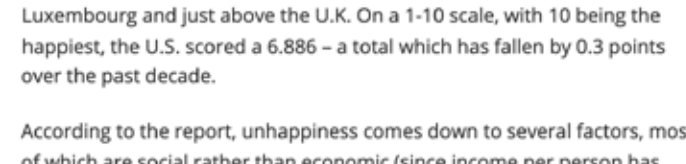


THE PATH TO HAPPINESS

Misery and sales no longer mix. Finding happiness within yourself will spread joy to co-workers and clients while increasing your productivity and strengthening your relationships. Here's how to find your happy place.

By SARA LAVENDUSKI | March 4, 2019

It was a year of tumult for the State Mutual Life Assurance Company. The New England insurance company had been through several acquisitions and mergers, and leadership in 1963 knew it needed a way to boost happiness and morale among the workers.



As the story goes, the company did something a little simpler to boost employee engagement (way before it was an HR buzzword) than free gym memberships or incentive trips to Acapulco.

It recruited graphic artist Harvey Ross Ball and paid him \$45 to create a happiness-inducing graphic to disseminate across the company, according to the Smithsonian Institution. Ball obliged; the result was disarmingly simple and universally recognized now: a bright yellow smiley face with two small oval eyes and a mouth with a subtle, Mona Lisa-esque smile. The company produced posters, buttons and signs with the face, and the image gradually became world-famous as an unpretentious reminder to be happy.

More than 55 years later, the quest for happiness still exists. In fact, people are finding it even more difficult to be happy. In the UN's latest World Happiness Report, for example, the U.S. ranked 18th for happiness, behind Luxembourg and just above the U.K. On a 1-10 scale, with 10 being the happiest, the U.S. scored a 6.886 – a total which has fallen by 0.3 points over the past decade.

According to the report, unhappiness comes down to several factors, most of which are social rather than economic (since income per person has risen since the 1960s). Fewer people feel they have control over their life choices, can count on others when times get tough, or can trust public figures. And based on charitable giving numbers, people are less generous with others than they used to be.

Academics and experts debate whether happiness is a choice, but this much is true: you can take steps toward adopting a positive mindset that improves your outlook, perspective and attitude. Not only will it make a difference in your personal life, but it will make you a more effective salesperson through increased productivity and healthier relationships.

"The key to happiness is genuinely caring about your own," says Paul Krismer, a public speaker, certified executive coach and the Chief Happiness Officer at Happiness Experts in Victoria, BC. "And it's learnable. You don't necessarily need a psychologist. Happiness isn't frivolous, and yours matters."

It matters not just for individual wellbeing, but also for those around you. This applies to the workplace as well. Through a phenomenon called "emotional contagion," according to Krismer, happiness and a positive mindset spread to employees, which improves everyone's happiness and productivity. But unhappiness and negativity spread the same way, resulting in a drop in productivity.

It's becoming more and more necessary for companies to determine what kind of environment they're fostering. In fact, a recent Staples Annual Workplace Study found that a whopping 80% of workers believe employers are responsible for their employees' mental and physical wellbeing while on the job.

And that has repercussions on the bottom line. A survey by the Social Market Foundation found that happy employees are 20% more productive than unhappy ones. Shawn Achor, a positive psychologist and author, reports that a happy and engaged workforce increases sales by 37%, productivity by 31% and accuracy on tasks by 19%.



It's all the more important in a heavily commoditized industry like promo products. When the same items are available from nearly every distributor, clients choose to work with companies they like – those run by happy people who are proud of what they do, actively get to know them and their needs, empower employees to find solutions and put clients' brand message and stories first. That all originates from a culture of positivity and joy, nurtured by a team that has tapped into its own happiness.

"When people take pride in what they do, it shows," says Jamie Stone, president of Gifts By Design (asi/205947). "We spend more time with employees than with our own families. I'm happier when my staff is happy because they're feeling empowered and heard, and they know they're an important part of the machine here. Then they take ownership, and that results in sales being up. If you're not happy, you're not doing your best."

Your happiness, as well as that of fellow employees and clients, are all interrelated; each seamlessly flows into the other. But by looking at each separately, we can identify the key elements and strategies that spark happiness and lead to better work environments, strong relationships and more sales – and maybe make this world a better place.

