6-1-2011

Important Tips for Finding Happiness at Work

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Important tips for finding happiness at work

Writing about happiness might seem a stretch for a professor of marketing, but I have been leading an honors section of Georgia Southern’s freshmen orientation class titled “Finding Happiness in Today’s Consumption-Oriented Society.” Marketers share some blame for the overt materialism that undermines much happiness in our lives today, and I will try to rectify some of this bad karma by offering these lessons in happiness from our class readings and discussions.

1. Find your noble purpose at work and make sure it’s linked to helping others. Each day, do your best to help others, to alleviate suffering, and to do your part in doing good. If you work in a system that allows you to do this, you are more likely to find happiness at work.

2. Look for good in others just as you look for the meaning and purpose in your work. If you look for good, you will find it. If you look for bad, you will find that, too. One outlook will more likely lead to happiness. The other will lead to your personal unhappiness. Make a point to express gratitude when you find others doing good things.

3. Don’t expect your boss to be any more perfect than any other human being. Shunryo Suzuki is credited with saying, “each of us is perfect. Each of us could do with a little improvement.” Every human being has strengths and weaknesses, and frequently they are tied to one another.

For example, a leader with great empathy might be overly sensitive to criticism. When we give our leaders room to be human, we are more likely to see the good in them.

4. No whining. This is one of the most difficult of lessons because complaining is so tempting. Snarky and sardonic remarks and witty sarcasm get easy laughs, but they erode happiness at work for yourself and others.

Before complaining, ask yourself what you can do to offer a solution. Work helpfully to fix problems or keep quiet. Finding new employment is definitely an honorable course of action when efforts fail to correct persistent intolerable problems, but this is a drastic course of action.

Finding genuine humor in the multitude of minor irritations that are part of the normal workplace is helpful and healthy. You can tell the difference between an undermining comment and genuine humor by the impact on organizational culture. The former depresses spirits, and the latter raises them.

To be happy, express your contribution to an organization’s happiness climate. If you are bringing the happiness of an organization down, evaluate yourself honestly and consider what changes you can make in your actions and/or outlook.

There are many bad bosses and unhealthy work environments out there, but if your past is strewn with persistent unhappiness that spans people, bosses and organizations, do “not double down” this time with a strategy that has already failed you. Try something new.

Frequently, people unhappy at work decide to invest less in their organization. This may result in a decline in happiness, job satisfaction and work performance.

To be happier, invest more. Also evaluate those you are working with at work and if they consistently make you feel worse about where you work, you may need to choose a different group. Happiness and unhappiness are both contagious.

6. Widen your zone of happiness. Allow yourself to be happy under a wider range of circumstances. Do not intentionally narrow your happiness zone with a list of personal demands. Being picky and hard to please does not boost happiness.

7. Realize that happiness is not a destination. If you find yourself thinking, “I would be happy if...” or “I’ll be happy when...” or “If I owned a...,” then I would be happy,” you are setting yourself up for sustained unhappiness while you await some future perfect satisfaction.

Look for the relative happiness available to you right now, even as you delight in your prospects of even more happiness down the road. The realization of mine recently told me class no “one deserves to be happy.” Embrace that mantra and then take responsibility for creating your own happiness at work.

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