Ode to Joy - An Evidence-Based Discussion of How to Infuse Joy into the Workplace and Why it Matters

Michael Wiggins, DBA, FACHE

Department of Healthcare Management and Leadership • School of Health Professions • Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Lubbock

Introduction

This presentation aims to help leaders reduce burnout, improve retention, and increase employee engagement by introducing evidence-based practices that infuse joy into the workplace.

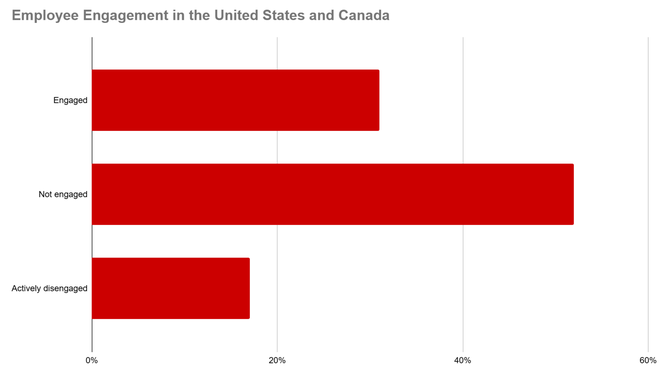
The 2025 Gallup State of the Workforce Global Survey reports that the majority of the workforce in the United States and Canada is disengaged.

When people are overworked and overwhelmed, they disengage, creating an emotional wall between their work persona and the other aspects of their lives.

The reason for this decoupling of “real self” and “work self” is that work environments have lost elements essential to human well-being.

The missing elements are those that enhance personal satisfaction and strengthen the sense of community. Among these missing elements is joy.

This poster describes evidence-based benefits of increased workplace joy and provides leaders with practical, field-tested interventions to create environments that support joy.



Source: Gallup. (2025). State of the global workplace: 2025 report. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

Methods

Literature Review with Field Experience Commentary

The presentation fuses over thirty years of healthcare leadership experience, including a decade serving as chief executive of large academic medical centers, with existing research. Evidence points to the benefits of infusing joy into the workplace, while extensive field experience informs methods for creating environments that enhance joy.

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™

Results & Discussion

Benefits of Increased Joy in the Workplace

- Higher job satisfaction, which can contribute to lower turnover (Diener et al., 2002).
- Higher productivity (Watkins, 2016).
- Improved health, which can contribute to fewer missed work days and lower benefit costs (Diener & Chan, 2011).
- Enhanced resilience to deal with challenges and setbacks (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).
- Higher self-esteem, which contributes to enhanced confidence to achieve goals (Lyubomirsky et al., 2006).

How to Infuse Joy Into the Workplace

- Set positive, challenging but attainable, future-oriented goals that provide people with meaning and purpose in their work (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Watkins, 2016).
- Position people to use their strengths because people find joy in performing with excellence (Seligman et al., 2005).
- Demonstrate gratitude in a variety of ways with sensitivity to team member preferences (Watkins, 2016).
- Celebrate success within the team as well as when other teams succeed (Gu et al., 2023).
- Create opportunities for interaction that are not focused on work activities (Ooerlemans et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Leaders are not responsible for the happiness of their team members, but leaders are responsible for creating environments that support joy. By infusing the concepts above into the workplace, leaders can create environments that lead to higher productivity, less burnout, better retention, and increased employee engagement.

References

Diener, E., & Chan, M. Y. (2011). Happy people live longer: Subjective well-being contributes to health and longevity. Health benefits of happiness. Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being, 3(1), 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2010.01045.x

Diener, E., Nickerson, C., Lucas, R.E. et al. (2002). Dispositional affect and job outcomes. Social Indicators Research 59, 229–259. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1019672513984

Gu, X., Zeng, X., & Oei, T. (2023). Appreciative joy: A critical review of empirical research. Journal of Happiness Studies, Vol. 24(3), 1303-1318. DOI 10.1007/s10902-023-00620-y

Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? Psychological Bulletin, 131(6), 803–855. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.6.803

Lyubomirsky, S., Tkach, C., & Dimatteo, M. R. (2006). What are the differences between happiness and self-esteem? Social Indicators Research, 78(3), 363–404. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-0213-y

Ooerlemans, W., & Bakker, A. (2014). Why extraverts are happier: A day reconstruction study. Journal of Research in Personality, 50, 11-22.

Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitations of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. American Psychologist, 55, 68-78.

Seligman, M., Steen, T., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. American Psychologist, 60, 410-421.

Watkins, P. (2016). Positive psychology 101. Springer Publishing Company.