



# 12 Ways to Make Your Workplace a Happy Place



**A Special Report by JoAnna Brandi**

Certified Chief Happiness Officer, Author, Speaker, Workshop Leader.



In the last eighteen or so years we've learned more about how people – and companies – create positive emotion than ever before in history. The still young field of Positive Psychology has turned the study of happiness into a science, and the world has been a better place since then.

As work and the workforce changes, the role of the leader is changing too. While it's still critically important for a leader to set direction, it's no longer so important for a leader to *give directions*.

Capable people, enabled by the intelligence they access through search engines and social connections, often create new (and better) ways to do things. Just witness the number of young, *successful* entrepreneurs in so many fields!

Now, more than ever, that means that leaders must be clear in their vision and clear in their expectations - *and* - simultaneously hold “open space” for possibilities they could never have imagined on their own. As leaders, they must bring both focus and emotional intelligence to the table, creating freedom (within a few “fences” that reflect the company values and focus).

I am a teacher of Positive Leadership – an intentional form of values-based leadership, which is built upon evidence-based strategies that are primarily from the field of Positive Psychology.

This eighteen year-old field is the science **of what goes right** with people, it's the science of **what makes people bring their best** to any situation, and it's the **science of well being**.

When this science is practiced by a leadership team, their goal becomes to build more “positive capacity” in their organization. As the ratio of positive versus negative occurrences rises, so does creativity, speed of problem solving, team ‘connection’, collective intelligence, higher sales, happier customers, productivity, as well as the physical and financial health of the organization and its people.

**Positive psychology is essentially about high performance and how to create it.**

In one of the most authoritative studies to date, 200,000 respondents in 8,000 business units show that outcomes – such as employee turnover, productivity, customer loyalty, and profitability – *are all influenced positively* by the way leaders and managers address the issues of well-being and engagement.

We've learned that happy people are more productive, they make better leaders and better negotiators, they have more friends and more social support, and they have larger social networks. They are more resilient, cope better with change, stress and trauma. They have stronger immune systems and actually live longer! Happy people are more philanthropic, generous and kind to others. They simply give more because it feels good.

**Happy companies** have fewer accidents and fewer quality defects, lower healthcare costs, and less absenteeism and turnover. They are **more creative, have happier customers, and, of course, better bottom lines.**

**Here are a dozen ways you can make your workplace a happy place:**

### **1. Give People The Opportunity To Use Their Strengths And Skills.**

People who have the chance to do what they do best – to be in their “strength zone” – **are more likely to be engaged** in their job than those who don’t.

When you’re NOT in the strength zone, you are 6 times **LESS likely** to be engaged in your job – and you are *more likely* to dread going to work, you are *more likely* to have negative attitudes and interactions, you’re more likely to treat the customer poorly and have few, if any, moments of creativity.

That makes sense – when people have the chance to do what they do best – they FEEL good about where they are and what they are doing. Sadly - when asked the question, “What percentage of a typical day do **you** get to play to your strengths?” the average answer is 14%.

Many managers, stuck in old deficit-based thinking, are much better at noticing and focusing on what employees are *doing wrong* – than on where their strengths are and how to build them.

We all know we get more of what we focus on. Focus on weaknesses – they expand. Focus on strengths, they do, too. When leaders emphasize weakness, performance decreases 26.8%. When a leader supports, praises, acknowledges and develops employee strengths, performance increases by 36.4%. That’s a hefty point spread - I’m going to place my bets for success on the leaders that encourage strengths!

There are many good levers for inspiring engaging high performance – and by far **the master lever for engaging employees and increasing performance is to help people discover and play to their strengths.**

Focusing on employee strengths gives them confidence and self-assurance, and increases their well-being. Positive psychologists have discovered – and verified scientifically – that when people identify their strengths and focus on improving even one of them a week, over time their level of happiness goes up. It seems the more time people get to spend doing what they do well, the more likely they are to perform in ways that increase your profitability.

