

Having Fun at Work

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Having Fun at Work

Who said that fun and work are mutually exclusive? In this session we will focus on the competitive advantage of fostering a culture of fun in your office, how to implement such a culture, and how to find the fun in your everyday work life.

It's easy to think that fun and work are mutually exclusive, or that it doesn't make a difference to an employee or a supervisor whether or not the employee is having fun at work. I'm sure we've all heard someone say, "That's why they call it work." That attitude isn't beneficial for the employee or the organization, however. In fact, the benefits to having fun are measurable for both the employee and the organization, and as most people spend the majority of their lives at work, it is critical to find a way to be happy in doing so.

Studies show that 61% of Americans enjoy their jobs, and are happy at work.¹ Overall happiness at work is generally comprised of several factors including: getting along with colleagues, believing that your work is worthwhile and useful, having control over your duties and managing your own workload, doing something challenging and stimulating, recognition and appreciation, and being able to use skills daily.² Erica Anderson of *Forbes* believes that there are three things employees want most from work, which when present significantly increase employee happiness:³

Autonomy—the desire to direct our own lives

Mastery—the urge to get better and better at something that matters

Purpose—the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves

Anderson believes that people are happiest in jobs that allow for significant autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Research would support her belief, as the 20 jobs in which people are happiest all allow for significant autonomy, mastery, and purpose⁴.

For the employee, or job candidate, having fun and having a sense of humor are important to an employer's perception about you as a candidate, and about your performance. Hodge-Cronin & Associates found that 98% of CEOs prefer job candidates

¹ Nisen, Max. *How to Be Happy at Work*. Business Insider.

² Nisen, Max. *How to Be Happy at Work*. Business Insider.

³ Anderson, Erica. *The Surprising Truth About What Makes Us Happy At Work*. Forbes. Aug. 13, 2012.

⁴ Anderson, Erica. *The Surprising Truth About What Makes Us Happy At Work*. Forbes. Aug. 13, 2012.

with a sense of humor, and 84% of executives think that employees with a sense of humor perform better in their job.⁵ Having fun at work also stimulates creativity, relieves stress, makes employees more likely to share their ideas, and increases productivity.

For the employer, employee happiness is equally important. Happy employees are more likely to be loyal to the organization and to have increased productivity when compared to unhappy employees. They are less likely to be late or absent from work, and use fewer sick days. Turnover rate is lower among happy employees, and employer health care costs can decrease.⁶ Employers have found that having a fun work environment is a way to attract the best people to their organization, and to entice them to stay there.⁷ Fun can also increase the bottom line. In fact, the stock market value of *Fortune's* "100 Best Companies to Work For" grew four times faster than the market as a whole between 1998 and 2005.⁸

When thinking about how to implement a fun work environment, many CLE organizations can learn from tech companies. LinkedIn, for example, offers free lunch, arcade games, and yoga classes.⁹ In addition, they hold monthly *inDays*, which are one day each month when employees are to invest in themselves, and *hackdays*, where employees can work on any project, not necessarily one just in their position description, and then share the results with the rest of the company.¹⁰ Though not all CLE organizations can provide lunch every day, or yoga classes, there is a lot that can be learned from these organizations. Perhaps your CLE organization can offer lunch monthly or quarterly. Perhaps it can offer employees days to invest in themselves, or work on a project outside of their normal work, to keep the employees energized. While most CLE organizations don't have arcade games to offer, it is easy to think about things that you might be able to offer. Utilize the talents of your employees and contacts. At Georgetown Law CLE, we've been able to bring in someone to talk about Health & Wellness. We also offer a craft circle once a month for interested employees to spend their lunch hour crafting together. These are no-cost offerings that enhance morale and make our workplace more fun. We also offer lunch once a month, which costs the

⁵ Rau-Foster, Mary. *Humor and Fun in the Workplace*. www.workplaceissues.com. Accessed Sept. 6, 2012.

⁶ Rau-Foster, Mary. *Humor and Fun in the Workplace*. www.workplaceissues.com. Accessed Sept. 6, 2012.

⁷ Bathurst, Patricia. *Having Fun at Work Increases Loyalty, Productivity*. Arizona Business & Money. Jun. 1, 2008.

⁸ Bathurst, Patricia. *Having Fun at Work Increases Loyalty, Productivity*. Arizona Business & Money. Jun. 1, 2008.

⁹ Lee, Maverick. *Having Fun and Working Hard at LinkedIn*. www.blog.linkedin.com. Accessed Sept. 6, 2012.

¹⁰ Lee, Maverick. *Having Fun and Working Hard at LinkedIn*. www.blog.linkedin.com. Accessed Sept. 6, 2012.

department less than the cost of one program registration annually. It has a significant impact on morale, however. These programs can be implemented in most organizations.

Additionally, a flexible work environment increases employee happiness. When employees are able to telework, they save between \$4,000 and \$21,000 per year on work and commuting related costs. They save an average of 6 hours per week in commuting time, and they experience a 43% reduction in interruptions. They gain an average increase of 90 minutes per week in time spent planning, goal setting, and strategizing. They also experience an increase in productivity of 27%.¹¹ When trying to increase employee happiness, it is important to evaluate what kind of teleworking or flexible scheduling your organization may be able to offer. Though teleworking and flexible scheduling may seem difficult to implement, the benefits to the employee and the organization are significant.

