



Topic  
Better Living

Subtopic  
Professional Development

# How to Build a Thriving Workplace

## A Leader's Guide

Course Guidebook

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Dr. Cabrera is the president and founder of Cabrera Insights, a consulting firm that assists companies in creating and maintaining positive work environments. Her research has been published in leading academic and professional journals, and she is the author of the book *Beyond Happy: Women, Work, and Well-Being*. ●

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Over the last 20 years, major corporations have focused an increasing amount of resources on employee wellness, with some startling results. These companies have found that small investments in their employees' mental and physical well-being can pay huge dividends in productivity, innovation, employee retention, and customer satisfaction. The results have been so transformative that employee well-being is now considered the new competitive edge in business.

In this course, you will discover the secrets for creating a workplace in which employees are happy, healthy, engaged, and invested. The course offers insights from the rapidly growing field of positive psychology—the study of how human beings thrive—and focuses on 13 strategies proven to promote high levels of well-being in your employees and in you: mindfulness, positive outlook, optimism, hope, relationships, generosity, compassion, learning, engagement, meaning, resilience, physical health, and autonomy.

The course builds from a foundation of mindful leadership, an approach to management that focuses on awareness of the present instead of the usual focus on the future. Mindful leadership can free you from the negativity bias that often clouds our judgment and corrupts our decision making, and it can connect you to your employees in powerful ways. You will learn simple techniques for creating a positive outlook in the workplace, unlocking creativity, and increasing employee retention. You will also discover the surprising effects that workplace friendships can have on productivity and

engagement, and you will learn simple but effective practices for promoting civility and generosity among your staff.

This course offers concrete guidance for helping your employees achieve a state of flow, in which deep engagement creates high performance. You will learn how to best use performance reviews to challenge and motivate your employees as well as how to successfully delegate to promote autonomy. You will also discover which employee health initiatives can have the greatest impact on overall well-being and work performance.

Throughout the course, you will be exposed to data from large-scale studies on employee well-being, which show the significant positive impact that small investments can have on all aspects of your business. You will discover how companies such as Google, Virgin, Best Buy, and others have revised their practices to focus on the employee experience and how these shifts have created significant increases in productivity and innovation.

Above all, this course encourages you to engage deeply and personally in the experience of your employees—by leading by example and by forming stronger connections and a deeper sense of meaning with your staff. ●

# 1

## WORKPLACE WELL-BEING: THE NEW FRONTIER

Companies are beginning to realize that the next competitive frontier in business success is employee experience. The experiences that employees have in the workplace shape their engagement and success, and organizations that focus on employee experience are able to attract and retain top talent. As you will learn in this lecture, well-being in the workplace can be a critical competitive factor, reducing costs associated with high turnover and employee health care, increasing employee productivity and innovation, and even impacting customer satisfaction. By investing in workplace well-being, you are offering your employees

Research by Jacob Morgan, who wrote *The Employee Experience Advantage*, shows that companies with the strongest focus on employee experience are significantly more likely to be ranked among the best places to work and among the most innovative companies. They are also found in the American Customer Satisfaction Index twice as often, and their profits are four times the average.

less stressful, more meaningful lives. It's a win-win for everyone: your business, your employees, and yourself.

## THRIVING AND WELL-BEING

Thriving employees are satisfied. Thriving employees are engaged. But thriving employees are also actively seeking ways to improve both themselves and their organizations. And this can be transformative for a business.

Everyone will have a different idea about what thriving is, but there will be similarities. You may equate thriving with feeling good or functioning well, or perhaps it is a sense of vitality and fulfillment—feeling truly happy or being satisfied with your life.

The standard dictionary definition is prospering, flourishing, or developing well. There are many different formulations, but at the heart of every definition of thriving is the idea of well-being.

While we all have an intuitive sense of the concept of well-being, it is actually quite complicated—so complicated that an entire field of psychology has recently developed to define, measure, and promote it. This field is called positive psychology.

Positive psychology is not about how to be happy all the time or how avoid setbacks, failure, or disappointment. It's not about ignoring reality; rather, it's about providing the tools to better deal with it.

Researchers in the field of positive psychology use the scientific method—testing ideas, obtaining evidence, and applying statistical analyses—to determine the factors and circumstances that enable thriving. In doing this research, scientists focus on different aspects of well-being. Some scientists work to identify the factors that impact it; others investigate the consequences of well-being. And others test different interventions to determine the best ways to enhance our well-being.

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

In the decades following World War II, the science of psychology made significant advances in diagnosing and treating pathologies. The focus on mental illness and adversity enriched our understanding of the causes of human suffering, but we didn't learn much about the other side of the human experience: thriving.

In 1998, Martin Seligman, the president of the American Psychological Association, believed that the absence of mental illness did not imply the presence of mental wellness and urged more psychologists to shift their focus from relieving misery to exploring what makes life worth living. He encouraged them to study the conditions that enable people to thrive and began bringing together researchers who were working on human strengths and positive attributes.

Since then, there has been an explosion of research on topics including happiness, gratitude, optimism, strengths, flow, meaning, and relationships. The field of positive psychology brings a scientific understanding to many of these concepts.

**Well-being can be defined as a mental state characterized by positive feelings and positive functioning.** When we are thriving—when we have high well-being—we are at our best. We are happy, healthy, and prosperous. At work, we are more creative, more productive, and more engaged. Students who are thriving get higher grades, are less depressed, and are more likely to stay in school.

**Well-being doesn't just make us feel good; it is also positively related to our health.** It can protect us from getting a cold and reduces the likelihood of developing cardiovascular disease and possibly even cancer.

Well-being isn't a single dimension. There are many different factors that influence our well-being, and several well-being scholars have created models based on similar factors.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first to distinguish two separate dimensions of well-being: hedonia—which means “feeling good” or “pleasure” and involves things and activities that result in positive emotions—and eudaimonia, which means “human flourishing” and is about doing good or living up to one’s potential by making meaningful contributions.

Many scholars today agree that well-being comes from a combination of eudaimonia and hedonia. Yet most well-being theories encompass more than just these two dimensions.



- › Ed Diener developed a tripartite model of subjective well-being that includes frequent positive emotions, infrequent negative emotions, and a mental evaluation of being satisfied with your life.
- › Martin Seligman’s PERMA model includes five distinct elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.
- › Carol Ryff, created a scale of psychological well-being that measures six facets: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations, purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy.

- › Tal Ben-Shahar’s SPIRE model for what he refers to as “wholebeing” includes spiritual well-being, or finding significance and meaning in whatever you do; physical well-being; intellectual well-being, which he defines as deep engagement with texts, people, art, or nature; relational well-being; and emotional well-being.
- › Richard Davidson is a neuroscientist who has identified four distinct neural circuits in our brains associated with higher levels of well-being. These include resilience, positive outlook, focused attention, and generosity.

## LIVING IN OUR MODERN WORLD

Our world has changed pretty radically over the last few decades, but our minds have not evolved to live in this new world. Technological advances have improved our lives in countless ways, yet technology has also contributed to frenetic, fast-paced lives that can undermine our well-being.

Our minds are pretty much the same as the minds of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, but the world we live in is very different. **There are two particular characteristics of our mind that can make living in the modern world especially challenging: our negativity bias and our wandering mind.**

Stress levels have increased between 10 and 30 percent over the last 30 years. According to the World Health Organization, stress is the number one health epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The number of people suffering from depression in the United States has also risen dramatically. The use of antidepressants rose 400 percent between 1988 and 2008. The suicide rate in 2016 reached its highest point in almost 30 years, with an increase for middle-aged adults of 40 percent since 1999.

Our minds have a survival instinct to constantly be on the lookout for potential threats or problems. This was critical for helping our ancestors stay alive. They had to be vigilant to notice the saber-toothed tiger crouching in the bushes. But after fighting or running away from the tiger, they were able to go back to calmly looking for food. Their bodies returned to a state of rest and renewal.

Today, we face many fewer real dangers than our ancestors did, yet our brains perceive deadlines and emails that might bring bad news as potential threats. This keeps us in a constant state of alertness. We never go back to grazing. Our bodies rarely have a chance for rest and renewal, which can lead to chronic stress that hurts our physical and psychological well-being.

In addition to our negativity bias, our minds wander about half of the time. This ability to think about the past and the future is what makes us human. It allows us to learn from our mistakes and to make plans. But it is also the source of much of our unhappiness. Because of our negativity bias, when our minds wander, they often turn to ruminating about something bad that happened in the past or worrying about something that might go wrong in the future.

But there is good news. **Research in positive psychology and neuroscience shows that we have the power to boost our own well-being.** Much of our well-being depends on our thoughts and actions, so we can learn ways of thinking and acting that are good for our well-being.

For years, scientists believed that the structures of our brains became fixed once we reached adulthood. They thought that our brain was pliable when we were born, but hardened over time, like plaster. More recent scientific discoveries have found that the brain can change its structure and patterns of activity throughout our lifetime. Researchers call this neuroplasticity.

We now know that our brains are rewired in response to our thoughts and experiences. When we focus on something, neurons fire together in our brain. When neurons fire over and over again, the neural

## THE BUSINESS LEADER

A survey by the American Psychological Association concluded that leader support was critical for workplace well-being. Results showed that 73 percent of employees with leaders who were committed to well-being initiatives said their organizations' employees were thriving, versus only 11 percent of employees with leaders who were not supportive. Yet despite the importance of leader support, only 40 percent reported having a leader who was involved in and committed to employee well-being.

Gallup researchers measured the well-being of 1,740 team members and their leaders and found that when the leader was thriving, his or her direct reports were 15 percent more likely to be thriving six months later.

Leadership sets the tone for almost everything in a work environment, including well-being, and a thriving workplace starts with a thriving leader. If you are thriving, you will have more energy, creativity, and resilience to better serve your team. You can then create experiences for and direct the attention of your employees in ways that will increase their well-being.

connection becomes stronger, which means they will be more likely to fire together in the future.

The more frequently you think in a certain way—be it positive or negative—the more that pattern is hardwired, so it eventually becomes your default way of thinking. Those thoughts will arise more quickly in your mind than others. Whatever you frequently think or do becomes a habit in your mind.

By shifting your thoughts and behavior, you can activate and strengthen new neural connections. Doing this over time will help you build greater well-being.

## THRIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WORKPLACE

Research shows that almost 40 percent of employees suffer from stress at work. In one survey, seven percent of people reported being hospitalized because of workplace stress.

Stress at work can also hurt company performance by contributing to a lack of engagement. Research by the Gallup organization shows that around 70 percent of US employees are not engaged. Disengagement is associated with higher absenteeism and turnover, more accidents, and lower productivity. It's estimated to cost the US economy between 450 billion and 550 billion dollars each year.

The workplace can pose unique challenges to our sense of well-being. Heavy workloads, long hours, tight deadlines, a lack of control, a lack of meaning, and incivility can all have a negative impact on factors related to well-being. Many employees aren't thriving because they are too focused on surviving the pressures they encounter at work each day.

Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford, published a book entitled *Dying for a Paycheck*, in which he discusses many of the ills of the modern workplace and argues that they can be life-threatening. He explains how the biggest source of stress is the workplace and that stress is responsible for much of the chronic disease from which so many Americans suffer. He estimates that job stress may cause as many as 120,000 deaths each year.

Pfeffer believes the environment we work in is as important as the one we live in, so we should hold organizations accountable not just for the impact they have on the physical environment, but also for the impact they have on the human beings who work for them. His book is an urgent call for companies to focus on workplace well-being.



Many researchers are studying the impact of applying positive psychology in the workplace, and the benefits are undeniable. Employees who experience greater well-being at work are more engaged, more productive, more creative, more resilient, more loyal, and healthier.

The benefits of employee well-being are so powerful that researchers have been inspired to create centers that focus on applying the science of well-being in the workplace. A group of scientists created the Center for Positive Organizations at the University of Michigan and are working to advance what they call positive organizational scholarship. Scientists there pursue research in the areas of culture, meaning and purpose, resilience, and positive relationships in organizations. They are focused on identifying positive characteristics that lead to exceptional individual and organizational performance.

Another group of researchers led by Fred Luthans at the University of Nebraska created what they refer to as positive organizational behavior, which integrates positive psychology into organizational

settings. Their research has identified four key components of positive organizational behavior: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. They have developed an intervention to develop these four strengths in employees, and results show that the intervention increases performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

The Gallup organization has a strengths-based consulting practice that promotes the assessment and development of employee strengths. The shift away from a focus on what's wrong with employees and trying to fix their weaknesses to a focus on what employees do well—and giving them opportunities to do more of that—represents a positive approach to the workplace.

This explosion of research and resources devoted to well-being in the workplace has taken place because companies are beginning to recognize that focusing on employee well-being can be a smart financial move. Research shows a clear link between businesses that invest in their employees' well-being and the bottom line.

Jerome Dodson, president of Parnassus Investments, was so convinced that companies focusing on employee experience would show excellent investment returns that he started the Parnassus Endeavor Fund, a mutual fund that invests exclusively in large American firms proven to have outstanding workplaces. And this fund is the company's top-performing fund.

## SUGGESTED READING

Cabrera, *Beyond Happy*.

Seligman, *Flourish*.

## EXERCISES

1. Consider how your employees might experience stress at work.
2. List the factors that you believe have the greatest impact on your own well-being.
3. Imagine how things would be different if everyone at your place of work were thriving.

# 2

## MINDFULNESS AT WORK: THE POWER OF PRESENCE

**M**indfulness is an awareness of what is happening in the present moment. It is about paying attention to what is going on in the world around you, as well as to what is happening in your mind—your thoughts and feelings. It is intentional and nonjudgmental. You make a conscious choice to attend to what is happening in the moment and you accept it, rather than getting caught up thinking about whether it is good or bad or wishing it were different. Being mindful is good for both physical and mental well-being. It can help you to be a better leader, and creating conditions that let your employees experience more mindfulness will help them thrive.

### BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS FOR LEADERS

Three specific benefits of mindfulness for leaders are enhanced focus; a calm, clear mind; and greater emotional intelligence due to decreased emotional reactivity and improved relationships.

Our naturally wandering mind makes it difficult to stay focused on the present moment, but the added turmoil of today's superbusy,



## THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Research has revealed an impressive array of mindfulness benefits. It has been linked to multiple health benefits, including lower stress, anxiety, and depression; reduced pain; better-quality sleep; and an enhanced immune system. Other benefits include better concentration and productivity, improved memory and learning, enhanced creativity, and less emotional reactivity.

Many studies have explored the benefits of mindfulness at work, and many companies—including Aetna, Google, Target, General Mills, Nike, Apple, Proctor & Gamble, and Intel—have taken steps to promote mindfulness among their employees. Some of the companies have meditation rooms, while others offer meditation classes or mindful leadership programs.

The results from some of these programs have been astonishing. Aetna claims that its mindfulness program reduced employee health costs by seven percent and raised productivity 3,000 dollars per employee per year.

Mindfulness is not our natural state. Our minds have a tendency to wander. In fact, we often find ourselves in a state that is not just unfocused, but altogether mindless. We go through much of our day on autopilot, so caught up in our thoughts that we don't notice what is happening right here, right now.

hyperconnected world makes being mindful more difficult than ever before. Technology offers constant distractions that feed our tendency for mind wandering. We are bombarded with incoming information, which makes focusing extremely challenging. Most of us live in a state of continuous partial attention. We are paying attention to many different things simultaneously but can only do so on a superficial level—so we aren't really paying attention to anything.

**People who practice meditation are more mindful, and studies show they are better at sustaining focus, switching tasks less often.** Enhanced focus of the sort that mindfulness

provides is critical for learning and performance across a wide variety of fields. Focused attention and high performance go hand in hand, and the science shows that mindfulness can help you get there.

The benefits of mindfulness have been well documented in professional sports. Dwelling on a missed shot or an interception can prevent athletes from focusing on the play at hand. They must be able to let go of the past to pay full attention to the present moment.