## 2. Create Safe Emotional Space.

People do their best work when you remove fear and give them the opportunity to be seen, known and heard just as they are. To do their best work and to take risks, people need to feel that they will be accepted, even if they fail, as long as they have given it their best shot and are willing to keep learning.

I've often seen bright people shut down because when they tried to participate and offer suggestions, they were told things like, "We've already tried that and it doesn't work here." "It's just not in the budget, we can't do that kind of thing here." "Really? Are you kidding?" Most especially when employees are new, it's wise to do your best not to dismiss their ideas with a glib remark, but to listen carefully, with appreciation for what they are trying to contribute. Let them know you value their thinking and participation, even if it's not something you are able to consider at this time.

**People need to feel safe from ridicule, shame and embarrassment in order to play full out.** People need to know their ideas are important, even if they can't all be implemented. Creating safe space means you are building a strong sense of trust with every interaction. It's your job to coax people out of their comfort zones and into their stretch zones, without taking them into the "panic zone."

## 3. Provide Challenges, Stretch Goals, And Opportunities For Advancement.

Ongoing surveys by Career Systems Int'l say that almost half (48.4%) of their respondents claim that "exciting work and challenge" top their list of reasons for staying on the job. Second on the list is "career growth, learning and development."

People today are on the move; they don't want a job they can have forever, they want a job that stretches them, a job that expands them and that helps them move to the next level. Strengths-based leadership doesn't mean ignoring weaknesses – it means identifying and using strengths to improve in all areas.

**When our strengths meet our challenges at the far end of our comfort zones, we go into a positive state called "flow."** When in that state, we're highly productive. The "flow state" is where we lose track of time and get into "the zone."

As we help employees make their comfort zones larger in this way, they become more and more capable, more and more competent, and create more and more value for us in the marketplace.

Take time to help your employees on their career paths, ask them about their dreams and aspirations. In companies where there are limited opportunities for advancement up the ladder, look for opportunities for them to learn, places where people can use their skills and strengths on projects that have **heart and meaning to them.**

#### 4. Praise Often, Praise Right.

It's important to catch people doing things right and let them know you've noticed. In my 26 plus years of consulting, the one phrase that I heard said (almost word for word) consistently in all kinds of companies is this one: "How come they never notice when I am doing something right, but when I do something wrong they are all over me." (And often in public). Over and over again I have heard the frustration from employees wanting so badly to be appreciated for doing their jobs well.

In the last two decades we've discovered that focusing on someone's doing the wrong thing only depresses their performance. Sure, it's important to let people know when they have done something wrong. It's even more important for people to know when they have done something right.

**When you catch people doing the right thing – and especially when you see them doing that well, let them know.** Go deeper than the "attaboy" or "attagirl" by speaking specifically about what they did that contributed to the company's success, how it was in alignment with the values, or how they added value to the experience for a customer or a co-worker. Shine the light on what is right!

#### 5. Build A Big Emotional Bank Account.

Psychologist Barbara Frederickson is one of the people who have discovered that there is a "Positivity Ratio" that works to tip people from a state of "languishing" to a state of "flourishing". That ratio is three positive things to each negative. She and others in the field have also discovered that **businesses (and happy marriages) that achieve high performance have a ratio of positive to negative that is 5:1.**

That means *five times more acknowledgement*, affirmation, praise, good will, recognition, compliments and focus on strengths than sarcasm, criticism, cynicism or corrective actions related to weaknesses. *Five times more* questions focused on what's strong rather than what's wrong, and *five times more focus* on what's right and what you want to create, rather than on what needs to be fixed and what you don't want. When you focus on delivering 5:1 leadership you build a BIG emotional bank account with people.

#### 6. Provide A Balance Between Stress And Recovery.

Everybody's stressed – nobody has time – everybody's inbox is full. We're multitasking so much that we are becoming ineffective. Accuracy rates are going down and stress related illnesses are going up.

We try managing our time, but TIME is really not the issue. *Energy* is. Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance. When we work from our strengths we create more energy, when we work from our weaknesses we deplete energy.

