



FOR HAPPIER, HEALTHIER WORKPLACES

*A GUIDE TO THE*

# 13 ELEMENTS OF HAPPINESS AT WORK

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## Hi, Dr Jenny here.

Welcome to my guide on Happiness at Work.

You're likely here because you're looking for more happiness in your own work and life. I'm happy to say that this guide is a great place to start.

Throughout the following pages you'll find my tips and tricks about:

- What happiness at work really is
- Why happiness at work matters
- The proven benefits of happiness at work
- 13 factors to take into consideration when starting to build greater happiness at work and in life

However, while happiness at work isn't rocket science, it's important to remember that it's a process and it takes time.

*"But why should I listen to you, Jenny?"*, I hear you wonder. Whoops! Let me introduce myself.

I'm a medical practitioner, Fellow of the Australasian Institute of Lifestyle Medicine, an award-winning speaker and best-selling author specialising in creating thriving teams and leaders.

In my speaking engagements, workshops, courses and writing, I work to assist leaders in better managing the current malaise associated with overwork and high stress working environments, helping them to create teams that thrive even when under pressure.

A big part of the picture is about fostering greater happiness in work and life. Should you need more information, you can find it on my website:

[www.drjennybrockis.com](http://www.drjennybrockis.com)

*In the meantime, let's get started.*

# What is Happiness at Work?



Happiness is often described as a feeling of pleasure experienced when we undertake an activity that brings us joy, contentment or satisfaction. Happiness at work is an extension of this feeling in our working lives. At work, happiness is also associated with a positive state of mind that determines your energy levels, discretionary input and outcome.

It turns out the Danes and the other Scandinavian countries have their own name for this: *arbejdsglaede*. Work happiness.

Happiness at work is not about being happy all the time or just thinking happy thoughts but, rather, seeking out new ways to feel better about our life and work in general so that we can have more better days that we enjoy, overall.

*“...happiness at work is an emotion. It comes from inside of you, and like all other emotions it is difficult to define, but inescapable once it's present.”*

Alexander Kjerulf  
Founder, Woohoo Inc.





# Why does Happiness at Work matter?



It's been estimated that we spend over one-third of our lives at work. While work provides us with the means to pay the bills and put food on the table, what if we spent more of that time feeling happy?

Research consistently reports how happy, healthy workplaces are more profitable. In 2015, The University of Warwick's Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy revealed happy, healthy people are up to 12% more productive at work. To put it simply: being happy is good for the individual and the bottom line.

Conversely, unhappy people are more likely to be disengaged and are up to up 10% less productive. The high level of disengagement in the modern workplace is really about presenteeism – the 'brown-out' zone. 'Presentees', while still showing up to work, are going through the motions, staying under the radar and are not contributing or collaborating.

Happiness at work matters because no matter how smart you are, how many degrees you hold or what expertise you have, your contribution, discretionary effort and ultimate success very much depend on your state of mind. In other words: how we feel has a huge impact on performance, efficiency and productivity.

# *The Benefits of Happiness at Work*



- Better decision-making
- Improved working memory, so we learn more effectively and solve problems more quickly
- Increased possibility thinking and curiosity
- Increased creativity and innovation
- Increased generosity and collaboration
- Increased mental energy
- Increased optimism and gratitude
- Increased resilience in dealing with life's curveballs
- Increased drive/motivation and engagement
- Increased consistency in work performance
- Being a better team player when negotiating and problem-solving
- Higher levels of success
- Influencing others to be more positive
- Decreased intolerance, irritability, hostility and judgment



**WHAT DRIVES  
HAPPINESS AT  
WORK?**

# Breaks

Taking time out to rest, away from work, is so important. It helps to:

- Keep things in perspective
- Cultivate an interest in other things beyond work
- Provide a much-needed cognitive break to refresh and re-energise
- Provide the thinking space we need to think more deeply, reflect, think more broadly, imagine and come up with new ideas
- Deflect us from the constant instant gratification we seek from our updates and newsfeed that fragments our attention and adds to our sense of time poverty
- Remind us of all those other things we enjoy doing – like walking, singing or dancing, hanging out with friends, listening to great music, watching a magnificent sunset or not doing terribly much at all
- Regain control of our own time, rather than being at the beck and call of someone else's agenda

Overwork stifles performance and productivity, and it's deadly. Regular uncluttering our mind from work-related activities would not only give Marie Kondo great joy, but it also helps us all to find greater peace of mind, new insights and happiness.