Many coaches and athletes—even entire teams—have embraced mindfulness meditation as a way of developing the ability to focus in order to improve performance. Phil Jackson was well known for using meditation when he coached the Chicago Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers. LeBron James is often seen meditating on the sidelines of his basketball games. The Seattle Seahawks and many Olympic athletes have also embraced mindfulness.

The second benefit of mindfulness for leaders is a calm, clear mind. For someone in a critical decision-making role, mental clarity is paramount; in fact, it may be the single most important trait to develop to ensure that you make decisions based on an accurate assessment of present circumstances.

### HOW STRESS AFFECTS OUR BRAIN

- Research shows that mindfulness training can decrease the emotional reactivity of the amygdala, which is involved with the experiencing of emotions. If the amygdala senses something as being potentially threatening or dangerous, it sends an alarm to the rest of our brain.
- The prefrontal cortex is responsible for executive functions, such as making plans and organizing action. This part of the brain takes just a little longer to react than the amygdala, so when something scares us, upsets us, or stresses us out, our amygdala signals our sympathetic nervous system to take over and prepare us for a fight-or-flight response. At this moment, our emotional brain, not our thinking brain, is in charge.
- Taking a mindful pause—such as a long, deep breath—activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which slows everything down and returns our body to a more calm, thoughtful state.

A third benefit of mindfulness for leaders is improved emotional intelligence. In his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman cites hundreds of studies conducted across companies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies worldwide, all of which concluded that emotional intelligence was more important for leadership success than IQ or previous experience. IQ and technical skills predict performance in lower-level jobs, but the competency that best predicts leader success is emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence requires both an awareness of emotions and an appropriate response based on that awareness. Emotionally intelligent

people are aware of their own emotions and use that knowledge to regulate their behavior. They are also aware of the emotions of others, which lets them interact in a way that improves relationships.

When our amygdala takes over when we're emotionally triggered by something that upsets us or stresses us out, we sometimes say or do things without thinking them through. Mindfulness provides an alternative to living reactively. It promotes behavior regulation by helping us notice the emotions we are experiencing without getting carried away by them. It creates a space between our initial emotional reaction to a situation and the way in which we ultimately respond, and it's in this space that clear thinking and conscious choice can happen.

One thing that mindfulness practice can show us rather quickly is that emotions are transient states that pass through us like clouds pass overhead. Our body's chemical response to an emotion lasts only 90 seconds, but that's enough time for us to do or say something without thinking.

One effective mindfulness technique that can have an immediate impact is simply labeling your emotions as you become mindful of them. Try not to judge the emotion as "good" or "bad"; simply give it a name. The act of labeling an emotion instantly puts distance between you and the emotion, decreasing its intensity and reengaging your thinking brain. Even this small bit of distance can be enough to let you choose a thoughtful course of action rather than acting on emotional impulse.

Before you can label emotions, however, you have to be aware of them. When we are moving through our day mindlessly, we sometimes don't even notice we are experiencing a certain emotion. Practicing mindfulness on a regular basis will prime you to become more aware of all that is happening in the present moment, including your own emotional state.

**Another benefit of mindfulness—one that is especially important for people in leadership positions—is that it can help to improve our relationships, both personal and professional.** Most of us aren't especially good listeners because our minds wander. We think about what we should say next or are distracted by a text message. The

increased focus that comes with mindfulness lets us really pay attention to what people are saying. It also increases the likelihood that we notice the nonverbal signs that communicate emotions.

Practicing mindfulness—and in particular emotional awareness—can make your interactions with your peers and your employees meaningful and authentic in ways that can have far-reaching positive consequences.

Being aware of people's emotions lets us respond to them in an emotionally intelligent way. We have to know how someone feels in order to take appropriate action, and doing so strengthens our relationship with that person.

## CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS

The best way to cultivate mindfulness is through meditation, which is a formal way of training your ability to focus. The practice of focusing your attention on something like your breath and refocusing each time your mind wanders is an excellent way to strengthen your attention muscle. It improves your ability to sustain focus and concentration.

When you meditate, you become better at noticing when you've become distracted throughout the day so that you can bring your attention back to the task at hand. You become aware of your thoughts and emotions without judging them or getting carried away by them.

If you are new to meditation, the easiest way to begin is by focusing your attention on your breath. You will become distracted, and each time that happens, just bring your attention back to the breath.

The key is to treat yourself with kindness. Don't get upset when you become distracted; just reorient your attention.

If you decide to try meditation, start with just a few minutes a day. Consistency is more important than the amount of time you spend.



Do less than you think you can in the beginning. As you practice, you'll find that it becomes easier, and you can increase the amount of time.

**You can meditate anytime, anywhere**—such as in your car or on a plane. It doesn't have to be first thing in the morning sitting on a pillow in a lotus position. Try to find a place and a time where you will be free from distractions. Sit in a comfortable position, but keep your spine erect to minimize sleepiness. Your goal isn't to stop thoughts from arising; it's to not get caught up in them.

Meditation is simple, but it's not easy. Be kind to yourself, and keep trying. **You may want to download one of the many available meditation apps to guide you as you are getting started.**

If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness and different types of meditation, check out offerings from The Great Courses on the topic.

**The next strategy for increasing mindfulness is to do one thing at a time.**

We all like to think that we're good at multitasking, but actually, it is impossible to multitask. Your brain is incapable of doing two things at once. When you think you are multitasking, you are really switching your attention back and forth between two things rapidly.

**Once you've minimized the distractions around you, give yourself permission to spend a few minutes each day doing nothing but being aware—called taking a mindful pause.** Taking a few mindful pauses throughout the day doesn't take much time, but it can be a powerful way to check in with yourself and your surroundings. Combined with a few long, deep breaths, it can lower stress and keep your mind clear and focused.

**The best way to fit mindful pauses into your day is to find some cues to remind you.** For example, each time you sit down in front of your computer, take a moment to bring your attention to your breath. Before you pick up the phone to make a call, pause to notice how you are feeling. Practice mindfulness when you walk to meetings or the bathroom. Try taking a mindful pause with a few deep breaths before

Multitasking increases your cognitive load, which hurts your performance, reducing productivity by up to 40 percent. Multitasking also hurts your psychological well-being by causing you to feel stressed and overwhelmed. The cognitive overload brought on by trying to do several things at once leads to intense mental exhaustion. And performing poorly can lead to stress.

In fact, we do see increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol when people are multitasking. This can become a vicious cycle, because increased levels of cortisol further impede our cognitive functioning, leading to even greater stress.

Technology is a major culprit in the temptation to multitask, and the multitasking culture that exists in our society has major implications for business. According to one study, employees lose up to two hours of productivity a day due to distractions.

beginning a difficult conversation or if you are nervous about making a presentation.

## FOSTERING A MINDFULNESS ENVIRONMENT AT WORK

**Start by having discussions with your team about how mindfulness can reduce stress and increase productivity.** Explain how multitasking and technological distractions prevent us from being mindful. Modifying technology use is probably the easiest way to help people focus. Ask employees not to bring their phones to meetings or have a basket where they can leave them at the door. This may cause a bit of anxiety for some at first, but resistance is often short-lived once people see how much quicker meetings are when everyone is focused.

**Check email less often.** Many work cultures have expectations of immediate responsiveness; creating an environment where people can experience more mindfulness requires a shift in these cultural

norms. Encourage people to schedule times throughout the day to check their email so that they aren't constantly distracted by incoming messages. Assume that a delayed response is a sign that someone is focused on their work.

**Most importantly, lead by example.** Put your phone down. Be present in your conversations with employees. Work on creating a space between your emotions and your actions. Let your employees see you doing it and encourage them to do the same. A healthier, more productive workplace will follow.

## SUGGESTED READING

Cameron, *The Mindful Day*.

Gelles, *Mindful Work*.

Marturano, *Finding the Space to Lead*.

Tan, *Search Inside Yourself*.

## EXERCISES

1. Pick a time and a place to meditate for three to five minutes each day.
2. Choose a cue that will remind you to take mindful pauses throughout the day.
3. Commit to doing one thing that will help your employees be more mindful. You could have phone-free meetings or change norms regarding email responsiveness, encouraging people to check email at scheduled times throughout the day.

# 3

## POSITIVE OUTLOOK, POSITIVE PERFORMANCE

Psychologists define outlook as the emotional lens through which we view the world. People who have a positive outlook notice and savor positive moments and are able to sustain positive emotions over time. It may seem obvious that positive emotions—such as joy, hope, love, contentment, inspiration, and pride—are essential for our well-being and success, but the benefits of a positive outlook are actually quite specific and have been well established through years of research. They include psychological benefits, cognitive benefits, social benefits, and significant health benefits.

### THE BENEFITS OF A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

There are several psychological benefits of having a positive outlook. Barbara Fredrickson, a leading researcher in positive psychology, has developed a broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions based on all of the research showing that positive emotions help us build psychological resources, such as better mental health. Positive people experience less anxiety, have lower levels of depression, and are more



hopeful and self-confident. Hope and self-confidence lead individuals to set higher goals and to expend more effort trying to reach them. That's one way that positivity helps us be more successful.

Another important psychological resource that we gain from experiencing positive emotions is resilience. Positive people are better able to cope with adversity because they are proactive and solution-focused when facing obstacles. They bounce back from setbacks and continue to pursue their goals despite difficulties.

The second set of benefits we gain when we experience positive emotions are cognitive benefits. Our emotions affect the way our minds work, and it turns out that happy brains are actually smarter. Positive emotions flood our brain with dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that help us organize new information, hold information in our mind longer, and retrieve it faster later on.

**Positivity also helps us be more creative.** When we are in a negative mood, our minds have a very narrow focus. We zoom in on whatever's causing our fear or anger. This can be useful in helping us respond rapidly to an imminent threat. When we hear a honking horn, it is in our best interest to ignore everything else and look for the car to see if we are in danger.

### TRY THIS

Look at the back of your hand for a minute and then make a list of everything you would like to do. Next, think about a joyful memory and make a new list.

In an experiment that can be used to show that positivity helps us be more creative, the second list was usually longer for participants: People generated more ideas after focusing on something positive.

When we experience positive emotions, our minds work in the exact opposite way: Rather than narrowing our focus, the range of ideas and behaviors that come to mind are much broader. Positive people are more aware of what is going on around them, taking in more information. This lets them make better decisions because they are more open and see more solutions to problems. In the workplace, this broader approach can lead to precisely the kind of creativity needed to keep a business innovative.

**The next set of benefits of being positive are social benefits.** Positive emotions foster trust and compassion. When we are in a good mood, we like other people more, so we end up spending more time with them and having more positive interactions. People also like us more when we are happy. It's uplifting to be around positive people. This means that positive individuals typically have higher-quality relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.

Some studies have looked at the effect of positivity specifically in the workplace context. One study found that managers who were more positive made more accurate decisions and scored higher on several measures of interpersonal behavior.

**These social connections are critical for our well-being.** They satisfy one of our most basic human needs: the need to belong. They also provide us with emotional support, helping us cope with difficulties and bounce back from adversity.

**Having strong social connections at work contributes to personal growth, creativity, and motivation.** These relationships can provide resources and information that help us do our jobs better. We experience less conflict and are more likely to be highly engaged when we like the people we work with.

**The final set of benefits are health benefits.** With the increasing cost of health care and employee benefits, many businesses have started taking a proactive approach to their employees' physical health. Encouraging exercise and healthy eating is great, but fostering positive outlooks can also have a substantial impact.

## **A LEADER'S POSITIVE OUTLOOK**

- **As a leader, you have a huge influence over what people at work pay attention to.** You set the direction and the tone. You may not be able to control everything that happens, but you can influence how people think about and respond to events.
- **Emotions are highly contagious, spreading rapidly from one person to another.** We have mirror neurons in our brains that fire in the same way when we perform an action and when we observe someone else performing the action. These mirror neurons cause us to mimic other people's facial expressions, which affects our mood. During a social interaction, the neural activity in the emotional part of our brain syncs with the other person's. This is the basis for empathy.
- **Many studies have documented the spread and impact of emotions in the workplace. The emotions of a leader are especially contagious.** Research by Thomas Sy has shown that teams with positive leaders perform better.

## NEGATIVITY BIAS

- Although creating a workplace where people experience more positive emotions will help your employees—and, by extension, your business—thrive, this is unfortunately easier said than done, because we all have a negativity bias.
- Our brain is wired to help us survive, so it's constantly on the lookout for potential danger. This means we pay more attention to negative events and react to them more strongly. We remember bad times more than good ones. We even feel negative emotions more intensely.
- Obviously, we can't avoid negativity in our lives; bad things do happen. But because our brains are more responsive to bad experiences, we need more positive experiences to outweigh the negative ones.
- Despite our brains' proclivity to search for the negative, we can train ourselves to notice more of what's positive. And we can influence those around us to do the same.

Positive people have lower blood pressure, lower heart rates, lower levels of stress-related hormones, and stronger immune systems. Positivity reduces the probability of hypertension, diabetes, and stroke. Some studies have even found that positive people live longer than negative people. They also sleep better, have fewer colds, and report experiencing less pain than people who are less positive.

## FOSTERING POSITIVE OUTLOOK IN THE WORKPLACE

Some of the practices that researchers in positive psychology have discovered can help you and your team have a more positive outlook are gratitude, positive reframing, positive priming, and positive influences.

Gratitude is noticing and appreciating what is good. We experience positive emotions each time we think about the good things in life. **One of the most effective ways to create a positive workplace is to develop a culture of gratitude.**

**Start by making a conscious effort to notice pleasant experiences and count your blessings.** Take note of the kindness of others. Celebrate someone else's joy. Help those around you feel gratitude by directing conversations toward what is going well, celebrating small wins, pointing out people's strengths, and sharing success stories.

One of the best ways to train your brain to have a positive outlook is to keep a gratitude journal, in which you write down three things you are thankful for each day. Another option is to pick a time each day when you will reflect on what you are grateful for. Start meetings by asking everyone to mention something or someone they are thankful for. These gratitude practices cause your brain to be on the lookout for good things throughout the day. Over time, you will rewire your brain so that noticing the positive will become a habit.

Robert Emmons, the world's leading expert on gratitude, has written that gratitude is "the ultimate performance-enhancing substance."

**Gratitude positively impacts employee performance in a number of ways. For one, research shows that gratitude helps people sleep better and longer.** Getting enough sleep is associated with more innovative thinking, fewer safety errors and injuries, and improved performance. **Gratitude has also been linked to lower levels of hostility and aggression.** That means there will be fewer incidences of incivility at work when people are grateful.

**One concrete way to foster gratitude in your company is to express it to your coworkers and encourage them**

In one experiment, researchers found that employees who were thanked by their managers had a higher sense of self-worth, enhanced confidence, and greater trust and were more willing to help their colleagues.

**to express it to each other.** Expressing gratitude inspires people to help one another.

**A second practice that contributes to a more positive outlook in the workplace is positive reframing.** Events themselves aren't inherently good or bad; it's the way we interpret them that determines whether they are positive or negative. Revising what you believe about an event can change your feelings.

**Positive reframing is looking on the bright side or seeing the glass half full.** It takes effort at first to notice your negative thoughts and look for more positive ways of seeing things, but with practice you will build new neural pathways so that a positive outlook will become more natural. You will find yourself instinctively looking for a positive way to interpret situations.

**As a leader, you influence how your team interprets events at work. If your employees are upset about something, help them refocus by looking for some good in the situation.** Research shows that focusing on the negative causes people to feel hopeless, whereas focusing on the positive does just the opposite: It motivates them to take action.

**You can also move people to action by reframing a conversation from a focus on the problem to a focus on solutions.** The hope and optimism fueled by focusing less on what's wrong and more on what can be done to solve it will inspire and engage everyone.

**A third strategy for building a more positive outlook is positive priming.** Starting with the good sets a positive tone going forward.

**A positive outlook helps us perform better.** If you have a big presentation or you're working on an important project, thinking about something that puts you in a good mood before starting can boost your performance.

