

The Five Ways to Happiness at Work

Happiness is the workplace of the future, but creating a positive organizational culture is not easy. In this article, we've determined five key ways to happiness at work that will improve your employee's work experience, bring change to your team and grow your company in a post-pandemic world.

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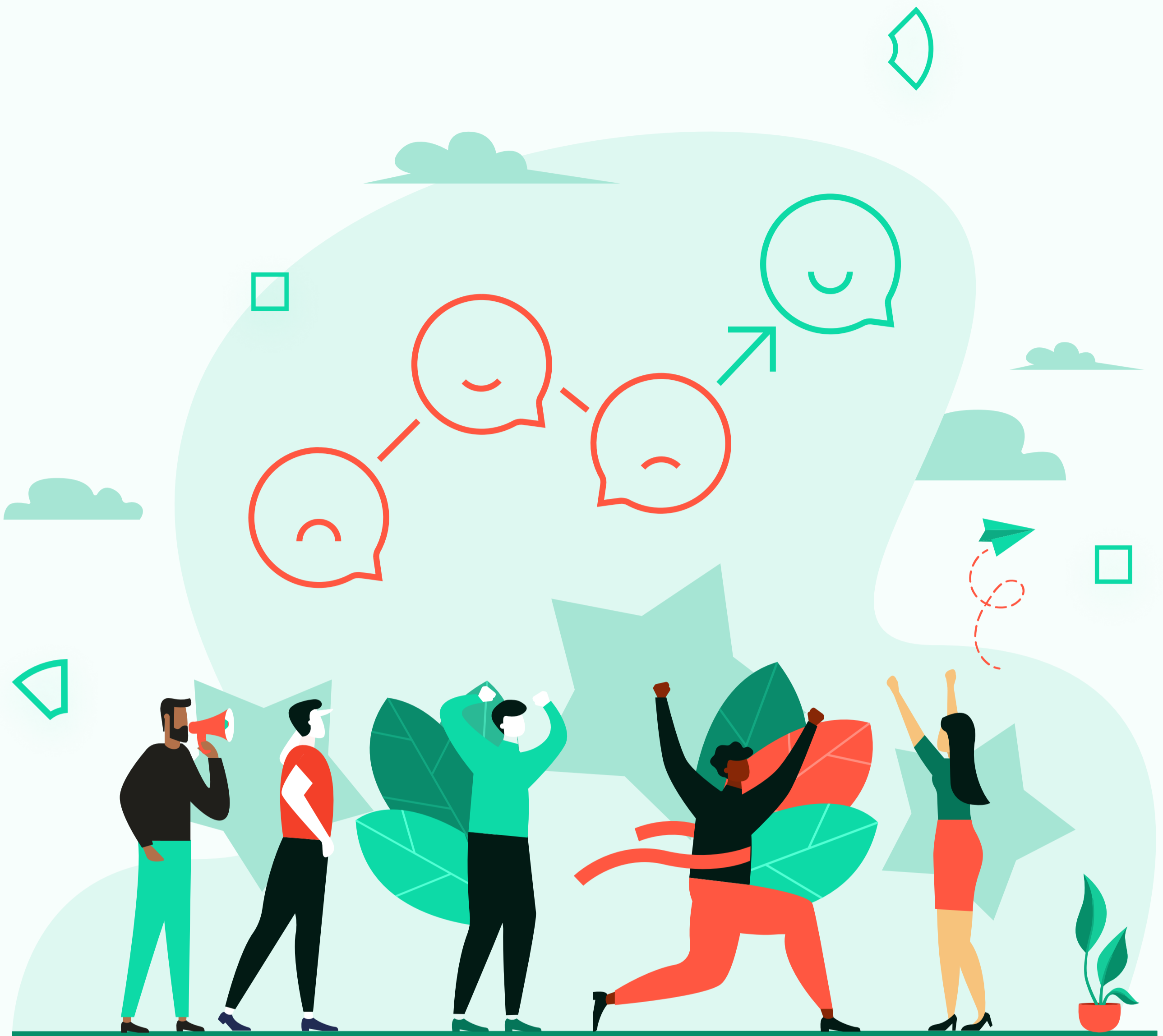
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Happiness and Work Are Not Mutually Exclusive

“ A job is a job. I find happiness outside of work in my personal life.

