

# How To Be Happy At Work

## -Despite that Jerk Boss

By Vivek Wadhwa

Companies often hire management consultants with the aim of improving productivity. They focus on process and procedure. But here's an even more potent ingredient for boosting productivity: *happiness*.

According to author and business coach Alexander Kjerulf, the Danes have a word for happiness at work: *arbejds-glæde* (if you want to stay happy, don't try pronouncing that). Kjerulf says that this concept is deeply ingrained in the

Scandinavian work culture. It's about enjoying what you do, feeling proud of your work, knowing that what you do is important and being recognized for it, having fun, and being energized.

When workers achieve *arbejds-glæde*, their employer benefits from higher productivity, because happy people achieve better results; from higher quality, because happy employees care about quality; from lower absenteeism, because people actually want to go to work; and from less stress and rarer burnout, because happy people are less susceptible to stress. Not surprisingly, all of this leads to higher sales, better customer satisfaction, more creativity, and higher profits for the business.

Sounds like some kind of Nirvana or Disneyland, doesn't it? After all, who doesn't want to be happy? And how can one be happy at work when the boss is a jerk, the company doesn't care for its employees, and the job simply sucks?



One of my old friends, Professor Srikumar Rao—who is the best marketing person I know—wrote a book on this topic entitled *Happiness at Work: Be Resilient, Motivated, and Successful—No Matter What*. He offers some interesting remedies.

For example, what do you do about the jerk boss? Rao says that by allowing him to leave you a “quivering mess of indignation, resentment, and frustration” you’re handing the keys to your happiness over to him. Remember that he may have control over what you do at work, but he has no control over your emotional well-being unless you let him have it. Just look at your boss and see the mess of emotions sloshing through him: anger, insecurity, fear, and jealousy. Now consider this: You only have to deal with him for a few hours a week. He has to live with himself his whole life.

Did you smile as you considered this idea? Good. That is important, because in that smile is the seed of compassion. That is the start of seeing him as a human being caught in his own predicament, and not solely as an impediment to your well-being. And when you learn to deal with him on that level rather than relate to him solely in his role as “boss,” the dynamics of the relationship change. It sounds simple, but it is very powerful. Rao says that when people start thinking like this, they lift the once totally toxic interactions to the “I can survive this” level and even to the “He’s not bad at all” level.

It is easy to focus on all the things you loathe about your job. But instead of being despondent at work and focusing on the two or three things you think are *wrong* with your job, try thinking about the 20 or so things that are *good* about it. Try making a list of all the things you appreciate about your job, including the fact that you have one. Don’t think it. Feel the gratitude. Let it well up and surround you and overflow. It takes some practice, but you can get there. Now, from this space, tackle the problems you are facing. They no longer seem so formidable, and the odds are great that you will be able to resolve your predicament effortlessly.

You may feel as if you are kidding yourself when you try hard to focus on what is good about your job, but you are indulging in exactly the same mental

gymnastics when you focus on what you dislike about it. You might as well invest your emotional energy in ways that make you feel and function better!

Another important lesson: You always have the opportunity to pick the way you see the world.

In the early stages of a start-up, one entrepreneur was irritated by employees who bothered him with “trivial” issues. He reacted with sarcasm and brusqueness and even blew up at them. His view was that his time was important and they should be able to take care of such issues themselves. He woke up when several of his key people departed. After that, he consciously trained himself to view each such interaction as an opportunity to forge a relationship with the employee and to reinforce his idea of company culture by emphasizing independence and innovation. Not only

did turnover drop, but some of those who had left came back.

Rao’s advice strikes a chord with me. When I was preoccupied with the many problems that beset any growing company, I was sometimes far from ebullient—and my attitude brought down the entire company’s morale. My own experience has taught me that those people who choose to view life as a learning opportunity and who take responsibility for their own actions are also the most confident and the happiest. They are the ones who build enduring companies. **N**

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