



# DAYS TO A HAPPIER WORKPLACE

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A MONTH OF HAPPINESS-INDUCING ACTIONS TO BOOST JOY,  
ENGAGEMENT AND TEAM SPIRIT

**DAVE CAPERTON**

## 30 DAYS TO A HAPPIER WORKPLACE

What if everyone where you work exhibited genuine happiness? How different would that be from the way it is now? Not much different or a night and day kind of change? Here's the second and bigger question: How much difference would it make in the results you're getting and the life you're living? Maybe you can't even imagine what it would be like to have the people around you operating from a default mode of joy and positivity. Maybe you even think that it's not that important. If so, here are some findings from recent research:

- Happy salespeople increased sales by 37%
- Contented employees are 31% more productive
- High morale correlates with lower absenteeism and lower healthcare costs
- People who feel appreciated are 87% less likely to leave for other jobs

So how do you get there? Certainly it depends upon your starting point. Environments in which morale is already healthy have a shorter journey than those trying to overcome a history of broken trust, insulated leadership and resentful workers. But no matter your starting point, it's possible to begin to see positive change in as little as 30 days.

## **Starting at the Top**

When change is implemented from the top-down, the buy-in and success is a reflection of the level of trust and respect that already exists. But when everyone up and down the hierarchy accepts that they have a responsibility and the power to change the culture and are given simple action steps to make that change, the transformation can begin with each person and can improve with each contact.

## **Lead Like a Boss**

It's on that granular level that this book is designed to work. Managers and leadership teams are in a great place to affect cultural change, but no matter what your position, you can lead a positive revolution from anywhere. Think of it as **The Power of One**. If you need evidence that one person can lead a charge without being in charge, here are some research findings to ponder:

- One person's expressed happiness raises the chances of happiness for others by 15% at a *THIRD DEGREE OF SEPARATION*
- One person can solve a traffic jam with one attitude shift and two simple actions
- The top three things people want from their work are not what most bosses think and are benefits that anyone can provide

## **Solving a Traffic Jam**

My dad was in sales for over 40 years. His territory was all of Ohio and some areas in the surrounding states and over that time he logged over 2 million miles. All the years of driving made him an expert behind the wheel under every condition imaginable. He knew how to bring a car out of a skid, how to spare wear and tear on his brakes down a steep grade and how to parallel park in the tightest of spots in three practiced moves.

One day when I was about 15 or so, I was riding along with my dad in a long traffic backup due to some unseen situation a couple of miles ahead. Dad turned to me and said, "I'm going to show you how to fix a traffic jam."

I looked at the endless line of brake lights ahead and then turned to my dad smiling in anticipation of the punch line, but I could see he wasn't joking. "The key is to stay off the brake and make room."

Then he began backing off from the car ahead until a wide space was created. Into that space other drivers cut in and raced up on the car ahead. Dad just backed off more. Over and over again, cars driving in the lane that was stopped beside us used the space he allowed, and every time, dad just continued to make room.

Sometimes a driver behind our car would honk to get him to fill up the space. Even I complained that it wasn't really fair that drivers were zooming around us and cutting in from the other lane like line jumpers at an amusement park. But through it all, my dad remained serene and committed to his plan and soon the flow began to pick up. The speed rose from 5 to 10 to 20 and then, just like that, we were back to freeway speed. I was impressed if not entirely convinced that one person could make such an impact.

In 2016, I came across this headline in the Wall Street Journal: "How One Driver Can Prevent a Traffic Jam," by Sue Schellenbarger, who reported:

*There is a growing body of research finding that an individual driver, by preventing bottlenecks and maintaining a steady speed, can sometimes single-handedly ease or break up a traffic jam. The techniques are simple, though some of them—such as leaving a large gap between your car and the one in front and freely letting other drivers cut in—feel counterintuitive to most drivers.*

I had to smile, thinking about my dad and wishing I could tell him that his methods had been confirmed by research.

So, if it works so well, why don't more drivers stuck in traffic an average of over 40 hours every year use such a simple approach to spend less time crawling along freeways?

The answer, I think, is two-fold. For one thing, if you do what my dad did, you'll have to take some criticism in the form of blaring horns and rude gestures from the unenlightened drivers around you. At the very least it's unlikely that anyone will thank you. My dad never got a hip-hip-hooray for his jam-busting tactics. In fact, a lot of the time he got just the opposite. Drivers behind him saw him as a slowpoke and one of the reasons for the crawl. They honked and flashed their lights to urge him to close up the gap he had created because other people who hadn't earned the privilege were zipping into that space he opened for them.

Those horn-blowers thought it unfair and frankly, they had a point. It WAS unfair. Impatience and a failure to plan ahead by those drivers who waited until the last second to merge from a lane that was ending actually were rewarded with a place in line ahead of those who had



But here's the thing; to insist on fairness could mean slowing everyone down even more. Those are key elements in practical problem-solving. Backing off and letting others in is concerned exclusively with providing a solution to a problem and that, like it or not, is sometimes incompatible with fairness or recognition. My dad was willing to take criticism even though he felt sure his actions would help everyone and he accepted that some would be given an advantage they hadn't earned. It was an example of something Daniel Goleman would eventually call emotional intelligence.