YOUR EMPLOYEE, TODAY

Happiness and work for most people are mutually exclusive terms. Even the layman definitions are unfair. Work is the time and effort you put in to receive a wage. Happiness covers all the enjoyable things experienced outside of work — family, hobbies, relaxation. In other words, fun things. There’s a clear boundary between work and happiness.

For most, work and happiness rarely intersect — a depressing thought when you consider how much of a day we spend at work. It’s the sort of thing that’s enough to tap into the deepest of existential questions. Most people work out of obligation, to provide for dependents, or just to survive. Rarely do people get to do what they love for work.

Yet, at Friday Pulse, we not only claim that happiness at work is a real thing, but it’s also achievable within your organization.

Happiness is a catch-all word for a whole array of positive emotions — some of which are certainly about enjoying yourself and not thinking very hard. Other emotions such as curiosity, enthusiasm and interest have different energies to them that positively impact work.



Making work a positive and happy experience isn’t the same as making it a laugh-out-loud fun zone all the time — although laughter has been proven to bring people together. Neither is it about throwing lavish parties in an attempt to raise office morale. These temporary solutions may bring short bursts of positive emotions, but they won’t create lasting happiness at work.

There is a place for fun at work, but it has to be balanced against the aim of creating a productive environment.

To use a metaphor, happiness at work isn’t a flash in the pan — it’s a slow burn, continuous process, that extends over weeks, months, and even years. Yet, happiness at work creates energy, sustains itself and builds momentum. It’s about creating a culture that brings out the best in people, keeping them motivated, innovative and engaged in what they do at work. [In our other article](#), we talked about how employees are rarely engaged. Happiness is a way to get these people back.

Happiness and your bottom line



NIC MARKS
FOUNDER & CEO, FRIDAYPULSE™

Over the last 25 years, Friday Pulse Founder & CEO, Nic Marks has been fascinated with people and data — especially data about people. He believes emotions like happiness could be tracked and quantified. His research led him to advise the British government on measuring wellbeing and to create the **Happy Planet Index**, which he gave a [TED Talk](#) on in 2010. Based on original research into the science of happiness, Nic and the team at Friday Pulse have identified five positive behaviours that are the key drivers of happiness that can improve your company's culture:



BE FAIR CONNECT EMPOWER CHALLENGE INSPIRE

Unhappiness easily sets in when one or more of these factors are out of balance. However, external events can just as easily impact happiness. The disruption from COVID resulted in great strife. COVID affected us all differently. Some were able to work remotely and consequently worked to the point of burnout, while others were furloughed or made redundant. Office policies may have required people to return from remote working before they were ready, leading to resentment.

While COVID changed the world of work, it hasn't changed human motivation. In this light, **The Five Ways to Happiness at Work** are a lens through which we can take stock of our organizations as we reintegrate our workforce. When an organization fails to take these drivers seriously, unhappiness and resentment can quickly set in.