Tal Ben Shahar, who teaches Happiness and Psychology of Leadership at Harvard, believes that while most of us are capable of some level of multitasking, today most people are required to go beyond their optimum limit.

Tal suggests that we need rituals – he calls them “restorative niches” – throughout the day where people can work on a single project for an hour. He recommends small bits of time where people can relax, renew, and rejuvenate before taking on the next thing. He, and other experts, say we need recovery time. **It’s perfectly okay to have stress on the system – as long as we build in the recovery time as well.** Create space for restorative rituals – such as a 15-minute walk at lunchtime, a place where people can go and meditate or nap, or indulge in a quiet cup of tea - to give your employees built-in recovery time.

Research shows that if you are working on a project that requires focus and you have your email client on in the background, your IQ level drops by ten points – that’s the same amount it would drop if you had been up all night and hadn’t slept. For the sake of comparison: Your IQ would only drop 4 points if you were smoking marijuana. Now there’s something to think about!

We can’t actually live without stress, but it’s important to differentiate between good stress (eustress) and bad stress (distress). Often a leader has an opportunity to shift the team’s focus by *contexting* the current stress into an exciting, worthwhile and meaningful situation.

## **7. Express Authentic Appreciation.**

American psychologist and philosopher William James said the deepest human need is that for appreciation. When leaders develop the art of listening deeply and giving meaningful feedback and genuine appreciation, performance usually increases.

Years ago behavioral scientists discovered that behavior that gets rewarded gets repeated. *Now I’m not talking about money here* – because money loses its power to motivate as soon as people get used to having a little more of it and spending it; I’m talking about a different kind of currency, one that also appreciates over time.

When feeling appreciation, we create a positive emotional and physical response that changes the variability patterns of our heart. When we all do it at the same time – we are *literally* all on the same wavelength!

**Today’s leaders have the opportunity to offer a different and more productive wavelength.** Create a ritual – start and end a meeting with gratitude and appreciation. I’ve never heard an employee complain that they get appreciated too much! You have the opportunity to create behaviors that help people feel valued and appreciated. Do it often. Do it sincerely.

## 8. Create Connection To People And Purpose – A “Cause.”

There are five paths to enduring happiness and well-being. Pleasure, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA). The fullest life has a little of each.

Happiness is not just feeling good – the hedonic rush we get from the pleasure of a good meal, a beautiful sunset, a big sale, or a successful marketing campaign. Happiness also comes from being fully engaged – *involved* – in what you are doing. Whether it's engagement at work or with a hobby, a sport, or volunteer service, *engagement* is the second face of happiness. That's why engaged employees are happy employees.

An important path to happiness at work is meaning – being connected to something outside ourselves – that's bigger than we are.

Jason Jennings, author of “Think Big, Act Small” and “Less is MORE,” studied over 160,000 companies to find the fastest and the most productive ten. **He says the best companies turn their mission and vision into a cause.** They connect their people with a compelling “why” to do business. A cause gives meaning to people's lives. It provides purpose, fuels passion, drives momentum and builds culture. And according to Jason “culture is the ultimate competitive advantage.”

Cause is only one of the things that help people feel connected – the other is *friends*. According to Gallup – people are 7 times more likely to be engaged when they have a best friend at work. Give people the opportunities to create and cultivate relationships and friendships, and connect them to a cause bigger than themselves, and you are contributing to their happiness and well-being.

## 9. Expand Your Emotional Intelligence.

While our IQ is fixed, our “EQ” (emotional intelligence) can be learned and cultivated. That's important since there is a significant impact of emotions on performance, engagement, commitment, creativity, generosity, happiness, and longevity in the workplace. Perhaps you remember the “old days” where we were cautioned to “leave our emotions at the door.” Bad advice. Better advice would be to ask others to leave their problems at the door, but please bring their emotions to work. Today's leaders must be emotionally intelligent and use the power of positive emotions to craft a culture that has *flourishing individuals and thriving organizations* as its intention!

