Don’t Worry, be Happy

Employee engagement is a choice

By Ruth K. Ross

It only takes a moment to move from engagement into disengagement, but it will take a lot more time and effort to re-engage and find your passion and happiness again in workplace. As someone who struggled with the disengagement disease while an EVP of a well-known and admired company, and who is now blissfully re-engaged with my life and career, here’s my top ten list for how to be happy at work.

1. It’s always your choice. You are the only person who can make the choice for you to be happy at work. Even in the face of negative aspects of the workplace, you need to think positively. You can do this by looking for those things that are good and not dwell only on bad stuff. Stay away from negative people and associate with those who are happy at work; it will rub off on you.

2. Take charge of your own development. No one cares about your development more than you. Today’s careers are all about moving from one role to another, gathering experiences for your portfolio along the way. Lateral moves and stretch assignments are more important than following a straight line up. Don’t be afraid to raise your hand and ask for something more.

3. Don’t be shy; ask for feedback. For most people, the annual performance review is the only time they get feedback, and it is the most anxiety-producing process around. Millennials and Gen Xs have turned this process on its head by asking their managers for constant feedback. They want to know early and often how they are doing. For some people, it’s the only time they get any acknowledgement of what they are doing well. For others it’s the chance to fix something that might not be working as well before it becomes an insurmountable problem. If we believe (as I do) that each of us is responsible for our own development, then getting feedback is a key part of the equation.

4. Gather your support system. Find a group of supportive people who share similar backgrounds, experiences, and lifestyles as you. This can help to take some of the pressure off of you at work, by having your ‘team’ to whom you can safely voice your feelings.

5. Don’t try to change others. You can’t change anyone else, but only the way you react to him or her. Don’t let other people’s actions impact your journey. There will be colleagues who rub you the wrong way at some point, and if you let them get to you they will have control over your engagement at work.

6. Avoid negativity. Making the decision to be happy at work means avoiding gossip, negative conversations, and the unhappy people you can’t change. No matter how positive you may be personally, negative people can have an impact on how you feel. They tend to suck up all the oxygen in the air, leaving you out of breath and frustrated.

7. Keep personal problems out of the workplace. When you are overwhelmed by personal problems, it’s really hard to be happy and productive at work. Also, your colleagues don’t want to drown in your problems, even if they seem interested. Trust me, when I say they aren’t!

8. Focus on the positive. Even though you may not love your job, there is always some aspect of it that you do like. Find that nugget and focus on it, along with ways to incorporate it into other aspects of your day.

9. Make friends. Most people laugh at the notion of do you have a best friend at work, but truthfully it is important. Given the number of hours we spend on the job, it is important to have a small group of people you can really count on for support, resources, sharing and caring.

10. Have a ‘get out of jail’ fund at the ready. Sometimes you just need to leave a job; there is no other right answer. There is nothing worse than realizing this and not having the ability to do so because of money worries. You need to put aside resources that give you the freedom to walk away on your own terms.

You can be healthier and happier in all aspects of your life because you have the control. No one else has the power to disengage and disrupt your life, but you. Don’t let anyone but you take the reins of responsibility for your engagement. Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your re-engaged life and career. R&E