

The Business Case for Happiness

Nearly a third of us think about resigning from our jobs at this time of year, immediately following a Summer holiday. Almost 70% of Britons have considered becoming their own boss – September is the month when most new businesses are set up.

These findings, from research carried out by a body called the Franchise Group, may not surprise us, but they should worry us. Indeed, this high level of dissatisfaction with how we spend the largest proportion of our waking lives may be downright dangerous.

The cost to businesses of a lack of motivation is well documented, as is the havoc that unresolved tension plays with our individual health. However, we may not realise the importance now placed on our happiness by many leading authorities:

- The psychologist, Professor Martin Seligman, believes that being happy is critical to the very evolution of our species – enlarging our intellectual, physical and social resources, happiness generates the optimism we need for embracing new ideas and experiences¹;
- The eminent neuroscientist, Dr Candace Pert, goes as far as to say we are “hardwired for bliss” – our physiology is working optimally when we are happy²;
- Politicians such as David Cameron have argued that we should focus as much on increasing happiness as on increasing GDP³.

As the economist, Lord Layard, sums up in the opening paragraph of his seminal book, “There

is a paradox at the heart of our lives. Most people want more income and strive for it. Yet as Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier”⁴.

“There is a paradox at the heart of our lives. Most people want more income and strive for it. Yet as Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier”

Richard Layard

Layard explains that when we are dissatisfied with our jobs, we are probably working to gain satisfaction from other sources. The security of our family is often our prime concern. However, contrary to what we might say, our actions infer that happiness is something we can buy. As a result, we may defer our individual happiness until we think we can afford it, even as late as retirement. If so, we are probably misguided.

Albert Schweitzer, the philosopher and Nobel Peace Prize winner is quoted as saying “Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful”. This statement implies that success emerges from the inside out and depends upon how happy we are.

Indeed, our experience proves that when we smile, the world smiles back at us. When we are happy, life becomes easier and circumstances change for the better. Since we are more relaxed, we are able to come up with more

“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful”

Albert Schweitzer

creative solutions to the challenges we face. We also find we function better in relationships. It is, surely, therefore critical that we become more conscious of our feelings and take control of the different moods we drift in and out of during the day.

It is not always easy to do this. Seligman explains that becoming happy may require a re-working of our attitude to the past, a re-appraisal of our expectations for the future, and a greater appreciation of the present. A range of psychological approaches and therapies can offer us practical and fast-acting tools to do this when it is difficult, including neuro-linguistic programming and cognitive behavioural therapy.

Those who are happiest are not necessarily self-employed. Rather, it is those who realise they do not need to wait for external conditions to change until they can become happy.

What are the things you do to get yourself into a great frame of mind when you need to? Whatever you can do to make yourself happier in your current situation – do it! It is probably the most important task you can carry out right now.

¹ Martin Seligman “Authentic Happiness” (2002)

² Candace Pert “Molecules of Emotion”

³ Google Zeitgeist Europe conference, May 2006

⁴ Richard Layard “Happiness. Lessons from a New Science” (2005)