



How to Be Happy at Work: The Power of Purpose, Hope, and Friendship

Annie McKee

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“I’m working harder than I ever have, and I don’t know if it’s worth it anymore.” If you’re a manager or leader in today’s high-speed, high-stress economy, these words have probably run through your mind, maybe more than once. Many people in management positions are feeling fed up, burned out, and unhappy at work: the constant pressure and stress, the unending changes, the politics . . . People are feeling they can’t give much more, and their performance is suffering.

But it’s *work*, after all, right? Should we even expect to be fulfilled and happy at work? Annie McKee answers with a definitive yes. She makes the most compelling case yet that happiness—and the full engagement that comes with it—is more important than ever in today’s workplace. Based on extensive research and decades of experience with leaders, this book sheds new light on the powerful relationship of happiness to individual, team, and organizational success.

McKee’s research reveals that there are three essential elements that people *must have* in order to be happy at work:

- A sense of purpose and the chance to contribute to something bigger than themselves;
- A vision that is powerful and personal, creating a real sense of hope; and
- Resonant, friendly relationships

The book is organized around these essential elements and shows how leaders can create and sustain them in the face of ongoing stress and pressure, as well as how to create a healthy, positive climate for their teams and other groups within their companies.

How to Be Happy at Work will transform and enrich our understanding of what it means to be happy at work, and it will provide clear, practical advice and instruction for how to achieve this.

How to Be Happy at Work: The Power of Purpose, Hope, and Friendship Details

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Mike Gunderloy says

I ran across this one thanks to the How To Be Awesome At Your Job podcast, and picked up a copy. It's a lot more academic than I had expected: even though this is aimed at a popular audience, McKee has plenty of research background and she pulls in a lot of work she's been involved with in the past, notably on emotional intelligence. There's no magic spell to be happy, of course, but there are techniques that can help in many circumstances, and she makes a nice organized presentation of them. I personally got the most value out of the discussion of hope at work and the value of having friends, even though I'm not one to easily make friends. It's nice to see an empowering set of ideas in one place, though I'm not 100% sure I'll have luck putting them into practice to change things outside myself. But one of the messages here is that changing yourself is a good starting point.

Ron says

Overall, a well-written self-help book of strategies to use to cope with the pressure put on their employees by organizations. Very helpful...the idea of resonant microcultures really struck home. Enjoyable and educational.

Esequiel Contreras Jr says

I was a little hesitant when I started this book because I thought it was one of those feel good, be happy no matter the situation, but it actually turned out to be better than I imagined.

Charles Franklin says

The power of this book, to me, comes from its focus on resilience and recovery. Unlike other books on work-life balance, this book makes the point that we cannot separate work from life, that whatever we experience at work spills into our home life and vice versa. The book also makes the point that when we experience things that threaten our values or our financial/mental/physical safety, we get what the book calls an "amygdala hijack" (aka our emotions take over) and we're in a totally different mindset than we would be otherwise. In that mindset, we do things like yell, fight, quit jobs, or any number of irrational things. That's not a good thing. A better approach is emotional management, something that develops when we develop and foster our emotional intelligence. With emotional intelligence, we can understand the signs of stress that lead us to the "amygdala hijack" and take proactive and reactive steps to recover.

Simon says

I thought it was going to be a good Harvard type book, but it was not.

Brian Kurzhal says

Emotionally intelligent norms of resonant teams: Seek to understand each other's viewpoints and feelings; Actively care for people; Respect and accept people for who they are; Connect with people around a higher purpose and dreams; Engage in open, honest dialogue; Don't shy away from conflict, but don't harm people or relationships; Be reliable and consistent to build trust; Take the lead, and also be a good follower, and; Celebrate success. Norms that support a sense of belonging: Create a shared language, special ways of describing your work, values, and goals; Create team traditions and rituals, e.g. ways of celebrating team success or mark special occasions; Share playful times and fun; Talk with one another, and not at one another; Get to know each other personally, and; Find something to care about, and love, in everyone.

Sanford Chee says

<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/ar...>

Life is too short to be unhappy at work.

The best leaders in our organizations, at the very top and all the way down to the shop floor, understand that people matter, feelings matter, and it's job number one to create a climate where people feel good about what they're doing where they're happy, engaged and ready to share their talents.

If we want our employees to be at their best, we need to care about their emotional well-being as well as their physical well-being.

3 things that matters at work:

#1 People need to feel that they are making a +ve impact on something that's important to them i.e. they need to feel their work is purposeful, and it's tied to values they care about.

#2 Optimism that work is tied to a personal vision of the future. The organization's vision isn't enough. As good as it may be, we have to know that what we're doing ties to a personal vision of our future.

#3 Friends at work. Belonging to a tribe. We're with people that we respect and who respect us in return. We need warmth, we need caring, and we need to feel supported.

"We do need to know that what we do matters at work, that we are doing something that is tied to our future, and that the people we work with are great."

Happiness trap at work:

1. "Should" trap instead of authentic motivation (cf. ignoring the source within; devaluing happiness).

2. Ambition trap (cf. Raj Raghunathan's concept of chasing superiority; external scorecard vs inner scorecard).

3. Helplessness trap (cf. being overly needy; distrusting life).

"What choices can we make in the middle of that culture? We don't have to be victims of our organizational culture, and we don't have to be victims of that bad boss you might have or maybe you've had in the past. We can make choices about what we do with our time, our energy and our emotional stance."