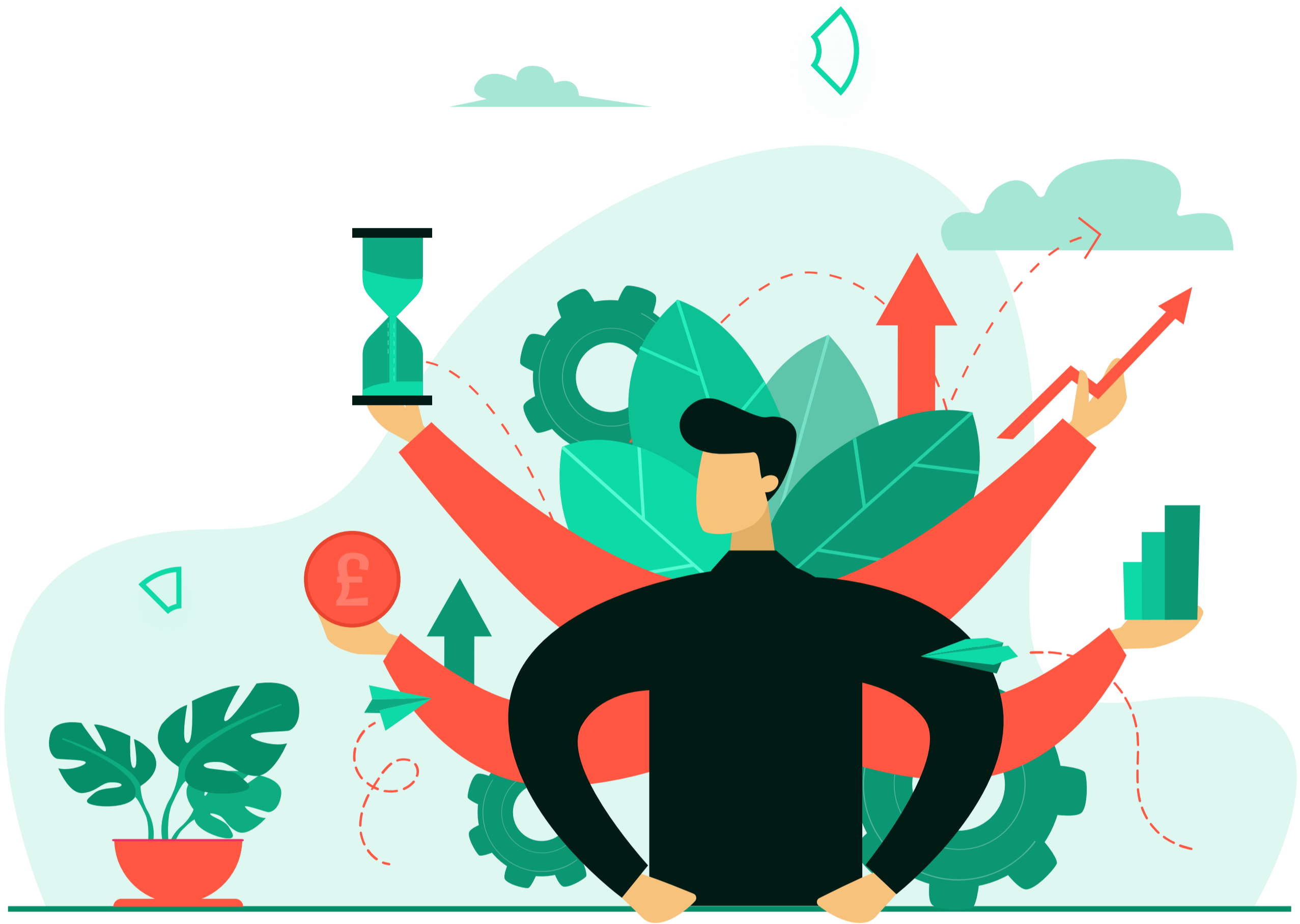
Even in a COVID and post-COVID world, recent headlines show the top reasons why people quit their jobs: they're often overworked, not recognised for their achievements, trapped and unable to grow or learn new skills. Employees who leave often talk about how isolated they are, how toxic the work environment was, how office politics are a nightmare, how they're micromanaged, bored or disconnected from the mission of their employer.

All of these problems have their roots in ignoring the five drivers of happiness.

The impact of not taking happiness seriously is readily apparent in the high turnover and low engagement rates that businesses and governments report each year.

During COVID everyone's happiness has been under severe pressure. However, Friday Pulse clients, who are all businesses that take employee wellbeing seriously, **fared much better than others**. While many businesses languished, our clients were able to return to happiness levels 24% higher than their peers.

If it's just a job to employees, they probably won't give their best effort. Research shows that improving happiness at work leads to a workforce that's more motivated, more innovative, and has better internal relationships. This results in better retention rates, better customer service, enhanced performance, higher social value and, ultimately, a better bottom line.



The Five Ways to Happiness at Work

“ No one cares about me at work. I’m replaceable. I work so hard and don’t get to see my family. But none of the work I do matters. It’s not making the world a better place. It’s just profit to them.

YOUR EMPLOYEE, TODAY



CONNECT: It all starts with people

FRIENDSHIPS. COOPERATION. A SENSE OF BELONGING.