There are four main competencies that make up emotional intelligence. They fall into two categories: Personal Competence and Social Competence. Emotionally intelligent leaders understand and manage their own emotions as well as being able to empathize and understand others. They are able to use their skills to communicate clearly and connect with others in relationship.

Emotions play a powerful role in the workplace and yet they are hardly discussed. Most organizations focus on tangible business results - output, sales and profit for instance – leaving some of the intangible results – like morale, commitment and yes, happiness - to chance. You are about to change that. **When you drive collective emotion in a positive direction with intention and focus, your team becomes a powerhouse of energy – and you become a “Positive Energizer!”**

Emotions are contagious – and yours, as the leader, even more so; it’s critical that you understand the very basics of how to increase your “EQ”.

## **10. Shift from “Power over” to “Power with.”**

We’ve all experienced the first power shift in the marketplace – the power that has shifted from the people who sell to the people who buy. Now we need to look at the power shift that needs to happen inside our companies. The newest shift in the model is from *Power over* to *Power with*.

There are still vestiges of the “Power over” approach today: decisions are made at the top; critical information is held by only a few; there is a scarcity attitude and a mechanistic view of the organization as a machine; there are lots of rules, procedures, extrinsic rewards, fears, threats, and often punishment for non-compliance. This model tends to dwell on weakness – it looks for what’s wrong and who’s to blame for it. The old “my way or the highway” attitude that characterized the command and control models still exist in *some form* in lots of companies.

**Want to engage and involve employees? You have to believe in their brilliance, not just your own.** “*Power with*” is a more organic model. It sees the organization as a system where everything is related; it strives for intrinsic motivation by connection to that cause.

It’s all about leveraging the strengths and INCLUDING the people that do the work in the decision-making processes. It’s a win-win model.

How do you get to this model? You master the art of letting go. It’s one of the hardest things for a leader. Let go of ego, let go of the need to be right, let go of same old same old. *Let go.*

## **11. Create Kindness.**

Strong quality relationships are formed with trust, respect, appreciation, clear communication (delivered without blame or judgement), and kindness. (I call this staying on TRACK.)



**Kindness is a force.** It's a force so strong that the experience of kindness is felt not only in the person who is the recipient of a kind act, but also by the person who delivers it. In the presence of kindness the body creates the biochemistry of well-being. Endorphins (the happy hormones) start pumping, immune cells start reproducing, the heart rate and blood pressure slow down, and the "pleasure centers" in the brain light up – in *both* parties. If ever there was a win-win situation, kindness is it; that's why it's another key to building healthy, happy and harmonious long-term relationships.

Kindness speaks of compassion and kinship, and connects people in a special way. It produces a glow, that when appreciated, can last for hours - and as mentioned above, even gives the immune system a boost. It touches the heart and warms the soul; *it makes an experience memorable.*

Kindness is easy to produce, doesn't need a special budget, has long lasting effects and doesn't require technical training. Kindness wears many costumes. It can be simply dressed in a smile, a friendly gesture or a sweet tone of voice. It can be more elaborately clothed in the willingness to pitch in, stay late, clean up, and help out when someone needs us. When we are sensitive to another's needs and go the extra mile to meet, exceed or anticipate them, we are being kind.

**Kindness helps relationships flourish.** It helps them expand and *grow*. Yes, even in (especially in) business! Kindness speaks of a mindfulness that is sorely needed in business today. Since employees are likely to "catch" the emotions of their leaders, it starts with you.

But be aware, Kindness is hard. It's easier to ignore those in need of our kindness than to stop and see what we can do. It's easier to push our own agenda, which we know so well, than to slow down and see what matters for the other. It's easier to believe the cultural dictum that we need to be tough to get ahead, because it doesn't require that we search our own hearts for what's right.

**I urge you to be kind anyway.** I urge you to use kindness as a strategy for bonding and building relationships – the kind that last. How many places can you find to use kindness as a powerful tool for relationship-building in your business?

