

If your employer offered you happiness training at work, then you'd be working for one of the many organisations around the world seeking to increase satisfaction, positivity and happiness at work. And with good reason – research shows that it's not only good for you, it's good for business and the bottom line.

It's a practical topic which you can easily do something about in your organisation. Clients are increasingly asking for our assistance with building positive people, leaders and teams:

- "if we're happy, our teams perform well"
- "we're all here at work to pursue the goal of happiness"
- "we want our employees to be engaged and satisfied"
- "we want to foster a positive culture"

So, it's no surprise that "Happiness" is listed in the AFR's annual survey of top new business ideas & trends:

Australian Financial Review's Big Ideas: 2006. The business edge is all about big ideas.

#3 *Happiness* -- "Feeling blue? Then try learning how to override your negative emotions through learned optimism. The big breakthrough here is that simple ways to circumvent depressive thoughts can be highly effective and the effects then snowball. Thanks to the work of experts such as US psychologist Martin Seligman, these techniques are getting a wider airing. And while we're on happiness, yet more research is showing that economic prosperity is not synonymous with happiness. Economists are getting in on the act now and they reckon it's time we assessed quality of life in a new way that doesn't measure just financial prosperity. Translated to the workplace, the new happiness credo means that providing meaningful work and offering decent non-financial rewards can boost productivity and efficiency." [AFR Boss Magazine, June '06]

The Economics of Happiness.....

Ross Gittins (Economics editor, Sydney Morning Herald and The Age) spoke at an Australian Institute of Management breakfast earlier this month in Sydney: "The Meaning of Business Life – Is That All There Is?" Some of his key points included:

- Modern psychology is of increasing interest to economists
- We are into comparisons, competition, "materialism is catching"
- Wanting and enjoying are not the same thing
- If you're doing it for the money, make sure what you buy brings lasting satisfaction
- Question what you're working so hard for; stop worrying about the next promotion, status and keeping up with others
- Find the best trade-off – this is what economics is all about
- Our present era of hyper-materialism can't go on forever
- We all have control, we can "make changes at the margin, loosen up a little"; change happens when people make changes in their lived and "then the business world will calm down"
- "That's what I'd like to see: let's just calm down a bit. This is my message to the business world"

Over in the UK, British politicians, concerned that prosperity and economic development might actually cause unhappiness, are considering **GWB – General Well-Being**: "the central political challenge of our times". Tony Blair is seeking the advice of Lord Richard Layard, a Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, and who wrote "Happiness, lessons from a new science". Layard insists that "the pursuit of relative affluence and prosperity merely results in dashed expectations". [Canberra Times, 22/6/06]

Over in the USA, the most popular course at Harvard is "Positive Psychology, a class whose content resembles that of many a self-help book but is grounded in serious psychological research, has enrolled 855 students, beating out even Introductory Economics". [Boston Globe, 10 March, 2006]

About this article

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