It's much easier to do great work when we get along well with our colleagues. Teams who encourage, support and appreciate each other make problem solving, innovation and success possible.

For almost everyone, working involves some level of interaction with other people. The quality of those interactions and the extent to which they are supportive, encouraging and appreciative is an important influence on how people feel at work. Good working relationships support cooperation, collaboration, higher performance and help create a pleasant working environment.

Positive relationships with others help people cope with the demands of the job. More fundamentally, good relationships are a basic psychological necessity. We need to feel that people care about us and to feel close to others. This applies as much to work as to our other relationships.

TEAM RELATIONSHIPS



The relationships we have with the colleagues we work with most closely are what define our day-to-day experience at work. From the 'how was your weekend?' on Monday to the after-work social on Thursday, our teammates can be a reliable source of support and enjoyment. Positive team relationships allow employees to be themselves and cope better with the demands of the job.

INTER-TEAM COOPERATION



How well teams co-operate is often overlooked, yet this has a significant effect on levels of frustration, stress and perceptions of progress. Things go more smoothly when teams work well together, and frustrations quickly build when they don't. Frequently, work content and volume are affected by colleagues outside our team. It's no surprise, therefore that the degree to which people feel teams in an organization work together is strongly related to the happiness of employees in the organization.

FRIENDSHIPS AT WORK



It's good for our spirits to have people around us we care about and who care about us. Asked what they value in a job, over two-thirds of people consider good relations at work to be 'very important', and with good reason. Research highlights a positive relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction. Friendships help us deal with stress and bring meaning to the work we do.



BE FAIR:

The foundation of a happy place to work

RESPECT. APPRECIATION. SPACE FOR PEOPLE'S LIFE OUTSIDE WORK.

Being treated with fairness and respect is fundamental to happier work. People flourish when organizations are responsive to their needs and value the energy they put in. Teams flourish when colleagues appreciate one another.

Fairness at work can be thought of in two ways: distributional fairness (fair outcomes), and procedural fairness (fair processes). This is because people care about the actual outcomes of any decision or procedure and the conditions and processes that lead to the outcomes.

For example, we may be more likely to accept a decision we disagree with if we think the decision-making process is fair than if we believe the process is unfair. Both distributional and procedural fairness have been shown to relate positively to work happiness.

RESPECT



Respect isn't something that comes from a position or title — it's earned over time. A major part of creating fairness at work is ensuring that everyone is respected and treated equitably. Rules apply to everyone, not just a handful of people. Additionally, research has shown that low feelings of respect and fairness correlate with higher reported levels of stress and that feeling respected in one month can predict the level of happiness in subsequent months.

APPRECIATION



Showing appreciation for employees is essential. This can be through public recognition in team meetings or privately for jobs well done, or extra effort. Visible appreciation elevates the positive energy and creates a culture of recognition — higher performing teams are more positive in their words and behaviour towards each other. Appreciation has also been found to increase creativity in employees and teams alike.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE



The right work-life balance for your workplace should be a high priority. It is often a cause of conflict, as people sometimes find it hard to negotiate the tensions between work and home demands. **The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS)** – a survey of people in 27 European countries – found that poor ratings of work-life balance were the strongest predictor of stress and highly correlated with intention to quit.



EMPOWER: Give people the freedom to use their strengths

TRUST. DELEGATE. THE OPPORTUNITY TO SELF-ORGANIZE.

Sharing responsibility and playing to people’s strengths can unleash amazing potential in organizations. When people can be themselves and use their judgement, they do great work.

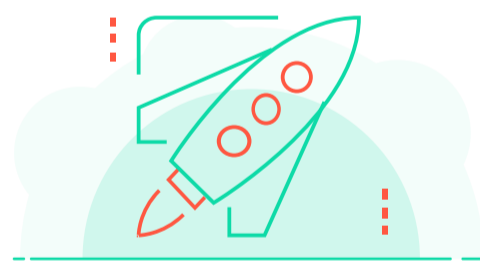
Studies show that people-oriented towards autonomy and intrinsic motivation have higher self-esteem, better interpersonal relationships and greater general wellbeing than those who are extrinsically motivated. Research papers – including a meta-analysis of 28 studies covering over 15,000 respondents – have found a correlation between job autonomy and overall job satisfaction.