In one study, students who were asked to think about a joyful memory before taking a standardized test completed significantly more problems accurately than students in a control group.

Conversations that start on a positive note set an optimistic tone that leads to more positive interactions and more creative problem solving. Make a point of starting meetings with good news or a discussion of recent accomplishments. Use positive phrases in the subject header or first line of your emails. Positive priming can help people thrive by fostering open, optimistic mindsets that enhance both interactions and performance.

A fourth strategy for a positive outlook is to surround yourself with positive influences. Author Tim Sanders warns that “you should be as careful about what you put into your mind as what you put into your mouth.” A positive mind diet contributes to a positive outlook, and you can feed your mind less negative junk food in order to lead with positivity.

First, choose your news carefully. This applies more to your personal outlook than to the outlooks of your employees, though it may be

Three minutes of good or bad news in the morning determines whether you have a good or bad day.

Get more of your news online so that you can pick which articles to read and which ones to avoid. When bad news can't be avoided, try spending a few minutes at the beginning of each day reading something inspiring to counteract its effects.



relevant if you have the news on in your company break room or other areas. Research shows that negative news leads to increased levels of hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, depression, and hostility. Positive news stories that focus on solutions increase levels of hope and optimism and motivate us to take action.

Several studies have found links between social media use and depression.

Another strategy for a positive mind diet is to **spend more time with positive people**. In your position as a leader, you may not have much choice about who you spend time with during your day, but you can create a more positive climate by leveraging the power of positive energizers—people who lift us up. Being around them makes us feel motivated and inspired. Negative energizers bring us down and deplete our energy. **Researchers have found that positive energizers are better performers and that the people they work with are better performers.**

One of the most impactful things you can do as a leader to foster positivity is to **identify the positive energizers in your workplace**. Reward and support them. Place them in roles where they will interact with others. Give feedback to negative energizers, explaining how their behavior hurts the team. Provide them with coaching so they can learn more effective ways of responding.

## SUGGESTED READING

Achor, *The Happiness Advantage*.

Fredrickson, *Positivity*.

Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness*.

## EXERCISES

1. Start meetings with something positive. You could highlight an achievement, ask everyone to share something for which they are grateful, or tell a joke.
2. Make an effort to reframe negative events by looking for ways to interpret them in a more positive way.
3. Identify positive energizers in your workplace and place them in roles where they will interact with others.

# 4

## FOSTERING EMPLOYEE OPTIMISM AND HOPE

### OPTIMISM AND PERFORMANCE

Research has found a strong link between optimism and success at work. A study of employees from a wide variety of organizations found a significant positive relationship between employee optimism and manager-reported performance. People are more likely to work hard and persist toward their goal if they expect to succeed.

This lecture will focus on two powerful ingredients in the recipe for a thriving workplace: optimism and hope. These terms are often used interchangeably, but they mean different things. Optimism is a general expectation that good things will happen. Hope is more specific than optimism. It's the belief that you will achieve a desired goal. Hopeful people expect that what they want to happen will occur, while optimistic people believe the future will be positive. Hope and optimism offer many benefits, including greater happiness, stronger friendships, less stress, and better health outcomes.

## HOW DO HOPE AND OPTIMISM DIFFER FROM POSITIVE OUTLOOK (AS DISCUSSED IN THE PREVIOUS LECTURE)?

Optimism and hope often go hand in hand with a positive outlook, but a positive outlook has more to do with how you feel about the present moment, while hope and optimism are more future-oriented.

## HOPE AND PERFORMANCE

Research has found links between hope and both academic and athletic performance. Hope can boost the chances of success by creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Having hope influences the goals you choose to pursue and your persistence in striving to achieve them. Like optimism, because hopeful people expect to succeed, they set more difficult goals and are proactive when problems arise, looking for ways to resolve them.

Many studies have analyzed the impact of hope in the workplace. A survey of US companies found that organizations where employees were more hopeful were more profitable, had higher levels of employee satisfaction and commitment, and higher retention rates.

## THE STUDY OF OPTIMISM

The study of optimism emerged from earlier research in the area of learned helplessness. Martin Seligman, one of the fathers of positive psychology, started his career studying the concept of learned helplessness. He and his colleagues discovered that when dogs were exposed to electric shocks that they couldn't avoid, many became helpless. Later, when placed in a situation where the shock could be avoided, the dogs just passively endured the shock. They learned to be helpless, believing that nothing they could do would make a difference.

A longitudinal study of women by researchers at Harvard found that women who are optimistic are less likely to die from cancer, heart disease, stroke, infection, and several other major causes of death. Perhaps the belief that having positive expectations for the future leads to a willingness to invest more time and energy in maintaining one's health.

Researchers then began studying learned helplessness in humans, using things like loud noises instead of shocks. But the results were the same: Most people learned to be helpless. About a third of the people in the experiments never learned to be helpless. And this is what fascinated Seligman, who turned his research toward exploring why some people give up easily and others never give up.

Seligman and his colleagues eventually identified explanatory style as a factor that influences how people respond to situations—why some become helpless but others remain optimistic. **Explanatory style**

**refers to the way we mentally explain why things happen. The causal attributions we make determine our expectations for what we believe will happen in the future.**

There are two attributions that influence whether our explanatory style is optimistic or pessimistic. The first one is permanence: whether we attribute the cause to something that is permanent or temporary. Pessimists believe the causes of bad events are permanent, so they expect that bad events will continue to occur. Someone with a pessimistic explanatory style might attribute a poor performance review at work to the fact that he or she just doesn't have the right skills for the job, which means he or she is unlikely to ever get a good evaluation. An optimist may attribute a poor evaluation to an unusually difficult project.

The second attribution is pervasiveness, which is whether we believe the cause is global or specific. Pessimists see the cause of negative events as global. For a real estate agent who has been unable to sell a house, a pessimistic explanation would be that he or she is no good at sales—or anything, for that matter—while an optimistic explanation

would be more specific, such as house sales are typically down around this time of year.

The optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles for good events are the exact opposite of the way they explain bad events: Optimists attribute positive events to permanent and global causes, while pessimists attribute positive events to temporary and specific causes.

**Fortunately, optimism can be learned.** Your explanatory style is a habit of thought that you developed in childhood or adolescence, and habits can be changed. You can choose how to interpret events. Cognitive strategies can be used to shift your explanatory style from pessimistic to optimistic. And the way you explain things to others can influence their explanatory style.

**You can become more optimistic by learning how to talk to yourself when something bad happens.** Cognitive behavioral therapy is a psychotherapy intervention that helps people become aware of negative thought patterns so they can develop more effective ways of thinking. The process of recognizing and then disputing your negative thoughts can move you from pessimism to optimism. Basically, you need to listen to the voice inside your head. If it is saying that something bad is going to be permanent and global, then you need to argue with yourself.

**The first step is to recognize your own pessimistic thinking.** This requires being mindful. By paying attention to your self-talk you will start to notice when you are being pessimistic. The language you use can give you a clue. Words like “always” (“I *always* make the wrong choice”) and “never” (“Business is *never* going to get better”) imply permanent, global causes.

**The next step is to use rational thinking to dispute the pessimistic thoughts.** The best way to do this is to show that your thinking is factually incorrect. Often our pessimistic thoughts aren't realistic; they are opinions that may be distorted by our emotions or simply be the result of pessimistic habits. Try to distance yourself from these opinions by thinking more objectively about the event, focusing on the facts. Ask yourself if the thoughts are reasonable. Make sure you

aren't overgeneralizing or blowing things out of proportion. Search for evidence that proves your initial reactions aren't true.

To dispute the thoughts in your head, imagine someone else saying the things to you that you are thinking in your head. If someone tells you, "You always screw things up; you don't deserve to have this job," you would defend yourself by citing evidence that disputes what the person is saying. You would point out your successes and give the person examples of how well you are doing your job.

Another way to dispute negative thoughts is to explore other possible explanations. Almost everything has multiple contributing causes. List all the possible causes and choose to focus on those that are temporary and specific.

## **DECATASTROPHIZING**

Disputing your pessimistic thoughts by replacing them with more rational thoughts or by focusing on alternative causes can help you become more optimistic. But there may be times when you try your best to find a more optimistic explanation of a bad event, but there just isn't one. In some cases, maybe it really was your fault.

If this happens, you can try another technique called decatastrophizing. Often, things seem much worse in our minds because we exaggerate their implications or imagine all of things that could go wrong. Catastrophizing is when you jump to the worst-possible conclusion.

In her book *10-10-10*, author Suzy Welch suggests considering the consequences of something 10 minutes from now, 10 months from now, and 10 years from now. This may help you to see that you might be blowing things out of proportion. Even the worst-case scenarios often aren't as catastrophic as we think.

The fact-checking that can help you dispute pessimistic thoughts when something bad happens can also help you stay optimistic when you are worried about something bad that might happen in the future. The next time you start feeling pessimistic about the future, take a moment to pay attention to your thoughts. Check to see if your self-talk is realistic and try to come up with alternative explanations. **You have the power to change your thought patterns and become an optimist, and studies have shown that it's worth it to try.**

**You also have the power to help other people adopt a more optimistic outlook.** The way you talk to your team members at work makes a difference. If something bad happens, discuss it in terms of a temporary, specific cause to keep everyone optimistic. Point to permanent causes when good things happen. Help people dispute pessimistic thoughts by asking questions that will lead them to look for new facts or alternative explanations.

The Best Possible Self exercise asks people to spend five to 20 minutes thinking about their best-possible future selves. They visualize themselves in the future with everything having gone wonderfully in their personal and professional lives. Then, they write down what they imagined. Research has shown that this strategy increases optimism.

Consider using a retreat or an annual planning meeting to give your team the opportunity to complete the Best Possible Self exercise. Perhaps you could adapt the exercise to have everyone envision the best-possible team and then share their ideas with the group.

## HOPE THEORY

**A basic premise of hope theory is that much of human behavior is driven by goals.** Setting and working toward goals increases our happiness and contributes to our sense of meaning and purpose. Having goals motivates us, giving our lives direction and excitement. Achieving a goal brings a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

According to the theory, hope comes from both having goals and believing we can achieve them. Hopeful people expect the future will be better because they can set and achieve goals that will make it so.

The theory identifies three components as necessary for hope to flourish: goals (things you want to achieve), agency (the belief that you can achieve your goal), and pathways (alternative routes to achieving a goal).



Hope begins by envisioning exciting goals, so the first step in building hope is to set long-term goals for a better future. Goals should be challenging, but not too difficult. Leaders build hope by communicating a powerful vision. They create excitement for the future and help people believe that future is possible by identifying the goals that will turn the vision into reality.

Hope starts with a desirable goal, but that's not enough. You also have to trust that you can make it happen. Hopeful people believe they

have the ability to motivate themselves and to persist in goal-directed efforts. **This requires the other two components of hope: agency and pathways.**

Often our sense of agency is low because a big goal can seem so intimidating. Just figuring out where to start is overwhelming. But taking action is critical. It gives you a feeling of control and a sense that you are making progress.

**One way to increase agency is to break goals into smaller subgoals, identifying the specific steps you need to take to achieve your goal.** Completing each small step creates momentum, bringing you closer to your goal and building your confidence.

**Something else you can do to increase agency is to use success stories to build confidence.** Hope can be strengthened by thinking about your own past successes and by hearing stories of other people who have overcome adversity to reach their goals.

**If you are facing a moment of self-doubt, recall a time in the past when you have succeeded and think about the strengths and resources that you used.** Thinking about your past successes and the effort it took to achieve them will help you see that you have the ability to positively influence future outcomes as well.

**When you experience success, take time to savor the moment and to think about how your planning, effort, and persistence helped you achieve it.** If you have an office space, consider populating it with mementos of your past successes—not as a show of ego, but as a way of surrounding yourself with reminders of your own agency.

**Identifying a role model who has achieved similar success or has been an inspiration to you can also increase your sense of agency.** Research shows that our belief in our ability to achieve a goal is influenced by seeing someone else succeed.

**A final strategy for increasing agency is visualization.** The more clearly you can see yourself achieving your goal, the stronger your hope will be, so try picturing having achieved your goal in as much detail



Hope is having high expectations for the future and a realistic view of the obstacles that will need to be overcome.

as possible. Writing about it can create an even more vivid image. Another possibility is to make a vision board; find pictures of things that represent your goal and put them together in a collage.

It's important to also visualize the steps you'll need to take to achieve your goal. Imagine yourself working hard to successfully complete each of the subgoals you've identified. This can help you develop strategies for reaching your vision and will remind you of the effort it will require.

**The third component of hope is pathways. Hopeful people believe that there are many paths to a goal and none of them is free of obstacles.** So, in addition to setting desirable goals and taking action, hope also requires identifying alternative routes that can be pursued in the face of setbacks. Knowing that you have other possible paths when problems arise is key for maintaining hope. If you find that your original plan isn't working, you can keep going by adopting an alternative strategy. Encourage your team to always identify alternative plans for meeting their goals as well.

## VISUALIZATION EXERCISE

Imagine what your workplace would look like if everyone were thriving. Try to use all of your senses to really immerse yourself in a mental image that's as real as possible. Envision yourself walking around the office. What do you see? Have the surroundings changed in any way? What about the people? How are they interacting? What do you hear them saying? Can you tell anything about their moods or energy levels? How do you feel?

Return to this image from time to time as you continue to learn about how to create experiences that will build the well-being of your team. Use it as a source of hope and optimism as you work toward this goal—which is worthwhile and, above all, achievable.

## SUGGESTED READING

Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*.

Seligman, *Learned Optimism*.

## EXERCISES

1. Practice disputing pessimistic thoughts by looking for temporary, specific causes when something bad happens.
2. Find a time for your team to get together to complete the Best Possible Self exercise.
3. Create a victory log by listing your past successes and have it ready to read when you feel hope fading.
4. Encourage your team to identify alternative plans for achieving their goals.

# 5

## THE ADVANTAGE OF WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

**H**umans are social by nature. We have a biological need to feel connected to other people; to feel that we belong; and to feel understood, recognized, and affirmed. This fundamental human need stems from our survival instinct. The propagation and protection of the human species has depended on the strength of our relationships. Our relationships with other people are at the heart of thriving, contributing to our health and happiness. This lecture will address the benefits of social connections and then discuss what leaders can do to create environments that foster positive relationships.

### CULTIVATING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

Many companies discourage on-the-job friendships, but that's a big mistake. If you ask people the key to their success, they often mention a person who believed in them or supported them.

When he was at Gallup, Tom Rath studied the influence of friendships at work and found that people who reported having a best friend



## BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

- Numerous studies have found that having close relationships and high-quality connections with others is one of the most important factors for our well-being. In one study, Ed Diener and Martin Seligman found that the only difference between the top 10 percent of the happiest people and everyone else was the strength of their relationships. In addition to having close relationships, our well-being is also affected by the interactions we have with others throughout the day.

- Positive relationships also have a significant impact on performance at work. An analysis that combined the results of dozens of different studies concluded that having positive workplace relationships boosts job satisfaction, increases collaboration and innovation, and increases the energy that people have for persisting at tasks—all of which contribute to better performance.

at work were significantly more likely to engage their customers, get more done in less time, innovate, share ideas, have fun on the job, and have fewer workplace accidents.

You can help your employees thrive by encouraging them to build close relationships with their colleagues. Rath found that people who had at least three close friends at work were 96 percent more likely to be extremely satisfied with their lives, and employees who had a close friendship with their managers were two and a half times more likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

Gallup found that leaders who regularly discuss friendships triple the chances of employees having a best friend at work. Encouraging closer, more personal relationships among coworkers can increase the likelihood that people become friends.