"We still need to feel like we belong, we need to feel that we're cared for, and we need to be able to care for others in return. If we're working far away, we've got to take extra time and make a concerted effort to build those relationships in a different kind of way than if we're in person."

See Oprah Winfrey's interview with Howard Schultz of Starbucks on creating a company culture:
<https://youtu.be/ltkJ5mGHd1I>

Don says

McKee's work, while not necessarily earthshaking, is informing and an affirmation of my current organization/position. Much of what is written here is about emotional intelligence, something that I have read quite a lot about; self-awareness and awareness of others. The work also affirms creating learning plans, something that I am also passionate about.

Wendy Wong Schirmer says

This is basically a book about how to approach work in a way that is holistic and integrated into our lives. The underlying questions that drive the book are "what does fulfilling work look like?" and "what are the reasons that we do anything at all?" So there's good food for thought regarding the question of work for human flourishing, and also even the formulation of a theology of work. One concrete area where there are possible applications is the classroom. Teaching and learning, after all, constitute the nurturing of a work culture toward particular, specific ends.

Also important to a healthy work culture is the idea that rigor should coexist with a sense of play. Rigor, after all, does not inherently mean drudgery, just as truth (in the observations of G.K. Chesterton) need not be separable from humor. A sense of play is important for creativity-- that's when the ideas really flow-- and discipline exists for a higher purpose, not for its own sake. We often learn more effectively when we are in an environment where we are unafraid to make mistakes, where we make room for others; where we could be tossed in the deep end in doing some serious grappling, but we're still having way too much fun to care.

Heather Lavigne says

Yeahhhhhh...I'm gonna go ahead and not finish this one. I gave it 100 pages but I can't swallow one more sentence of idealistic hooey. This was written by one of those "looks like somebody's got a case of the Monday's" people. I just know it in my soul.

If you're really unhappy at work, go ahead and use the time you'd have spent reading this book some other way to make you happy. Apply for jobs. Write a Jerry McGuire style manifesto. Destroy a printer with a baseball bat. Anything. I'm sure it'll be more productive and satisfying than this book.

Eric Sbar says

Like other books in this genre, it relies on platitudes about finding your calling and making a job into a lifestyle. Modern work is full of pointing fingers at those not in control and going to the same consultants to convince employees that they know better how work should be done. You cannot take a soul sucking experience and add smiley stickers onto it and state happiness is within. The basic premise is, if you are not happy at work, make work fun and find some friends at the job. In the modern remote office, that is ridiculous. See the Harvard Business Review's article *Lonely at Work*

Kevin says

Happy at work? Pigs on the runway? Actually, it's a challenging subject. We spend enough of our days working and this is a serious research-based look at the ingredients that make us feel good about going to work each morning. Basically broken down into three areas. Does our work have a purpose that we can value? Do we feel hopeful that our actions can make a difference? Do we connect with people in a positive way? (This area has tended to be overlooked - the traditional view is that we go to our work to work and not to make friends. But, the science now recognises that we are profoundly social creatures and our relationships make a critical difference to our well-being - at home and work).

What can we do? Well, as in all things psychological, it's a choice. We can go to work and focus on bad things and be miserable and rude, or we can choose to be different. Maybe it's not rocket science!

As a boss, the challenge is how I make these things happen for me, and for people who work for me. I do try! But it's always a work in progress. It's a big challenge because stress can wear us out and make us cynical - this is also discussed. The book's author appears wise, grounded and mostly insightful about the challenges. The research is solidly presented, sometimes perhaps a little too stolidly. It is aimed as a self-help book for individuals with some interesting practical exercises. But maybe individuals also need the organisation to be on board with some of these issues if they are going to have an impact. Definitely worth a read.

Danielle says

This had a lot of practical advice and questions to think about in our work lives.

Greg says

I was asked recently by one of my colleagues at work, what would make me quit my job. I tried to think for a few seconds and then I said that I would file my resignation if I am no longer happy at work.

I've seen several studies that indicate that too many of us around the world are expressing dissatisfaction at work one way or the other. Some studies say that 8 out of 10 people are not fully engaged at work. This is somehow appalling given that most of us are spending almost one-third of our lives in the office or some other

form of work setting.

Fortunately, this book addresses the lack of happiness in organizations as well as within ourselves. The title of the book is straight forward, How to Be Happy at Work. At first I thought that this could be about stress management, relaxation, and healthy habits. Then I realized that this is being published by Harvard Business School Press so there could be some business cases here.

After reading the book, I found myself realizing several things that I've never considered before. Things such as hope and developing friendship at work, never became part of my resolve when I want to be happy. I understand that you need to find personal meaningful purpose on what you are doing to be motivated to do your job as I read in one of the articles in HBR but I haven't considered the friendship aspect at work.

This book gives me different stories including that of the author. She came from a very humble beginnings, now I realized, and she is a product of hard work and resilience. I can relate to some of the other stories not because I was in the same situation but due to the fact that I've seen people in similar cases.

If there is one thing that I can take away from this book, it is that I now understand how to develop happiness for me and for others around me. Things would be a lot better to anyone or any organization if people know how to cultivate happiness with each other. This book is inspiring and reading this makes me happy.

Tina Panik says

Full of practical advice for both sides of the workplace coin: happy and unhappy.
