

A SMARTSHEET REPORT:

Want to Supercharge Your Career? Prioritize Happiness.



We all want to live successful, happy lives. Yet many of us have the equation backwards: we believe that if we work harder, we'll be more successful; and if we're more successful, then we'll be happier.

But according to positive psychologist Shawn Achor, we need to reverse the formula for happiness and success.¹ Achor says that by raising positivity in the current moment — before you ever reach the goalpost of success — you experience what he calls [the happiness advantage](#).² He argues that “75% of job successes are predicted by your optimism levels, social support, and your ability to see stress as a challenge instead of a threat.” This means that being happy at work actually contributes to your success, rather than the reverse.

If you feel like Achor's happiness advantage is easier said than done, you're not alone. Most of us are struggling to figure out how to achieve what the Danes call [Arbejdsglæde](#),³ or happiness at work. According to a Gallup poll, 85% of employees worldwide are either not very engaged or are actively disengaged from their jobs,⁴ indicating that many of us just aren't feeling it.

Disengaged and unhappy workers are costly for businesses. Studies show that happy workers are 12% to 37% more productive than unhappy employees.⁵ And other studies indicate that when employees are happier, companies make more money.⁶

But being happy at work isn't just about company productivity or employee engagement at a large scale. It's about actually enjoying how we spend the majority of our waking hours — and driving our personal and professional success. It's about getting up in the morning and looking forward to heading into work to tackle the next big initiative, coach team members, or serve customers.

So what does it take to create a happiness advantage for yourself? It might be easier than you think. It turns out that even minor adjustments can result in major improvements in our moods and attitudes. Here are seven things you can do to be happier at work — based on the latest research — plus instant happiness boosts that you can try right away for both immediate and longer-term benefits.

1, 2. Achor, Shawn. [The Happiness Advantage: Linking Positive Brains to Performance](#). TEDxBloomington, June 30, 2011.

3. [What The Heck is Arbejdsglæde](#). 2019.

4. Clifton, Jim. [The World's Broken Workplace](#). Gallup, 2017.

5. Revesencio, Jonha. [Why Happy Employees Are 12% More Productive](#). Fast Company, 2015.

6. Preston, Camille. [Promoting Employee Happiness Benefits Everyone](#). Forbes, 2017.

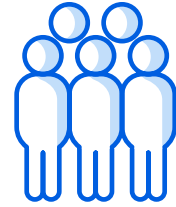
Make work matter

Start with what matters most for happiness at work: a sense of purpose or meaning. Research has found that the single most important factor that boosts emotions during the workday is the belief that one's work has meaning.⁷ One study shows that more than 9 out of 10 employees would be willing to trade a percentage of their lifetime earnings if they could find greater meaning in their work.⁸

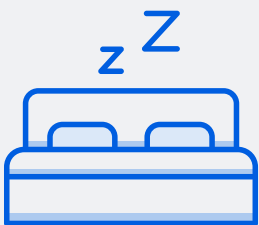
Workers who find meaning in their work aren't just happier, they're more productive. One study estimates when employees feel that their work is highly meaningful, they will generate an additional \$9,078 per worker per year for their company, plus an average savings of \$6.43 million in "annual turnover-related costs" for every 10,000 workers.⁹

Sometimes it can be difficult to see, but there are ways to find meaning in any job. Even if your day-to-day work seems mundane, reflect on what could be its higher purpose. A customer call could be a chance to really connect; a product you are helping to build could make someone's life a little easier.

This type of thinking is known as "job crafting" or "reframing"; that is, shifting your own perception of the work you do to focus on the meaning. One study found that the way we think about our jobs and the stories we tell about our job can be transformative.¹⁰ For example, a study of hospital custodial workers found that while some described their job as "cleaning toilets," others described it as "creating a positive environment for others."¹¹ Those in the latter group reported being happier at work.



Instant boost: Make a list — mental or physical — of the people (or groups of people) who benefit from your work. This could be the people your product helps, the people your customers help, your teammates, and even your family members (who benefit from the fruits of your labor).



Back to basics: Get good sleep

Getting enough sleep is one of the best ways to influence whether or not we have a good day.¹² While the majority of us need seven to nine hours of sleep a night to reap the full benefits, many of us skimp on sleep because we don't see it as important as our other obligations.

Some tips for better sleep:

- Schedule your zzzs: Prioritize sleep. Schedule your bedtime and wake-up time to ensure you get enough.
- Make your bedroom darker: Leading up to your bedtime, eliminate screen exposure. Try blackout curtains to cut down on ambient light from outside.
- Train your brain to fall asleep: Create a routine or ritual around your bedtime. Your brain will recognize the activities leading up to hitting the pillow as signals that it's time to sleep.¹³

You can find much more useful info about sleep at [sleepfoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org).

