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The Power of Happiness

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THE POWER OF HAPPINESS

- Sarah Romney -

WE ALL GREW UP HEARING THE CHEESY LINE,

"a smile is contagious."

But, this phrase represents a simple idea that may be the key to improving your entire experience at work and school each day. Whether you are dealing with an unproductive team, a tough boss, or a personal lack of motivation, focusing on a positive attitude will improve your own success, as well as affect the emotions and performance of your classmates and coworkers. Not every problem will be solved by pasting a smile on your face and hoping it will work out. However, one's conscious and persistent effort to be happy can significantly impact an organization.

Emotions are Contagious

Whether you are happy, sad, excited, or bored, your attitude will spread to others. The human brain is fascinating in that it recognizes and reflects social cues from other people, whether or not we notice it. The psychological principle of “mirroring” explains that we tend to mimic and reflect the expressions of other people. Not only do we start to reflect the expression on their faces, but our facial expressions and posture become the emotions we are feeling inside (Hatfield et al., 1993). So, like a virus, your attitude will quickly spread around the workplace and school to your colleagues and to your

family at home. Focusing on having a positive attitude will likewise make others that you interact with happy and positive.

Professors James H. Fowler and Nicholas A. Christakis performed a study in which they measured people’s levels of happiness based on the levels of happiness of others in their social networks. Happiness was determined by a series of questions about feeling happy and enjoying life. The study showed that people were about 15% more likely to be happy if their first-degree acquaintances were also happy. This statistic decreased as the directness of the relationship with the person decreased, but there was still a significant impact on happiness up to four degrees

of separation from the subject (Fowler, Christakis, 2008). The chart shows these findings based on the directness of the relationship in the social network (see Figure 1). The feelings of happiness that one finds in social networks, even from people not in the person’s direct network, are significantly correlated with that person’s happiness.

Attitude Improves Performance

So, why does being happy help so much? In school systems, the curriculum and schedule is important, but another important contributing factor to student’s performance is their attitude. And what contributes most to the attitude of the students? Not surprisingly, it is the attitude of the teacher! The attitude of one leader can spread to a class full of students, causing them to perform better (Osae, 2016).

Similarly, the results of customer service interactions also depend greatly on the attitude of the salesperson (Libin, 2017). When salespeople have a positive attitude, they are more likely to make a sale, which shows how their attitude can influence responses of others and their own personal performance.

One’s attitude affects performance, as well as other contributing factors. From examining a variety of studies, Dr. Geetika Patnaik explains that optimism and positive emotions improve a person’s motivation, ability to make decisions, capacity to think creatively, and physical health (Patnaik, 2017). A positive and happy attitude leads to improved performance and output.

Happy Workers Earn More

Happiness of employees is also shown to improve their wage both directly by standing out more and indirectly through improved performance and increased output for the company. In an analysis performed by Madhu S. Mohanty, a survey that measured positivity and

