



Happiness At Work?

Insights

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I will admit that I do not often think in terms of looking for “happiness” at work. My self-made World War II Vet dad raised me to focus on responsibility and to not expect easy roads. Nevertheless, is it unrealistic to talk about “happiness” at work. We probably define our goals by different terms, but at the end of the day, are we not all searching for happiness? Last spring I attended a series on “The Philosophy of Happiness” taught by Marist High School teacher and future Ph.D, Eric Heintz. Eric applied rigorous analysis to an otherwise “touchy feely” concept. He explored philosophical, physiological, and religious factors influencing happiness, and the methods by which we have sought this elusive state for thousands of years. It turns out that developing “a philosophy of happiness” may be a more orderly and rigorous pursuit than often portrayed. I came away from the lectures believing that we have a responsibility to seek to be happy; in large part because of the benefits to society.

This week I read a white paper, [“The Science of Happiness: “How to Build a Killer Culture in your Company” By Globoforce](#) (good stuff on their site). The paper opens with the acknowledgement that “the culture we have isn’t always the culture we want.” The paper challenges one to consider the factors which contribute to the type of workplace culture we want, and argues that employee “happiness” is essential. Many employers would love to have Intel’s 2% turnover rate or to have to deal with Google’s 7,000 unsolicited applications received every day. The paper discourages us from thinking about culture simply as the sum of our perks and that culture is entirely dictated from the top “leaders tend to see culture in terms of things they can do, like setting goals and core values, but execs cannot dictate a great culture. They can only lay the ground work for a great culture to take hold.” Employees control your culture, and as the paper explains, when employees are happy, the culture thrives. The paper quotes a Wall Street Journal’s survey that “happy employees”:

- Stay twice as long in their jobs as their least happy colleagues;
- Believe they are achieving their potential twice as much;
- Spends 65% more time feeling energized;
- Are 58% more likely to go out of the way to help their colleagues;
- Identify 98% more strongly with the values of their organization; and
- Are 86% more likely to recommend their organization to a friend.

The paper's conclusion is that the most direct and powerful way to impact organizational culture is to focus on making employees "happy."

The paper does not analyze the meaning of "happiness." Here's where Eric Heintz philosophy and philosophical analysis provides us with assistance. We all know that a poor healthcare worker in Africa may be far happier than a wealthy rock star. However, let's leave those more weighty questions to focus on some of Global Force's sound suggestions. Globoforce lists five ways to align employees' vision, goals and values with that of the organization. The first and most important point is to ensure that employees see how they "fit into the larger picture." The paper recounts a recent Stanford study for the self-evident truth that there is a strong correlation between happiness and a sense of meaning. Jennifer Aaker from the Stanford Graduate School Study states:

"In fact, having a meaningful impact on the world around you is actually a better predictor of happiness than many other things you think will make you happy."

The paper cites various studies emphasizing that once basic needs are met, employees crave a sense of direction, meaning and purpose. Globoforce discusses five suggestions to build alignment:

1. Pay closer attention to job-person fit;
2. Fire people who don't fit your culture;
3. Help employees find greater meaning in your values;
4. Show workers how your company fits into a bigger picture; and
5. Cultivate more trust and flexibility into your policies.

The paper's next point is to "accentuate the positive." It is a sad commentary on our workplace that New York Times best selling author, Gretchen Rubin, author of "The Happiness Project," has to remind us:

"workplaces far likelier to be a happy place when policies are in place to ensure that people regularly get acknowledgment and praise for a job well done, and where people feel that their happiness at work matters to their employers."

I'll leave the remainder of Globoforce paper for your reading. I also recommend their related post on "The Power of Workplace Gratitude: A Brief Biography." I suppose that we all actually understand the importance of employees being happy. We may even know how to facilitate this exulted state of work life nirvana. However, I also suspect that we do not often prepare business plans and act on our common sense knowledge to achieve that goal. After all, isn't happiness too touchy feely a goal for business?

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