STRENGTHS USE



Too often, team leaders don’t know the strengths of their team members or the kind of work they enjoy doing. More often than not, it’s when employees are on their way out that they reveal the work they enjoy. Narrow job descriptions further stifle the full spectrum of personality that exists in team members. Rather than participating in a futile exercise of hindsight, employees should be put in a position where they can use their strengths.

FREEDOM TO BE YOURSELF



Though employees were hired to fit a specific role, they are not drones — they want to maintain a sense of self. Autonomy-supportive management is associated with greater employee job satisfaction, higher levels of trust in management and other positive work-related attitudes. In many cases, this means managers need to be able to lead without micromanaging and give their teams choice and the room to take the initiative for themselves. This also means being able to acknowledge the perspective of employees and their opinions.

INFLUENCE DECISIONS



Employees show higher levels of wellbeing when they have opportunities for control. As well as control over our job, the control we have to the broader organization, and our participation in organizational decision-making may also be important for wellbeing.

Involvement in decision-making has a positive effect on wellbeing if they help to impact organizational changes. However, if people feel frustrated that the changes they want are not being implemented, or that they’re not being listened to, involvement in decision-making can negatively affect wellbeing, and may be detrimental to workplace trust.



CHALLENGE: Professional development fosters a sense of achievement

STRETCH. ENJOYMENT. SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.

People are happy in their jobs when they are absorbed and progressing their work. By making jobs interesting, organizations pull people into spaces where they learn and achieve great things.

An employees' perception of their opportunities for developing new skills is a strong indicator of their job satisfaction and wellbeing. It shows that they are invested in their work and are seeking to improve at it. Some researchers even go so far as to say that without some opportunities for learning, thriving at work becomes impossible.

LEARNING



Training is one-way employers can give the people who work for them the opportunity to learn new skills. Receiving training is positively associated with job satisfaction and employees who have received any training in the previous year report greater satisfaction with a range of aspects of their jobs. Research has also shown that the perception of having opportunities for skill development could predict company productivity for the following year.

However, training of less than one day is associated with lower satisfaction for some parts of the job than receiving no training at all. This perhaps reflects that very short training is more likely to do with compliance (such as meeting health and safety requirements) rather than enhancing skills.

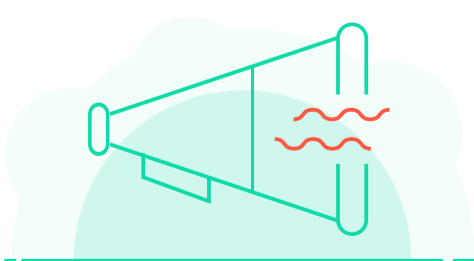
CREATIVITY



In addition to the autonomy to choose tasks, the freedom to be creative about work leads to higher productivity. Research has shown that when our skills are in balance with the level of challenge a task demands, people can become absorbed in work. This feeling of focus, engagement and satisfaction so that a sense of time and place sometimes melts away is called 'flow'.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the psychologist who discovered and researched this concept, found that people are more likely to reach a state of flow at work rather than in leisure. Flow can be experienced only when a person is required to work at a high level of skills; jobs that do not challenge us necessarily prohibit the experience of flow.

FEEDBACK



Feedback is a lot like recognition and appreciation discussed in previous sections. It's a human touch that shows that team leaders are not just invested in what an employee can do, but in their professional development. Feedback applied correctly helps encourage people to work through challenging goals at work, to develop a growth mindset and develop new skills.



INSPIRE: employees want to feel they are making a difference

PRIDE. PURPOSE. BEING PART OF A BIGGER PICTURE.

Doing a job that we feel is genuinely worthwhile is a great source of motivation in our lives and can sustain us through challenging times. Seeing beyond narrow business goals to how we help other people makes work more meaningful.