Find five places to add a little kindness today, six tomorrow and seven the day after that. *A practice of kindness* will revolutionize your customer care (internally and externally), buffer the effects of a harsh world, and benefit your health and the health of others. Kindness researchers are finding that people who are the recipient of a kind act are more likely to pass that kindness along to another immediately afterward. That extends your impact!

## 12. Use These Positive Leadership Practices.

Let me conclude by saying this – because sometimes people misunderstand Positive Leadership practices – there is a place for negative thinking in business – there are some positive uses for pessimism. For example, negative emotions play an important role in helping us navigate around danger, so there are times when it's very important to look at the “what's WRONG” of things.

However – too much of this kind of thinking and managing narrows our outlook and perspective, and physiologically puts us in a state of contraction where creativity and innovation are impossible. Honor the place negative thinking has in business, but do not worship it. In business – as in marriage – **if you want to flourish, use the 5:1 ratio.**

Five positive interactions to every one negative. Spend five times more of your time in positive frames than in negative ones. Give five times more positive than corrective feedback. Psychologists studying peak performing teams observe a HIGH positive to negative ratio of words, questions, facial expressions and body language. Be a leader with the intention and the power to create positive emotion. Why? The experience of positive emotions:

- Widens our scope of attention, gives us more choices, increases our intuition, expands our creativity, speeds problem solving.
- Alters the front brain symmetry; increases our immune function; lowers our cortisol levels and speeds recovery from cardiovascular effects of negativity.
- Increases our resilience to adversity; increases our happiness; reduces our inflammatory response to stress; reduces pain; and reduces the likelihood of stroke and high blood pressure. Positive emotion increases our psychological capital and produce hope, optimism, resilience and efficacy.
- And there is a clear link between positive emotions and longevity – optimists live on average 7-9 years longer than pessimists.
- Over time positive emotions make us healthier, more socially adept, more knowledgeable, more effective - and did I mention resilient? These are powerful reasons for creating positivity.
- Positive emotions in business alter all business outcomes in a positive way.

**How do you become a Positive Energizer?** Start by looking for what's right, what's possible, what's good. Learn how to listen for strengths – even in everyday conversations. Practice the art of authentic appreciation. Create mechanisms and positive rituals that bring out the best in people. Be bold – be like the little country of Bhutan – they've made Gross National Happiness official public policy and measure it every year.

**Will happiness make it to your agenda this year?** There is a powerful 'ROH' - Return on Happiness - in business when you couple it with extreme customer focus!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report!

JoAnna Brandi is the publisher of the E-Course, **The Practice of Positive Leadership: Use the Science of Happiness to Keep Employees Engaged and Customers Happy**, which teaches leaders at all levels how to become a "Positive Energizer."

She is also the publisher of the Customer Care Coach® a self-study training program on mastering "The Art and Science of Exquisite Customer Care" and the author of three books: *Winning At Customer Retention*, *101 Ways to Keep 'em Happy, Keep 'em Loyal and Keep 'em Coming Back* and *Building Customer Loyalty: 21 Essential Elements in Action* as well as a gift book on positive thinking *54 Ways to Stay Positive in a Changing, Challenging and Sometimes Negative World*.

She is a contributing author to *Best Practices in Customer Service* and the *Inc. Magazine Complete Guide to Superior Customer Service*.

Fifteen years ago she became an Authentic Happiness Coach and began developing programs on Positive Leadership and Creating Happiness for organizations. She is currently working on a book entitled "How Good Can You Stand It?" which teaches her 'Positivity Practices'. Learn more about how to increase your levels of happiness and customer focus.

JoAnna Brandi



### JOIN ME ON SOCIAL MEDIA



[JoAnna@ReturnOnHappiness.com](mailto:JoAnna@ReturnOnHappiness.com)

©2023 JoAnna Brandi & Company, Inc. 561-279-0027  
[www.ReturnOnHappiness.com](http://www.ReturnOnHappiness.com) • [www.PositiveEnergizer.com](http://www.PositiveEnergizer.com)