We develop close ties with people when we get to know them better. Authentic social connections are built when people feel understood and accepted for who they really are. Lead by example, asking a

## DRAWBACKS OF LACK OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

- Many studies have looked at the negative consequences of loneliness and social isolation. Researchers at Brigham Young University combined the findings from 148 different studies and found that people with strong social ties have a 50 percent lower risk of dying than solitary people.
- Feeling isolated from others can disrupt sleep, elevate blood pressure, increase the stress hormone cortisol in our bodies, lower our immune functioning, and increase depression. Unfortunately, feelings of being socially isolated are rising dramatically.
- Research also shows the negative impact of loneliness on performance at work. One study of almost 900 employees and supervisors found that greater employee loneliness led to worse performance.
- Unfortunately, many people experience loneliness at work, feeling a lack of close relationships or rejection by others.

colleague what he or she did last weekend or sharing personal stories so people get to know you better. Start meetings with everyone sharing a family tradition or a recent vacation.

**Create opportunities for people to form closer relationships.** Organize social events, outings with families, games of kickball, or potluck meals. Have a buddy system to help new employees meet people. The more we learn about people, the more likely we are to find things we have in common, which increases feelings of closeness and affection.

**In addition to having a few close friends at work, high-quality connections are also necessary for people to thrive.** Every interaction with a person at work has the potential to positively or negatively impact our day. Negative interactions can create a toxic work environment that damages employee well-being and performance. Positive interactions at work give people a sense of belonging and make them feel valued.

Employees who report small moments of connection throughout their workday feel more energized and engaged.

## FOSTERING HIGH-QUALITY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AMONG EMPLOYEES

Leaders need to build workplace cultures where everyone experiences positive interactions on a daily basis. **There are a number of important elements that contribute to high-quality connections, including appreciation, trust, psychological safety, and civility.**

The importance of showing appreciation at work cannot be overemphasized. One of the top reasons people leave their jobs is because they don't feel appreciated.

Appreciation is one of our strongest human needs. We all have a need to feel valued. Our sense of self-worth is impacted by how others treat us. And appreciation can have a profound effect in the business environment. Dan Ariely, a researcher at Duke University, conducted a study that showed that the less appreciated we feel our work is, the more money we want to do it.

**Appreciation can go a long way in improving engagement, productivity, and happiness among employees.** The good news is that showing appreciation is easy. The bad news is that we don't do it often enough.

**There are many ways you can show appreciation.** Say "thank you." Acknowledge people when you walk past them; make eye contact, smile, and say "hello." Call people by their names. Learn as much as you can about your employees. Ask about their families and their hobbies. Show people you value their opinions by asking them what they think. Praise people often. Congratulate them for a job well done. Let them know that they are valued

About half of Americans say they have gone an entire year without receiving recognition for good work.

members of the organization. Small positive interactions take almost no time and can create a sizeable impact.

Recognition for bigger contributions is also important. Find ways to celebrate product innovation, cost reduction, or extraordinary sales. Recognize people who have been with the company for a certain number of years and celebrate the life-long contributions of employees when they retire.

Being recognized by others signals that we belong, which is a basic need that stems from our survival instinct. It's so strong that it can impact our health and even our longevity.

The example of appreciation that you set as a leader is powerful. But you also need to foster an environment where everyone shows appreciation.

Studies show that Oscar recipients live an average of four years longer than other successful actors. Similar results have been found for Baseball Hall of Fame members and Nobel Prize-winning scientists.

**Trust is another critical element of high-quality connections.** It's important for our well-being because it helps us feel safe, and it also impacts performance. A study of almost 200 employees in a financial services company found that those who trusted their leaders more experienced higher levels of psychological safety and that both trust and psychological safety were positively related to team performance.

**We perceive people to be trustworthy when they act with integrity, dependability, and benevolence.** This means that leaders need to be honest, consistent in their behavior, and show they care about others. As a leader, be open, authentic, and vulnerable. When you admit your failures and are open about your limitations, people can relate to you. This sense of authenticity creates a connection that boosts engagement and lifts performance.

**High-quality connections are also built by showing your employees that you trust them.** One of the best ways to do this is to give people autonomy. By allowing employees to make important decisions

and giving them control over how, when, and where they work, you demonstrate your trust in them and in turn inspire their trust in you.

**You can also show your trust in others by sharing valuable information.**

Sharing information regarding profits, costs, customers, or strategy with employees sends a clear signal that you trust them with sensitive information. And it turns out that entrusting people with certain knowledge increases the likelihood that they act responsibly with that information. When you share more complete information with people, it gives them a sense of ownership. They will better understand the issues the company is facing and how their behavior impacts the organization. It can make it easier for them to see ways they could help.

**Another important condition for high-quality connections is psychological safety,**

which is similar to trust but is defined at a group, rather than an individual, level. Psychological safety is a shared belief that it is safe for employees to take risks at work. In psychologically safe teams, people feel accepted for who they are and don't fear negative consequences for expressing their opinions or making mistakes.

Our need for acceptance means that we are all reluctant to do something that might negatively influence how others perceive us. Self-protection is natural, but refraining from asking questions to hide the fact that you don't know something can be detrimental to performance.

The safer people feel at work, the more likely they are to ask questions and admit mistakes. When people don't have to worry about feeling insecure or embarrassed, they can focus their attention on solving problems rather than on self-protection. Many studies have confirmed that psychological safety facilitates learning and performance in organizations.

**There are a number of things you, as a leader, can do to help create a climate of psychological safety.**

You can start by framing work as a learning process. Discuss how the level of uncertainty we face today requires everyone's input. Admit that you don't know everything and reinforce that by asking a lot of questions. Demonstrating that you

Google believes psychological safety is by far the most important factor for team success. Paul Santagata is Google's head of industry, and one of his suggestions for building psychological safety is emphasizing collaboration over competition by always asking how the team can work together to achieve a desired goal.

Another recommendation is to replace blame with curiosity. If a problem needs to be addressed, engage people by asking them to explore possible factors that might be causing the issue and help them look for solutions.


Santagata also directly asks his team members how safe they feel taking risks.

don't have all the answers will encourage others to share their ideas. And try to show appreciation when your views are challenged; model the openness and respect that you want to encourage in others.

**Finally, there is one more critical factor on which relationships are based: civility, treating people with dignity and respect.** People cannot thrive in an environment where they are belittled or treated rudely. Unfortunately, incivility at work is getting much worse.

Some of the reasons for increased incivility include stress and overload, technology, and feelings of isolation. Whatever the reason, incivility hurts our well-being and our performance. Experiencing rude behaviors disrupts our attention, which causes us to miss information and impairs our ability to make decisions. In addition, incivility can impact performance by making us just not want to put in the effort.

**Start by setting clear expectations for civility and holding everyone accountable.** Explain to new employees during their orientation that your company expects people to treat each other with respect. Include respect or civility as one of the company values. Post these values so that people will be reminded daily of the expectations. Have open discussions with your team about the importance of civility.



Today more than ever, it takes work to create an environment where everyone treats each other with dignity and respect. As a leader, showing respect to others will bring out the best in your people.

Employees who feel respected by their leaders report 92 percent greater focus, 89 percent higher job satisfaction, and 56 percent better health and well-being.

Give feedback to each other about specific things people could do to treat others better.

**Recognize and reward examples of civility.** Include behaviors like collaborating and helping in performance evaluations. Come up with an award that employees can give their colleagues to recognize positive behaviors. Use collective rewards so that team members have incentives to work together and help each other. Share stories to make heroes out of people who save the day by helping others.

**Any incidence of incivility should be dealt with quickly.** If an employee behaves in a disrespectful way, don't let it slide, even if the culprit is

a top performer. The collateral damage is too costly to ignore. Hold that person accountable by immediately addressing the incident and identifying steps to improve future behavior.

## SUGGESTED READING

Dutton, *Energize Your Workplace*.

Porath, *Mastering Civility*.

Rath, *Vital Friends*.

## EXERCISES

1. Organize an event or a team exercise that will let your employees get to know each other better.
2. Set a goal to thank at least one person at work every day, either in person or by sending a letter or an email.
3. Ask your team members if they feel safe enough to take risks and admit mistakes.
4. Think about one thing you could do to reduce incivility in your workplace.

# 6

## ENCOURAGING GENEROSITY AND COMPASSION

**G**enerosity and compassion are key components of a happy, thriving life—as well as a happy, thriving workplace. Generosity boosts our well-being by increasing life satisfaction, providing a sense of meaning, increasing feelings of competence, improving our mood, and reducing stress. Compassion has many of the same benefits. This lecture will discuss how practicing generosity and compassion can help you be a better leader and how building a culture of generosity and compassion at work can help everyone thrive. The lecture will end with the powerful benefits of self-compassion.

### GENEROSITY AT WORK

Any act of kindness is an act of generosity. It can be as simple as an encouraging word, a smile, or a thoughtful gesture. You can give time, skills, information, or attention. The problem is that we often we get so caught up in our own lives that

It is likely that we are wired to be generous, because helping others contributes to building social connections, and having stronger, more supportive social networks increased our chances of survival.

## BENEFITS OF GENEROSITY

- The feel-good centers of our brains are activated when we give. This euphoric feeling is followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional well-being—feelings that reduce stress and improve health.
- Being generous can make you feel better about yourself by distracting you from your own problems and increasing your sense of gratitude for what you have.
- If you are feeling down about something, one of the best ways to improve your mood is to help someone else.
- Studies have found that people who are more altruistic report having a greater sense of meaning in their lives. Researchers believe this is because extending acts of kindness connects us to others and improves our relationships, which are key sources of meaning.

we overlook the needs of others or don't feel we have the time to be generous.

That's why we need to make generosity a conscious, daily priority. We need to actively look for ways to extend kindness at work—to pay someone a compliment, to help a colleague figure out the new reporting system, or to share useful information.

In Adam Grant's best-selling book *Give and Take*, he explains that at work, people tend to adopt one of three interaction styles: giving, taking, or matching. Takers try to get as much as they can from others, matchers strive to trade evenly, and givers contribute to others without expecting anything in return.

In his research, Grant found that the most successful employees are givers. More generous sales people have higher revenues. Leaders who are givers create psychologically safe work environments that

Happiness researchers Michelle Gielan and Shawn Achor found that generosity, or what they call support provision, was one of the greatest predictors of success at work. Their research showed that people who give the most support to others are more engaged and are 65 percent more likely to get a promotion.

foster learning and innovation. Companies with a higher percentage of givers are more profitable.

There is a caveat, though. Grant's research revealed that givers are also the worst performers. When considering the performance of all employees, the top performers are givers, the middle performers are a mix of takers and matchers, and the bottom performers are givers. This is because some givers don't have

time to get their own work done because they either are exploited by others or become so exhausted they burn out.

Givers have to be careful to give in ways that also protect them from these potential pitfalls. Effective givers don't confuse generosity with selflessness. They make strategic choices about how, what, and when to give in order to protect their time and stay energized.

Choosing what to give is important. There are three different types of resources that can be shared. **People can share informational resources, such as knowledge and expertise; social resources by using their network to connect people; or personal resources of time and energy.**

Personal resources are finite, and giving too much of your time and energy to others can deplete you. **Smart givers limit the amount of personal resources they give, opting instead to help people by making a personal introduction or forwarding a relevant article.**

Self-protective givers also prioritize help requests so that they can say yes to those that are most important. They give in ways that align with their interests and that let them use their strengths so that they are energized by giving. They dedicate blocks of time to respond to help requests. Refraining from responding each time someone asks for

something lets them focus on their own work. Smart givers prioritize their own well-being and are careful to stay away from takers, to avoid being taken advantage of.

Creating a workplace that encourages people to be smart givers can have an exponential effect, because kindness is contagious. We get a warm, fuzzy feeling when we witness a kind act or when we are on the receiving end of kindness. This inspires us to want to do nice things for others—to pay it forward. Researchers refer to this as moral elevation.

The spread of generosity has also been found in the workplace. In a study conducted at Coca-Cola, people who experienced an unexpected act of kindness were three times more likely to do something nice for someone else.

There are many ways leaders can leverage this phenomenon to encourage employees to be generous. One is to recognize

One way to be generous that takes neither much time nor much energy is to share recognition by giving others credit or promoting their work.

One study showed that humility predicts leader performance. Leaders who shared credit had teams that were more focused on learning and employees who were more engaged, satisfied, and likely to stay.



people when they demonstrate generosity. This sends a clear message to everyone that helping behaviors are valued and makes it more likely that these behaviors will be repeated. Another way to encourage generosity is through the process of socialization. Telling stories of past acts of generosity helps newcomers see that helping others is expected and appreciated. Assigning specific individuals to help new members adjust demonstrates through actions, not just words, that helping is highly valued.

Mentorship programs provide opportunities for more experienced employees to help newer employees with their careers. People who serve as mentors typically find it rewarding to be able to give back by using their experience to make a difference in someone else's career.

About 70 to 90 percent of giving occurs because someone asks for help, so more people will be givers if more people ask for help. But employees are often reluctant to seek help because they worry it reveals a weakness. Creating an environment of psychological safety lets people feel more comfortable asking for help. You

Try the five-minute favor. Each day take just five minutes to do a favor for someone: Make an introduction, share an interesting article, or suggest a new mindfulness app.



can also create structures or processes that encourage help-seeking.

Leading by example is also a powerful way to create a culture of generosity. Leaders who practice acts of kindness set in motion positive reactions, inspiring those around them to follow suit.

## COMPASSION AT WORK

Research shows that **compassion has a positive impact on employee well-being and performance and is a critical factor for leadership success.** Compassion in the workplace has been linked to positive emotions, reduced stress, less burnout, more collaboration, and higher levels of commitment.

Mandy O'Neill's research focuses on what she calls companionate love, or feelings of affection and compassion for others at work.

In a randomized survey of more than 10,000 US adults, Gallup researchers found that one of the most important qualities that people want in a leader is compassion.

### BENEFITS OF COMPASSION

- Whereas empathy is feeling someone else's pain, compassion is an awareness of someone's pain combined with a desire to help.
- Empathy is associated with negative feelings of stress, self-protection, withdrawal, and poor health. It can leave you feeling emotionally drained and overwhelmed.
- Compassion, on the other hand, lets you connect with another person's suffering without becoming too distressed yourself.
- Compassion is associated with positive emotions of love, other-oriented responses, helping behaviors, and good health. It increases your resilience and ability to serve others.

In their book *Awakening Compassion at Work*, organizational psychologists Monica Worline and Jane Dutton identify four steps for building compassion.

1. **Noticing.** This involves paying attention to clues that might suggest someone is suffering—their body language, tone of voice, or unusual behavior. Then, you can ask the person about what might be going on.

2. **Interpretation.** This means considering people's suffering to be real and worthy. Sometimes our unconscious biases cause us to make negative judgments about others. Making an effort to interpret the situation more generously can make it easier to show compassion at work.

3. **Feeling.** Feeling concern for what people are going through can help to remind ourselves that we all share the same fears and desires. Getting to know people makes it easier to understand what they may be feeling. Talk to your colleagues—ask how they are doing and how they are feeling.

4. **Acting.** When you discover that someone is having a hard time, offer to help. Maybe that person just needs reassurance or someone to talk to. Do what you can to show you understand and care. Ask the person how you can help.

She has conducted numerous studies showing the positive impact of a culture of caring and compassion.

**Compassion leads to generosity.** One study found that people who completed compassion training, which involved generating positive wishes for another person, were more likely to demonstrate altruistic behaviors.

**As with generosity, one of the best ways to create a more compassionate workplace is for leaders to serve as role models.** Your actions as a leader will shape organizational norms around caring and compassion.

You can encourage people to practice compassion at work by formally recognizing and celebrating compassionate acts. The more often people interact with one another, the more likely they are to notice that someone is suffering. And they are more likely to respond to suffering when they feel close to someone. Taking some of the steps mentioned in the previous lecture to foster closeness among employees can increase the likelihood that people act with compassion.

## SELF-COMPASSION

Feeling compassion for yourself can help you be a better leader. People who have self-compassion are happier, more optimistic, more curious, more resilient, and less likely to suffer from anxiety and depression.

Self-compassion is being kind and understanding toward yourself instead of being self-critical. It is confronting your own suffering with an attitude of warmth and kindness, without judgment.

