

SUMMARY

12

RODD WAGNER
JAMES K. HARTER, PHD



Summary of “12” by Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter, PhD

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Learn why happy workers make a stronger company.

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Introduction

Have you ever seen those motivational memes on Facebook? The ones that are modeled after the cover-art for the popular kids' movie Finding Nemo? Some creative minds out there have taken that design and repurposed the caption so that it now reads, "Finding... the will to live," or "Finding... the motivation to go to work." And, let's be honest, who can't relate to that meme?? As silly as it might sound, that meme is relatable because it humorously summarizes the fact that most of us aren't thrilled to go to work every day. We don't leap out of bed, awash with purpose, and delighted to do our jobs every day. There's a reason, after all, that human beings coined the term "the daily grind?"

And whether you're a manager or an employee, this lack of motivation afflicts everyone with equal vengeance. However, the effects can be uniquely catastrophic if your employees are unmotivated and you lack the willpower to help them up their game! So, over the course of this summary, we're going to take a look at a summarized collection of the best practices for cultivating employee satisfaction and turning your company culture around.

Why You Need Happy Employees

At some point in your life, you've probably heard someone say something along the lines of, "Well, back in my day..." or "Back in the good old days...!" Phrases like this are usually employed to invoke the nostalgia of a simpler time or imply that things were better "back in the good old days." However, when these phrases are used in the context of the workforce, they also typically invoke a time when corporations had few restrictions and when employees were subjected to inhumane work days, appallingly low pay, and little to nothing in the way of workers' rights. And if these were the overarching conditions of the day, it stands to reason that employee happiness was also unheard of. "Back in my day," people are likely to say, "it didn't matter if you were happy! You were just supposed to show up and do your job!"

And as you've probably already noticed, this is a commonly held view. Many people view employee happiness as being a trivial concern, brought to light by "those darn millennials" or "that snowflake generation," as many insensitive souls often say. However, the authors affirm that these views are blatantly untrue. Employee happiness matters, and to prove it, the authors are armed with the results of millions of Gallup poll surveys. So, after consulting millions of managers and employees alike, here's what the numbers say about the value of employee happiness.

For starters, it's important because it raises company morale. Sure, you might be able to eak by with a workforce that's driven by unhappy, unmotivated people, but you're unlikely to reach your full potential that way. That's because happy employees won't seek any excuse to get out of work (as most of us who are unsatisfied do). They'll be more likely to show up, to be consistent, and to do a good job while they're there. And as a result, your business will prosper. Similarly, if your employees are happy, they won't be on the lookout for a better offer. If you've ever felt trapped in a job you despise, you know that this is a common symptom of employee dissatisfaction. Because you hate your job so much, you adopt an

“Anywhere is better than here” mentality, and you’re likely to pounce on the first new offer that comes along, whether it’s really better or not.

But if your employees are happy in their current position, they’ll stick with you for a long time. That’s a mutually beneficial (and less expensive) arrangement for everyone!

But don’t take the authors’ word for it-- just take a look at the data! Gallup polls on this topic have reported that happy employees have a 27% higher rate of attendance than those who are dissatisfied with their job. By contrast, unhappy employees are 31% more likely to quit. So, the key take-away from this chapter is that even if you don’t care about your employees’ happiness, the truth is that happy employees are simply better for business. But in addition to being better for business and less expensive to maintain, it might surprise you to know that there’s another perk of having happy employees: they’re also less likely to be injured on the job! That might sound odd until you consider the fact that people who are unhappy are less likely to focus on what they’re doing. If you ever took a class you despised in high school, you know that first hand; you probably spent more time daydreaming about getting out of that class than you did paying attention to the material. And the same is true for your employees. But if your workers don’t hate what they’re doing, they’re more likely to give it their full attention. The results of additional Gallup polls support this, confirming that unhappy employees are injured 62% more than those who enjoy their jobs!

Happy Employees Have the Right Tools

Let's imagine for a moment that you're hiring someone to groom your dog. What kind of skills would you expect from them? For starters, you'd probably expect them to have groomed a dog at least once before, right? You would hope that they'd have at least the vaguest idea of how pet grooming works. You'd probably also prefer that they're not allergic to dogs or avid dog haters. But these are, of course, only the most obvious generalizations for this type of scenario; realistically, you would want them to be certified in pet grooming, to have a gentle touch, and to be genuinely passionate about what they do. Why? Because no matter who you are, you have a certain standard of quality in mind for the goods and services you pay for. And if you hold your dog groomer to a high standard, why wouldn't you do the same for your employees?

