

Leading with Happiness

Most of us have been taught that if we work hard, we'll be successful. And, if we're successful, we'll be happy. Extensive research in psychology, neuroscience and management studies shows this formula is backward. Happiness fuels success, not the other way around.

When we're positive and happy, our brains are more engaged, creative, motivated, energetic, resilient and productive. A recent poll by Partners in Leadership confirms that when employees are happy at work:

- 85 percent say they take more initiative
- 73 percent say they're better collaborators
- 48 percent say they care more about their work

The greatest predictors of happiness are:

- Optimism
- Your social connections
- Whether we see stress as a challenge or a threat



Leaders can help employees make the choice of happiness easier

Happiness is a choice your employees make, but leaders and companies can make that choice easier for their employees when they provide a:

- **Sense of progress:** This is a powerful motivator because it goes to the need to contribute, group and see that our actions matter. Close to 60 percent of millennials say the “opportunity to learn and grow” is the deciding factor in their job selection. They want to know how an organization will help them learn and grow in their careers.
- **Sense of connectedness:** Research says happiness is about relationships. We are social beings and our need for connection is deep. Connection increases:
 - Empathy as we see our similarities
 - Teamwork because we grow to care for each other
 - Resilience as we build social networks
 - Individual and organizational success as we work better together

It's not enough to get along with your co-workers, it's important to have close, authentic bonds. According to Gallup, having a best friend at work increases engagement sevenfold. When a company has 60 percent of their employees say they have a best friend at work, their company can see up to 36 percent fewer safety incidents and 12 percent higher profit.

Some companies have included opportunities for connection such as:

- A worksite garden

- Puzzles in their break area
 - Sponsoring a team to play golf, hockey or softball
 - Board game day where people bring in their favorite board game for their team to play
 - Monthly breakfasts to celebrate birthdays
- **Sense of control:** This is about autonomy since we all want to be masters of our own destiny. The sense of ownership fulfills our needs to see that we matter — our time, choices, and ideas matter. Some employers meet this sense of control with:
 - Flexible work schedules
 - Clear career direction
 - Teaching and encouraging their employees to be empowered to make decisions

It starts with you

Walk the talk: It's easy for leaders to preach, but difficult to put those words into action. The best leaders win respect and admiration of their team by consistently leading by example. Get out of your office and engage with your employees, get to know them, praise their progress and spend time with them.

Prioritize people: Show genuine care for your employees. Send cards to employees for their birthdays or to congratulate them for major milestones. Incorporate things like an informal walk-and-talk meeting instead of a one-on-one. Find out how your employees are motivated and use that. Thank them in a meeting, take them to lunch, bring cookies on their birthday, send them an email letting them know they are "seen" in your office.

Improve manager-employee relationships: Take coaching and leadership training, read books or ask a mentor to help you. Be open to critique on how you can be a better, more supportive manager to your employees. Also, your employees need to know where they stand with you. Give them honest feedback without judgement or comparison. Reduce their fear of failure by showing them it's an opportunity to learn.

Address frustrations at your office: Are there too many meetings so people have to work in the evenings to do their actual work? Is there a lack of boundary between work and home where employees are expected to answer calls and emails after hours? Find out the pain points that are keeping your employees frustrated, and eliminate as many as possible.

Sources: [forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com)*, University of Buffalo School of Management

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