Having compassion for ourselves is not easy. Our competitive society pushes us to try to do more, to achieve more, to be the best. If we don't live up to our own expectations, we often beat ourselves up with self-criticism.

Some people worry that having too much self-compassion might prevent them from being successful. We think that being hard on ourselves is important for self-discipline. But research actually shows the opposite—that self-compassion promotes self-improvement. It's positively

Most of us treat other people much better than we treat ourselves. Think of things you tell yourself when you mess up or fail to achieve a goal. Most likely, you would never say some of those things to a friend or even a stranger.

Learning to accept ourselves, for better and worse, and being kinder to ourselves when things go wrong increases our well-being.

Kristin Neff, the world's leading expert on self-compassion, describes three main elements needed to cultivate self-compassion: mindfulness, kindness, and a sense of common humanity.

1. Be mindful so that you notice when you are suffering. When you make a mistake, recognize that you are disappointed or upset. We often try to suppress or ignore these feelings. Mindfulness helps us notice and accept negative feelings about ourselves so that we can respond with self-compassion.

2. Respond by being kind, caring, and supportive toward yourself. When you make a mistake, instead of beating yourself up, respond with tolerance and understanding and offer yourself acceptance and encouragement. This requires paying attention to your self-talk. When you catch yourself being self-critical, replace those thoughts with something kind.

3. Recognize that imperfection is part of the human experience. Self-compassion comes from having a sense of common humanity—understanding that nobody is perfect. This can help you see your experience as part of the larger human experience and not as isolated to you personally.

related to developing new skills and knowledge. Caring about ourselves makes us want to grow and reach our full potential. It motivates us to work through challenges and learn from mistakes.

Self-criticism erodes our confidence, making us feel insecure and inadequate. This can lead us to feel hopeless about our potential for positive change, which reduces our motivation to take action. If we show ourselves encouragement and acceptance rather than frustration, we are less afraid of failure and more willing to learn from mistakes. Self-compassion helps us see setbacks as a normal part of the process, so we're less likely to give up. Self-compassionate individuals are more likely to see personal weaknesses as something that can be changed.

Another concern is that self-compassion may lead people to engage in less ethical behavior, because they are more likely to let themselves off the hook. But studies again have shown the opposite to be true: **People with self-compassion have been found to be more likely to take responsibility for transgressions, holding themselves to a higher moral standard.**

Researchers believe that self-compassion leads to higher feelings of self-worth, so self-compassionate people are less threatened by their own shortcomings, which makes them more willing to acknowledge them.

This may explain why a study of 135 nurses found a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and emotional intelligence. **Self-compassion likely increases our acceptance of the full range of our emotions, even those that may be unwanted. This openness would increase emotional awareness, which is a critical element of emotional intelligence.**

Having constant criticism in your head about not being good enough is a sure way to be unhappy. It can also undermine your performance and hold you back from trying new things. Self-compassion lets you put your imperfections and mistakes into perspective, seeing them as a normal part of life. This will help you feel better about yourself and will motivate you to take action and keep trying in the face of setbacks.

Assess your workplace environment in terms of generosity and compassion. Is it modeled by you and other leaders? Is it recognized and rewarded? Even small steps in this direction can transform your workplace culture and help every part of your business thrive.

## SUGGESTED READING

Grant, *Give and Take*.

Neff, *Self-Compassion*.

Worline and Dutton, *Awakening Compassion at Work*.

## EXERCISES

1. Try out the five-minute favor by taking five minutes each day to do a favor for someone.
2. Practice the four steps for building compassion: pay attention, don't judge, feel, and act.
3. Consider ways in which you could reward people at work for being generous or compassionate.
4. Pay attention to your self-talk. When you notice you are being self-critical, remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and offer yourself kindness and encouragement.

# 7

## CREATING AN INSPIRING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The happiest, most successful people are open to learning new things in order to grow and develop their full potential. Curiosity enriches our lives and helps us learn. It also fosters creativity, which builds our well-being and improves our performance. This lecture will explore the relationships among learning, curiosity, and creativity and will detail how each of these contributes to our well-being and success in the workplace.

### LEARNING

We all have an innate desire to get better and better at something, and many models of well-being include either learning or growing as key factors for thriving.

- › One of the elements in Carol Ryff's model of subjective well-being is personal growth, which she defines as a feeling of continued development, a sense of realizing one's potential, or improvement in self and behavior over time.

- › Harvard professor Tal Ben-Shahar includes intellectual well-being—which he defines as engaging in learning experiences that stretch, grow, and challenge your mind—as a core element of optimal well-being.
- › According to social determination theory, we are all motivated by an innate need for competence, which is to learn and develop one’s knowledge, and we experience higher levels of well-being when this need is satisfied.

Learning exposes us to new ideas and helps us stay curious. It also gives us a sense of accomplishment and boosts our self-confidence. People who keep learning throughout their lives have greater ability to cope with stress and report more feelings of hope and purpose.

While the desire to learn and grow is innate, some people are more open to learning than others. Our willingness to learn new things is influenced by our mindset.

Carol Dweck, a psychology professor who studies motivation and achievement, argues that the kind of mindset we have determines our motivation to engage in something. According to Dweck, **people can hold one of two views of their own intelligence: a fixed mindset,**

where people believe their basic qualities, such as intelligence or talent, are fixed traits that can’t be changed; **or a growth mindset,** where people believe that their abilities can be developed through effort.

People with a growth mindset are focused on trying to *improve* their abilities, while those with a fixed mindset spend their time trying to *prove* their abilities.

Mindset influences behavior in a number of ways. A growth mindset creates a love of learning and a desire to engage in challenges. Exerting effort on something is a good thing because it will help you to improve. If you have a fixed mindset, you don’t believe effort will help your performance, so you are threatened by

feedback and avoid challenges, choosing not to engage, which prevents you from learning and growing.

**The good news is that mindsets can be changed.** A person with a fixed mindset might say things like “I’m not smart enough” or “I’ll never be able to do this.” A leader can challenge these ideas, assuring the person that it is possible to improve with effort. Developmental feedback and coaching can help people see the steps they can take to improve.

Regardless of an individual’s learning mindset, all employees value the opportunity to learn new skills at work. They recognize that job-related training is critical for their career advancement. Yet surveys show that most employees are not satisfied with the training and development offered by their companies.

Ensuring that people have an opportunity to learn and grow at work will help them thrive and be their best selves. According to researchers at Harvard Business School, **there are three key characteristics of organizations that foster employee learning: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning practices and processes, and leadership behaviors that provide reinforcement.**

**A supportive learning environment includes psychological safety, appreciation of differences, openness to new ideas, and time for reflection.** Employees learn when they feel comfortable asking

In many organizations, the first question asked when a mistake is made is, Who is to blame? Leaders who want to encourage a growth mindset ask instead, What can we learn?

Blaming people when they make a mistake kills the spirit of learning. It causes people to become self-protective, covering up their mistakes in an effort to avoid blame. This limits information about how the mistake occurred.

In a safe environment, where people feel comfortable talking about their mistakes, information is shared so that everyone can see what led to the mistake, which means it’s less likely to happen again.

questions, expressing their opinions, and trying new things. They need an environment where they don't fear negative consequences for disagreeing with someone or making a mistake. Growth mindsets flourish in environments where people feel safe and know that they won't be punished for trying something new.

Learning happens when we hear different ideas and are exposed to new perspectives. Permission to challenge the way things have been done in the past opens up people's willingness to try new things. Learning also requires time to think so that we can assimilate new information and consider ways in which it could be applied.

In addition to a supportive learning environment, **procedures need to be established for formal and informal training.** Policies that encourage the sharing of knowledge will ensure that people are continually learning from one another.

Having formal and informal training programs can help to attract and retain talent. One of the top reasons employees leave their companies is dissatisfaction with employee development efforts. A motivated workforce with plenty of opportunities for high-quality training can make a significant impact on a challenge that nearly all companies struggle with: employee retention.

Two of the main barriers that keep employees from sharing what they've learned with their colleagues in organizations is that it takes too much time and they aren't rewarded for sharing. Establishing procedures that make it easier to share information and policies that reward people for sharing can increase the amount of learning that happens in an organization.

Employee development is critical not just for retaining talent, but also for attracting talent. A survey conducted by a human resource firm found that the one thing that job candidates look for above all others when applying for jobs is the opportunity for growth and professional development.

Not only does investing in employee development boost workplace well-being, attract and build talent, and increase loyalty, it also shows your



Employee development is worth the investment, and the good news is that developing employees doesn't have to be costly. It's more about taking the time to talk to people—to assess their strengths, learn what they want for their future, and identify the right steps to help them get there. Maybe formal training is needed, or perhaps a stretch assignment in a particular area would make a difference. Coaching can be useful for helping people develop desirable behaviors and skills.

employees that you genuinely care about them and their success. And you've already learned how important generosity and compassion can be for leaders creating a thriving workplace.

The third characteristic of a learning organization is leader behavior. This is the most important, because it impacts the other two. Leaders are responsible for creating and sustaining a supportive learning environment, and they also influence procedures and policies and whether or not they are followed.

It is up to leaders to make sure that people feel comfortable asking questions and voicing different opinions. Leaders signal the importance of sharing knowledge and trying new things. They can model open-minded questioning and the consideration of opposing points of view. As a leader, you can help people thrive by having conversations with them to discuss their future goals. You can provide them with developmental opportunities and frequent feedback.

Research by Gallup reveals that the best leaders care about their employees, talk to them about their career progress, encourage their development, and provide opportunities to learn and grow.

As a leader, don't limit your conversations with your employees about their career goals to annual performance reviews. Have ongoing discussions with your employees about their goals and interests. Let them know where the company is headed and the challenges it's facing. This can make it easier to spot opportunities for people to align their learning goals with the needs of the company.

## CURIOSITY

Curiosity motivates us to inquire, explore, and engage with the world. It pushes us to try new things and meet new people. All of this leads to discoveries that help us learn and grow.

Research shows that curiosity changes our brain's chemistry and activity, which helps us learn better and retain information. Psychologists at the University of California, Davis, conducted a study that showed that curiosity prepares our brain for learning and makes learning more enjoyable.

In addition to indirectly influencing our well-being by helping us learn and grow, curiosity also has a direct impact on our well-being. In Todd Kashdan's book *Curious? Discover the Missing Ingredient to a Fulfilling Life*, he explains how our brains are wired for curiosity. From the time we are born, we have an urge to explore and discover new

things. Being open and receptive to new experiences contributes to our happiness, meaning, and personal growth.

**Curiosity also motivates us to engage with other people.** This helps us form relationships, which are vital for thriving. Curiosity at work helps people build more collaborative relationships with their colleagues. Curious people report being more satisfied with their relationships. They show interest in learning about people, are more open to different perspectives, and have more playful and interesting interactions.

Curiosity requires courage—a willingness to look deeper, to see things in different ways, to consider alternative factors, to investigate the unknown. Curious people embrace uncertainty. They let go of the need to know, which leaves them open to exploring new ideas and hearing different perspectives.

## CREATIVITY

**Encouraging curiosity at work boosts employee well-being and helps people learn and grow and build closer relationships, but it is also the key to creativity and innovation.** In their book *Wired to Create*, Scott Barry Kaufman and Carolyn Gregoire argue that being open to new experiences is the number one thing you need to cultivate if you want to be more creative. They suggest constantly challenging yourself to push past your comfort zone, question assumptions, and be intellectually curious.

**Exposure to things that take you out of your normal way of viewing the world increases cognitive flexibility, which fosters creativity.** Engaging with new information and experiences creates new pathways in your brain. This makes you better at connecting new, seemingly unrelated ideas, which is the basis for creativity. Having a breadth of different experiences helps you come up with a novel approach to something.

**Because innovation is so critical for success, creativity has become a key focus of leadership, and great leaders recognize the value of fostering creativity among their employees.** One way to do this is to give workers autonomy. Some of the most innovative ideas come from



Many of Google's most significant advances—including Gmail, Google News, and Google Scholar—were created by employees working on side projects that interested them.

letting people follow their curiosity. There are companies that allow their employees to spend part of their time on projects of their own choosing. **Modeling curiosity and openness as a leader is also important.**

**Another way to spark creativity is through a positive work climate.** Positive emotions enhance creativity. Being in a good mood broadens our perspective, opening our minds up so that we can think outside the box. Infusing the workplace with fun can stimulate creativity. Play not only puts us in a good mood, but it also actively engages our imagination, which helps us dream up novel ideas and approaches.

**There are many things that leaders can do to create a workplace culture that brings out the playfulness in everyone.** Play games, celebrate obscure holidays, pick creative names and decorations for meeting rooms, or have company picnics or chili cook-offs. Even something as subtle as a lunchtime trivia team or a doodle board in the break room can make a difference by sending a message that you and your company value the creativity that comes from a spirit of play.

### ***WHAT COULD YOU DO TO SHAKE THINGS UP AT WORK?***

Unconventional leader behavior, such as standing on furniture or hanging ideas on clotheslines, has been linked to higher levels of creativity. Try asking your team members to brainstorm about how a company in a completely different industry might solve a problem similar to the one they are facing.

Unfamiliar and novel environments spark creativity. Maybe you could have employees switch desks from time to time so they interact with new people. Invite your team to eat lunch in different places; have meetings outdoors when the weather is nice. See if you can use your creativity to come up with innovative ways to engage your employees' imaginations.

Creativity not only boosts performance by increasing innovation; it also has a direct impact on our well-being. One study asked people about their daily involvement in creative acts and about their sense of continued development and realization of their potential. Results showed that higher amounts of engagement in creative acts gave people a stronger sense of personal growth.

## SUGGESTED READING

Dweck, *Mindset*.

Grant, *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*.

Kashdan, *Curious?*

## EXERCISES

1. Have a conversation with each of your employees to discuss their career goals and identify ways that you could help them grow professionally.
2. Encourage people to ask questions, share opposing views, and try new things. A good way to do this is to model these same behaviors.
3. Use your creativity to come up with innovative ways to engage your employees' imagination.

# 8

## ENGAGING YOUR WORKFORCE: THE POWER OF FLOW

This lecture focuses on engagement and achievement. Engagement is participating in an activity that entirely absorbs you into the present moment, giving you a sense of energized focus. Achievement is the sense of accomplishment and fulfillment you experience when you put forth effort toward a goal. Engagement and achievement both boost our well-being and our productivity, and in this lecture, you will find out how.

### FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH FLOW

Engagement comes from directing our full attention to a task or an activity. When we are completely engaged in something, we experience flow, which is a mental state that occurs when you are so absorbed by an activity that you are completely immersed in the moment.

Athletes describe flow as being “in the zone.” Everything just clicks and they feel like they can do no wrong. They are achieving personal bests, yet their performance feels effortless.

Flow is a state of consciousness where we feel our best and perform our best.

The concept of flow was introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian-American creativity researcher. He found that flow experiences contribute positively to both performance and well-being. When we experience flow, we lose our sense of self, forgetting about our worries and concerns; our sense of time is distorted, the experience is intrinsically rewarding, and our performance soars.

When someone is in a state of flow, there is decreased activity in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for higher cognitive functions, such as self-reflective consciousness, working memory, and temporal integration.

This temporary inactivation of the prefrontal area may trigger the flow state's feelings of distortion of time, loss of self-consciousness, and loss of our inner critic. It may also help us be more creative by enabling the implicit mind to take over, which allows different brain areas to communicate freely.

We all have limited attention capacity. Our minds can only attend to a certain amount of information at one time. When we are hyperfocused on a task, all of our attention is consumed by it, so we lose awareness of other things, not noticing if we are hungry or tired or how much time has passed.

There are a number of reasons why you, as a leader, should be interested in flow. Csikszentmihalyi believes flow is the most powerful source of intrinsic motivation. People in a flow state often say they are so wrapped up in the moment that they don't notice how they are feeling. The actual state of flow is void of emotion, yet on reflection, people report that these situations are enjoyable.