What you choose to do for a break is less important than actually doing something different; whether it's scheduling a regular weekend time-out, a daily appointment just for you to exercise, meditate, read or snooze or a 5-minute break out of the daily humdrum of busyness.





2

## Choice

No one is happy all the time, but we can, through conscious choice, increase our number of happy days experienced. While genetics and circumstance also contribute (we all have what is termed our “happiness set-point”), it turns out we have a considerable influence in determining how happy we choose to be. You determine 50% of your happiness through your own thoughts, actions and behaviours. Every time we tune into our ‘happy channel’ we’ve chosen to consciously seek to elevate our own happiness.

Choosing to smile also makes you feel happy through an increased release of dopamine and serotonin. It’s a super easy, quick and effective way to boost your mood – and, of course, it’s contagious! So, choose to smile more and spread that positive contagion of shared happiness.

3

## Compassion

Making a mistake, showing an error of judgement or making a bad choice happens all the time. We are human, after all: imperfect, vulnerable and sometimes quite irrational – and that’s OK. Developing greater compassion for ourselves and others makes it easier to come to terms with adversity and move forward. Acknowledging our vulnerability and accepting responsibility is the first step to silencing that inner critic that’s constantly seeking to belittle and remind us we’re not good enough.

Not to mention, research has shown that practising self-compassion using loving-kindness meditation can up-regulate positive emotion, influencing what is called our vagal tone. A higher vagal tone helps to boost further positive interpersonal connection and creates a positive feedback loop, helping to foster greater happiness for ourselves and those around us.





4

## Exercise

Studies have shown that physical activity stimulates the releases of our feel-good hormones: dopamine, serotonin and endorphins. Exercise also releases more BDNF: the brain's growth factor that keeps your neurons in top working order and acts to reset memory and stress.

For greater all-round happiness in life and at work, do some form of aerobic exercise daily to get your heart rate up and trigger the release of those happy hormones. Exercise primes the brain for better performance with improved memory and cognition. It's far easier to work efficiently with a clear head.

For more exercise at work, make inactivity your enemy! Start by:

- Promoting physical movement, whether it's stand up sales meetings, or walk and talk sales meetings
- Start a movement challenge like 10,000 steps every day (and best of all you can download pedometer apps on smartphones for no cost!)

5

## Gratitude

Gratitude boosts our level of optimism and has been shown to elevate confidence and performance.

Shawn Achor, the author of *The Happiness Advantage*, explains how gratitude can boost productivity by 31%, providing you with a competitive advantage. The ROI of gratitude is that undertaking the simple act of journaling 3-5 things you are grateful for each day for 21 days will significantly raise your level of optimism for the next 6 months.

Choosing to focus on what you have and what you're grateful for shifts you to a more positive space that cultivates a mindset that is more accepting, more open, more willing to learn. The more you practise gratitude by counting your blessings, the more attuned you become to seeing the good around you – and this will make you happy.



6

## Green Space

Feeling connected to nature is a unique predictor to our happiness. Getting enough serotonin to balance our mood and elevate our sense of wellbeing comes from having access to the great and green outdoors, and exposure to sunlight.

This is more than just getting out into some fresh air. Connecting with nature has been shown to reduce stress levels, reduce rumination, help to restore our ability to pay attention to what's important to us and boost creativity, problem-solving and vitality.

7

## Kindness

Our greatest reward comes from helping others, whether as a random act of kindness, calling out the good or choosing to do something nice for a friend or colleague for no other reason than *because we can*.

For greater happiness at work:

- Do something for someone else when you perceive their need, without seeking recompense or reward. Not because you had to or were asked, but because you saw the need and filled it.
- Perform one R.A.O.K (random act of kindness) every day – shout someone a coffee, lunch or a small unexpected gift, or help someone carry their stuff. It doesn't have to be huge or earth-shattering, just a nice thing to do for someone else for no other reason than because you can.

