



Don't worry, be happy

A happy workplace is good for the soul - and the bottom line. Domini Stuart reports.

It isn't often you get a chance to be selfish and selfless at the same time. As a business owner you can, just by keeping your people happy.

Happy employees are...well...happy. That, of course, is great for them. The good news for you is that they're also more loyal, more productive and, ultimately, more profitable. Even better, happiness isn't something you need to buy with expensive perks and bonuses. All you have to do is be a supportive leader, and be happy yourself.

Using data drawn from 450,000 employees in private and public sectors worldwide, InsightSRC found that supportive leadership was the single most important influence on workplace morale across every industry and job type.

“Supportive leadership is a recurring factor in the world's highest-performing organisations,” says Dr Peter Cotton, a leading organisational psychologist and principal consultant with InsightSRC. “It underpins everything that can make an employee feel comfortable in a job, from role clarity and consultative decision-making to a positive culture of co-worker interaction, appraisal and recognition.”

In a world where occupational stress is responsible for significant absenteeism, workers' compensation claims, reduced productivity and poor client service, the happiness flowing on from supportive leadership can also have a significant impact on dollars and cents. Cotton cites the example of an Australian State Government department which reduced workers' compensation premiums from almost \$800,000 in 2000 to less than \$200,000 three years later. “The organisational health program they used cost less than \$20,000, and it didn't even mention 'stress', 'rehabilitation' or 'early warning systems',” he says. “Instead, it focused on the broader issue of leadership and its influence on workplace culture.”

You as mentor

As director of a consulting, coaching and business advisory hub known as 3rdi, Angela Sinclair is passionate about helping her clients to create healthy, happy and sustainable working environment. She, too, believes that supportive leadership is key.

“Business owners tend not to realise how much their staff look up to them – as a mentor as well as a leader,” she says. “They’re genuinely amazed when they realise how closely their employees’ behaviour reflects their own. If they’re grinding themselves into the ground, chances are their people are too.”

When Peter Moore of Melbourne’s Shēk Hair Group called in 3rdi, his primary concern was that his business had started to outrun his skills. “I’m a qualified hairdresser, not trained in business at all, so I was flying by the seat of my pants,” he says.

Sinclair began with a business health check, created a business plan and put a number of effective and manageable systems into operation. However, for 3rdi, this was very much the first step.

“I guess the clue is in our name,” says Sinclair. “It’s pronounced ‘third eye’, which is all about consciousness, energy and centred vision. We chose it because we like to mix insight, fun, transformation, consciousness and passion in with the figures and charts.”

In Moore’s case, this more holistic view included an appraisal of his physical health.

“I eat well, but I’ve always said I don’t have time to exercise,” he says. “Angela encouraged me to *make* time, and now I cycle before I start work, 150-200k a week. I definitely have more stamina, and that makes it easier to cope with the pressure of working long hours and managing eight staff.”

Once Moore was feeling happier, healthier and more in control of his business, Sinclair began helping him to help him lead and motivate his employees. “Creative people aren’t likely to have a conventional approach to business,” he says. “Show most hairdressers an ordinary business chart and their eyes will glaze over. Angela understands this, and she helped me to simplify our communications and make them more appealing. For a visual person, using colour and images rather than words and figures can make all the difference.

“She also encouraged us all to sort out our personal goals – to focus on the things we feel passionate about at home as well as the things that made us want to be hairdressers in the first place,” he continues. “We even do Qui Gong as a group every Saturday morning. As a result, there’s an amazing energy and enthusiasm about the place. I never have to advertise for staff, they just turn up and say they want to work here.”

And is all this happiness good for business?

“I’ve no doubt that customers feel the positive energy too,” says Moore. “In fact, we’ve attracted so much extra business lately that I’m about to open a second salon.”

Happiness by example

Your employees are much more likely to do what you do than what you say – and creating the right example is as good for you and your business as it is for them

- Take care of your physical health. Eat well, do some exercise, get enough sleep.
- Prioritise and allocate your time, then fully engage with whatever you're doing at that moment. If you're worrying that you should be at home while you're working, or that you really should be working when you're playing with the kids, everything will suffer.
- Don't give out mixed messages. If you tell your people to work five 8-hour days then make it obvious that you're working seven 12-hour days they'll feel guilty if they leave on time, resentful if they feel compelled to stay.
- Lead by co-operation and support rather than coercion and instruction.
- Talk to your people about things other than work. They'll feel that you care – and you'll gain invaluable insight into what really motivates them.
- Develop your intuition, then balance it with common sense.
- Spend 30 minutes every day doing something you really love – anything from watching a soap or reading a trashy magazine to writing your memoirs or meditating. It doesn't matter what it is as long as you're doing it for yourself and not to impress someone else.
- Reconnect with the passion that inspired you to start your own business in the first place.