Spending more time in flow makes us happier. It also helps us to be more successful. The focus that accompanies full engagement in a task

can dramatically improve performance. The flow state is intrinsically rewarding, so it motivates people to engage in an activity.

Flow also enhances learning. When we experience a state of flow, our bodies release several neurochemicals, including dopamine and norepinephrine, which help us learn more effectively by heightening our focus and making it easier to retain new information.

Several studies have linked flow to achievement in school. The benefits of flow at work have also been demonstrated.

Studies have shown that people are six to eight times more creative in flow.

### **THERE ARE THREE MAIN CONDITIONS FOR ACHIEVING FLOW:**

- 1. Skills must be well matched to the challenge of the task.** People thrive on a having a healthy challenge, something that simulates them without being so difficult that it produces anxiety or so simple that it induces boredom.
- 2. People need clear goals with feedback regarding their progress.** Goals give direction and structure to the task, and feedback helps us adjust our performance to maintain the flow state.
- 3. Distractions must be minimized or eliminated.** Studies show that it can take up to 20 minutes of focus before you become fully immersed in an activity.

Given the right conditions, flow is a state that everyone can access. Yet, on average, people spend only five percent of their time at work in flow. **What could you do to create an environment where your team members experience flow more often?**

Ensure that your employees' skills are matched to the tasks you assign them. Check in with people frequently to make sure their work is sufficiently challenging. If you find that it isn't, look for possible stretch assignments that would help them grow and keep them challenged. If,

on the other hand, they are experiencing stress because the challenge is too difficult, have a conversation about how you might help them develop the necessary skills. Maybe coaching or training is needed.

When you are faced with the issue of poor performance, try addressing it with a discussion of flow. You can even use the flow model to guide the conversation. Ask your employee to think about where he or she might fall on the chart. Is the challenge too difficult for his or her skill level, or is the task too easy? Use the outcome of your discussion to modify the situation.

Goals and feedback are also important, so you need to communicate your expectations and provide frequent feedback. Discussing goals and giving feedback once a year is not nearly enough; you should be having ongoing conversations so that people always know what they are trying to accomplish and what more needs to be done. This provides a direction for their engagement.

Figure out ways to help your employees minimize distractions. Talk to people about how flow can improve their well-being and productivity. Encourage them to schedule time in their day to focus on a single activity and to eliminate distractions by turning off phone notifications and shutting down email. And make sure you do the same.

Think about ways that you as a leader could ensure that people have some uninterrupted time. Perhaps schedule meetings only at certain times of the day so that people know when they will have time to sustain their focus, or maybe pick a morning or two each week to have no meetings.

## **ACHIEVEMENT: USING STRENGTHS AND FACILITATING PROGRESS**

Another way to boost your employees' well-being and success is to ensure that they experience a sense of achievement. We are going to look at two ways in which you can do this: Make sure that people have the opportunity to use their strengths at work, which will increase the

likelihood that they achieve their goals; and facilitate progress, which will contribute to your employees' ongoing sense of accomplishment.

Each of us has unique talents or strengths. When we have the opportunity to use them, we experience higher levels of engagement and achievement. Strengths are things we are good at and enjoy doing; they influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Our greatest opportunities for growth come from developing our strengths. Investing in our strengths has a significantly bigger impact than putting forth comparable efforts to improve weaknesses.

Despite the positive benefits of using strengths at work, only 20 percent of people around the world have the opportunity to do what they do best each day in their current jobs. Most companies focus on fixing employees' weaknesses rather than building their strengths.

Our negativity bias makes it more likely that we notice what's going wrong. We focus on client complaints or missed deadlines. Of course, problems like these must be addressed. But the issue is that we are so busy attending to problems that we fail to notice what people are doing well.



Strengths-based leadership shifts the focus away from weaknesses to identify what people do well and figure out how to let them do more of it. The first step is to identify your employees' strengths. Talk to your employees to find out which tasks they enjoy the most. Observe people while they are working, looking for things like rapid learning, high energy, or consistently great performance.

Once you've identified people's strengths, **the next step in strengths-based leadership is to make sure that your employees have the opportunity to use their strengths as often as possible.**

Start by making strengths part of your daily conversations. Have workshops so that people can learn more about their own strengths and the strengths of their colleagues. Encourage people to include their strengths as part of their email signature or to display them near their workstation. Start meetings by asking everyone to give an example of how they recently applied one of their strengths.

One of the most valuable things you can do is to work with your employees to structure their roles so that they can make the best use of their talents. Jobs are rarely designed based on an employee's unique combination of strengths, so leaders need to work with them to modify their roles so that they can play to their strengths.

One of the best ways to ensure that everyone has a chance to apply their strengths often is to use a team approach to strengths-based leadership. When work is designed in teams, tasks can be allocated to team members on the basis of their strengths. Knowing the strengths of your team members will help you assign tasks to the right people.

**It is also important to help employees build their strengths by providing feedback and developmental opportunities.** When giving feedback, point out the specific strengths you've seen people using. When you mention what they've done well, try to highlight one of their strengths and how you've noticed them applying it.

When weaknesses are causing performance problems, strengths-based leaders try to reshape the role to better fit the employee's unique talents. They also encourage employees to find support from

someone who has the needed strengths. Complementary partnerships let everyone do more of what they do best.

Another way to make sure your employees experience a sense of achievement is to support their progress toward goals. Making progress makes us happy, giving us a sense of purpose and competence. Even minor accomplishments give us the sense that we are making progress, which motivates us to keep going.

As a leader, there are many things you can do to help your employees make progress. Start by looking for any barriers to progress—such as a lack of clear goals, irrelevant tasks, or an unhelpful coworker—that you could try to remove. Eliminating obstacles that cause setbacks is especially important because of our negativity bias. A single setback has twice the impact on people's emotions as making progress. As with everything, we pay more attention to bad than to good.

Once you've addressed possible barriers, look for ways to actively facilitate progress. Ask your team if they have access to the resources they need to succeed. Help them find information they might be lacking. Offer to brainstorm ways forward if they are stuck. Give them encouragement.

Make sure to point out the progress that people are making. Celebrate small wins. Reflect on the progress being made by your team at weekly meetings. Encourage people to take a few minutes at the end of each day to list their accomplishments—and you do the same. This simple strategy helps us notice our progress. Even on bad days, if we make an effort to look for it, we will surely find some small way in which we moved forward.

Reminding your team why the work they are doing is important will give them an even greater sense of accomplishment. The more meaningful the work is perceived to be, the more making progress matters.

## SUGGESTED READING

Amabile and Kramer, *The Progress Principle*.

Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*.

Rath and Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership*.

## EXERCISES

1. Consider ways you could make sure that people have time to focus on an activity long enough to experience flow. You could pick a time during the day or designate one morning a week when there are no meetings.
2. Adopt a strengths-based approach to leadership by identifying people's strengths and providing opportunities for them to use their strengths more often.
3. Look for ways that you could remove barriers, facilitate progress, or celebrate small wins to help your employees experience a sense of accomplishment.

# 9

## THE NEED FOR MEANING: MAKING WORK MATTER

There are three different ways to think about meaning in life. The first equates meaning with purpose, which is an overarching aim for your life—why you wake up in the morning. A second way to define meaning is significance, or the feeling that you matter and that your life is worthwhile. A third view equates meaning with coherence, or interpreting your life in a way that makes sense; you understand who you are and how you fit into the world. These definitions can be combined to view meaning as the feeling that your life makes sense and is worthwhile because you are doing good things, making a positive difference.

### SOURCES OF MEANING

Having a sense of meaning in life impacts your physical and mental well-being in many ways. People who have meaning in their lives are happier, have greater life satisfaction, have more positive self-regard, feel more in control of their lives, and are more engaged in their work. They also experience less stress, anxiety, and depression. A sense of purpose in life has been linked to a decreased risk of having a heart

attack or a stroke and been estimated to extend life expectancy by seven years.

Each individual experiences meaning in his or her own way, but research has identified several sources through which people often find meaning in their lives. **Three of the more typical sources include values, relationships, and service to others.**

**Values are deeply held beliefs about what is right and good.** They contribute to meaning by helping us identify our purpose and by giving our lives a sense of coherence. Knowing what we value helps define who we are. **A purpose is a long-term life goal that reflect our values.** It is something we are always working toward that guides the choices we make about what actions to take.

**Our sense of meaning in life is enhanced when we choose goals and take actions that are aligned with what we care most deeply about—our core values.** Unfortunately, our overscheduled, fast-paced lives can prevent us from living our values. They may be important, but often they aren't urgent.

As author Annie Dillard said, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

**To live a more purposeful life, we need to make a more conscious choice to align our daily behavior with goals that are based on our values.** A good check to see if you are spending your time in a purposeful way is to look at

your calendar. Does it reflect your values? If staying fit is an important goal, then going to the gym should be on your calendar.

Decide what goals you want to pursue based on what matters most to you, commit to spending time on activities that move you closer to those goals, and your sense of meaning in life will grow.

As a leader, **talk to your employees to find out what matters to them at work.** Encourage them to be intentional about spending more time on what's important. Have team discussions about how you can support one another so that you can all live more meaningful lives. Help people see how their work contributes to valued outcomes. Point

out shared values so that they understand how their personal values align with corporate values.

**A second source of meaning is our relationships.** Relationships contribute to meaning by giving our lives a sense of significance or belonging and coherence. Our lives feel worthwhile when we think of the relationships we have with others. Our relationships also help define who we are.

Research shows that people consider their relationships to be one of the most meaningful parts of their lives.

Relationships at work matter. Meaningful workplaces have a strong sense of community where employees experience a feeling of support and belonging. Have spaces that encourage dining together. Use social events to provide opportunities for employees to become friends. Relationships can be strengthened when teams volunteer together. Mentorships can facilitate the development of close relationships. Leaders create a sense of community by encouraging openness and trust, demonstrating personalized attention, using self-disclosure, and showing compassion.



Supporting the relationships that employees have outside of work is also important. Encourage people to display pictures of their family and to talk about them. Organize events to which family members are invited, such as a picnic on the weekend. When employees experience a challenge at home, ask how you could support them, such as time off or a more flexible schedule.

**For many of us, our strongest sense of meaning comes from serving others.** There is general agreement around the idea that meaning is most fully achieved when we actively engage in pursuits that transcend our own immediate interests. Serving others contributes to meaning by giving us a sense of purpose and significance. Making a difference in someone else's life makes us feel that our life is worthwhile.

Work provides an ideal setting for people to find meaning. It gives them a chance to coordinate their actions with others to improve people's lives by providing them with a valuable product or service. Working together with a group of people makes it possible for individuals to do something collectively that they would be unable to do alone. The potential for greater impact means that work can allow us to experience greater meaning.

According to one survey, Americans value meaningful work more than anything else, including promotions, income, job security, and work-life balance. Employees who find meaning at work are more satisfied, more productive, and more committed. This leads to increased customer satisfaction and better financial results.

Many people look to their work to find a sense of fulfillment. They believe that their career is not just about making a living, but that it is about making a difference. They want to move beyond success to achieve significance.

**Leaders need to have frequent conversations with people about how the work they do makes a positive impact.** A helpful exercise is

to ask employees to list the five or so tasks that they perform most often. Then, for each task, have them write down who benefits from that task. Often it will be a colleague who uses their output to do something further; this may help them appreciate how their work

benefits their fellow employees. But the line of questioning can be continued by asking who the colleague's task helps, and so on, to get closer to the final output and see how it ultimately benefits the client.

Talking to employees about how the work they do benefits others is important, but it is much more powerful for them to see the impact firsthand. Some companies, such as Johnson & Johnson, have programs to ensure that their employees have contact with customers who benefit from their work.

Research by Adam Grant and colleagues showed that seeing how their actions benefited someone had a huge impact on employees' motivation.

People experience more meaning when they see how the work they do makes a positive impact by serving others—customers or colleagues. Great leaders make sure that their employees are aware of the impact of their work. They remind people of the company's mission and how the work they do contributes to it.

As a leader, do all that you can to keep people focused on why they work. Invite a person to speak to employees about how your company has made a positive impact in their life. Tell stories or show videos of how people are benefiting from the products you make. Start a meeting by asking everyone to share how a colleague has made a positive difference to them.

## COGNITIVE CRAFTING AND CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM

Amy Wrzesniewski and her colleagues Jane Dutton and Justin Berg developed a technique for increasing meaning at work that they call job crafting. There are three ways in which we can craft our job: alter the number, type, or nature of tasks we perform; alter our interactions with others; and alter our cognitive perception of work, to reframe the way we think about it so that it more closely aligns with our values and interests.

Values, relationships, and service all contribute to our sense of meaning in life, and leaders can build on each of these to create more meaningful workplaces where people thrive. These efforts can help employees see their work as a calling, which is a belief that you are doing something of value that positively impacts others.

Amy Wrzesniewski, a professor of organizational behavior at Yale, and her colleagues have found that whether or not people experience their work as a calling does not depend on the actual work they do. It depends on how they perceive their work. This means that people can make changes in their work to turn it into a calling and find it more meaningful.

There are many examples of how people can craft their jobs in ways that make them more meaningful. Many people change their interactions to create more meaning at work by spending more time with individuals who share their values, who energize them, or from whom they can learn. An example of cognitive crafting is a zookeeper who chooses to see her work as caring for the animals, rather than cleaning up animal waste.

As a leader, there are steps you can take to empower your employees to make changes so that they experience more meaning at work. Give them autonomy to perform tasks in a different way. Give them time to take on an additional task or interact with customers. Use performance reviews as an opportunity for people to craft their jobs. Ask them what might make their work more meaningful. Talk to them about the company's goals. If they

understand what the organization is trying to accomplish, this can help them identify contributions that would align their values with the company's needs.

People experience meaning at work when they believe the work they do contributes value to others. They also derive a sense of meaning from working in a company that contributes to the greater good by helping to make the world a better place.



Employees today have a strong preference to work for socially and environmentally responsible companies. They want to work for an organization that is making a difference in the lives of its customers, its employees, the community, and the planet.

Employees who believe their company demonstrates socially responsible behavior have higher levels of commitment, greater morale, and a sense of pride. More and more companies are focusing on the so-called triple bottom line, which considers their impact on people, profits, and the planet.

Raj Sisodia, a professor at Babson College, coined the phrase **conscious capitalism**, which has four principles: having a higher purpose, stakeholder alignment, conscious leadership, and conscious culture.

Conscious businesses, including TOMS shoes, Warby Parker, and Ben & Jerry's, have higher purposes that serve the interests of all their major stakeholders. They have conscious leaders who are driven to serve

B Lab is a nonprofit organization that also promotes using business as a force for good. It encourages companies to align their interests with those of society to serve a higher purpose.

B Lab has created a B Corps certification that is awarded to companies that meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. More than 2,000 companies have earned the B Corps certification. For a list of these companies, visit [bcorporation.net](http://bcorporation.net).

the company, the people the business touches, and our shared planet. They also have caring cultures that promote the personal growth and professional fulfillment of their employees. Sisodia's research shows that **conscious capitalism is good for the bottom line.**

Does your company serve a purpose beyond just making a profit? If so, make sure your employees are aware of it. Working for a company that serves not only its customers, but also the wider community can provide people with a much greater sense of meaning at work.

If your company doesn't have a higher purpose, look for ways your team can make a difference. Start a recycling program, plant trees on Earth Day, sponsor a canned food drive for a local shelter, or spend a Saturday building a house with Habitat for Humanity.

## SUGGESTED READING

Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski, "What Is Job Crafting and Why Does It Matter?"

Mackey and Sisodia, *Conscious Capitalism*.

Smith, *The Power of Meaning*.

## EXERCISES

1. Have a team discussion about how you can support one another so that everyone can spend more time on what's important, not just what's urgent.
2. Think of one way you could show your employees the impact their work has on colleagues or clients. Consider using stories, videos, or face-to-face encounters.
3. Give your employees permission to craft their jobs in ways that will let them experience their work as more meaningful.
4. Find an opportunity for your team to work together to make a positive difference in the community.

