

WHISTLING WHILE YOU WORK



What you can do to transform the work experience from drudgery to exuberance.

Work can be exhilarating. Surely you have experienced times when your accomplishments came effortlessly and things seemed to just fall into place. Work was fun and you were eager to begin the day.

But these feelings are probably the exception, not the rule. For instance, are you looking forward to tomorrow? Are you eager to get on with your next task? Do you want to spend time with your colleagues? Are you going out of your way to meet with the boss?

Most people would answer in the negative. The view that work is to be endured, not enjoyed, is so commonly held that people do not even question it. It seems farfetched to expect that work could bring as much pleasure and satisfaction as time off.

We live with the consequences of this negativity every day. It lies at the root of unfriendly service, poor quality, mistakes, stress, tension, and low productivity. It helps justify reward systems that use the carrot-and-stick approach to compensation, encourage managers to treat their subordinates poorly, and drive out creativity. Work seems like a drag, and performance suffers. Poor mental attitudes are contagious.

But even in the dreariest jobs, there are those who come to work whistling. Haven't glum faces surprised you when you skipped into work eagerly looking forward to the day? If you want to see what "normal" looks like, go visit an elementary school when parents are dropping off their kids or the kids are jumping off the bus. Bright, cheery, and enthusiastic faces abound. The children often run into the building. You can feel their lightheartedness; it's contagious! So, what is the secret to finding joy at work that these children know, and we seem to have forgotten?

Their tasks seem more like play than work. They see things freshly, looking for the surprise and being curious about outcomes. You can tell that, more often than not, they are fully engaged and holding nothing back. Certainly they pay attention and focus intently on what is before them.

Ask them to name their favorite part of school and they can tell you instantly. These are the high points of their day. Given the freedom to choose, they would do these things all day long. And they do not dwell on the bad parts of schooling either. These tasks are taken in stride and completed when required.

They respect their teachers and understand that they are in charge. While they may not always agree with what the teachers want them to do and can be pretty vocal about it, they will comply once the decision is made.

Classmates are treated kindly and bullies, avoided. Differences in talents and abilities are acknowledged and appreciated; criticism is not tolerated. When someone is in a bad mood, they are left alone and given a break.

We seem to have forgotten what these children know intuitively and that still lies within us.

Work is a chance to express our deepest talents -- the things that come easily to us and that we do well naturally. If you want more joy from work, then look to fill more of your day with these activities. Do what makes you feel happy.

Do not begrudge time spent on chores. Every job has some tasks that are necessary but not interesting. So just do them; don't dwell on them. For the more you dwell on them, the more negativity you will create.

Trust the people you work with. Work is a collaborative venture, and collaboration depends on the feeling that others have your best interests at heart the essence of trust.

Speak up when someone lets you down, and be willing to move on if their negative behavior continues. But at the same time, don't take things personally.

Getting results requires collective energy, so be sure that you look to the "we" perspective before assuming the "me" point of view.

Assume innocence in the actions of others. Learning comes from asking questions, not from criticizing the actions of others.

Don't waste your time on fools or those who indulge in foolish behavior.

Integrity matters; it is the consequence of saying what you mean and meaning what you say. This habit keeps the mind free and the decks clear.

Forgive those who transgress, for who among us has not slipped up? Forgiveness acknowledges the wrong, puts the past in its place, and frees the heart to move on.

Look to do your best. Absolute standards of performance emphasize the negative, where one is more apt to fall short than excel; but doing one's best engenders feelings of satisfaction and leads to a desire to do even better next time.

Be clear about performance expectations. People find the most satisfaction from work that suits them well. Clear expectations provide necessary feedback that helps them find their niche whether in the present job or not.

Treat others with kindness. Nothing lifts the spirits of others more than an act of kindness in a moment of discouragement. Putting your own energy in service of someone else's need feels so good and costs so little.

Results count. So acting compassionately is not the same as covering for others who are not carrying their weight. So, be hardheaded about outcomes and warm hearted about how they are achieved

Gratitude connects people, engenders service, and supports human accomplishment. The best way to achieve your dreams is to appreciate what you have and not brood over what you don't.

If children know these lessons and if all of us were once children, then finding joy at work might be as simple as looking inside for what we already know.

When our thoughts are clear, feelings of happiness, appreciation, gratitude, trust, innocence, and grace come naturally. We are in touch with our common sense and deepest wisdom. Performance, creativity, teamwork, customer service, and accomplishment seem obvious and effortless.

But if we dwell on the negative worrying about things we can't control, procrastinating about what must be done, lying to ourselves or others, harboring grudges, thinking about what we are owed, or becoming self-absorbed by how we appear to others then work can be dreary and tiresome.

So when you lose your way, remember the child that lives within you. He or she is always there to show you what you need to know, bring out your common sense, and lead you to exuberance at work.

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