SELF HAPPINESS

There's a stubborn myth surrounding the idea of happiness, says Paul Krismer of Happiness Experts, that makes it seem unobtainable because it comes in one form: constant euphoria and grinning from ear to ear. But that's not the psychological definition of happiness, and it's not sustainable.

"Happiness isn't a destination; life is a journey toward happier," says Krismer. "You want to start leaning in to happiness."

Thriving distributors recognize this reality and continually look inward to steady themselves during the ups and downs of daily life, which are often out of their control.

"It starts with your attitude," says Reyna Hernandez, owner of Creative Branding Co. (asi/171045). "You have to have a grateful mind and heart. I wouldn't be as successful if I didn't."

Even as Chris Faris, president & CEO of Boost Promotions (asi/142942), keenly feels both the good and bad, he's learned to be grateful and put it all into perspective. "Sure, the T-shirts didn't arrive on time, but there are hungry people out there," he says. "The worst thing is I lose the client, but I'm still alive and my family is healthy. Putting things in perspective and being grateful puts you in a much better state of mind and puts you on a clearer path to finding solutions."

"Happiness isn't a destination; life is a journey toward happier."

Paul Krismer, Happiness Experts

Gratitude in particular is essential for business and a more positive outlook in general. It improves physical health, thinking and personal relationships, and it helps keep the mind focused on goals. "It actually rewires your brain," Krismer says. "I write down three things every day that I'm thankful for. It's life-changing."

It's a reminder that there are always positive things to be happy about, which can make the imperfections and stressors of life more bearable. "Not every day is going to be roses and unicorns," says Kelly Stone, president of The Idea Box – Powered by Proforma (asi/300094), Counselor's Fastest-Growing Distributor of 2018. "You have to take the good with the bad. There will be days where clients are mad at you. I take a break and remind myself that things will be better tomorrow."

Key Takeaways

- 1. Every day, count the positive things in your life that you're grateful for.
- 2. Make time for activities outside the office that help you unwind and relieve the buildup of stress.
- 3. Don't become preoccupied with striving a "perfect" work-life balance – it doesn't exist.

Gratitude starts with positive thinking, and that's helped along by physical and mental exercises. Faris, for example, wakes up each day at 4:45 a.m. and immediately works out, including stretching and meditating to boost his energy levels while setting his daily expectations and focusing on what he's grateful for. Then he eats a healthy breakfast and heads to the office, usually without checking email at all. "If it's bad, it puts you in a bad mindset," he says. "And honestly, there's not much I can do that early in the morning anyway."

Hernandez has set personal goals this year of traveling more, cooking a new dish each week and making more time for scuba diving. "I'll give me opportunities to speak with potential clients, like food bloggers and scuba shops," she says. "The more things you expose yourself to, the more you expand your repertoire of ideas."

Activities and hobbies can help bust stress and foster positivity, but it's sometimes drowned out by a preoccupation with striking the optimal work/life balance. Krismer calls that balance "an absurdity."

"It's a fad," he says. "I don't know anyone who has perfect balance. We're all just figuring it out. Happiness comes from finding joy in your strengths, because you feel like you're making a positive contribution to society, and also from knowing your values and concentrating on those so you find your individual purpose."

It may sound simple, but finding your niche and loving what you do helps lead to more happiness. Indeed, the common denominator among these distributors was their love for their jobs. "I love going to work," says Kelly Stone. "I've found my niche. It fits my personality. When you have a passion for something, people can tell. You can try to fake it, but the truth comes through eventually."

Does Social Media Impact Happiness?

Scroll through your Facebook News Feed or browse a few Instagram accounts and it seems like everyone's life is perfectly happy – except yours. Self-comparison on social media is a reality, and it's making people seriously unhappy, dissatisfied and anxious.

"We compare ourselves without actively thinking about it, and there's a subconscious cumulative effect," says Paul Krismer, chief happiness officer at Happiness Experts. "We feel like we don't measure up. But remember, when you look at social media, it's a highlight reel of someone's life. You say to yourself, 'I don't feel that happy,' but we have to realize that moment has passed for them, and now they're back in normal life."

Studies are beginning to highlight potential links with depression and unhappiness to social media. A 2017 study by academics at UC San Diego and Yale found that Facebook use led to reductions in self-reported physical and mental health as well as life satisfaction. Another study showed a correlation between use of social media and perceived social isolation among young adults aged 19-32.

