. Start an improv comedy club and host shows during lunch, offer onsite laughter yoga classes, or encourage joke exchanges before meetings to get people laughing and feeling lighter and more present.
8. **Designate a “Happiness Zone”:** If your workplace is really toxic, you may have to do something radical like set aside physical space where only happiness can “happen”. Encourage people to take time-outs once or twice a day (ensuring they see you leading the way). Fill the space with bright colors, music, joke books, activities that are more playful and touch the inner child, and other engaging ways to recharge and release. Over time, there will be a “spillover effect,” through which the lighter, more peaceful and balanced feeling that used to happen only in the Zone gets transferred beyond it to fill the entire office.

Following the principle of being the change we want to see, even if someone is not in a position to change the overall work environment, they can apply these suggestions to themselves and feel more happy at work.

For help creating more happiness in your life or business - email Valerie Sheppard at Valerie@YourSourcePower.com or call 949-891-8491