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The Happiness Factor

WHAT IS HAPPINESS? It's a subjective term, and it can be different for everyone. But, most of us think we know it when we see (or feel) it. What about happiness at work? These days it seems like just *having a job* should be enough to make you happy, but that's not all it takes. We want to be passionate about what we do; we want to feel appreciated at our jobs; and many of us want the flexibility to work the best way we can.

I recently read Gretchen Rubin's *The Happiness Project: Or Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle and Generally Have More Fun*. I discovered Rubin through her accompanying blog (www.happiness-project.com), where she provides tips, quotes and general inspiration on the pursuit of happiness. Less of a self-help book and more of a memoir, *The Happiness Project* describes a year in Rubin's life of taking on different happiness challenges like boosting her energy through exercise, honoring friendships by remembering birthdays and enjoying her children more by opening up herself to silliness.

Rubin picked a theme each month of the year on which to focus, and several made me believe I was on the right track to my own version of happiness: *That's why cleaning the basement made me feel so good* or *That really isn't worth the fight, is it? Just let it go*. There were several chapters (or months) in *The Happiness Project* where Rubin tackled ideas that could boost one's happiness at work, no matter what work you do.

PAY ATTENTION, BE MINDFUL

Rubin examined those rules we all make for ourselves that can actually set us back. For example, "Try to attend every party or event to which I'm invited" or "Always say yes." Many of our readers are members of several associations at once, attending meetings on a weekly basis. You can't be in this industry without networking, right? However, those meetings and events, on top

of your day job, can really take their toll. Perhaps cutting back on just one or two a month could help rejuvenate you for all the rest that's on your plate, in turn making you happier?

But, saying "no" is hard. Again, we should all just be happy we're employed, so we do what we're told, no questions asked. Even if it means we're scrambling and suffering from burnout. However, study after study and article after article claim you can be happier by prioritizing what's most important to you and saying "no" to the other things. Whether it's declining to sit on one more association board or make five dozen cupcakes for a bake sale at your son's school, saying no helps you focus on the projects at hand and keeps your mind less cluttered.

AIM HIGHER

When Rubin vows to "aim higher" in her work, she focuses on asking for help and enjoying the present. No matter what your job is, you can't know it all. Maybe you're holding an event at a venue you've never been to before. Or perhaps the largest convention this town has ever seen is coming in the next several years. Knowing it's OK to ask for help, and actually doing it, can only boost your happiness. You'll make connections you might never have made before, you'll achieve goals you couldn't on your own, and you'll be less stressed by delegating your weakness to someone who claims that task as a strength.

It's also easy to imagine you'll be happier "once this event is over," or "once this hotel renovation is complete." Rubin encourages enjoying the present because arriving at that future goal rarely makes you as happy as you thought it would. She writes, "You look forward to reaching these destinations, but once you've reached them, they bring emotions other than sheer happiness. And of course, arriving at one goal usually reveals another, yet more challenging goal ... The challenge, therefore, is to take pleasure in the atmosphere of growth, in the gradual progress made toward a goal, in the present."

ADJUST YOUR ATTITUDE

It's so simple, yet so hard for many of us. Those people who have good attitudes, who always seem content and satisfied? They're happier. "It's easier to complain than to laugh, easier to yell than to joke around, easier to be demanding than to be satisfied," Rubin writes. It can be as simple as letting go of the little things or laughing off a little mistake. We're so quick to criticize, but if a vendor was a dream to work with, why not write or phone in a good review to that person's boss? It'll make both you and the vendor happy. And really, that's the whole point. ■

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