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Keeping Happy at Work During Economic Turmoil

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The economic downturn has affected nearly every industry and business and employees are feeling the effects. During these tumultuous times, being “happy at work,” may seem idealistic. However, there are a number of practical steps employees can take to gain control of their own happiness. This article looks at the research and science of happiness at work and offers practical ideas to help you improve your happiness at work even during times of economic difficulty.

The impact on employees

Stress and anxiety in the workplace is at an all-time high. With budget cuts, restructuring, and downsizing, employees cannot help but feel that work performance is being assessed purely against the bottom line. While you may not be worried that your specific job will be eliminated, perhaps you have been asked to do more with fewer resources or take on a larger assignment. Concerns over personal finances loom large over work settings as concerns about diminishing benefits, declining or delayed retirements, and general uncertainty about the economy affect the morale of every work environment.

Signs of declining morale

Signs that morale may be declining in the workplace may include fatigue and diminished level of energy. People may find it more difficult to stay on task. Conflicts may also be on the rise as office politics, gossip, and disruptive behavior often increase during periods of uncertainty.

Doubts about personal capabilities are also common and can bring about tangible signs of behavior change. People who are normally confident may be indecisive while outgoing individuals may become increasingly quiet and introspective.

So, with all the harsh realities of today’s economy, how is it possible to believe that you can be happy at work? There are a number of very practical and immediate ways that you can control your happiness at work, but it helps to look at the science of happiness first.

The science of happiness

Happiness in the workplace is a key determinant of commercial success. According to a recent study by Boehm & Lyubomirsky, from the University of California, happy people are more satisfied with their jobs and perform better at tasks than their less happy peers. And they’re less likely to

use sick time (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Between 2006 and 2007, iOpener, a company that promotes happiness at work, conducted two surveys studying the happiness and productivity of managerial employees. They found a strong relationship between being focused and “on-task” and feeling happy at work. For employers this means that happier people will complete work faster with better outcomes. Unhappy people will spend more time gossiping, surfing the web or dawdling over tasks they don’t enjoy. In fact, when comparing the least happy with the happiest, data shows that the happier employees seem to do almost one day a week more in terms of productivity (Edmunds & Pryce-Jones, 2008).

And at a time when economic realities are negating the ability for employers to ‘incentivise’ their employees financially and with companies needing to be ever more efficient and productive, creating strong leadership and happiness in the workplace has never been more important.

Increasing happiness in the workplace

In the past, much of the responsibility for employee happiness fell on managers and supervisors. But there are many ways in



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which you can help yourself. First, it is important to focus on the positive and remember why the organization is lucky to have you.

Further, it is important to make yourself indispensable while expanding your knowledge base and capabilities. Volunteer for interesting new assignments or perhaps identify a type of knowledge within the organization that is in short supply. If you work for a department where much of the education team has decreased, it could be very valuable to start picking up some teaching or training skills.

It is important that you can identify your strengths and weaknesses in order to realize your full potential. Professor Alex Linley with the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology (CAPP) has developed an online tool to help individuals identify their strengths. When examining your strengths, Linley recommends focusing on four areas; 1) energy, 2) authenticity, 3) motivation, and 4) words and phrases. Energy reflects the activities that give you an energetic buzz. Authenticity relates to things that make you feel the most like the real you. Motivation is simply identifying what motivates you. And the last area of focus is to examine when you say "I love to" or "it's just great when." In these instances, the chances are that you are referring to strengths.

Another important step is to keep things in perspective. Your job is only one of the many roles

that you have. Spending time on the other parts of your life will make you more balanced and happier and has a direct effect on your contributions at work.

While the economy is currently struggling, now is the time for you to take action and control of your own happiness at work. When the upturn comes, you will be ready to go with more determination and engagement knowing that you have taken the steps to ensure a higher engagement and be enthusiastic and ready to go.

Resources:

1. Boehm, J. & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Does happiness promote career success? *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16(1), 101-116.
2. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper and Row.
3. Edmunds, L. & Pryce-Jones, J. (2008). Relationships between employee happiness, overtime, sick leave and intention to stay or leave. *Selection & Development Review*, 24 (2), Retrieved from http://www.iopener.co.uk/wsc_content/download/sdr2008paper.pdf
4. Global recession and Its Effect on Work Ethics. (2007). Cyber-Ark. Retrieved from <http://www.complianceweek.com/s/documents/CyberArk.pdf>
5. Linley, A. (2008). *Average to A+: realising strengths in yourself and others*. CAPP Press.

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