7, 12, 13. Webb, Caroline. "How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life." Currency, 2016.

8, 9. Achor, Shawn, Andrew Reece, Gabriella Rosen Kellerman, and Alexi Robichaux, "9 Out of 10 People Are Willing to Earn Less Money to Do More-Meaningful Work." Harvard Business Review, November 6, 2018.

10, 11. Zax, David. "Want To Be Happier At Work? Learn How From These 'Job Crafters.'" Fast Company, June 3, 2013.

Ask yourself why you do what you do. Sure, most of us need the paycheck, but is that the primary reason you're in this job right now? Spend some time reflecting on why your current role at your current company matters to you. And consider asking the same of your coworkers to see if what they say inspires you.

Finally, don't invest everything in your work. Make sure you balance your life between your personal growth, your loved ones, and your community – in addition to your work. "The happiest people according to all the best studies have a balanced portfolio," says Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute.¹⁴

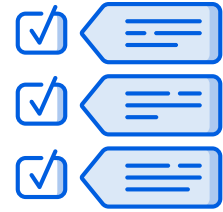
2.

Rewire your brain for positivity

According to some fascinating research, you can train your brain to be happier. Human beings have a tendency to spend more time thinking about what is bad in life.¹⁵ And while it can make sense to analyze and learn from things that didn't go well, dwelling on the negative can lead to anxiety and depression.¹⁶

If traffic is bad coming into work, your boss snaps at you, or you spill coffee on yourself on the way to your first meeting, it can color your whole day. Focusing on negative things can become a habit of mind. On the flip side, when we focus on what's right with the world – what's going well – everything looks a little brighter.¹⁷ And a positive mood can broaden our attention and lead to more creative thinking.¹⁸

The good news is that researchers in the field of positive psychology have found that we can train our brains to accentuate the positive by practicing the skill of thinking about what went well.¹⁹ We can actively choose to devote our attention to positive occurrences by setting intentions that prime us to focus on the good things in our day.²⁰



Instant boost: Every evening for the next week, either before you leave work or before going to bed, take 10 minutes to write down three things that went well – and why they went well. Set yourself a calendar reminder if you need to. Intentionally focusing on the good will give you an instant mental boost. Furthermore, this practice actually creates neural pathways that translate into more habitual positive thinking. Stick with it, and you are more likely to be happier six months from now.²¹

14. Friedman, Uri. "7 Ways to Find Meaning at Work." *The Atlantic*, July 4, 2016.

15, 16, 18, 19, 21. Seligman, Martin E.P. "Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being." Atria, 2011.

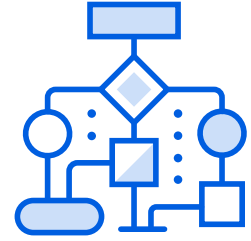
17, 20. Webb, Caroline. "How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life." Currency, 2016.

Let your signature strengths shine

Positive psychology research has found that playing to our signature strengths can increase happiness.²² And a [Gallup analysis](#) found that people who use their strengths every day are three times more likely to report having an excellent quality of life, six times more likely to be engaged at work, 8% more productive, and 15% less likely to quit their jobs.²³

Researchers Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman have identified the following character strengths in their book *Character Strengths and Virtues*:²⁴

1. **Wisdom and knowledge:**
Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective
2. **Courage:**
Bravery, persistence, integrity, vitality
3. **Humanity:**
Love, kindness, social intelligence
4. **Justice:**
Citizenship, fairness, leadership
5. **Temperance:**
Forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, self regulation
6. **Transcendence:**
Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality



Instant boost: Think of a project or process that you work on every day. How can you bring one of your signature strengths to that work? For example, if one of your character strengths is social intelligence, consider using a more people-focused approach to your project. Engage your coworkers and see who might be interested in sharing their ideas and helping out. Or if one of your character strengths is appreciation of excellence, take a moment to reflect on a job well done. For [more ideas on how to use each character strength](#), visit the VIA Institute on Character's website at viacharacter.org.



Back to basics: Exercise

Exercise is indelibly linked to happiness. Not only does exercise before work or during your lunch break improve concentration, it also boosts your mood.²⁵ Researchers at Bristol University found that exercise boosted people's mood and motivation by 41% and improved their ability to deal with stress by 27%.²⁶ And there's evidence that you can get these benefits with just 20 to 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity.²⁷

Some tips for getting in your exercise:

- Take a brisk walk at lunch time.
- Instead of a coffee break, take a quick walk around the block with your coworkers. Even a fast walk to and from a meeting can provide you with the benefits of exercise.²⁸
- Whenever you can, take the stairs.

