



GALE MOTE ASSOCIATES

Training People, Inspiring Growth

Making Happiness Work for You

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I was facilitating team building training for an organization in 2004. It quickly became known as “Happy Class” among the participants. At first, I wasn’t sure if I should be insulted by the remarks—perhaps they were taking the material too lightly. Then, I came to appreciate the mantra because it represented the

fun, positive spirit and energy they were experiencing each time we came together.

Shawn Achor, author of the book, *The Happiness Advantage*, conducts extensive research on the subject of positive psychology. “Happiness is a choice,” says Achor. “If you can find a way to get your brain to become more positive, your success rate will increase and work will become more productive, enjoyable and rewarding.”

According to Achor, your brain primed to be positive or happy outperforms your brain in a neutral or stressed state. Actually, every single business outcome is actually predicted by positivity. Happy employees are better at keeping their jobs, demonstrate 31% higher levels of productivity suffer less burnout and are perceived to be more trustworthy.

When I took Gallup’s Strengthsfinder assessment, Positivity was in my top five talent themes. I believe life is not a dress rehearsal; you need to live it out loud every day because you don’t get a second chance. I also believe in the Law of Reciprocity—what you give, you get. I keep a hefty supply of Thank You and Congratulations cards to send out when people least expect it. When you do something nice for someone else, it makes you feel good too. According to Gallup, “Other people’s worlds look better when they are around positive people because their enthusiasm is contagious.”

Some scientists refer to it as the “ripple effect.” In reality, our brains have mirror neurons that engage when we experience the emotions of other people. Research has confirmed that if there are three people in a room, two will leave with the emotions of the most expressive person. Think about it—is your attitude worth catching? Even if you are in a good mood, you need to be more demonstrative and verbalize your appreciation and excitement for people to catch the positive vibes.

So what do you do if you don’t have a natural talent for positivity? Good news! You can train the brain to have a positive pattern of viewing the world. Brain research has discovered that the brain is a single processor. It can only give a finite amount of resources

to experience life at any given moment. For example, if you spend all of your time complaining about a co-worker who doesn’t work as hard as you do, you are robbing your brain of precious time to focus on what is right with the team, your work and your life. The human brain is horrible at multi-tasking.

The challenge for unhappy people is that they get stuck in a rut, in a negative pattern of experiencing the world around them. In his book, Achor described working with tax accountants at a large consulting firm. These professionals spent their entire day combing through files looking for mistakes and errors. Focused and achievement oriented, they became very good at their work. It wasn’t so good when they applied it to their social life or families. One accountant admitted that he created a spreadsheet to keep track of his wife’s mistakes. She later became his ex-wife. The first rule of holes is this—when you find yourself in one, stop digging.

First, develop the habit of gratitude. In 2000 and 2003, researchers Emmons and McCullough asked employees who tested as pessimists to write down three things they were grateful for, in very specific terms, for 21 consecutive days. They wrote three new things every day for twenty-one days. After the experiment ended, the participants tested as low-level optimists. Six months later, they were low-moderate level optimists and experiencing positive effects on their life and work satisfaction.

Second, slow down and be in the moment. Learn to be present when you are communicating with people—maintain eye contact, demonstrate interest and really listen. This means put down your Blackberry, stop texting, and pay attention. When you train your brain to do one thing at a time, you become more confident, relaxed and happy. Meditation, yoga and mindfulness training are also great ways to reduce multi-tasking.

Exercise releases endorphins as well as training your brain that you are successful in regulating your life. People who exercise on a regular basis also tend to eat healthier. In fact, developing positive habits in one area of your life ripple into other areas as well. Your confidence increases and you see yourself as more successful. To create a positive habit, you need to be easy to start and hard to stop.

Lastly, practice conscious acts of kindness. A kind word never goes unheard and too often goes unsaid. Get your antenna’s up and look for opportunities to celebrate what’s right with everyone in your life.

Wayne Dyer once said, “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.” The challenge is to get started. Pick one positive habit you want to develop and begin today. Remember, success is getting what you want. Happiness likes what you get.

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