

Working happy by Widget Finn



Are you happy in your work? And are the people who work with you happy in theirs?

Happiness is the new Big Idea, though it's been around for a long time. Aristotle claimed that 'happiness is the meaning and purpose of life'. Now we find happiness – or rather, theories about happiness – everywhere. On one summer evening last year academics were publicly debating the theme 'Happiness; the science behind your smile' at the Royal Institution while just down the road at the London School of Economics an economist and a psychiatrist were tussling with the Politics of Happiness.

Richard Layard, New Labour's happiness guru, persuaded the government to train 10,000 therapists to help us to be happy. Management consultants have added to the burgeoning happiness industry and even educationalists have got on the bandwagon. Pupils at boarding school Wellington College in Berkshire are to be given classes in how to achieve happiness, says Headmaster Anthony Seldon. "To me the

most important job of any school is to turn out young men and women who are happy and secure."

Whether parents will be happy that the priority of a highly expensive education is to turn out their offspring with a smile on their face rather than robust exam results on their CV remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the media are having a field day, with the BBC's timely new series The Happiness Formula broadcast in six easy parts. A survey linked to the series claims that we were 16% happier in 1957 than we are today, even though incomes have trebled since then.

Which brings me back to my original question. Online recruiter Jobsite recently published a report called "In pursuit of Happiness: the Challenge of Jobseeking in the UK" conducted by YouGov.

It found that 44% of companies reported employee turnover was increasing annually, and

two out of three employees would move to another company 'to achieve a better cultural fit.'

This sounds as if a large proportion of workers are in the wrong organisation. Does the phrase square pegs in round holes ring any bells?

Anne Bruton, formerly HR Director for IT at Ernst & Young, recognises the syndrome. "When you work in an organisation you notice people who are not performing to the best of their ability. It doesn't mean that they haven't got skills and talents, it's just that their face doesn't fit or their management style doesn't work so they're not producing the best results."

The main indicator of a problem is when an individual's performance is affected, or they fail to get on with colleagues. "It becomes clear that the person can do well, but not in this organisation. I talk to them about what makes them feel comfortable in their role and what they think is going wrong. We discuss the difference



Stephen Edwards, MD of EuroCareer Consultants

between this and other jobs they've had, and help them realise that the problem isn't just them, but there's a mismatch between them and the organisation."

According to Stephen Edwards, MD of EuroCareer Consultants, too many HR people avoid the issue of how to manage square pegs. "They let it go by default which isn't best for individuals, other members of the team or the organisation. This is an issue which has to be tackled, but preferably by an outsider who can be seen as objective. It's hugely expensive in terms of man-hours for the HR department who will spend a disproportionate amount of time on the 15% of people who aren't productive, rather

than the 85% who are."

Sometimes the solution is for the individual to have coaching, or to move to another job in the organisation where his skills will be better used, though in Edwards' experience around 44% move on to another organisation. "In these cases we suggest that they should put aside all the baggage of their current situation and look at other opportunities."

As in the case of Kirk Kirkpatrick (**see box below**) the employer helps an employee who, through circumstances, is no longer productive to move to a role and an organisation where they fit in. It's a win-win situation or, in today's terms – everybody's happy.

Kirk Kirkpatrick worked for 11 years within a leading accountancy firm. Following a re-organisation he was promoted to Senior Manager responsible for the UK IT infrastructure.

"My new role became very stressful. I was closely involved in a major project, building the new London HQ, and was put under a lot of pressure by the partner responsible. I was told that if things didn't go well I'd be fired. I got to the stage where I could hardly get out of bed in the morning to go to work."

Kirkpatrick's GP warned him that he was heading for a nervous breakdown or a heart attack unless he slowed down. During five months' sick leave he told his employers that he couldn't return to his old position, and asked for an opportunity to look for other roles in the organisation. "They were very supportive, and arranged for me to meet Ian Nicoll of EuroCareers. We talked through what I enjoyed doing and what was really important to me, and I decided that I wanted to stay in IT work."

He moved to the IT consultancy division where he stayed for a year "but much of the work was IT audit which I didn't find satisfying." Further sessions with Ian Nicoll convinced him to look outside his current company for a new role. "He helped me to clear away the clutter and decide what to focus on. Having regular meetings kept me on my toes, and was a motivating factor in itself to get on and do something."

Armed with a reasonable financial package Kirkpatrick decided to move on, and now works as an IT consultant for Siemens. "I left on good terms with my employer, who had encouraged me to find a role that I really enjoy."

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