

# Why a joyful workforce is a more productive one

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If you hear people emitting peals of laughter, or talking animatedly, you might be tempted to think they're slacking off. In reality, your joyful employees are also most likely to be your best performing employees.

That's because according to [research by Warwick University](#), allowing employees to experience moments of joy not only makes them harder working, but also more productive. 12% more productive to be exact.

The reason joyful employees are so much more productive is because when we're feeling joyful our brain releases chemicals that suppress the part of our brain that's constantly preoccupied with worrying, significantly boosting our capacity for creative thinking and problem solving. It's a scientific fact: joyful employees are more effective and get more done because feeling happy enables them to think smarter. It also reduces the likelihood of them becoming sick with stress and anxiety and increases their ability to spread joy to others, boosting workplace productivity even further.

So if you want to test out the benefits of having a joyful workforce for yourself, read on for our top three tips, all of which you can easily put into practice.

## Three ways to create a joyful workforce

### 1. Harness the power of praise

A common misconception amongst managers is that people shouldn't be praised for doing a good job. Apparently, they get paid to do a good job. They should only be praised when they go above and beyond.

At least, that's what a worrying number of managers tell us at the start of workshops designed to educate them about the relationship between what they're saying to their people and how those people are feeling and perform. Logical as it might seem to preserve praise for extra special occasions, if that results in you saying more negative than positive things, you make the workplace a threatening place to be. Employees will constantly be on their guard, worried about where the next negative comment is going to come from and unable to tap into the creative thinking and powerful problem-solving skills associated with a more joyful state of mind.

One of our brain's main hobbies is trying to work out what everyone else thinks of us. What that person really meant by what they said or did, how we should have responded and how we can protect ourselves from a negative comment next time around. We're really very fragile creatures and hold what others have to say about us, whether good or bad, very close to our hearts.

This internal chatter can be very distracting. Unless we've had the opportunity to study mindfulness, where we learn to switch off our internal chatter to live more fully in the moment, negative comments at work can cause us to enter into a protective mindset that makes it very difficult to access our higher levels of thinking and creativity.

Conversely, when our manager and colleagues are encouraged to comment on what they like and value about us, and to regularly praise us, we become more relaxed and start to view work as a safe place, where we can start to feel inner contentment and joy at our small successes, to tap into our full potential.

Research published by Harvard Business Review shows that top performing teams give out nearly six positive comments for every negative or disparaging comment. Middle performing teams give out 1.9 positive comments for every negative. While the worst performing teams give out only 0.3 – that's three times as many negative comments for every positive one.

By educating managers how to harness the power of allowing people to experience the joy of being praised, so that they can switch off their internal chatter to access higher levels of thinking, you can not only make the workplace more joyful, but also more productive.

You can also educate employees how to use "kindfulness" to become aware of their internal chatter and when they're saying horrible things to themselves, such as 'I can't believe you said that, you're such an idiot' or 'I'm so stupid for not seeing that opportunity before.' Things which sound horrible spoken aloud but which many of us are in the habit of saying to ourselves inside our heads. By teaching employees how to become more compassionate to themselves, you can not only help them to find more positive inner voice to become more self-assured and joyful, but also help them to increase their compassion towards others and desire to praise others.

## 2. Celebrate success stories

On the face of it, work isn't typically associated with the moments of great pleasure and happiness that define joy. However that's not entirely true.

Most of us won't have to think that far back to a defining moment at work when we felt fantastic about closing that deal, hearing great customer feedback or mastering a new skill. The chances are we felt so good about it we even made an effort to share our good news with someone else at work, only to get a half-hearted "Well done" before they changed the topic or got stuck back into what they were doing – leaving us feeling a little bit flat and dejected.

Imagine instead that someone took the few minutes required to let you really relive an experience by asking you how you made it happen, what that means for you or the business and how proud you must feel. They would have multiplied your joy, allowing you to relish the moment, instead of zapping it.

Similarly, when someone comes back from a great holiday, bursting to tell everyone about it and no one's interested, it saps their energy. We might think we're so busy we don't have a minute, but it's a special thing when someone feels and is exhibiting joy. What's more it's contagious. When you allow someone who's really excited about something to tell you about it, by really engaging with them and letting them relive it for a moment, you can't help but feel uplifted yourself.

We're all under so much pressure to get so much done all the time, that it's all too easy to dismiss someone's joy as a bit of a distraction, instead of embracing their moment to create a culture where joy is celebrated.

It's therefore important to remember that since moments of pure joy can be so few and far between, they should be celebrated. By allowing ourselves to experience joy, whether directly or indirectly, we can reduce our heart rates, increase our ability to bounce back from stress, and boost our levels of productivity, wellbeing and engagement. All of which will benefit us far more than the few minutes of extra work we could have done during the time it takes to celebrate a joyful moment with someone else.

Managers should be proactively encouraged to lead by example, whether by celebrating someone's success at the start of a team meeting, or sending a group email to share a happy achievement.

By celebrating joy whenever it rears its head, managers have an important role to play in becoming 'joy multipliers' instead of 'joy zappers' in turn helping to create a culture where joy is valued and celebrated.

*Please note: The EAP/Health and Wellbeing Helpline is not available to family member(s) under 16 years of age. It is optional on Precision Corporate Healthcare and our large corporate schemes so please check your WPA literature carefully to see if you have this benefit.*

## 3. Show gratitude

One of the most effective ways to spread joy is by showing gratitude. When we genuinely thank someone, whether it's a genuine smile for holding the lift for us, a thank you card and small gift for working late, an end of year bonus or Christmas celebration, it feels good to be thanked. Indeed, we set far greater store by genuine thanks than we do the monetary value attached to any associated gift.

What's more it feels good to say thank you. Numerous studies show that willingly giving to others releases dopamine, the same chemical responsible for the 'high' associated with cocaine.

Humans are social animals. We're hardwired to help each other. In our complex modern society, it's easy to focus inwards on ourselves and our own challenges and issues, but it's been scientifically proven that by focusing outwards on others, we can actually create more personal joy.

Gratitude is such a powerful emotion and driver of happiness that simply keeping a gratitude journal, and making a note of three reasons to be grateful at the end of each day, can stop us from experiencing depression or anxiety by reprogramming the brain to focus on the positive.

That's because while the brain is remarkably complex, the neurochemical drivers of happiness are quite easy to identify and any activity that releases dopamine, serotonin or oxytocin will lift our mood.

Expressing gratitude and giving to others with a good heart results in all three chemicals being released at once, and that causes us to smile. This is a good thing because smiles are also highly contagious. We have 'mirror neurons' which cause us to reflect the emotions being directed at us. So when someone flashes us a big thank-you smile, it's very hard not to smile back, as our mirror neurons are automatically activated.

What's particularly special about smiling is that when we produce a genuine smile, by using our eye muscles as well as the muscles around our mouth, our body becomes tricked into thinking that we had something to actually smile about, even if we were just mirroring someone else's dazzler. Throw someone a Duchenne smile (the word for a smile which raises the corners of the mouth and causes the corners of the eyes to crease) and see what you get back. You can even try 'faking it until you make it' by forcing your mouth and eyes into a smile as this has been proven to lift your mood in much the same way as the real thing.

The upshot is, the more you give your workforce to smile about, by expressing gratitude, praising them for work well done and celebrating success, the more happy, healthy and productive they'll become.