# 10

## PROMOTING WORKPLACE RESILIENCE

A person's resilience—the ability to successfully handle life's setbacks and adapt to stressful events—can be one of the top predictors of future success. And it's an important component of thriving, especially in the workplace. Fortunately, everyone can learn to be more resilient. A combination of factors contributes to

resilience. Some of them will be familiar, because several of the elements that you have learned contribute to well-being also positively impact resilience: mindfulness, relationships, optimism, compassion, and meaning. You will also consider four additional factors that can boost resilience: how you view stress, benefit finding, experiencing adversity, and acceptance.

Resilience skills are critical for handling workplace stressors. The pace and intensity of the modern workplace has led to widespread stress and burnout. Forty percent of employees say their job is very or extremely stressful.



Resilience has two components: the ability to withstand pressure in the moment and the ability to recover quickly from adversity. People who have low levels of resilience are slow to recover from challenges. People with high levels of resilience cope with negative events in ways that allow them to more quickly return to normal.

Many of the challenges we face in the workplace can be stressful. Time constraints, high workloads, competing demands, administrative hassles, and limited resources can all lead to stress. In today's competitive environment, they are often unavoidable. But by recognizing the value of resilience in the workplace, we can learn to respond more effectively and recover more quickly from the challenges we face individually and as an organization.

A resilient workforce performs well under pressure and deals quickly and effectively with change. Resilient employees are able to deal with uncertainty and maintain their productivity in the face of setbacks.

## FAMILIAR FACTORS THAT INCREASE RESILIENCE

**Mindfulness can help us cope with difficult situations by preventing us from getting too overwhelmed by our emotions.** Not dwelling on negative thoughts and emotions allows us to move forward. Instead of obsessing over things that can't be changed, mindful people accept that they need to adapt to the new circumstances.

**Research shows that one of the primary factors in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships.** People can help you cope with adversity by providing both practical assistance and emotional support.

Our bodies have different types of response to stress: a fight-or-flight response, a challenge response, and a tend-and-befriend response (the desire to be near or talk to friends and family when we are under stress). These prosocial instincts during stress can bring us needed social support.

Research has shown that people who feel they can rely on or turn to others for help or encouragement are more resilient. People who have more friends at work will have more social support and, as a result, will be more resilient.

**Another factor linked to resilience is optimism.** Resilient people don't expect adversity to last forever, and they don't let it affect everything else in their lives.

Adam Grant and Sheryl Sandberg published a book called *Option B* to help people facing adversity. One of the important lessons that the research on resilience shows is optimism. When bad things happen, seeing them as temporary and specific will help you be more resilient. Pointing out specific, temporary causes to your team can boost their resilience as well.

**Another key factor for building resilience is compassion, both self-compassion and compassion for others.** Showing compassion at work helps us build stronger relationships with our colleagues. And a culture of compassion can increase everyone's resilience.

Self-compassion is being kind to oneself when faced with hardship or adversity. It replaces harsh self-criticism with caring. This helps us bounce back from adversity. We can move forward more quickly if we aren't ruminating about what happened.

**People with a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life show increased resilience.** When we feel stressed by small, daily challenges, focusing on a longer-term goal can help us keep things in perspective. When you are working toward something meaningful, small setbacks seem less important.

Studies conducted in companies, nonprofits, the government, and the military have all found that meaningful work increases resilience. The more people feel that their work helps others, the less depressed and emotionally exhausted they feel. On days when people report having made a positive difference to someone at work, they feel more energized and capable of dealing with difficult situations.

The next time you start to feel stressed about something, take a step back and remind yourself what you are trying to accomplish and why. Talk to your employees about the why of work as often as possible; remind them how their efforts contribute to making a meaningful impact in the lives of others.



## A COPING STRATEGY: SLOW, DEEP BREATHING

Slow, deep breathing is an immediate coping strategy that can help you calm down in the moment so that you are able to more effectively deal with a difficult situation—big or small. It is the fastest, most effective way to tell our brain that everything is okay.

A simple, effective technique that you may want to try is four-by-four breathing:

- Breathe in slowly through your nose while counting to four.
- Pause at the top of your inhalation for another count of four and then exhale slowly through your nose for the same count.
- Pause for a count of four and then repeat this several more times.

These mindful pauses can boost your resilience at any moment.

## MORE FACTORS THAT BOOST RESILIENCE

One of the most powerful strategies for boosting resilience is to shift the way we view stress. How we think about stressful situations can change their effect on us.

As Kelly McGonigal explains in her book *The Upside of Stress*, our bodies can respond to adversity in different ways. A threat response, or fight-or-flight response, prepares you for self-defense, constricting your blood vessels, ramping up inflammation, and getting immune cells ready to help you heal. This response is useful in a dangerous situation, but on a sustained basis it can hurt your cardiovascular health.

Another type of response to stress is the challenge response. In this case, your body responds like it does to physical exercise, maximizing blood flow to give you more energy. This type of response helps you perform better, increasing your confidence and concentration.

Hormones are released that improve learning and memory, enhance empathy and intuition, and protect your heart.

This gives us two ways of viewing stress: as something bad for us or something good for us. And the way we see it can actually change our body's response. Choosing to view your stress as something positive that can help you perform better activates a challenge response in your body, which makes your stress beneficial. Worrying that your stress is bad for you causes you to have a threat response, which in most cases isn't good for you.

When you face adversity, or even daily struggles, remind yourself that stress can help you perform better. This way of viewing the situation makes it less threatening, so you are more likely to have a challenge response than a threat response.

Your mindset can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The belief that stress is bad makes stress harmful. If you change your view of stress to see how it can help you be smarter, stronger, and more successful, it will do just that.

Resilient people have a stress-is-helpful rather than a stress-is-harmful mindset. And fortunately, researchers have demonstrated that a person's mindset regarding stress can be changed.

Telling yourself that you are excited when you feel stressed can help switch your mindset. Another way to see a situation as less threatening is to remind yourself of your strengths and the resources you have to handle the problem. Think of past difficulties that you have overcome and the people who support you. The more you believe in your ability

The next time you notice that you are feeling stressed—maybe your heart is pounding or you are breathing rapidly—tell yourself that this is good. Tell yourself that your body is preparing you for action by giving you extra energy, focusing your attention, and heightening your senses. Tell yourself that this stress is going to help you perform better.

to confront a situation, the easier it will be for you to view it as a challenge rather than a threat.

You can also influence how your team views stress. Talk to them about the upside of stress. Explain how our bodies can respond to stress in a way that helps us perform better. The next time your team faces adversity, keep them focused on the challenge of trying to figure out a solution.

**Another way to build resilience is through benefit finding, or looking for the silver lining.** Finding some benefit that has come as a result of a negative event can be very helpful. We can learn and grow from adversity. Benefit finding is not about denying what happened or implying that adversity is a good thing; it's just trying to find some good in the bad. Research shows that this can be a healthy coping strategy.

When people experience a positive psychological change as a result of a struggle with adversity, psychologists refer to it as post-traumatic growth. It represents a personal transformation, a change in the way you see yourself or the world around you.

There are many different positive changes that people can experience as a result of a difficult situation. Some gain insight by learning something positive about themselves. They realize they are stronger and more resourceful than they thought they were.

Experiencing a hardship can bring you closer to others, strengthening your relationships and helping you appreciate them more. Finding benefit in adversity is an effective coping strategy that can help you and your employees experience resilience. In this way, experiencing a hardship can actually help everyone thrive.

**In fact, experiencing adversity actually increases our resilience by enabling us to learn ways of coping.** Because all of us will inevitably face hardships along our path, it's good to know that these experiences can help us grow stronger and learn how to handle adversity, strengthening our resilience. Even small obstacles can be an opportunity to learn

coping skills that can help us face larger challenges. It also gives us a sense of confidence that we will be able to handle future difficulties.

You can work on building your resilience by looking for experiences that push you outside of your comfort zone. You could participate in an open mic night; this type of challenge will strengthen your resilience.

If you or your team experience an especially difficult hardship, an exercise that can help speed recovery is to write about the event. When we experience adversity, we often relive the incident over and over in our heads. This rumination prevents us from moving forward. Taking time to write down all of your thoughts and feelings about the event has been shown to make a positive difference. It allows us to make sense of what happened in a way that can bring closure and more meaning into our lives.

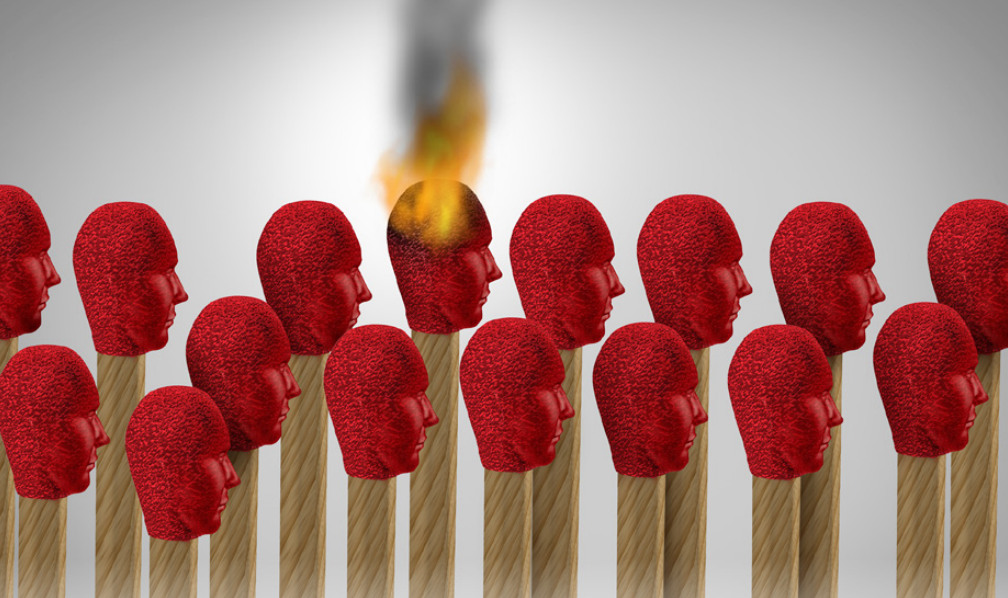
**One last coping strategy for enhanced resilience is acceptance.** Much of resilience comes from our ability to adapt to a new situation, often one that we don't want. Acceptance can make this easier.

Acceptance comes from acknowledging that there are things in life that are beyond our control. People who understand this are much happier, because they don't waste time and effort in frustrated attempts to change what they can't control.

Acceptance is figuring out where you do have influence so that you can direct your efforts more effectively. Identifying what is outside of your control and accepting that allows you to dedicate your resources more fully to what you can control.

Set goals and work toward them, but accept the limits of your influence. Resilient people understand that sometimes things don't work out. They try to learn what they can from the experience and then move on to another goal. The flexibility

Some people misinterpret acceptance to mean accepting everything as it is. But acceptance isn't resignation, nor does it mean being passive; it means recognizing that there are some things beyond your control.



## **BURNOUT**

A lack of resilience will not only prevent your employees from thriving, but it can also lead to burnout—a psychological syndrome that results from chronic stress at work. It has three components: exhaustion or lack of energy, cynicism or lost enthusiasm, and ineffectiveness or diminished capacity to perform.

People who experience burnout feel depleted, distant, and discouraged. Burnout negatively impacts performance as well as physical and mental health. Becoming more resilient yourself and helping your employees build resilience will reduce the likelihood of burnout.

to change in response to circumstances is essential for maintaining resilience.

Accept the things that you can't control so that you can focus your energy on things that you can influence. Stay flexible in order to adapt to changes. And help your team to do the same.

## SUGGESTED READING

McGonigal, *The Upside of Stress*.

Sandberg and Grant, *Option B*.

## EXERCISES

1. Practice four-by-four breathing to calm yourself when you feel stressed throughout the day.
2. The next time your team is facing a difficult situation, encourage people to view it as a challenge rather than a threat by reminding them that stress can help them perform better.
3. Build your resilience by committing to doing something that takes you outside of your comfort zone.
4. Choose to let go of something that you can't control so that you can dedicate your resources more fully to what you can control.

# 11

## STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYEE HEALTH

Physical health depends on good nutrition, exercise and movement throughout the day, getting enough sleep, and taking breaks for rest and renewal. People do have to take responsibility for their own health, but because we spend so much time at work, a healthy workplace can make a big impact on employee health. This lecture will take a closer look at each of these health factors and discuss the influence that you as a leader can have over the health of your team.

The challenging health-care environment in the United States can have a significant impact on a company's bottom line, and more and more businesses are coming to understand that a few well-planned front-end investments in employee health can prevent significant costs down the line.

Physical health plays a significant role in emotional well-being. The truth is that you can do everything that has been covered so far in this course, but if your employees aren't physically healthy, they will fail to thrive.





## NUTRITION

Diet and exercise are the two main factors contributing to weight problems. And the food we eat doesn't just impact our weight; it also influences our mental health.

Unfortunately, many Americans aren't getting the nutrients their brains need because of diets high in processed foods and sugar. These unhealthy diets lead to an increased risk of mental health problems, such as depression and attention deficit disorder.

Only 14 percent of full-time employees in the United States are of normal weight. More than one third of American adults are obese, which means they have an increased risk of disease, including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and several cancers.

There are many things your company can do to improve the nutritional value of the food your employees eat. One is to make it

more convenient for people to bring their lunch to work. We are much more likely to consume less-healthy food when we eat out, so have a place where food can be stored and heated and a pleasant room where people can eat.

Another option is to provide healthy food at work. Some companies offer free meals, but even making sure that vending machines have healthy options can make a difference. Make healthy choices easier than unhealthy ones by placing healthy snacks out in the open and unhealthy foods in opaque containers or inside of cabinets. You can also label foods with green, yellow, or red stickers to let people know which ones are more or less healthy.

**Think about your company's policies concerning food.** Small adjustments in a business's attitude toward food in the workplace can create significant changes in employee behavior—to everyone's benefit.

## EXERCISE

Eighty percent of Americans have jobs that are classified as sedentary or require very light activity. This is a serious problem, because our bodies were made to move. Our ancestors walked five to 10 miles a day foraging for food. But modern-day living has brought our movement to a halt. Most of us spend our days and nights sitting in front of a screen or in our cars.

**Exercise has profound benefits for our bodies and minds.** In addition to preventing weight gain, it improves mood, lowers stress, and enhances learning and productivity. Being active instantly improves your mood and can even lift you out of a depression. It also increases your energy level, which not only makes you feel better but can also help you get more done.

**What can you do to encourage your employees to exercise, especially if the work they are engaged in is largely sedentary?** Your company may not have the resources to have a gym in the building, but you could pay for your employees to have a membership to a gym or strike a deal with a nearby gym to provide employee discounts. Make

sure there is a bike rack that employees can use if they choose to bike to work. Many companies use conference rooms after business hours to provide exercise classes.

**Most importantly, make sure that your employees know that they have your support for taking time to exercise during the day.** There has to be a climate where people feel comfortable walking out the door with a gym bag on their lunch breaks.

Encouraging formal exercise is a great start, but finding ways to encourage small bits of activity throughout the day may be even more important. Scientists have recently discovered that exercise alone is not enough for optimal health. Being active throughout the day is critical. Sitting for too long is now being referred to as “the new smoking” due to its impact on mortality rates.

One study found that people who exercised regularly had a 50 percent higher risk of dying from heart disease if they sat for most of the day.

How could you get your employees to be more active throughout the day? Taking the stairs instead of the elevator is a great way to move more. Having walking meetings keeps people active and stimulates creativity at the same time. You could also organize a competition to see which employees take the most steps each week; you could give everyone a gadget that tracks their steps or have them use a smartphone app.

Make sure that people aren't sitting for too long. Your company can provide sit-to-stand desks for everyone, or if that's too expensive, perhaps you could have some standing desks with computers placed around the building that people could use to check their emails. Or you could have a few treadmill workstations that people could take turns using. Stand-up meetings can actually be much more focused and effective than meetings where people sit.

