

Happy Technicians Make Happy Clinicians

In October 2015 Dr. Daniel Sgroi, associate professor in the Department of Economics at Warwick University along with Andrew Oswald and Eugenio Proto undertook a 700-person experiment linking happiness to productivity. Their report, *Happiness and productivity: Understanding the happy-productive worker* was the fourth briefing paper in the Global Perspectives series, a collaboration between the Social Market Foundation and the University of Warwick's Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy. In three different styles of laboratory experiments, they treated one group to a "happiness shock" such as drinks and snacks or a ten minute comedy clip, left a second control group "untreated" and then posed a productivity task. The differences in productivity across the two groups determined the causal factor of the happiness shocks. Their results found that the individuals that received the happiness shocks had approximately 12 percent greater productivity than the control group.

Sgroi noted that in terms of economic growth, rises of 3 percent are considered very large and the impact of the happiness shocks they used was 10-20 percent. Even though their shocks were relatively cheap, the scale of the effect makes it likely that even close to zero cost "nudges" would have an impact. Another finding was that making subjects happy seems to encourage them to put in more effort but it does not make them better at the task.

Consider what measures could be implemented in the lab that would increase employee happiness and productivity. Many employers do not realize the potential providing happiness to their employees could have on their bottom line. It should be a priority for the human resources department to incorporate happiness strategies and also have a plan to address unhappiness issues when they arise.

Lonni J. Thompson, CDT, is the president and owner of LT Technology Enterprises, Inc., the parent company of Image Gallery in Dublin, Ohio, which she started in 1979. Since the start of her career it has been her driving business philosophy that she never wanted to be the largest lab, she just wanted to be the best lab and realized she couldn't do it without the best employees.

"In the beginning I had a hard time finding top quality people to do the kind of high-end artistic work that I wanted," said Thompson. "We have one of the best art schools in the country, Columbus College Art and Design, and I started working with them to recruit employees. They already had the artistic ability; I just taught them the science. And then once you get the good employees, the next step is to keep them happy."

Cross-training has always been an important element in Thompson's laboratory. She believes in order to create the best product employees need to know all of the pieces and then figure out what they like to do best. She's always had an open door philosophy and encourages employees to tell her what they want to do so they can figure out how to make it work for the laboratory as a whole. She encourages lab owners to find out where their employees want to go and put them in areas where they can work toward being where they want to be.

Thompson said, "I'm extremely lucky right now. I have a great group of employees; three are CDTs and everyone else is working on it. I offer raises once certification is achieved. I pay for continuing education courses and I send employees to industry meetings so everyone gets the opportunity to do something that would be helpful for them. My end goal is for everyone to be better than me! Also, some people don't even know they want to do something unless they try it. Go ahead and let them try it."

Additional employee benefits she offers are health insurance, vacation and personal days and a new bonus program. In this program, employees get ten percent of the profits on a quarterly basis. While all employees are a part of the bonus program, the payouts don't have to be equal. If one technician has demonstrated extraordinary work that quarter they may get more. This program has provided significant incentive for employees to continue to improve productivity.

Thompson has also undertaken her own journey. "Something I've come to learn over the years is that in general people don't like change," said Thompson. "I personally thrive on change and it took me awhile to understand why it was difficult for my employees. Now I just try to make them understand why as we are going through the process. For example, three years ago I installed a whole new software program that covers production

and scheduling. There was a lot of tension while this was happening and I kept reiterating that it will help all of us to get better. It took time for everyone to grasp it but now everyone loves it and can check on their own progress and productivity. This new software has undoubtedly improved my lab's production. I just had the best year ever, hitting numbers I didn't know I could hit. If you don't change, you die. But above all else, trust your employees and work with them to make sure they are happy doing what they are doing and you will be happy in return."

For Dave Lampert, MBA, vice-president and business manager of Town & Country Dental Studios in Freeport, N.Y., it's all about the culture. Town & Country was opened in 1962 by his father, Barry, and has grown to just over 100 employees. Lampert pointed out that back in the 60's, 'human resources' was much simpler. If you need a job, come in and work. Starting in the 80's and 90's businesses began facing more challenges such as new regulations, health insurance requirements like COBRA and reporting requirements to the labor department; human resources needed to provide more support.

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LT Technology Enterprises, Inc



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"As these new employment policies became a regular part of our office duties, it was clear that someone needed to become educated on the issues and capable of implementing them," said Lampert. "This was one of the reasons I decided to join the business in 1988 and handle these aspects so my dad could focus on the technical side."

Throughout his career Lampert has found that there are two important components to keeping employees happy; respect and appreciation. He believes that the culture is critical and that the culture starts with the organization's leadership. They believe in this so strongly that it's part of their mission statement to 'work in a nice place with nice people.' Lampert encourages labs of all sizes to have a visible mission statement and abide by those principles.

Lampert said, "When we say work in a nice place we really mean it. It should be clean, organized and accommodating to our employees with a nice kitchen, bathroom and work stations. We also want to work with nice people. This is the truth. Sometimes that means you have to pass up on excellent technicians because they do not fit your culture. One of the hardest things for a business to do is to get over the hurdle of saying 'no' or making that tough decision when you have an employee that cannot adapt to your business culture. But in applying that

theory, we have some of the best people in the region working here. Also, employees will surprise you in what's important to them. People like working in a nice place, where they are respected and appreciated and will stay with our lab even if they could make more money someplace else."

Increasing productivity at Town & Country is about good systems, improving processes and helping train people to meet or exceed the expectations of the new system or process. It is expected that implementing new ideas will meet with some resistance but Lampert works with employees to explain the situation and express the goals desired. His employees understand that it's not a personal objective to work them to the bone; it's about improving the overall system.

Overall though, the most critical piece of advice Lampert offers is to create a positive culture where people are treated with respect and work collaboratively. Employees need to know that their opinion counts and they are a part of the team and not being shoved around.

"That's the way we've always been from the start," said Lampert. "It's not perfect all the time but the facts remain that treating people with respect and having a good culture is a winning formula not just for this business but for all businesses."

Sgroi reflects in his report that in the post-2008 climate of spending cuts in the public sector, intense competition in the private sector and concern about future sources of economic growth and profit, an opportunity to boost worker productivity at relatively low cost would seem hard to dismiss. Having scientific support for generating happiness and productivity within the workforce should also help managers to justify efforts aimed at boosting happiness.

Increasing employee happiness can be relatively inexpensive. Options can range from a mentorship program for new employees or a pizza party every Friday. Owner transparency and open communication are absolutely free and are invaluable resources to build a happy and balanced workforce. Many states also offer a 'Best Companies' program through a state business magazine in which employees can anonymously evaluate their workplace through a survey. This exercise will give owners an honest look at how their employees view their environment. What "happiness shocks" can you implement in your lab? **JDT**



Steven, Barry, David Lampert. Town & Country Dental Studios