

9 Ways to Keep Your Employees Happy Even Without a Raise

As a prelude to this article, let's agree with the premise that both employers and their employees are inextricably linked on a common journey toward company success and (ideally) employee happiness.

With this premise in mind, we offer some evidence-based insight and nine practical actions on how to instill happiness in your workforce without painful financial outlays. The list is not exhaustive. Undoubtedly, dozens and dozens of workplace strategies can help to transform a sour culture into a cheerful one. So, we ask:

What is it that employees really want out of their work experience, if not raises?

For one, to be self-sufficient. Raises do matter.

But what if you're constrained (temporarily) from adding more cost to payroll?

You can act decisively right now to create and sustain a positive work culture buzzing with happy contributors. More than any other generation, the Millennials (who will represent more than 50 percent of the national workforce in 2020) want true engagement in their work.



In his book, *The Truth About Employee Engagement*, Patrick Lencioni simplifies employee desires into three core areas:

1. To feel that you matter
2. To know what you do has impact
3. To make steady progress toward career and organizational goals

Hundreds of powerful studies have been done over the years to measure what employees care about in their work. One of the most extensive comes from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), which surveyed 200,000 employees worldwide. Researchers uncovered the number one contributor to employee happiness at work is an acknowledged **appreciation** for what they do.

Of course, employees do still care about job security, job satisfaction, the opportunity to use their skills and talents, and upward mobility. Need for real engagement at work is on the rise. And real engagement leads to happiness.

What Gallup Found

In a recent survey by Gallup of more than 30,000 adults working full and part-time, data scientists discovered that “organizations and teams with higher employee engagement and lower active disengagement **perform at higher levels**.”

For example, organizations that are the best in engaging their employees achieve earnings-per-share growth that is **more than four times** that of their competitors. Compared with business units in the bottom quartile, those in the top quartile of engagement realize substantially better customer engagement, higher productivity, better retention, fewer accidents, and 21% higher profitability. Engaged workers also report better health outcomes.”

Happy employees fully engaged with their work exert far-reaching influence and impact on the financial fortunes of their companies.

Who's Responsible for Happiness?

It would be unfair and unrealistic for you to expect your employer to make you happy. In large part, that is your responsibility. In the same way, you should not make your partner in life responsible for your happiness, don't assign this role to your employer either.

If you experience tumult in your personal life, then bring it to work, your work will suffer, no doubt. And what can your employer do to help unless it offers an employee wellness program that may include well-trained counselors?

Ultimately, you are the architect of your state of mind in every passing moment.

Camille Preston, Ph.D., PCC with Forbes Coaches Council, an author, speaker, and renowned coach suggests you and your work teams follow this advice:

“Engage with happy people.” We’ve all been around sad sacks at work. The gal who never smiles. The guy who never comes to employee events. The manager who constantly complains about lack of resources. Do not let them affect your day. Set boundaries. Then, seek out the people at work who project positive energy. You are the company you keep, as they say.

“Foster meaningful relationships.” Employees experience greater happiness on the job when they develop friendships with co-workers. Gallup also found that close work friendships elevate employee satisfaction by 50 percent and people with a best friend at work are seven times more likely to engage fully in their work.

“Be responsible for your happiness.” As Preston explains, “while happiness can be affected by DNA and life circumstances, Sonia Lyubomirsky suggests in *The How of Happiness* that we still control roughly 40 percent of our happiness.”

Nine Ways to Keep Employees Happy

The following compilation of ideas, generated by experts in human resources, management, and employee benefits, was contributed to the American City Business Journals:

1. Ensure the Best Managers Lead Your Employees

Because effective leadership is not a natural human trait, it is essential that you train, coach, and supervise your leaders. And train yourself, too. Many companies are overrun with mediocre managers, which can have a shredding effect of fresh talent with new ideas. “Employees don’t leave companies; they leave bad managers.”

2. Cultivate a Sense of Purpose in Your Employees

The *Harvard Business Review* and The Energy Project polled over 12,000 white collar employees and found that “feeling a sense of purpose at work” is the single biggest driver of employee satisfaction, engagement, and longevity in the job. When feeling a sense of purpose, employees are:



- 3 times more likely to remain in their jobs
- 1.7 times more likely to feel job satisfaction
- 1.4 times more engaged at work

This sense of purpose can translate through transparency—share critical data, key reports, business plans, product launches, customer surveys, and help them see where they fit into the outcomes. Don’t be one of those companies where the employees gather to grumble at management’s closed-door meetings, which only serves to isolate them from decisions that may affect their fate.

3. Be Personable with Your Staff

Laura Stack, president of Productivity Pro, acknowledges that “employees appreciate pay raises, bonuses, promotions, and perks, but they can seem impersonal.” She claims “many employees respond just as favorably to the personal touch.”

