



Happiness at Work

By Diane E. Scott, RN, MSN

Being happy at work is a fundamental element of a person's life satisfaction. Because work is an integral part of a person's identity, the professional role that one assumes is frequently the means by which a person feels the most valued and derives their self-esteem. (1) Within the profession of nursing, there is a positive correlation between career satisfaction, self nurturance, and life satisfaction.(2) Given work's powerful influence in the measure of one's self-worth, it seems to reason that there are significant positive outcomes of experiencing happiness at work.

The business case for happiness at work

Experiencing happiness at work not only produces significant personal consequences for employees but is also a factor for business success. (3) Business and healthcare organizations are recognizing the direct connection between employee happiness and enhanced productivity and improved outcomes. Jessica Pryce-Jones is the co-founder of iOpener, a British based firm that works with businesses around the world to increase their employee's happiness. "Businesses and teams often focus on success and assume that people will be happy as a result, but success is not the same as happiness. It will not lead to long-term business commitment, loyalty, or motivation, whereas being happy at work does." Businesses value her firm's mission as demonstrated by Pryce-Jones' growing client list that includes the World Health Organization, Shell Oil and Baxter Healthcare.

The time you spend at work

Being happy at work is important, in part, because people spend the majority of their time working. According to the U.S Department of Labor, during the work-week, the average employed American spends more time working than with any other activity of daily life. (4) Because so much of a person's daily life is spent at work, it behooves a person to really look at the nature of what they do while they are at work.

"A person will not be happy with their job if they are spending too much time in activities that do not engage and energize them," states Pryce-Jones. She affirms that if an individual spends the greatest percent of their day doing what makes them happy, they become much more productive and committed. "You really can complete tasks much

more efficiently and to a higher standard if a majority of your day is spent on the work that is most meaningful to you.”

Job satisfaction verses happiness at work

Each year, healthcare organizations spend countless man-hours and considerable financial resources measuring employee satisfaction. Information obtained by these surveys can be valuable, but the danger exists when employees do not see concrete actions as a result of the information (5)

Pryce-Jones notes a distinct difference between satisfaction and happiness. She says, “The major difference between employee satisfaction and happiness is control. Satisfaction is determined by factors such as pay, working environment, and benefits. Happiness is a part of job satisfaction but really concerns what you can control and influence.” Pryce-Jones clarifies that control is a fundamental element of happiness at work. “What people are in most control of is reaching their own potential.”

The journey of happiness

Determining how to reach one’s own potential and learning what truly makes them happy is an individualized process. It is unique for every person because people bring with them a host of past experiences and a full spectrum of natural tendencies. When healthcare organizations implement a one-size fits all strategy for employee retention, their well-intended efforts often garnish few concrete results because what makes a person happy and fulfilled is different for each individual. The greatest success will come by focusing on helping an employee with their personal journey to happiness.

A daunting task for nurses

Because caring for other’s needs first and foremost has been the venerable mantra of nursing, it is not the traditional nature for a nurse to focus on their own emotional well-being. The journey to happiness at work may seem to be a daunting task.

Keeping in mind that every nurse’s journey to career happiness is different, the Center for American Nurses has started a unique initiative designed to assist nurses increase their career self-awareness and discover what gives them energy and meaning at work.

In the fall of 2008, the Center for American Nurses will launch a career coaching program. Career coaches are not recruiters, but professionals with specific training in assisting people to discover their unique skills, talents, and passions. Through individual phone conversations, they provide tools to guide in the self-discovery process and help people consider career choices that will make them the most happy. These services are designed to be convenient and affordable, but most of all, designed with a mission to help individual nurses discover success in their journey to career happiness.

For more information, please go to www.centerforamericannurses.org. Diane Scott, RN, MSN is the President of the Nursing Mentors Group and a consultant with the Center for American Nurses.

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