

# What makes your heart sing?

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In this series of Supermarket & Retailer's articles, we share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams. We give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven company in the world.

When an aeroplane taking off in New York lost power because of a bird strike, the pilot, Chesley Sullenberger barked out three words – “Brace for impact!” – and landed safely in the Hudson River. Passenger Ric Elias recalls that his most important lesson that day was to spend the rest of his life being happy. “In an instant,” he said ...

“I felt one real regret...

In my own humanity and mistakes, I wasted time on things that did not matter with people that matter. I thought about my relationship with my wife, with my friends, with people... and I no longer try to be right.

I choose to be happy... 🎵



Nobody on their deathbed ever wished that they spent more time at work, and no customer has ever wished that they could spend more time shopping.

I'm not going to give you a list of *Things to Do to be Happy* because that would be too long. (Indeed, my own list has 58 actions.) But I'd like to share some of the important findings that recent research on happiness has discovered – and some of it may surprise you.

Creating happiness is critical for a number of different reasons, not least of which is that there is a lot of bad news in the world at the moment.

But being happy, particularly at work, makes a huge difference.

Happier people work better with others, are more creative, fix problems instead of complaining about them, have more energy, optimism, are way more motivated, and inspire others. They get sick less often, learn faster, worry less about making mistakes (and thereby make fewer mistakes), and make better decisions.

In 1932, 180 novice nuns wrote short sketches of their lives. One wrote: “God started my life off well by bestowing upon me grace of inestimable

value. The past year has been a very happy one.” She lived to 98 in wonderful health. Another wrote a joyless and neutral sketch, ending: “With God’s grace, I intend to do my best for our Order.” She died after a stroke at the age of 59. But here’s the deal ...

““ The scientists analysed all 180 sketches for positive feelings, and found that almost 90% of the happiest nuns were still alive at 85. Only a third of the other group survived to that age. ””

So, what has research taught us about what cheers us up? Surprisingly, some things don’t have as powerful an effect as we may think. Ed Diener found that wealth, and all the delightful things that money can buy, wasn’t enough – once your basic needs are met, additional income does little to raise your happiness.

Enjoying good health is obviously a key, but what about something like having a good education? No, and in fact ‘clever’ people are, on the contrary, less happy. Are younger people happier in their exuberance? No again. Older people tend to be consistently content with their lives, and less prone to sadness and dark moods. Wedded bliss? More complicated: married people are generally happier than singles – but only if the relationship is good. Children do bring some happiness, but grandchildren bring much more.

The weather and sunny days in particular do make a difference, but unless you move to somewhere balmy, there’s not much you can do



about it. (Psychologists have identified a syndrome called SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder.)

What does create happiness? More than a few studies show that religious people tend to be much happier. What we don’t know for sure is whether it’s the spiritual side of it, or the community side, but the evidence is strong. But some form of prayer and meditation, and a values-driven belief system are important.

But the most important contributor to true happiness by far is one which won’t surprise you ... people and relationships. (For people who live alone, even pets can make a huge difference.) Jean Paul Sartre got it completely wrong in the 1960s when he wrote, “Hell is other people.”

You know what you need to do, but here’s a reminder...

- Invest time and energy and seek out interactions with family and friends. Personal relationships, and even doing trivial things together, make a difference. When we, for example, cook as a family, the routine and ‘boring’ preparation like cutting, peeling, preparing food around a table together is full of positive energy, and build relationships away from screens.

- As ‘plane crash survivor Ric Elias discovered, ego gets in the way. The ability to forgive others is right near the top of the list. Letting go of anger is crucial, for it burdens you. St Augustine wrote: “Resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to get sick.” Persistent rumination and dwelling on revenge hurts you.

- Bringing happiness to others, we somehow also find ours. It’s up to each one of us to practice ‘random acts of kindness’. We always see a colleague or a customer who is harassed by things out of their control, and that’s an opportunity to reach out. Being kind to others – friends or strangers – triggers a flood of positive feelings not only for them, not only for you (it makes you feel capable and generous, wins you smiles, and gives you a greater sense of



connection), but even for someone who just observes what you just did. Another great possibility is to thank someone – even someone from your past that helped you. Express your appreciation, and do so in detail, and face-to-face if possible.

- Count your blessings, and be grateful for what you do have in your life. It may sound very 'Dr Phil', but writing things that you are thankful for in a journal can make a huge impact on your happiness, especially when you are down. Do it often

and keep it fresh. And don't forget to savour all of life's wonderful little joys ... things that people do that inspire you, pleasurable things that affect any of your five senses (fresh-baked bread, anyone?), and focus on the scores of momentary wonders and pleasures that surround us. Good things

happen every day in our lives, but so often we are caught up in our work that we forget to notice.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was very clear on the purpose of business ...

**“ Business exists to enhance human well-being. ”**

I couldn't agree with him more. **SR**



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