That's why this chapter is dedicated to ensuring that your employees have the right tools for their jobs. Gallup polls conducted on the topics of employee satisfaction and productivity have reported that only 50% of American employees reported that they could strongly agree with the statement, "I know what is expected of me at work." If that's only 50% of employees, it's pretty scary to consider the other half who are walking around with no clue as to how to do their jobs! However, additional Gallup polls also reported that, in companies where more than 50% of employees strongly agreed with this statement, that company's workforce was also 5-10% more productive! So, what can you do to ensure that all your employees are able to answer this question with certainty?

The authors observe that many employees are able to achieve their maximum performance when they know how their role intersects with that of their colleagues. And that makes sense, right? To be effective in your role, everyone needs to know whose job depends on the information they provide and vice versa. For example, you might not know just how important it is for you to turn in that report until you know that Jill in accounting needs it in order to finalize the company's monthly expense

reports. Similarly, if you get stuck on a problem, you need to know enough about other departments to know who you can connect with when you need help. In short, your entire company needs to function like a team.

In addition to a team atmosphere, surveys have also shown that employees need to know why their role matters. Put simply, they need to understand what the company's mission statement is and how their job fits into that goal. For example, if you run a non-profit organization that's dedicated to supporting mental health, the people in accounting need to know why you need them just as much as you need the case workers who directly support patients. Without this knowledge, people may flounder and feel lost and adrift. That's why it's important that you take time to connect with each and every employee-- or at least each and every department-- and talk with them about the vital role they play in your company. If you can do this, then you can unlock new levels of understanding that will encourage each person to do their best. Because if everyone understands that their job contributes to the company's overall goal, employees are more likely to feel engaged and purposeful. And as a result, they'll be more motivated! So, make sure you're giving your employees the right tools for their job.

Throw Kindness Like Confetti

When you're in a managerial position, it's easy to be overwhelmed by the necessity of achieving results. Unfortunately, however, this pressure can also cause managers to become myopic and focus excessively on the outcome without considering the best way to get there. As a result, you might find yourself berating your employees or setting harsh deadlines in an effort to get your department to meet their goals. But what if you lead with kindness instead? What if, instead of motivating your employees through excessive pressure, you tried rewarding them instead? Gallup polls dedicated to the topic of employee satisfaction have found that rewards have an almost 100% success rate! So, let's take a look at what you can do to cultivate a culture of kindness.

It might surprise you, but praise from an employer was rated as one of the number-one factors in employee satisfaction! After all, everybody enjoys getting positive feedback and everybody likes to know that their efforts are appreciated. Plus, a Gallup poll discovered that when employers freely give out praise, employee satisfaction, productivity, and company revenue increase by 10-20%! That's a pretty big increase for very little effort! But why is praise such an effective motivator? Well, it has to do with the chemistry of our brains. Because positive experiences cause our brains to release feel-good hormones like dopamine, we're literally wired to seek out experiences that bring us those happy feelings. That's why many people become addicted to pornography, gambling, or alcohol; even if their habits are destructive in other ways, most people will continue to blindly chase that rush of endorphins.

However, the reverse is also true. When we don't get that flood of happy hormones, we become dissatisfied and unmotivated. Although perseverance can help us to power through things we dislike, most people don't enjoy pursuing activities that offer nothing in the way of benefits. Put simply, if an activity doesn't make us happy, we don't want to keep doing it. And that's never more true than when it comes to work! Employees might

power through their work days because they need to pay the bills, but if they feel like their jobs are sucking the life out of them, they won't want to give it their best. So, take a little extra time and effort to notice when your employees are doing well. Send them a hand-written thank-you card or even a kind email to let them know you noticed. Or institute an Employee of the Month program if you don't have one already! When you create a culture of kindness, your employees will feel happier and more motivated, and they'll look forward to coming to work!

However, the authors acknowledge that with that advice comes the caveat that you need to be cautious when giving out praise. While you should absolutely strive to throw kindness like confetti, you need to ensure that that confetti is covering everyone equally. If it doesn't, you may inadvertently create a culture of jealousy that encourages rivalry and competition. That's obviously the last thing you want, so try to avoid singling out certain employees or certain teams in front of everyone. Instead, be tactful, sincere, and discrete, and just connect with employees directly when you're dispensing praise. Or, as an alternative, the authors recommend establishing a fun, low-stakes competition that the entire office can get into. However, these competitions must be carefully structured to ensure that they're light-hearted and inclusive.

Final Summary

Many companies assume that employee happiness is irrelevant, but the authors argue that nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, as a collection of recent Gallup polls demonstrate, happy employees are more motivated, more productive, and more beneficial to the company!

Cultivating employee happiness doesn't mean that every work day needs to feel like a party, but it does mean that managers should apply a little extra effort and praise their employees. You can also establish fun workplace competitions or programs like Employee of the Month to boost morale. You can also encourage your employees by ensuring that they have the right tools for their job and that they know why their role is integral to the company's mission statement.



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