

# Cultivating Joy in Your Workday

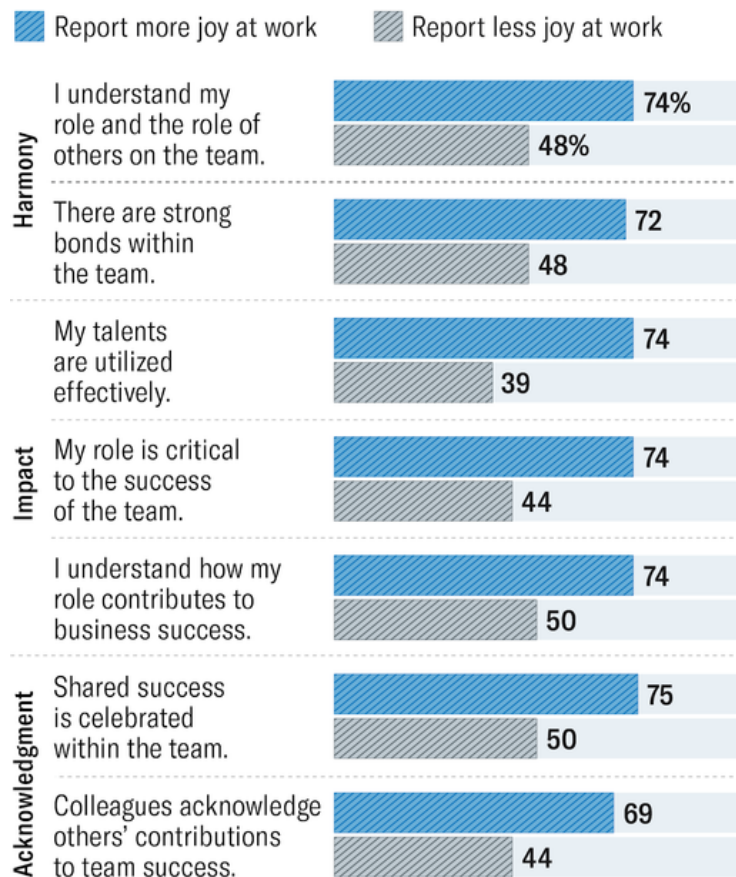
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**Joy: An intense momentary experience of positive emotion**

It's recognized and measured through smiling, laughing, feeling a sense of lightness in our bodies.

## What Drives Joy at Work

It arises from harmony, impact, and acknowledgment, according to a survey of more than 500 employees.



Source: Analysis of a 2018 A.T. Kearney survey by Siegel+Gale

HBR

# Lesson 1: The Little Things are the Big Things.

## **WE SPEND OUR LIVES CHASING BIG THINGS: A DREAM JOB... A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME TRIP... A BEST-DAY-EVER WEDDING.**

We work toward milestones and are disappointed when the pieces don't fall into place. Even when they do, we often wonder, "Now what?"

Ironically, our "pursuit of happiness" often causes our unhappiness. We prioritize big accomplishments and sacrifice everyday delights. We cancel plans with friends to work late.

It's easy to forget: the little things are the big things.

Even our biggest triumphs are experienced as a series of fleeting moments. The clatter of the applause as you finish a big performance. The feeling of your bare feet on the floorboards in your new apartment.

Being able to recognize and savor these moments will help you create an extraordinary life out of ordinary things. Without it, you'll keep chasing milestones and putting off joy.

Let's start by tuning in to the world around you.

## **PRACTICE: LOOK FOR TINY JOYS**

Tiny joys are moments of lightness, warmth, or wellbeing. Each tiny joy might be fleeting, but it helps regulate your nervous system and shift your mood. Here are examples:

- **Hearing your favorite song playing in a store**
- **A sweet conversation with a stranger**
- **A scent that reminds you of someone you love**
- **Spending five minutes absorbed in play with a child or pet**
- **A spectacular sunset on your drive home from work**

List 3 tiny joys you've noticed today:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Note: If this exercise is challenging, keep going. Over time, you'll notice more and more tiny joys.

### *For further study:*

Reason number one to pursue joy... it feels good! Here are a few more: Studies show that even small moments of joy can reduce stress and inflammation, make you more creative and productive, and even help you live longer.

### **CITATIONS**

- Fredrickson, B. L., & Levenson, R. W. (1998).
- Stellar, J. E., John-Henderson, N., Anderson, C. L., Gordon, A. M., McNeil, G. D., & Keltner, D. (2015).
- Oswald, A. J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2015) Happiness and productivity.
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- Harker, L., & Keltner, D. (2001).