Talk to employees about the importance of taking breaks to get up and move throughout the day. Give them ideas and ask what other ideas they can come up with. Like everything, if people see you

making an effort to be active throughout the day, they are more likely to do the same.

## SLEEP

As with a lack of exercise, a lack of sleep is bad for your mood, cognitive functioning, and health. Poor sleep causes anxiety and depression; many studies have documented this link. Skipping sleep impairs your brain functioning by slowing your ability to process information and solve problems.

Beyond the cognitive and emotional consequences, a lack of sleep negatively impacts physical health in a number of ways. For one, it's bad for your immune system. Not getting enough sleeping also contributes to obesity. Sleep deprivation makes you hungrier, which leads to overeating; a lack of sleep also likely slows metabolism, which can lead to weight gain.

Both memory creation and information processing take place while we sleep. This explains why we learn something better after sleeping on it. Sleep after learning something new helps your brain save the new information so that it's less likely to be forgotten.

There are a number of things that leaders can do to increase the chances that their employees get sufficient sleep. One is to encourage people to go outside. Daylight helps regulate our circadian rhythm, and sunlight makes us feel more alert. Take walking meetings outdoors and make sure there are nice places for people to sit outside to have lunch.

People who get two hours less sleep a night than they need nearly double their risk of death. When your body is sleep deprived, it overproduces the stress hormone cortisol, which can damage your organs and impair your immune system

Getting enough sleep is critical for both well-being and performance. The National Institutes of Health estimate that insufficient sleep creates 16 billion dollars in annual health-care expenses and 50 billion dollars in lost productivity.

Exercise helps us sleep better. But exercising within three hours of bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep, so leaders should encourage employees to go to the gym or take an exercise class during the workday. They will not only return with more energy for the rest of the day, but they'll also benefit from better sleep.

Another way you can help your employees get enough sleep is to provide the space and time for taking naps. A 20- to 30-minute nap can boost alertness, mood, and productivity. As a leader, you can let people know that taking a nap is not only acceptable, but is encouraged. Getting enough sleep is critical for thriving.

The most effective thing you can do as a leader to help your employees sleep better is to ensure that they can disconnect from work when they go home. The pressure to answer work emails after hours keeps people from getting to bed early enough and prevents them from sleeping well. And thinking about work issues right before bedtime prevents people from relaxing.

## REST AND RENEWAL

While our bodies are supposed to enter fight-or-flight mode when faced with a threat to our survival and then return to our normal state of rest-and-digest, the demands of today's workplace keep many people in a constant fight-or-flight state.

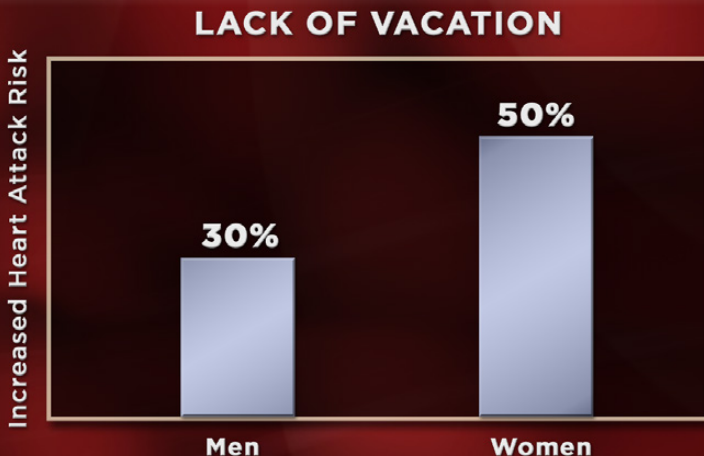
Human beings are not machines. We need downtime to function at our best. Constantly being plugged in with no time to renew our energy hurts our chances of success. The stress it causes negatively impacts our health, productivity, and relationships.

Often our best ideas come when we are doing nothing. Creative thinking occurs when we stop focusing and let our minds wander. Giving yourself the space to engage in fun activities, relaxing pastimes, or quiet time lets your mind drift off, fueling your imagination.

We perform better when we take breaks. In his book *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*, Tony Schwartz proposes a 90-minute work cycle for maximizing productivity. Encouraging employees to build breaks into their workday can help them manage their energy so that they can perform at their best.

Working extreme hours also hurts employee well-being. A culture where people feel they have to work extreme hours to be successful isn't good for them or your company's bottom line. Creating an expectation that your employees should work reasonable hours and disconnect from work when they go home is critical. It gives them a chance to restore their energy so that they can show up as their best selves at work each day.

As a leader, it is up to you to establish norms about work hours and email use. If you stay at the office for 10 hours, your employees won't



According to a survey of more than 2,200 US employees, only 54 percent take the paid vacation time for which they are eligible. Some of the reasons cited were getting behind on their work or feeling they can never be disconnected. Employees said they would take more time off if they felt fully supported and encouraged by their leaders.

feel like they can go home after eight hours. If you send emails after hours, your employees will feel obligated to respond. Try to refrain from doing this. If you think of something important in the evening, write the email so you don't forget about it but schedule it to be sent in the morning. Help your employees thrive by assuring they have a chance for rest and renewal each night.

Another extremely important way to help people avoid burnout and perform at their best is to make sure that they take vacations. Not taking vacations has serious mental and physical health consequences. Men who don't take vacations are 30 percent more likely to die of a heart attack; women who don't take vacations are 50 percent more likely to die of a heart attack. This is a matter of life and death—for you and your employees. It needs to be taken seriously for everyone's sake.

It is a leader's responsibility to make sure that employees feel comfortable taking breaks throughout the day, going home at a reasonable hour, disconnecting from work when they are home, and taking vacations.

You need to set expectations for employee rest and renewal, be a good example yourself, and resist the urge to equate long working

Assess your current employee health initiatives to see how well they address these major components of physical well-being: nutrition, exercise, sleep, and rest. Do you have a good nutrition program but perhaps neglect regular activity? Do you provide standing desks but require your employees to be at them 60 hours a week? A comprehensive, holistic approach to employee health can ensure that your employees have a strong foundation for thriving.

hours with increased productivity—a misconception clearly dispelled by the science.

## SUGGESTED READING

Rath, *Are You Fully Charged?*

Stringer, *The Healthy Workplace*.

## EXERCISES

1. Make one small adjustment that would promote healthy eating in your workplace.
2. Commit to doing one thing that will encourage employees to move more throughout the day. You could make it easier for them to exercise, have walking meetings, suggest they take the stairs, or start a competition to see who takes the most steps each week.
3. Help people disconnect when they aren't at work by discouraging the sending of emails after hours. That includes you!

# 12

## AUTONOMY: EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES TO SUCCEED

It's hard to overstate the importance of autonomy for a thriving workplace. You can have a well-rested, mindful workforce with plenty of opportunities for learning and forming meaningful relationships, but if those employees don't feel empowered to do their jobs and don't have a sense of control over their work lives, they won't thrive. We all have an innate need for personal control. You can leverage this instinct to bring out the best in your employees—and you should.

### AUTONOMY AND PERSONAL CONTROL

It turns out that autonomy has less to do with whether we objectively *have* control of a situation and much more to do with whether or not we *perceive* a level of personal control. This perception can be influenced by two factors: locus of control and self-efficacy.

People who have an internal locus of control believe that outcomes are influenced by personal action. People who have an external locus of control believe outside forces, such as other people or luck,

**determine outcomes.** Locus of control is a continuum; we all fall somewhere along this spectrum.

We are all more motivated and empowered to work hard when we have a higher internal locus of control. A meta-analysis that combined multiple studies of thousands of employees concluded that locus of control was one of the best predictors of job satisfaction and job performance.

A sense of control is so important for employee well-being and performance that psychologists at the University of South Florida created a scale to measure what they call work locus of control. Studies using this scale have shown that the amount of control employees feel they have at work impacts their satisfaction, stress levels, and intentions to quit.

The second factor that influences our sense of personal control is **self-efficacy**—your belief in your ability to take action that will result in a **desired outcome**. Whereas locus of control is a more general belief about whether or not you have control over outcomes, self-efficacy is more specific. It is your belief that you have the skills or knowledge needed to achieve a particular outcome. It's task-specific.

Self-efficacy influences the goals that employees set and the tasks they choose to learn. It also affects their level of effort and persistence. Not surprisingly, people prefer to do things they feel they are good at, and they work harder for something when they believe they will succeed.

Given the importance of personal control for employee well-being and performance, leaders should focus on building both their employees' sense of internal locus of control and their self-efficacy.

A meta-analysis combining 114 different studies that included more than 21,000 people showed a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and job performance. This relationship can be mutually reinforcing, because better performance leads to higher self-efficacy.

## BUILDING A SENSE OF INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

The best way to give people a sense of control is to actually give them control. Giving employees more autonomy will help them thrive. They want to participate in making decisions that affect them. Autonomy gives them the control they need to shape their work environment in ways that allow them to perform at their best. People who have more autonomy at work are less stressed, more satisfied, more likely to stay, and more motivated—and they perform better.

Research shows that the most stressful jobs are those with high demands and low levels of control. Demanding jobs aren't as stressful if people have autonomy to decide how to meet the demands. It is the lack of control combined with high job demands that causes stress.

Despite the importance of autonomy for employee well-being and success, leaders are often reluctant to delegate. They fear what might happen if they let go and give up control. But as a leader, you don't have time to do everything yourself. You will only be successful if you learn to delegate. And that means trusting people to get the job done, even if they don't do it the way you would do it.

In a survey of more than 600 women, autonomy was related to higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment and lower intentions of quitting.

Different people are likely to do the same job in different ways based on their unique combination of strengths. If you micromanage people by expecting them to do something the way you did it, you are likely preventing them from using their strengths in a way that will let them be more successful. Empowering people to do things their own way leads to higher engagement and better performance.

Delegating can be scary, but if it's done right, everybody wins. Good leaders recognize the benefits of empowering others. It helps them

manage their own workload by giving them more discretionary time. It's the best way to develop the capabilities of their team members. Decision making often improves when those on the front line who have the information are the ones making the decisions.

Delegating demonstrates trust, which is important for thriving at work. And granting employees the autonomy they so desire reduces stress and increases commitment.

There are right ways and wrong ways to delegate. **Successful leaders follow these three rules: clearly communicate goals and expectations, hold people accountable for results, and offer support.**

**Successful delegation involves clarifying roles, goals, and expectations.** Communication is vital. People need to understand their roles and how their work contributes to the team's goals and, ultimately, to the company's success.

Employees need to know exactly what is expected of them. This means that instead of spending time walking around to make sure everyone is at their desk looking busy, a leader should be spending time communicating with people to assure that everyone knows what direction the team is heading and what they are supposed to be doing to help get there.

**The second rule is accountability.** There can be no autonomy without accountability. Autonomy is about giving people increased control along with increased responsibility. Your focus as a leader moves from controlling when, where, and how people work to holding them accountable for results. This requires a cultural shift away from traditional norms that value physical presence

Autonomy is different from independence. It's not about working without supervision or rules; in fact, the more autonomy that employees are granted, the more clearly defined the boundaries have to be. Within those boundaries, people can then be empowered to choose how they will accomplish the tasks they are assigned.

at the office to norms that value outcomes. What gets done is what matters.

This is why setting clear expectations is so important. When we judge performance based on how many hours an employee spends in the office, performance expectations don't matter that much. The employee whose car is the first one in the parking lot in the morning and the last one there each night is the person who gets the promotion. But when performance is measured based on output rather than hours, people need to have a clear idea of what results they are expected to deliver and when.

Some leaders don't trust that their employees are working if they don't actually see them working. But in reality, employees can spend hours looking busy at work without really accomplishing much of anything. Attendance is not engagement; presence is not the same as productivity.

Research shows that people who work from home tend to work longer hours and are more productive.

Obviously, many jobs require that employees be physically present to perform them, but for these jobs, people can still be given some



The results-only work environment (ROWE) is a management strategy that was cocreated by Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson when they were at Best Buy. It's a pretty radical approach where employees are 100 percent autonomous and 100 percent accountable. They are evaluated on performance, not presence. Employees decide when, where, and how to work. The only thing that matters is that they meet their objectives.

A study of more than 3,000 employees working at Best Buy when ROWE was implemented found that they were happier, their productivity increased by an average of 35 percent, and turnover rates in some divisions were down by 90 percent. They also reported higher sleep quality, increased energy levels, better physical health, and lower stress levels.

ROWE may be a bit extreme, but it has shown the value of shifting organizational cultures away from an emphasis on face time to focus instead on results—which gives employees more control so that they can choose to work in ways that allow them to do their best work.

control over their schedules. Many studies have shown the positive impact of giving workers scheduling control.

**The third factor for successful delegation is support. Leaders need to provide people with the resources they need to succeed,** ensuring that they have the equipment, materials, data, and time necessary for accomplishing their goals. Support also involves working to eliminate any obstacles that may hinder progress. Giving timely, constructive feedback also supports people, helping them learn and improve.

An especially powerful way that leaders can provide support is through coaching. Coaches help people move toward their goals by asking them questions. Questions can help employees gain insight by prompting them to think about their situation in new ways or to recall past successes and consider how what they learned from them might be useful now.

When offering support, be careful to avoid upward delegation, which happens when someone comes to you for help on a task and you end up telling them how to do it or doing it yourself. Remember that the key to coaching people is to ask questions. **Great leaders don't give advice; they ask good questions.** Good questions make people stop, think, and reflect. They help your employees figure out how to solve a problem on their own. If they are having trouble, you can offer to brainstorm alternative solutions with them, which can help them uncover a preferred course of action.

When you delegate, mistakes will inevitably be made, especially if people have spent their careers in a more controlling environment where they haven't had much autonomy. But each mistake is an opportunity to learn. Delegating is one of the best ways to give your employees the chance to foster a growth mindset. It's how talent is developed—by helping people learn and move forward.

Great leaders make sure people have what they need to succeed and then let them do their jobs. Jack Welch, the former head of GE said it well: "Communicate your ideas, distribute the resources, and get out of the way."



## BUILDING A SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY

Leaders who understand the importance of autonomy shift their focus from the more traditional roles of directing, controlling, and supervising toward more supportive roles, including acquiring resources, coordinating efforts, and coaching people for success.

Employees who are given more autonomy have a greater sense of control at work. But for them to thrive, they also need to believe that they are capable of successfully performing the tasks assigned to them. So, as a leader, you also need to work on building people's sense of self-efficacy.

Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura, who introduced the idea of self-efficacy, identified different factors that contribute to its development, including mastery experiences, social modeling, and verbal persuasion. Leaders can take steps to influence these factors to foster the self-efficacy of their team members.

Successful past performance gives us confidence through the experience of mastering something. As a leader, you can boost employee self-efficacy by providing people with success experiences. Give your team members challenging but realistic assignments. Then, provide them with the support they need to succeed. Make sure they have the necessary resources and coach them through difficulties. And when they are successful, acknowledge it; external recognition of achievement can be a powerful confirmation.

Social modeling builds our sense of self-efficacy by allowing us to observe others succeeding at a task. Its effect isn't as strong as actually performing the task oneself, but watching someone else lets you see that it is possible. A leader or colleague can act as a role model, showing employees that a particular task can be successfully completed.

As a leader, you can also use verbal persuasion to help foster the self-efficacy of your employees. Let them know that you are confident in their abilities to successfully perform the task. Letting employees know that you believe in them can positively impact their belief in

themselves. With higher self-efficacy, they will choose to engage in harder tasks and will persist longer, which will ultimately enhance their performance.

## SUGGESTED READING

Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, *The 3 Keys to Empowerment*.

Pink, *Drive*.

Ressler and Thompson, *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It*.

## EXERCISES

1. Schedule a meeting every two months with your direct reports to clarify expectations and provide feedback.
2. Pick one task that you will start delegating.
3. Practice coaching your employees by asking good questions that help them gain insight.

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