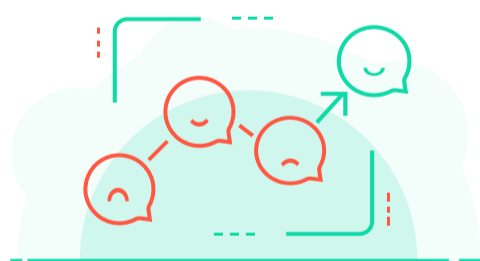
A sense of purpose comes from feeling like our efforts at work are worthwhile and is vital for feeling motivated. We may feel our work is worthwhile if it contributes to improving the world outside us; whether that's our office, our family, our organization, the place we live or the wider world.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS



We all want to feel that we're achieving things at work in exchange for the effort we put in, but it goes deeper than that. Accomplishment relates to competence, and our sense of competence is the feeling that we have an impact on the world. Without a sense of accomplishment, we can be left feeling frustrated and, in turn, that affects our relationship to work. Employees can gain a better sense of accomplishment through role clarity which helps employees get visibility on what they are accomplishing.

WORTHWHILE WORK



A sense of purpose is essential for people at very high levels. But those who do so in the service of some greater objective can achieve even more. Instilling meaning and purpose in work helps employees have more fulfilled, productive experiences at work. Employees who are motivated by a higher purpose and feel their contribution matters to management are more effective in their roles and more loyal to their employers.

ORGANIZATIONAL PRIDE



A Deloitte report looked at engagement levels in purpose-driven companies (defined as having 'an important objective that creates meaningful impact for stakeholders' – those stakeholders being customers, employees, their communities, and investors). It found that 73% of employees who say they work at a 'purpose-driven' company are engaged, compared to just 23% of those who don't.

Powerful Combinations



The Five Ways to Happiness at Work are synergetic and interconnected.

For example, workers who have good relationships with their colleagues and managers may find it easier to ask about learning new skills. Or they might feel more empowered to shape their job to suit their strengths and knowledge better.

Meanwhile, those who have a good work-life balance and feel more energised may find it easier to become absorbed by a task and derive a sense of accomplishment from doing it.

Interventions to improve people's working environment can be even more effective if they span two or more of **The Five Ways to Happiness at Work**. A team training day, by way of example, could be classified as a combination of 'Connect', 'Empower', 'Challenge' and 'Inspire'.

These links reflect the complexity and dynamic nature of our wellbeing in general. Different parts of our life influence how we feel and function in many different ways and are also likely to feed back into other areas.

Someone who enjoys strong social relationships and is autonomous is in a better position to shape their surroundings than someone without these advantages. There is also evidence that positive emotions can influence other parts of our lives in two ways.

They 'broaden' our repertoire of possible responses to a given situation. A happier person is more flexible, more creative, more open to experiences, as well as better at building relationships. Secondly, experiencing positive emotions regularly over time 'builds' our confidence, self-esteem and resilience. This is called the 'broaden and build theory' of positive emotions and is based on research by [Professor Barbara Frederickson](#).

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts when **The Five Ways** are applied in combination. Our scientifically robust approach demystifies culture by profiling what organizations need to focus on, giving clients the insight to drive change for the better.



How to apply The Five Ways to Happiness

But here's the catch. Do your employees trust you?

It's easy to say that you're going to make happiness a priority at work. To implement practices that cultivate happiness is the real challenge. There can be a sense of distrust from employees that follow new initiatives. It takes time to win over employees with the vision. Shifting the focus to happiness is no different — in fact, it may result in even more cynicism since happiness is not a word commonly associated with work.

Remember, your employees are smart. You hired them for a reason. And they will see through any shallow initiative or half-hearted effort to win them over. Honesty, sincerity and genuine, consistent efforts, on the other hand, will bring about real change in the workplace.

There are four basic steps to applying The Five Ways to Happiness at Work:

✓ | **START WHERE PEOPLE ARE**

Change and progress starts with your team. Happiness isn't just a theory; it's something tangible that begins with small actions. Get to know your team members. Find out what they do for fun, what their interests are and about their families.

✓ | **FOCUS ON BUILDING AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION WITH THE TARGET AUDIENCE.**

We've found that teams are resistant to change unless they feel like their leaders actually care about them. Forge a real connection with your team. If you have something in common, bond over it. You'll find that when people are treated as people and not employees, a lot more can get done.

