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Happiness at Work

Posted on October 27, 2015 by Kay Palan

Image of happiness emoticons

Mindfulness, exercise and gratitude can increase your happiness or the happiness of your employees, increasing productivity at the same time.

Welcome to Just Business, a new digital space where my colleagues and I at the Haworth College of Business share perspectives on topics that are all about business. When we talk about business, we often talk about the obvious topics and conversation starters such as revenue, technology, marketing and the global financial markets —but we often don't discuss that there's so much more to business. Business is all about people, and the solutions we devise to impact our ever-evolving society.

I was reminded of the impact people have on an organization during a presentation by Daniel Jefferies, founder of Newmind Group, at our Entrepreneurship Forum last spring. Daniel was invited to speak about the development and evolution of his technology consulting company and during the end of the presentation talked about his latest project, HappyGraph, software that helps individuals measure their happiness throughout the day.

So how does this relate to everyday business?

Daniel really captured my attention when he mentioned that many people don't bring their full selves to work, and a large percentage of employees in any given organization are often unhappy, or as Daniel refers to it, disengaged. Disengagement at work leads to stress throughout the organization, poor performance, lessened productivity and poor health outcomes with more sick days used, which in turn equates to a less successful company overall. Companies also experience a loss in the monetary investment they make in their employees. According to a recent Gallup poll, disengaged employees are estimated to cost the United States between \$450 billion and \$550 billion per year.

Interested in how we all can increase our happiness and engagement at work and encourage the same of others in our organization, I asked Daniel to share some findings from his research on how to stay engaged and happy in the workplace.

For employees looking to improve their on-the-job engagement, Daniel suggests practicing mindfulness while at the workplace. He says that mindfulness, the practice of being non-judgmentally aware of the present moment, can have an impact on how a person goes about their day and tasks. He suggests using simple breathing exercises to start your workday or to refocus during a stressful time. Taking three deep breaths before a stressful meeting or presentation can help you better respond to stress. Focusing on your breathing and the present moment allows you to better respond to stress, and not the fight-or-flight response that sometimes impairs self-control during a stressful situation.

Daniel also named exercise a way to help stay engaged at work. Companies that provide gym memberships or health incentives see a healthier workforce. Employees have longer-lasting focus

resulting in productivity gains for organizations. To start small, Daniel suggests taking a short walk between tasks or meetings to refocus the brain on the present and prepare for the next task ahead.

Another piece of the engagement puzzle, one that companies as a whole can participate in, is gratitude. Most companies have a review system in place, where management meets with employees to discuss progress and areas for improvement. Daniel mentions a method of recognition that can take place more often in the workplace than traditional review methods. He says that gratitude, sharing appreciation and thanking another for their kindness or work, can quickly boost the engagement in a workplace. He notes that experiencing gratitude changes the way you see the world, and in this case, your workplace. Employees at different levels in the organization showing appreciation for projects and tasks— big and small—can change how we view our contributions within the organization.

Engagement in the workplace is so important because it affects everyone in the organization and people outside the organization as well, much like business affects our society every day. When we're better engaged at work, we have more to contribute to our organization, which can lead to success for the organization and better professional outcomes for us as individuals. And happiness doesn't just stop there either. With happiness leading to better health outcomes and stress responses, our lives outside the office will be better as well.

As we post on this blog throughout the year, I am excited to explore topics that are important to business professionals and meaningful to those who have a general interest in business.

Business truly is all around us. It universal and a powerful way to problem solve.