In addition, the interactions that occur on social are a poor substitution for deep face-to-face conversations with others based on trust and respect. In other words, a person may have thousands of Facebook friends, but no real friends they can actually count on or trust with their deepest secrets.

"Social media results in a more shallow level of interaction, and it's affecting us," says Krismer. "Early on, we existed in social groups where everyone knew each other. We were truly in this together, the next winter, battle, plague. But we've lost that. We need to have tribes, even if they're small."

EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS

In the workplace, happiness isn't a nice-to-have; it's imperative for a company's wellbeing and growth. A recent Gallup report, "The State of the American Workplace," showed that happy, engaged employees display a resulting 20% increase in sales on average.

And the truth is that employee happiness is shaped by their workplaces. Workers today expect and seek positive environments in which they can thrive. Leadership in particular has an obligation to set a happy, positive tone with a healthy mindset, perspectives and attitude. Why? Because employees' loyalty to them for guidance, and a negative outlook can spread like wildfire through an organization, bringing down morale and performance and increasing turnover.

"It's called emotional contagion, and it happens on a pre-cognitive level," says Paul Krismer of Happiness Experts. "If we see a sad person, in 3.3 milliseconds we're mirroring them. It's the same with smiling. It's survival-based. Sharing an emotion helps us to survive as a group. And the more dominant the person in the workplace showing that emotion, the faster the contagion and the more determinative of overall workplace emotion they are."

While compensation packages and benefits are important, much of an employee's dissatisfaction, and often the decision to leave a job, comes from issues with supervisors. "Compensation is in the top three most important things for employees. But it's not number one," says Jaime Klein, founder and president of Inspire Human Resources in New York City. "The experience with a direct manager often outranks compensation when it comes to satisfaction at work."

Key Takeaways

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Jamie Stone of Gifts By Design says she's left negative, toxic work environments to go make half of her previous salary elsewhere. "They didn't communicate or manage well," she says. "If you're miserable, beaten down and depressed every Sunday night, you can only put up with that for so long. A great compensation package is important, but it won't keep someone happy."

Instead, employees need to feel they're trusted and respected, and given the opportunity to make important decisions for themselves. That includes empowering employees on the job and granting them flexibility with their work schedule. "If they need to take care of something, we want them to take care of it, as long as the job gets done," says Kelly Stone of The Idea Box – Powered by Proforma. "Flexibility is a number-one priority. They'll work on weekends because of the flexibility we offer."

"The experience with a direct manager often outranks compensation when it comes to satisfaction at work."

Jaime Klein, Inspire Human Resources



Recognition events, dinners, happy hours and team-building activities help to boost morale and encourage employees to support their team members, which contributes to overall comfort, satisfaction and happiness. All of that is imperative to the employee experience, but it won't make a difference if employees aren't regularly reminded of their value and that they're an integral part of the team who's trusted and empowered to make decisions for themselves, the company and their clients.

If they feel irreplaceable and a company empowers them to make important decisions, they'll have more of a sense of ownership for their work, which provides purpose.

"If they feel like they can be easily replaced because they're just a worker bee, they won't be happy," says Jamie Stone. "You have to inspire people, not just manage them. Don't dump on people because they remember it. If they're nervous because they got reamed out and lose their confidence, they can't do their best work."

CLIENT HAPPINESS

In a report titled "Customers 2020," consulting firm Walker declared that customer experience would soon overtake price and product as the key differentiator in the buying experience.

Likewise, a Gallup study measuring the engagement of bank customers found that speedy support increased engagement six-fold – but empathetic support caused a nine-fold increase.

These statistics reinforce one of the most pervasive adages in sales, as told in a Maya Angelou quote: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Interactions are crucial to making clients happy. They want to feel important and cared for. "This is a relationship business, because you can buy a mug from anybody," says Boost Promotions' Chris Faris. "Treat them as people and get to know them. Have lunch with them, get to know their families. We go skiing with one of our clients whom I've known for 15 years. It's both a professional and personal relationship."

"Meaningful connections are the most valuable currency today. People with the strongest relationships are the happiest."

John Dilulio, The Dilulio Group

While there's a big societal push to take the human element out of transactions, particularly sales, people still want face-to-face relationships, the lack of which is starting to emerge as perhaps a key source of society's decreasing happiness. "We all get caught up in new fads, like AI, chatbots, virtual concierges, self-driving cars, but now we're dying to meet an actual human being," says John Dilulio, president of customer service consultancy The Dilulio Group in Cleveland. "Meaningful connections are the most valuable currency today. People with the strongest relationships are the happiest."