22. Seligman, Martin E.P. "Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being." Atria, 2011. p.38.

23. Flade, Peter, Jim Asplund and Gwen Elliot. "Employees Who Use Their Strengths Outperform Those Who Don't." Oct. 8, 2015.

24. Peterson, Christopher and Martin E.P. Seligman. "Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification." American Psychological Association, Oxford University Press, 2004. ix-xi.

25, 26, 27, 28. Webb, Caroline. "How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life." Currency, 2016.

Rather than specific skills you possess at work (e.g. creating a brilliant presentation), these character strengths are fundamental to you in everything you do, according to Seligman.²⁹

So how can you let your signature strengths shine? The first step is to figure out what they are! Try taking the VIA Survey of Character Strengths developed by Chris Peterson at the University of Michigan (find it at viacharacter.org). See which of the signature strengths resonate with you.

You might also consider examining an especially enjoyable past success at work. What moments gave you the most satisfaction, or made work feel less like work? Take a look at which of your specific personal talents and qualities went into making that moment. Another approach you can take is to ask a few people you trust to share their thoughts on what they see as your unique strengths.

Once you've identified your strengths, find new ways to use them throughout your day. Though you can't always dictate the work you need to accomplish, you may be able to find ways to work that highlight your strengths and energize you throughout your day.

For example, if one of your strengths is humor, see if there's a way to infuse it into your team's culture, via a "daily quote" board or Friday Funny share. If you're most deeply engaged around issues of fairness and inclusion, see if there is a company group you can join, or a new employee you can mentor. And if you realize that you're at your happiest when you are learning, raise your hand for new assignments that stretch your skills, or ask to shadow someone for a day. Find out if your company offers professional development opportunities.

4.

Connect with coworkers

To truly elevate your work happiness, build friendships with your coworkers. In her book, *How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life*, Carolyn Webb writes that "in all empirical studies on psychological well-being, one thing emerges as a reliable foundation for happiness: the quality of our relationships."³⁰ One study found that close work friendships boost employee satisfaction by 50%, and that people who report having a best friend at work are seven times more likely to fully engage with their work.³¹

Make time to share non-work time with coworkers. Whether it's the occasional lunch or coffee out together, or just eating together in the lunch room instead of at your desk, connecting with others can give you a boost. Even chatting with the barista when you pick up your morning coffee can make you feel a tiny bit happier.³²



Instant boost: Tomorrow, do one new thing to make space for friendly connection at work. When you're getting coffee, tell yourself to slow down, make eye contact, and greet your coworkers with heartfelt enthusiasm. Set up a brown bag lunch date with one coworker a week to build connections and expand your network. Consider starting a monthly book club or group workout.

29. Seligman, Martin E.P. "Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being." Atria, 2011.

30, 32. Webb, Caroline. "How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life." Currency, 2016.

31. Riordan, Christine M. *We All Need Friends at Work*. Harvard Business Review, 2013.

And while you're at it, be choosy: Spend time with those at work who seem to radiate happiness. Emotions and moods can be infectious, so identify a few positive, upbeat people at work and spend some time in their orbit.³³

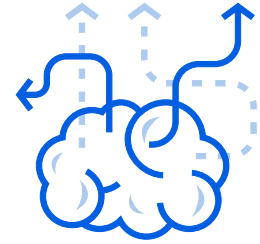
5.

Say 'thank you'

Positive psychology research has found that there is a positive link between happiness and gratitude.³⁴ Thanking someone for an assist or a job well done makes them feel good, and is also a mood booster for the one giving thanks.

Expressing gratitude can help us focus on what's going well and rewire our brains for positivity — helping us more quickly recognize the things that make us happy.³⁵ And one study found that expressing gratitude daily over time can not only provide us with a more positive view of our lives, it can even help us sleep better.³⁶

Expressing gratitude isn't just good for you — it can be good for your entire organization by helping to motivate others around you. One study found that managers who deliver a heartfelt "thank you" to the people who work for them may find that those employees are motivated to work harder.³⁷ Did one of your coworkers or direct reports go the extra mile to help you get a project over the finish line? Send them a note of appreciation or give them a sincere thank you in your next one-on-one meeting. And be specific. According to Kim Scott, author of *Radical Candor*, being specific and sincere with praise will improve your relationships at work.³⁸



Instant boost: Think of a coworker who has helped you out, either recently or when you first started at your current company. Spend a few minutes thinking about what the help meant to you, and the specific ways in which you appreciated it. Then take a gratitude coffee break with them and share your appreciation.



