

Happiness Delivers Results

Enhance your workplace by engaging your workforce. Donna Daisy, Ph.D. explains how positive psychology can help.

For years we have heard about the link between happiness and your health. Now equally exciting research links happy workers with business success. According to Shawn Achor, researcher and author of the book "The Happiness Advantage," the single greatest competitive advantage in the modern economy is a positive, engaged workforce.

When I first took the job of Executive Director of a large social service agency in Illinois, I believed that if I worked very hard I would do well in my new job. I thought feeling stressed and overwhelmed were part of the achievement. I believed that through working hard and enduring lots of stress, I would ultimately achieve success and, as a result, be happy. I had the same standards for my staff. If we all took our jobs seriously and worked very hard, we would successfully achieve our goals, and then be happy. The

problem, however, was that nobody was very happy in the present moment.

The lesson I needed to learn came from my assistant, Cindy. She seemed to know intuitively how to achieve personal happiness as well as how to encourage, motivate and raise the happiness level of our staff of 70 people. As it turned out, the best efforts from staff, and the best results in our work, came about because of the happiness and enthusiasm Cindy generated. At the time, I just accepted that Cindy had a gift for working with people. Years later, I read about research at Harvard University that explained why Cindy was so effective, producing such excellent results.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Studies in the field of positive psychology show that when your brain experiences high levels of happiness and energy and you feel engaged in the task at hand, everything improves. Your intelligence rises, your creativity rises, your accuracy rises and your energy levels rise. In Achor's words, "When we are happy, we are more successful, rather than our old paradigm that suggests that we need to be successful first, and then we will be happy." In other words, if you raise your happiness level now, your success level



will also rise because you are able to work faster, harder and more intelligently. So how does this affect the workplace?

The individual happiness of people in the workplace is the starting point. Individual happiness can be raised by training the brain for happiness. Do this by focusing on the good things in your life and the things for which you are grateful, rather than the unpleasant things. In other words, train yourself to reach for the thought that feels good instead of the thought that pulls you down. Focus on what you like, not what you don't. The goal is to move towards feelings of well-being by moving towards the thoughts that feel better. As a person's brain becomes trained for happiness, individuals find themselves becoming more joyous, fulfilled, exhilarated and more successful in whatever they undertake.

WHY DOES ONE PERSON'S HAPPINESS AFFECT AN ENTIRE TEAM OR CORPORATION?

Mirror neurons in the human brain cause you to yawn if I yawn. Interestingly, mirror neurons pick up on happiness as well. When you are around positive people who smile at you, your mirror neurons light up and your brain tells you that you are smiling. Your happiness level rises, causing you to smile as well. So the reason positivity or negativity can spread so quickly at a company is that these feelings can ripple through the mirror neuron network.

TAKE-AWAYS FOR BUSINESS OWNERS, MANAGERS AND TEAM LEADERS

Achor's research offers several tips for business owners:

1. Recruit positive people into your workplace.
2. Be positive yourself and ripple your own positivity through the organization using the mirror neuron network.
3. Find ways to recognize and encourage others for their achievements.
4. Prioritize and facilitate happiness **now** rather than saying, "I'll be happy when I am successful."
5. Praise the process. Don't wait for a successful result to praise your staff. Praise the process that leads up to the results.

Why wait? Let happiness deliver bottom line results for your business now.

Donna Daisy, Ph.D., has spent 25 years as a therapist, life coach, and author. More recently, she has pursued research into the topic of aging consciously. Daisy lives in Naples.