

Happiness: Your Ultimate Workforce Weapon in 2012

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Is it important for your employees to be happy? To answer that question, consider the results of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, which has been polling more than 1,000 adults every day since January 2008. According to their results, Americans now feel worse about their jobs and work environments than ever before.

People of all ages, and across all income levels, are unhappy with their supervisors, apathetic about their organizations and detached from what they do. Employee engagement may seem like an unnecessary care in a down economy — but low job satisfaction means poor bottom-line performance. When people don't care about their jobs or their employers, they don't show up consistently, they produce less and the quality of their work suffers.

So what can you do about it? Can you help your employees to be happier at their jobs? As it turns out, yes. Optimism is not just something we're born with; it can be learned. Promote happiness and satisfaction in your employees by encouraging the following:

1. **Use Their Strengths** — People are happiest when they can use their strengths and personality in their jobs. If you employ a high-energy extrovert, make sure he/she does not have a windowless cube and is forced to stare at a computer screen. Don't promote someone into a job that is not a personality fit just to further departmental goals. Take the time to discuss and assess your staff's skill sets and see if their roles truly suit them.
2. **Get Out of the Office** — Sitting around all day isn't good for anybody. Encourage your employees to take frequent breaks and walk around — and not just downstairs for a smoke break! Make sure everyone gets a little fresh air and natural light at some point.
3. **Encourage Office Friendships** — Set up employee outings, encourage a lunch-time book club and treat various departments to lunch once in a while. If coworkers have the time to get to know and like each other, they'll be happier about coming to work each day.
4. **Keep a Healthy Perspective** — Make sure your staff knows that one screw-up isn't the end of the world or their career. Life moves on, and things tend to work out in the long run. Putting things in perspective means taking a long view of life, realizing that a short-term setback are just that – short-term.
5. **Do Sweat the Small Stuff** — On the other hand, much of the daily stress in our lives is caused by the little, unnecessary mistakes we make. Roy Baumeister, psychologist and author, says the best

way to reduce stress is to “quit screwing up.” Don’t procrastinate, show up late, miss a plane to a client meeting or forget a deadline. Sweat the small stuff; the big stuff has a way of working itself out.

6. Have a Sense of Humor — Humans are biologically programmed for fun and play. This doesn’t mean encouraging touch football in the hallways or sitting around the conference table cracking jokes. Laughing and chatting are not unprofessional when done at the appropriate times. Allow your employees time to lighten up.

So as we close out this year, remember that there is a proven link between happiness at work and productivity. You can learn skills to promote it, you can help instill it in your employees and you can experience it yourself every day. Make the year 2012 the year that you make happiness one of the tools in your management kit.