# Lesson 2: To Find More Joy, You Must Feel It.

## IF I ASKED YOU TO DESCRIBE WHAT ANXIETY FEELS LIKE IN YOUR BODY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

You might describe butterflies in your stomach, sweaty palms, dry mouth, feeling shaky or like your thoughts are swirling and can't settle.

Now if I asked you to **DESCRIBE WHAT JOY FEELS LIKE IN YOUR BODY**, could you do it?

Negative emotions create such a sense of physical urgency that it's easy to forget that we feel positive emotions in our bodies too. Joy creates changes in heart rate, blood flow, posture, and facial expressions. It influences our attention and how much we see in our peripheral vision. But we often tune these physical sensations out because we've been conditioned to tone down our enthusiasm and ignore our body's emotional responses.

This **SIMPLE VISUALIZATION EXERCISE** will help you reconnect with the physical experience of delight and understand joy's unique signature on your body.

## PRACTICE: BREATHE INTO JOY

Use this exercise to expand a small moment of joy.

- **Close your eyes, take a few slow breaths, then think about a recent time when you felt joy.** It could be a time when you felt completely free, or a time when you laughed so hard that it hurt. It could be a time when the world felt magical to you, or a time when you were surprised by the power of a simple pleasure.
- **Surround yourself with the details of that moment.** Who were you with? What was around you? What did the ground feel like under your feet?
- **Now, turn your attention to your body.** What does joy feel like for you? Is it in one place, or all over? Does it have a color or a shape? A temperature or a texture?
- **Imagine expanding the moment as if you're blowing up a balloon.** Instead of watching the memory fly by, let it swell. Keep breathing into it for a few more moments, allowing it to sink in before you let go.
- **Open your eyes.** Use the diagram at the side to capture what joy feels like for you.

### *For further study:*

This exercise is brought to you by the science of savoring! Studies show that really concentrating on a joyful experience can increase life satisfaction, boost self-esteem, and help you feel happier even after the moment passes.

### **CITATIONS**

- Bryant & Veroff, 2007.
- Jose, P. E., Lim, B. T., & Bryant, F. B. (2012).
- Quoidbach, J., Berry, E. V., Hansenne, M., & Micolajczk, M. (2010).

# Lesson 3: You Can Create Joy for Yourself.

## **I USED TO THINK JOY WAS LIKE LUCK – GOOD TO HAVE, BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT.**

Research shows there are certain things that are universally, reliably joyful: sunsets, gummy baby smiles, ice cream with rainbow sprinkles.

We don't have to leave joy to chance. We can make more of it whenever we want. So why do we keep holding ourselves back from joy?

Well, we're conditioned to see joy as a reward. (Vacations are a reward for working hard. Dessert is a reward for working out.) The things we enjoy have been framed as an indulgence, or an extra.

No wonder we feel frivolous when we do things for the joy of it. Or lazy. Or selfish. No wonder we see deprivation as a form of virtue.

Here's a necessary reframe: JOY ISN'T A LUXURY.

## **Joy evolved as a core universal emotion because it helped our species survive and thrive.**

When you deny yourself joy, you're suppressing part of your humanity – abandoning an essential, innate tool to help you make the most out of your one life.

## **PRACTICE: TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR JOY**

Let's take fun seriously. It's time to protect the things that light you up inside. It's time to take responsibility for your joy.

REPEAT:

- **Joy is essential to my wellbeing.**
- **I don't need to earn it, wait for it, or seek permission for it. I will make it for myself. I'm worthy of joy just as I am.**
- **I deserve joy.**

FEEL FREE TO REPEAT THE LAST LINE EVERY DAY.

Feeling entitled to joy is a lifelong practice of unlearning guilt, shame, and judgment.

Every tiny moment of joy you choose brings you closer to your truest self. Feeling weird or worried that you won't do something well is part of reconnection. Over time, you'll find it easier to allow yourself (and others!) to enjoy life.

### *For further study:*

Let's talk emotional evolution. As you might know, negative emotions narrow our attention to focus on immediate threats to our survival. But what about positive emotions? Experts believe they broaden our focus out so that we can explore, create, learn new skills, and build deep, relationships that will help us thrive in the long run. Joy is truly essential.

### **CITATIONS**

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2004).

# Lesson 4: There's Plenty of Joy to Go Around.

## IT'S TIME TO GO INWARD. HAVE THOUGHTS LIKE THESE EVER CROSSED YOUR MIND?

- When a colleague does well: "I'm falling behind."
- When a friend meets someone new: "Our friendship must matter less to them now."
- When you get offered a great opportunity: "What's the catch?"
- When you are enjoying a carefree moment: "I shouldn't be doing this when so many others are suffering."