“ . . .public praise from a hard-to-please boss can work wonders, putting the employee on an intrinsic high that translates into increased engagement, improved company loyalty, and greater productivity for months to come.”

She goes on to say that “team-wide gestures of appreciation like taking the whole team out for a nice lunch will increase solidarity and purpose. Do things unexpectedly to boost morale or celebrate a job well done. Make a big deal of milestones like birthdays, job anniversaries, landing a client with high lifetime value, or finishing a big project. You’ll boost motivation and help your team blow off steam.”

4. Remind Your Rock-Stars They Count

“Taking the time to call somebody into your office (or even better, drop by theirs) to laud them and remind them what a rock star they are gives them a gift and reward for their hard work that no amount of money can buy. It also creates a more cohesive bond between managers and their team members, creates a sense of fulfillment for a job well done, and creates willingness for team members to step up to take on tough challenges in the future,” says Spider Graham, CEO of Trainingcraft.



5. Exercise Spontaneity and Surprise in the Workplace

The suggestions by Ken Cook, founder of Peer to Peer Advisors, are so easy to do and lighten the day at the same time. However, he warns that you do these things only if you want to and do them with genuine sincerity:

- **“Be spontaneous:** On the first warm spring day, walk into the office at 8 a.m. and let everyone know that Spring Fever has struck and that everyone gets a half-day off. Take care of the critical stuff by 11:30 that morning. Then go out and enjoy the sunshine.
- **Recognize the achievement of an employee's child with a gift certificate for the child.** A parent will remember a kindness to their child for a very long time.
- **Spruce up the bathrooms.** A plant manager I know upgraded the employee's bathrooms and received more thank-you messages for that than any other thing he had done.”

6. The Value of Time Over Money

Like the Spring Fever moment above, at the end of a major project, when everyone is tired, give your select contributors time off. Not to do errands or home projects, but to go and play. On their return, ask them to share a verbal report on the happenings of their day-of-fun at the next meeting.

The best illustration of the value of time over money is “when you provide opportunities and encouragement for learning and growth. Money spent on skill development is truly invested well,” says Alice Waagen, president of Workforce Learning. If your employee knows that you care about their future by giving the time they need for continuous learning, they will most likely stay put. And we all know the heavy costs of high turnover.

7. Flexibility Reins Supreme

We love this story from Marc Kramer, president of Kramer Communications:

“I was once brought in to run a company that was in financial trouble. We couldn’t afford raises and we certainly couldn’t afford to lose top-tier talent.

One of the things I discovered when I took over was that the prior leader wouldn’t let people move their desks around, have personal items on their desks, and was very regimented about when they had to arrive and leave.

I told them the employees they could decorate their offices anyway they liked as long as it wasn’t offensive to anyone. And most importantly, they could come in when they wanted, leave when they wanted, and work at home when they wanted as long as they met their obligations.

We actually had friends of employees sending in their resumes to join us.”

8. Offer Desirable Amenities at Work



For the entire workforce, create a company challenge to which every individual can contribute. If it’s met, reward them with a new amenity at work.

Let’s say, if the company hits revenue goals for the year, install a games table in the break room. If they boost site traffic by a desired figure over a specific time percent over a certain time, provide free snacks daily. They will feel recognized and rewarded.

And it will cost a great deal less than bonuses. These amenities need to reflect your work culture. What pleases a software developer may not even register in the mind of a line manager.

9. Re-evaluate Your Benefits Package for Improvement

Broadening your healthcare coverage or instituting a percentage match for your 401(k) plan will both cost money but move the needle on employee well-being. Add an extra level of life or disability insurance. Then, you protect their incomes and their families.

However, do a smart cost-benefit analysis, and you may well discover that these actions are less expensive than raises. Remember though; most employee benefits are a tax-deductible expense for businesses. They're going to cost you less in the long-term even if they require a bit of money up front.

In a recent *Inc. Magazine* article, one expert affirmed that: “rewarding your employees across the board with greater benefits can also function as a sign of good faith--that you appreciate all your employees, and that the company is doing well enough to afford the extra coverage.”

Benefits Gold Standard Hot Off the Press

If you truly wish to raise your employee happiness factor, we encourage you to read an article in [Employee Benefit News](#) from Kathryn Mayer, published in March of this year. You may be in for a surprise because “The 15 Most Popular Employee Perks” concludes that you can forget on-site gyms, pet-friendly offices, or roaming masseuses.

Remember what author Lencioni said above: Employees desire to feel that they matter, to know what they do has impact, and to make steady progress toward career and company goals.

The average working person spends 2,000 hours a year at work. That’s enough time for you, as their employer, to create ways to infuse periodic doses of happiness where it’s needed most.

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