✓ | **BE POSITIVE, UPBEAT AND ASPIRATIONAL — AND SEEK TO AVOID “DON'T DO” MESSAGES**

People respond better to positive goals rather than negative reprimands. Remember, you're not just trying to get more productivity out of your team — though that may be a by-product — you are trying to help them enjoy their work more.

✓ | **EXCHANGE — THERE MUST BE A CLEAR BENEFIT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE AS WELL AS THE ORGANIZATION FOR CHANGE TO OCCUR**

There has to be a good answer to “What's in it for me?” that your team members can understand. Fortunately, overall happiness is usually a good result, but you have to be able to articulate why a happier workplace is a good thing for your team members.

Building happy teams with Friday Pulse



The **Five Ways to Happiness at Work** should be considered a framework or ‘rule of thumb’ checklist rather than a discrete set of categories. Areas interrelate, overlap and affect each other. Nevertheless, all of them are present in companies with great cultures because they are essential to happiness and thus, success in the workplace.

The Culture Profile

Friday Pulse applies **The Five Ways to Happiness at Work** through a quarterly, 15-question **Culture Profile** survey. Questions in the Culture Profile help business leaders determine where to act by identifying key strengths and weaknesses on the team and organizational level. It highlights positive and negative subcultures that exist in your organization and provides actionable insights so you can put positive routines into place on the individual, team and organization level.

We’ve designed the Culture Profile as a quarterly in-depth survey that measures how you’re progressing on the five ways. It uncovers practical insights and actions that improve culture and employee’s experience of work.

The Happiness KPI™

Another way we work to improve culture is by helping businesses monitor employees’ experience of their work-life with a [Happiness KPI™](#). This KPI allows leaders to track the impact their initiatives are having on employee experience. Every week we ask employees how they have felt that week. Once they’ve rated their experience on a scale of 1-5 (from ‘very unhappy’ to ‘very happy’), we collate this employee experience data to highlight how teams are doing in real-time. This allows organizations to update and adjust their plans according to employee reactions.



The Origins of the Five Ways to Happiness

The Five Ways to Happiness were developed from a combination of academic and empirical research. In 2008, Friday Founder and CEO Nic Marks worked with longstanding colleague and collaborator Dr Jody Aked to create the very popular Five Ways to Wellbeing for the U.K. Government's Foresight programme to boost mental resources and happiness. [Nic went on to speak about this project in his popular 2010 TED talk.](#)



Settling on ‘five’ ways was a deliberate move. It built on the widespread public health dictum in the UK that people should eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day for the good of their physical health. This meant ‘five’ was already perceived in the U.K. as a ‘healthy’ number. Additionally, a five-point list is convenient. Short enough to be easily remembered, it provided a perfect structure for the framework.

During the years that followed **Five Ways to Wellbeing**, Nic designed several surveys on workplace happiness with nationally representative samples in the USA, U.K., Mexico, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Finland and the Netherlands. With each survey, he honed his overall understanding of the drivers of happiness and refined the questions to measure these drivers with increasing accuracy.

In 2016, Nic had the opportunity to build further on his thinking in this area. As a recognised expert in happiness, he was approached by global recruitment agency Robert Half to design a survey to support its **Work Happy** campaign. This led to probably the most comprehensive international survey ever conducted on happiness at work. Its representative sample of over 22,000 workers spanned 12 sectors and eight nations.

Evidence from this research was distilled into a clear set of achievable actions that businesses can adopt to achieve a happier workplace. The resulting paper took these actions beyond the classroom. It gave real-world examples of practices undertaken by organizations across the globe to achieve and foster happy, productive and sustainable businesses.

Further refinement has taken us to **The Five Ways to Happiness** as they stand today. Think of them more as your pathway to improvement. We’re continuously researching the five ways, and we’ll undoubtedly be sharing insights and improvements with our clients on an ongoing basis.