While bonuses and promotions are nice, our greatest reward comes from doing something for someone else without the expectation of reward or compensation. That's why it feels good to give a gift, the pleasure is in the giving. The bonus here comes in the form of dopamine and motivates us to repeat that rewarding behaviour. In turn, we become more pro-social and generous, creating a positive feedback loop.

What opportunities are there in your workplace to promote greater generosity of spirit?

## Mindfulness

Being mindful is about noticing what's happening around you, right now, in the present moment. Checking in to really see and listen deeply helps you to evaluate what needs to be done next and make a better decision. While regular mindfulness has been shown to reduce stress, hone attention and boost creativity, the sense of calm that comes with being more mindful helps to keep us all in a positive frame of mind.

## Positive Relationships

As social creatures, we are hardwired to connect. This is what we really need to feel happy. When we are with those we like or have a relationship with, our brain releases oxytocin. Whenever our oxytocin levels are boosted by undertaking a social activity, this amplifies our emotions and triggers a cascade of events leading to higher levels of serotonin that activate the brain's reward circuitry resulting in greater happiness.

So, for greater happiness at work:

- Seek to connect. It's the little things that count, like saying good morning in a cheery voice in a tone that conveys you mean it and with eye contact.
- Look for commonalities and aligned values and beliefs in those you work with. You don't have to be best friends with everyone but seeking ways to get along with others goes a long way to fostering trust and relatedness.
- Spend time with people you like. Our ability to connect with others we consider similar to us elevates oxytocin, which is essential to the foundation of all positive and meaningful relationships.
- Be selective in who and what you spend time listening to. Our negativity bias can easily spiral down into deep grey unless we're careful. We can't always avoid those positivity sappers, but we can minimise their impact by choosing not to buy into their negative language, reframing things to widen our bandwidth of perspective and applying a high level of critical thinking.



## Psychological Safety

Do you have the freedom to get on with the job you've been hired to do, with the autonomy to deliver great work without the threat of micro-management, lack of social support (especially from a manager) or toxic work colleagues?

A psychologically safe environment is one that enables people to think at their best because they have the resources, the support and encouragement to do so. It is an environment that is people-centric and thus enjoying the bonus of a happy, healthy workforce that is more focused, efficient and productive. This is good for the individual, the business and the bottom line.

When work is psychologically safe:

- It's easy to have the confidence to speak up when you've noticed something isn't right
- It feels good to be able to voice an opinion or share an idea even though others might not like because it leads to more robust and honest conversations
- You know you have permission to experiment and fail without being made to feel a failure and be congratulated on your successes

To determine if your workplace is psychologically safe, ask:

- Is there an air of trust between colleagues?
- Is there a willingness to be open to change and new ideas – an adaptive and resilient approach?
- Do you and your colleagues enjoy a strong sense of purpose and meaning for the work you do?
- How curious are you to ask questions, to what could be done bigger and better?

The happiest workplaces are those where people feel safe, secure and valued. Having a psychologically safe work environment and a boss or manager who treats you as a human being counts for far more than the money you receive in your pay packet.





11

## Reward & Recognition

We feel rewarded when undertaking an activity that makes us feel good – like doing something for someone else to help out, completing a group project that is successful in delivering the desired outcomes or being acknowledged for our effort and contribution. These provide us with lots of lovely dopamine shots, motivating our desire to repeat those rewarding behaviours.

It all boils down to being acknowledged for a job well done, being trusted to get on with what you know you're capable of, feeling a sense of pride in what you do and enjoying great working relationships. For greater happiness at work, make the work rewarding, build trust and provide challenges to build pride i.e. treat people as human and say thanks.