Back to basics: Practice mindfulness

Studies suggest that a practice of mindfulness enhances our sense of well-being, energy, and emotional resilience.³⁹ Practicing mindfulness has become mainstream — organizations from Google to the U.S. Army teach it to their teams to help them boost performance and increase resilience. But what is mindfulness? In her book *How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life*, Caroline Webb provides a simple yet powerful definition:

"At its heart, the practice [of mindfulness] is simply this: you pause, focus your attention on observing one thing, and calmly return your attention to that point of focus if your attention drifts away. Pause, focus, return — for anything from a few seconds to up to twenty minutes or more."⁴⁰

Though simple in its definition, practicing mindfulness can be a challenge for all of us when the busyness of the day catches up to us. Yet it's worth the effort — and doesn't have to take a lot of time to produce real benefits.

Some tips for practicing mindfulness:

- Choose a moment to slow down and notice everything you can about the moment you are in. What are you hearing, feeling, smelling? What are your senses (not your thoughts) telling you?
- Focus your attention on one thing (like your breathing). If your attention drifts, return your focus back to that one thing.
- Try a few different techniques and see which ones work for you.

33, 39, 40. Webb, Caroline. "How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life." Currency, 2016.

34. Stoerkel, Erika MSc. "The Science and Research on Gratitude and Happiness." Oct. 29, 2019.

35, 36. Greenberg, Melanie. "How Gratitude Leads to a Happier Life." Nov. 22, 2015.

37. "Giving thanks can make you happier." Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School. Nov. 21, 2019.

38. Scott, Kim. "A HIP Approach to Feedback: How to Achieve Radical Candor." Dec. 17, 2019.

6.

End on a high note

Our minds tend to assess work happiness on two levels: how we're feeling in the moment, and our remembered happiness when we reflect back on our day. Research has found that the latter has a bigger impact on our sense of well-being.⁴¹ This means that how we remember our days can hugely influence how happy we feel at work.

Our brains tend to remember the most intense moments we experience (the peak), as well as how things turn out (the end). Scientists call this the “peak-end effect,” as our brains create a simple shortcut version of events to file away. To make the most of our tendency to do this, seek to create endings on a high note. Research has found that “ending with something slightly less bad” makes people feel better about their experiences — and that ending on a really good moment is better than having a really good moment earlier, and then ending on a just-OK moment.

As you go through your day, think about how you can reframe the order of your tasks, moments, and/or meetings to end on a high note. Then don't forget to write your positive moments down. When you hack your brain into remembering happier days, happier you will be.



Instant boost: At the end of your next meeting or conversation, recap the most positive thing that happened to bring that highlight to the front of your mind — and help you remember the good moments all week long.

41. Webb, Caroline. “How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life.” Currency, 2016. p. 289.

7.

Pass it on

Increasing your happiness at work is possible. By taking small steps to set yourself up for a more positive outlook, practicing gratitude, and keeping track of the things that went well in your day to train your mind to focus on the positive, you can improve your mood and enjoy happier days at work.

Once you're feeling happier at work, you can spread that positive feeling throughout your organization. Our brains are wired to sense the emotional state of others: Social psychologists have found that being physically close to someone who is in a good mood can lift people's motivation and improve their performance.⁴² They found this to be true even when the people in the study were working on different things – and even if they didn't talk to each other.

We radiate emotions and others pick up on them. One study found that just looking at photos of people smiling could spark measurable feelings of happiness in those looking at the photos.⁴³

The research is making it increasingly clear: Our personal level of happiness has a major impact on our careers. Once considered the first thing to forfeit on a rise to the top, personal happiness should now be an indispensable part of your strategic career planning. So take steps today to be happier at work. Not only will you receive a mood boost – your career will get a boost, too.

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Suggested reading list

How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life

by Caroline Webb; 2016, Currency

Connect First: 52 Simple Ways to Ignite Success, Meaning,

and Joy at Work by Melanie A.

Katzman, PhD.; 2019, McGraw-Hill Education

Happiness by Design: Change What You Do, Not How You Think by Paul

Dolan PhD; 2015, Plume

Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity by

Kim Scott; 2019 revised edition, St. Martin's Press

The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom by

Jonathan Haidt; 2006, Basic Books

Flourish: A Visionary New

Understanding of Happiness and Well-being by Martin E.P. Seligman;

2017, Atria Books

Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment

by Martin E.P. Seligman; 2004, Atria Books

^{42, 43.} Webb, Caroline. "How to Have a Good Day: Harness the Power of Behavioral Science to Transform Your Working Life." Currency, 2016.