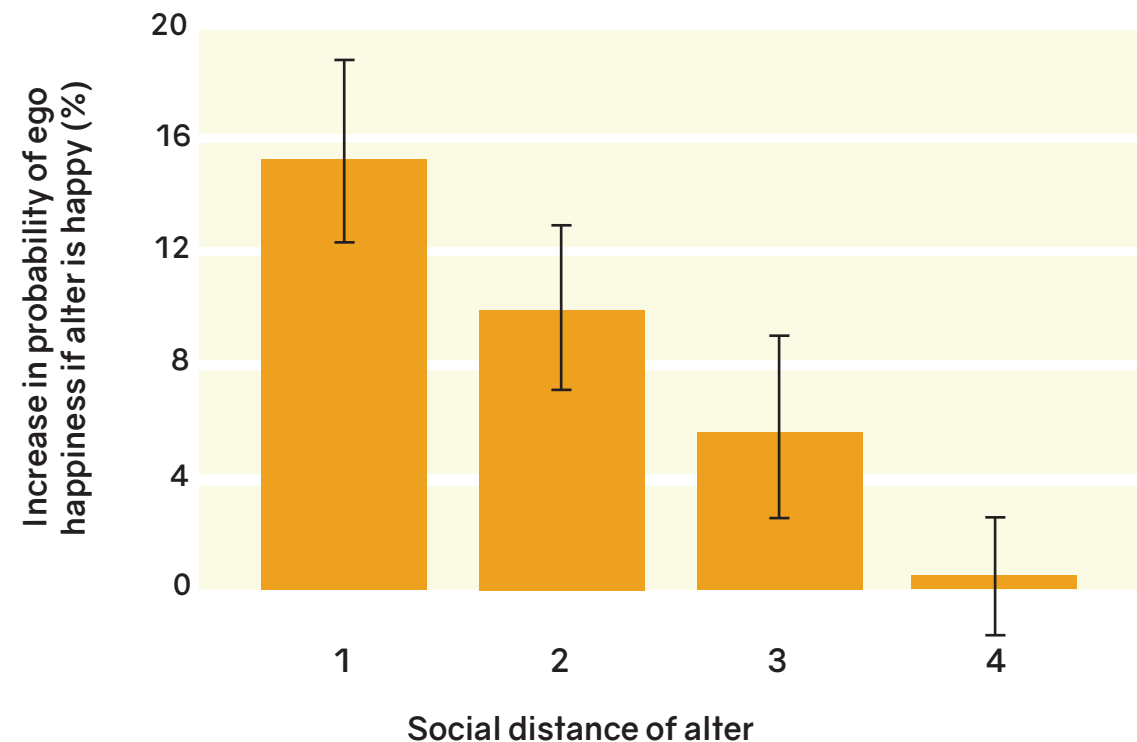
happiness of workers compared to their wage, based on different variables. The analysis showed a statistically significant positive effect on wage both directly and indirectly from other variables that are impacted by a positive attitude (Mohanty, 2009). Even if happiness does not somehow magically alter the ink on your paycheck, it leads you to work harder, perform better, and be noticed by supervisors and is shown to have a strong correlation with wage.

Individuals' Attitudes Improve Teams

Not only does focusing on a happy attitude improve one’s personal performance and success, but through the effects that your emotions have on others, positivity can also benefit teams. Teams are more “resilient” when team members are happy. This helps them work together to solve problems and face adversity. A study was conducted on 216 different teams belonging to 40 companies where positive attitudes of team members including enthusiasm, optimism, satisfaction, comfort, and relaxation were compared to the team’s resilience. The collective emotions were shown to significantly improve the team’s resilience (Meneghal et al., 2017). Even when only some of the team members are happy and positive, those that do not have a positive attitude still perform better when surrounded by those that do (Livi et al. 2015). You can’t go wrong by bringing a good attitude to a team; your positivity will benefit each of its members.

FIGURE 1

Figure 1 represents the probability that someone is happy if their acquaintance is also happy. The “social distance” refers to the directness of the relationship. (i.e. a “1” means that the person is in the subject’s immediate social network, a “2” is a person in the social network of the subject’s acquaintance, etc.)



Source: bmj.com

LET AN
Romney: The Power of Happiness
ENTHUSIASTIC Demeanor

shine

THROUGH IN YOUR POSTURE,
VOICE, AND FACIAL EXPRESSIONS,
LEAVING YOURSELF
CHEERFUL AND RADIATING
HAPPINESS TO OTHERS.

How Can You Be Happy?

When work or school is tedious, boring, challenging, or overwhelming, how can you have a happy, positive attitude all the time? It goes back to “feedback,” the idea that our facial expressions and posture contribute to how we feel on the inside. Basically, you must “fake it ‘til you make it.” Even if you are not feeling happy or excited, by controlling your expressions and making yourself appear happy and excited, you will actually start feeling that way (Hatfield et al., 1993). A smile does, in fact, go a long way. However, a smile here and there may not do the trick. You must let an enthusiastic demeanor shine through in your posture, voice, and facial expressions, leaving yourself cheerful and radiating happiness to others.

Emotions are powerful and contagious. By focusing on something as simple as your attitude, you can easily make a positive impact in your school and work environment, or any organization for that matter. The benefits include, but

are not limited to, improved performance, more resilient teams, and a higher wage at work. You can enjoy work and life more and help others catch the epidemic too. So, be the one to influence others and not to be influenced!

Notes

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