12

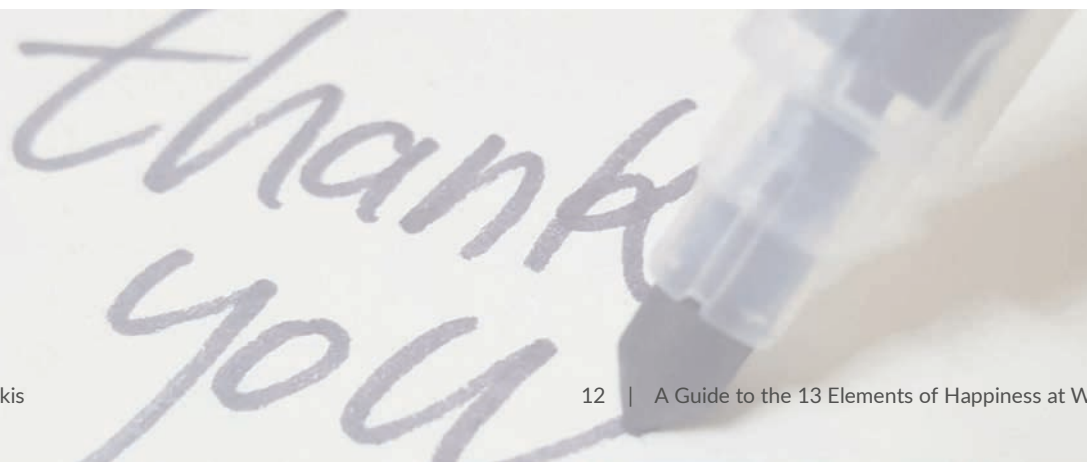
## Sense of Purpose & Meaning

Doing work that you love, for something bigger than yourself provides a sense of purpose meaning. When you have located that, then happiness will follow. Doing meaningful works means you:

- Will be more committed to the organisation
- Have a lower intention to leave
- Clock up fewer days absent or sick
- Are more willing to work discretionary work hours (i.e. for free)
- Have more faith in management
- Function better within teams

Doing work that we consider meaningful is strongly correlated to job satisfaction and provides us with **the 'why'** we do what we do, and it's not about the money.

Our riches come in many different forms. Whether it is the richness of experience, enjoying great relationships or achieving success (whatever that might look like to you), it's about being true to ourselves, to our sense of purpose and doing what gives us meaning to our lives.



## Sleep

Get enough sleep. When we're tired, we get crankier, more irritable and are at greater risk of getting stuck in the negative groove. Getting enough quality, uninterrupted sleep is essential to how well we can regulate our emotions.

Sleep deprivation comes with the terrible cognitive cost of poor attention, a slower speed of processing, reduced learning and memory capacity, more mistakes, poorer decision making and reduced analytical or creative thinking. It's about making the decision to, no matter what, put sleep first.

But how much sleep is enough? Only you know the answer to that question. However, ensuring you get 7-9 hours of good quality and uninterrupted sleep every night will put you in the higher mental-wellbeing and happiness bracket.



## *Do You Need More Happiness?*



Happiness at work isn't rocket science. Work doesn't have to be hard or endured for us to be able to achieve our goals and be successful.

However, happiness at work is a process and it takes time. It has to be:

- Treated as a project to be effectively managed – many workplaces now have chief happiness or engagement officers who provide several ways to do just that.
- Voluntary – you can't force yourself to be happy, it has to be something you want to be a part of.

The real magic happens when leaders embrace in investing in their most precious asset, the brains and minds of those who work for them because creating greater happiness at work for yourself and others starts with better brain health.

*Disclaimer:*

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Dr Jenny Brockis is a medical practitioner and board-certified lifestyle medicine physician, specialising in brain health and mental performance. She works to inspire others to become the best versions of themselves by translating the findings of the neuroscience and positive psychology into simple, practical tools that enable people to work smarter not harder.

With three decades experience of working with people, she understands that while intentions may be good, changing behaviours is not always easy!

An international speaker, trainer and author of three books including the best-selling “Smarter, Sharper Thinking” (Wiley), Jenny is frequently sought after as a commentator in the media and has had many articles published in a variety of magazines and journals.

When not speaking, researching or writing, Dr Jenny loves to spend time with her family, travel to new destinations and continues to challenge her long-standing fear of heights.

Visit [drjennybrockis.com](http://drjennybrockis.com) to learn more about Jenny's keynotes, workshops and more.