Happy organizations are also usually run by leaders, as opposed to managers. Employees are motivated and stimulated when you stretch them, giving them more responsibility, and more decision-making authority.¹² Sharing information is empowering and inclusive. Educating employees about the state of the organization as a whole provides a broader perspective, and informed employees are more likely to be happy employees.¹³ A happy work environment is also one where employers delegate to their subordinates. This gives employees the ability to grow, which increases their happiness and productivity.¹⁴

As an employee it's critical to take ownership over your own desire to be happy at work. Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, has a blog, on which she provides *24 Tips for Being Happy at Work*. There are a few tips which I think are important to highlight. The first is to be mindful of your space. "Check for eyestrain: put your hand to your forehead in a salute. If your eyes feel relieved, your space is too bright."¹⁵ She also suggests getting a good desk chair and getting a phone headset.¹⁶ These modifications can significantly improve your day to day happiness about being in your office space. She also recommends saying "I'll get back to you" instead of "yes" when requests are made of you, as the desire to be accommodating can lead an employee to say yes without thinking through the timeline, other priorities, whether the task is better suited for another team member, and if it can be accomplished by the deadline. Similarly, she recommends that when you accept a new task you always think of it as something you'd have to do the following week so that you don't accept something onerous and

¹¹ <http://blog.shhmooze.com/2012/12/10/heres-another-secret-to-being-happy-at-work/>

¹² Stibel, Jeffrey. *7 Ways to be Happier at Work*. Harvard Business Review. May 15, 2009.

¹³ Stibel, Jeffrey. *7 Ways to be Happier at Work*. Harvard Business Review. May 15, 2009.

¹⁴ Stibel, Jeffrey. *7 Ways to be Happier at Work*. Harvard Business Review. May 15, 2009.

¹⁵ Rubin, Gretchen. *24 Tips for Being Happy at Work*. www.happinessproject.com

¹⁶ Rubin, Gretchen. *24 Tips for Being Happy at Work*. www.happinessproject.com

unnecessary, simply because it seems far away. She also suggests resolving difficult calls and emails immediately, as having those hanging over your head spreads out the unpleasantness.¹⁷

Rubin also makes some recommendations regarding your interactions with colleagues. She suggests forming friendships with colleagues, and finding out why certain colleagues get under your skin. Once you understand their behavior, and what exactly they are doing, it can be more difficult for that behavior to have the same impact on you. Finally, if you know you have a difficult colleague or supervisor, choose positivity. By not allowing yourself to criticize, you won't become trapped in a spiral of negativity in all of your dealings with that person.¹⁸

Jeff Stibel, of the *Harvard Business Review*, also has tips on how to be happier at work. There are three tips in particular which I think are important to note. The first is to remember to take a break.¹⁹ He makes sure to do so by having lunch out of the office daily. However you do so, it is important to step away from your computer each day to recharge and reenergize. Failing to do so because you are too busy will lead to decreased productivity and decreased happiness. He also recommends doing things differently in order to minimize boredom.²⁰ Though employees would ideally be able to learn and grow by taking on more responsibility, if your employer or organization doesn't allow for that, he encourages you to try and do your current tasks in a different manner. By taking a different approach, you can make your job seem new and fresh again.

Stibel's third tip is to have fun.²¹ Stibel thinks that it is critical to like what you do, and when you stop liking it, to do something else. It's important to remember that as fun as a workplace might strive to be, more than half the battle is employee attitude. The easiest way to be happy at work is to choose to be happy at work. Like with most situations, there will be aspects about each of our jobs that we love and some that we don't love. It is a choice to dwell on the positive or the negative aspects of your position and employer. Each day, choose to get motivated on your way to work. Think about each of the aspects of your job that you enjoy.²² Choosing the positive won't just be better for the employer, but will be better for you in the long run as well. Similarly, in choosing to be happy, one must also choose to avoid negativity. Doing so means avoiding office gossip, negative conversations, and unhappy people. Surrounding yourself with gossip and negativity will make it very difficult to continue to be happy.

¹⁷ Rubin, Gretchen. *24 Tips for Being Happy at Work*. www.happinessproject.com

¹⁸ Rubin, Gretchen. *24 Tips for Being Happy at Work*. www.happinessproject.com

¹⁹ Stibel, Jeffrey. *7 Ways to be Happier at Work*. *Harvard Business Review*. May 15, 2009.

²⁰ Stibel, Jeffrey. *7 Ways to be Happier at Work*. *Harvard Business Review*. May 15, 2009.

²¹ Stibel, Jeffrey. *7 Ways to be Happier at Work*. *Harvard Business Review*. May 15, 2009.

²² Moulesong, Bob. *Being Happy at Work Has More to do With Attitude Than Surroundings*. Nwi.com

Finally, if you aren't happy, or think you won't be long term, choose to search for a new position while maintaining an attitude of happiness. You will be much more attractive to a potential employer if you are able to portray positivity, and that happiness will leave former supervisors and colleagues sad to see you go. If you have difficulty maintaining this happiness while in a position you are seeking to leave, remember that you are choosing to remain there. For whatever reason, remaining in that position is better than the alternative (a demotion, unemployment, or a job farther away, with a less attractive commute). It is much easier to maintain your positive attitude when you take ownership over the decision to remain in your current position.

Remember that humor and fun in the workplace must be appropriate for a professional setting. In a business setting, perception is important both from colleagues and customers. Happiness, humor, and professionalism, however, are not mutually exclusive. Southwest Airlines has proactively tried to create a fun and playful environment for their employees. Their safety videos are humorous, and they have a more casual dress code for their employees than most airlines. While they may have been concerned about the response they would receive, it has been positive, not just from employees, but also from customers.²³ The same can be true for humor and fun in the CLE industry. When having fun, however, it is important to remember that you are still interacting with colleagues, supervisors, and customers, and to act accordingly.

²³ Rau-Foster, Mary. *Humor and Fun in the Workplace*. www.workplaceissues.com. Accessed Sept. 6, 2012.