These thought patterns are manifestations of the scarcity myth, which says there's a fixed amount of good stuff in the world. Every good thing that happens to someone else subtracts from the good things available to you.

So we learn to compete (for jobs, for prestige, for cute singles in our area) and we forget that joy doesn't actually work this way.

## SOMEONE ELSE FINDING JOY DOESN'T DECREASE YOUR OWN CHANCES. IN FACT, IT MAKES IT MORE LIKELY.

When you understand that joy is abundant, you're more likely to find opportunities to make it so. You'll know that no matter what, joy will find you.

## PRACTICE: REWRITE YOUR SCARCITY SCRIPTS

Messages that reinforce a scarcity mentality are repeated as conventional wisdom, family teachings, and economic principles. How can you rewrite these scripts for yourself?

TURN: I'll never have what they have.

INTO: **There are many different paths to joy, I am free to make my own.**

TURN: You can't get something for nothing.

INTO: **I don't need to sacrifice to achieve my dreams.**

TURN: I'm running out of time.

INTO: **I have plenty of time to do what matters to me.**

TURN: You have to fight to get your piece of the pie.

INTO: **We can grow the whole pie, not just our individual piece.**

TURN: If I share, I'll have less.

INTO: **When I share joy, it grows.**

### *For further study:*

Scarcity doesn't just feel limiting, it is. Scarcity clouds our judgment and can lead to poor decision-making. In one study, feeling a sense of scarcity effectively reduced subjects' IQ by 10 points. (Researchers note that this effect explains how people in poverty get trapped by predatory loans, why overworked students mismanage their time, and why dieting actually makes it harder to resist temptation.)

### CITATIONS

- Mullainathan, S. and Shafir, E. (2014).

# Lesson 5: Joy Makes More Joy.

## **OUR EMOTIONS AREN'T SINGULAR AND ISOLATED. INSTEAD, THEY BUILD ON EACH OTHER, CREATING MOMENTUM.**

We've all felt the pull of a downward spiral — when something small spins us into a full-on Very Bad Day.

Well joy does the same thing in reverse. The benefits we reap from A SINGLE JOYFUL EXPERIENCE set us up for more joy in the future.

In the wake of a positive mood, we become more resourceful and creative. We open up to others, helping us strengthen our social ties. We become curious and exploratory, which pushes us out of our comfort zone and helps us discover new joys.

Researchers call this phenomenon an "UPWARD SPIRAL." The easiest way to think of it? JOY MAKES MORE JOY.

So instead of thinking of a moment of joy as too much effort or a waste of time, remember it's the first link in a chain reaction. It may take some energy to kick it off, but once in motion an upward spiral has its own momentum, sending ever-widening POSITIVE RIPPLES throughout our lives.

How could these currents change your life? Let's find out.

## **PRACTICE: THE JOYFUL MIRROR**

Imagine there's a magic mirror that reflects back at you your most joyful self. What do you see in this mirror? To answer this question, you might think and write about the following prompts:

- **What would a stranger notice about you if they met you on a day when you were particularly joyful?**
- **When you reflect on joyful memories, what do you notice about yourself?**
- **What would a friend or partner say about how your joy has affected them?**
- **What might happen in your life if you could be this joyful person more often?**

### *For further study:*

One study has shown that we're up to 12% more productive in a state of joy. What does a benefit like this mean in real life? More time. Applied to a workday, you'd save almost an hour — every day! You could use that time to go for a long walk, finally meet that friend for lunch, or dive in to your new novel. (See? Joy makes more joy!)

### **CITATIONS**

- Oswald, A. J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2015).

# Joy

Create the conditions for harmony,  
impact and acknowledgement

## *Harmony*

Understanding roles

Creating strong bonds

## *Impact*

Using talents effectively

Seeing role is critical to team success

Seeing how role contributes to business

success

## *Acknowledgement*

Celebrating shared success as a team

Acknowledging contributions to team success

# Bonus: Make Time for a Joy Walk.

You can do this activity in your neighborhood or even within your home. Use this worksheet as a guide to spotting joy.

Your favorite color

A wonderful scent

Something unexpected

A texture that feels good under your fingertips

Something that makes you want to play

A sign of growth or new life

Something someone else has done to create joy for others

A pleasant sound

Something that makes you say "Wow"

Something that makes you curious to know more

A shape that feels joyful to you

Something that reminds you of someone you love