THEORIES AND INSIGHTS THAT UNDERPIN OUR WORK

- ✓ | *Abraham Maslow's 1943 Theory of Human Motivation proposes five human needs people are motivated to achieve. These needs are arranged in hierarchies so that the appearance of one need depends on the satisfaction of another. Starting at the bottom of the hierarchy, the needs are physiological needs; safety needs; love needs; esteem needs; and the need for self-actualisation. The latter three in particular (love, esteem and self-actualisation) are relevant to work, such as relationships at work (love); achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, respect from others (esteem); and realising personal potential, self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences (self-actualisation). Physiological and safety needs must also be met at work.*
- ✓ | *In 2007, Peter Warr, a professor of work psychology, wrote a comprehensive review of the relationships between aspects of work and aspects of wellbeing. He lists 12 environmental features in job settings that 'provide an overarching explanation of happiness levels in any role.' These are an opportunity for personal control; opportunity for skill use; externally generated goals; variety; contact with others; availability of money; physical security; valued social position; supportive supervision; career outlook; and equity.*
- ✓ | *Self-Determination Theory (SDT), based on empirical research about what motivates people, proposes that three universal psychological needs must be satisfied for us to experience high wellbeing in the short- and long-term: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Workplaces that promote the satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs will enhance people's intrinsic motivation and help them to internalise extrinsic motivations. This leads to positive work outcomes, such as persistence; maintained behaviour change; effective performance, particularly on tasks requiring creativity, cognitive flexibility, and conceptual understanding; job satisfaction; positive work-related attitudes; organizational citizenship behaviours; and wellbeing.*
- ✓ | *Daniel Pink's bestselling book Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us builds on evidence from behavioural science to propose three elements of true motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Autonomy refers to acting with a choice; mastery refers to the desire to get better and better at something that matters, and purpose refers to working in the service of a greater objective. Fulfilment of these three needs will lead to high performance and satisfaction.*
- ✓ | *PERMA is a theory developed by positive psychologist Martin Seligman. It proposes five essential elements, or building blocks, of human flourishing: positive emotion; engagement; relationships; meaning; and accomplishment. These can all be applied to people's lives at work.*
- ✓ | *Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, an online retail company, wrote a book about his own experience of making happiness at work the central goal of his business (where the mission statement is: 'Zappos is about delivering happiness to the world'). Delivering happiness proposes a framework with four elements: perceived control; perceived progress; connectedness; and vision/meaning (being part of something bigger than yourself).*
- ✓ | *Teresa Amabile, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, and her colleague Steven Kramer propose that to be happy and productive at work, people need to feel like they're making progress. They call this the Progress Principle. To feel like they're making progress, people need to feel motivated, experience positive emotions and have a positive perception of their work, their team, the management and the organization. To support these three states, managers can use catalysts and nourishers. Catalysts are actions that support work and include setting clear goals, allowing autonomy, providing sufficient resources and time, helping with the work, openly learning from problems and successes, and allowing a free exchange of ideas. Nourishers are acts of interpersonal support, such as respect and recognition, encouragement, emotional comfort, and opportunities for affiliation.*
- ✓ | *Before Happiness, written by positive psychologist Shawn Achor, includes Five Hidden Keys to Achieving Success, Spreading Happiness, and Sustaining Positive Change. These include the most valuable reality (seeing a broader range of ideas and solutions by changing the details on which your brains chooses to focus); success mapping (setting goals oriented around the things in life that matter most to you); positive inception (transferring skills to your team, employees and everyone around you); the x-spot (using success accelerants to propel you more quickly to your goal); and noise cancelling (boosting the signal pointing to opportunities and possibilities).*



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Friday Pulse gives employees a voice by asking them to rate their experience of work, and share their weekly successes and frustrations.

By tracking positive and negative emotions and systematically collecting feedback, our people platform provides real-time insights on individuals, teams and organizations.

We're offering companies and teams free access to Friday Pulse for 6 weeks.

Book your free demo now to find out more.

[BOOK A DEMO →](#)

The Workplace Happiness Experts



Founded by [Nic Marks](#), leading statistician, happiness expert and TED speaker, Friday Pulse interprets people data to help companies understand employee wellbeing.

Over the last six years, Friday Pulse has worked with over 9,000 teams across 1,000 organizations, measuring and improving workplace culture.



Drop us a line

hello@fridaypulse.com
UK +44 (0) 20 3322 4949



Request a demo

demo@fridaypulse.com
UK +44 (0) 20 3322 4949