Of course, client happiness doesn't happen by itself. It stems from happy employees, who attract more clients. "Employees treated with respect and civility show up better," says Jaime Klein of Inspire Human Resources. "Their body language conveys a belief in the product or service. In a commoditized industry, people want to work with companies that make them feel good about themselves, that bring joy."

Key Takeaways

- 1. Encourage sales reps to get to know clients beyond their immediate marketing and branding needs.
- 2. Build trust with clients and will make them look good.
- 3. Look at other problems as opportunities to find solutions and impress the client.

Clients are happy when they can trust a company, says Faris, and in this industry it means clients have to trust him and his employees with their brand. "I won't sell them anything that will break," he says. "I'd rather do nothing than hurt their brand. If it can't happen, I won't say yes. You have to be respectful, transparent, nice and honest. Do good by them. It's all about making others look great."

It's important to remember that the client often has a supervisor to answer to, and helping them look good puts the distributor in a positive light. Say a client receives their apparel order but had given their distributor the wrong color to order – in other words, the fault lies with the client. At Interform (asi/231501), that's neither here nor there, says Sales Manager Jim Hirst.

"We'll rush the new garments at no charge and give them a 20% discount," he says. "We don't have to do that, but my client has a boss that the interform is taking care of it at a discount. We see a problem as an opportunity to make the customer happy."

Empowering employees to make these kinds of decisions to solve problems makes both the client and employee happier, says Dilulio. "Empower employees to find a solution instead of saying, 'There's nothing I can do. That's our policy,'" he says. "Employees are able to deliver happiness and satisfaction and it's disarming to the client. Be a zero-risk company to work with – it's not that you never drop the ball, but you make it right. And that makes clients happy."

In a commoditized industry, when companies offer much of the same product, the decision to work with one company over another often comes down to positivity and transparency, which makes clients comfortable, satisfied – in a word, happy – with the company they've chosen. "Client happiness is way more than just a job delivered on time," says Jamie Stone of Gifts By Design, who still has clients from when she started her company 30 years ago. "We got so many gifts this holiday season from ours, with notes like, 'We don't know what we would do without you.'"

Millennials Choose Happiness at Work

According to the Pew Research Center, 35% of the labor force is comprised of millennials, and that number is poised to grow over the next several years. With them comes a new slew of expectations from their employers; they want a positive environment, regular recognition, autonomy and a sense of purpose at their jobs. And if they don't get what they're looking for, they have no qualms about leaving for greener pastures.

Jamie Stone, president of Gifts By Design (asi/205947), has noticed millennials quickly recognize the importance of – and demand – positive work environments where they're valued, encouraged and acknowledged. "My generation didn't realize they wanted this until they were in their 40s," she says. "Millennials aren't working a ton of lousy jobs first."

But where is this shift coming from? It stems from how millennials were raised. "They grew up being taught that what they believed mattered, that the way they feel matters," says Paul Krismer, chief happiness officer at Happiness Experts. "When I was a boy, I wasn't even allowed to cry. There was no way I thought I'd be happy at work."

35% of the labor force is comprised of millennials

Workers' philosophies have changed too – Generation X and baby boomers basically traded money for good. "They made a bargain," says Krismer. "As long as the money was labor, they stayed. But then they allowed themselves to be subject to all types of abuses, just so they could be wealthier than mom and dad."

With all the tumult in 2018 during the #MeToo movement, HR departments are becoming even more aware of how their employees are feeling at work. "Workplaces are becoming more compassionate and conscious of their employees," says Jaime Klein, founder and president of Inspire Human Resources in New York City. "I think employees feel safer at their workplaces now, after a stressful 2018 when there were so many revelations of things that happened at work. I think HR departments will be more proactive and employees will be more respectfully dealt with."

Millennials want positive, supportive workplaces they're happy to come to every day. If their current job isn't meeting their expectations, it's not long before they're out the door. "A very large number of millennials will leave a job in 30 days," says Krismer. "Most workers in other generations did not – they stayed unhappy for their entire careers. Millennials want meaning and purpose, and companies have to find a way to tap into that."