Can you imagine what innovations or solutions to your challenges might be possible if you dispensed with any concern about:

- A. who will get the credit, and
- B. who is or isn't worthy of the benefit?

One person with the emotional IQ to set aside personal ego and judgment of others has the power to change the world around them so long as they accept that the world around them may never know nor appreciate who made that change.

It doesn't matter where you are in the traffic. You don't have to be at the front of the pack. You can make positive change that changes the outcome for everyone right where you are with the smallest actions and attitude shifts. You just have to be willing. That's ***The Power of One***.

## **What Do People Want?**

One of the big challenges of making work a happier experience is that everyone has different priorities, different attitudes and different needs. You can't please everybody, as the saying goes, so why even try?

If you want to understand the challenges of trying to please everyone, just pull up to a fast food drive-thru with a car full of hungry family. Because you're driving, you are automatically appointed the orderer in chief and it becomes your responsibility to collate, convey and collect the orders including all the special requests (double cheese, no onions and ask if I can get a shake with the combo or does it have to be a soft drink?).

When you drive away you'll soon learn how hard it is to be in charge of other people's emotional well being (I wanted CURLY fries!).

You might conclude that driving the car and paying for the food is enough responsibility and you shouldn't be expected make people happy, too and would it kill them to say thanks once in awhile?

It's a common refrain of managers and other leaders who often complain that they have to deal with endless grouching, conflicts, and criticism and that, frankly when they've tried to please one, it's an invitation to protest how unfair it is to someone else and what about me or our department and on and on.

They know what their people want but you just can't give people what they want because you'd go broke.

## **What People Want**

In 1940, the New York Labor Relations Board conducted a survey of employers and employees for the first time asking the same question of both groups, "What do employees want?" The survey has been repeated again and again over the decades since by other groups and the results over 80+ years have remained stubbornly consistent.

Here, in order, are the top three that employers thought back then and many still believe today:

1. Higher pay
2. Job security
3. Opportunity for advancement

Those seem like logical answers and they certainly appear on many employee wish lists. But they seldom crack the top three. When employee responses are tallied, these are the top answers:

1. Recognition for the job they do
2. To feel included and a sense of belonging
3. To know that someone cares about them personally

There are three takeaways here. First, how much do any of those three desires represent in cost? Not a single dime. Each one is about an emotional need. Second, who can supply those desires? Certainly leadership should, but that doesn't mean that no one else could. And third, how hard are any of those three to accomplish?

Fully 60% of workers who quit their jobs pre-pandemic did so because of a bad relationship, usually a leader. And once so many workers were furloughed as restaurants, stores and businesses shut down, many have reevaluated their employment options and the result is fewer who are willing to settle for a that's-what-the-money-is-for arrangement.

The relational over transactional model is partly a reflection of the demographics of the workforce as Boomers age out and Gens Y and Z take their place. But they aren't wanting anything different from what those circa-1940 workers expressed when they wished for recognition, belonging and someone to care about them. The only difference is that, now, employees are less willing to do without those things. A lot of industries now facing worker shortages are offering sign-on bonuses and perks to sweeten the transaction. But that's a 1965 solution to a 2021 problem.

## **The End of Transactional Work**

There is a memorable scene in the AMC hit, *Mad Men*, where Don Draper, Sterling-Cooper creative director, has a heated exchange with Peggy, his talented account executive who has to fight for respect in the male-dominated world of advertising. In the scene Peggy is angry because Don has won an award for an idea that was her creation and for which she wasn't recognized. Don tells her, "It's your job! I give you money, you give me ideas.." When Peggy counters, "But you never say thank you," Don explodes, "THAT'S WHAT THE MONEY IS FOR!"

If you view that clip on YouTube, you'll read comments from managers and bosses expressing some form of "Right on, Don!" But those people miss the point entirely. Transactional work is as out of touch with the current culture as Don's Brylcreemed hair. A job now is less about the money than the relationship.

## Work Orientation

Beyond the transaction of money for work is another exchange of value that is harder to quantify. It has to do with what else you get from your work. Think of it as your work orientation. How do you define what you do as it aligns with who you are and where you are in life? Which of the following best describes how you and the people you work with or lead, feel about their job?

1. **It's a J-O-B.** It's a car payment. a means to an end. Lose it or leave it and there will always be another.
2. **It's part of a Career.** It's a step on your journey to bigger and better. You're invested because it will be good for the resume to get you to the next chapter in your story.
3. **It's a Calling.** It's aligned with your purpose in life. It gives you joy, it fulfills you and is not just what you do but who you are.



## **O.P.E.N. for business**

You might be thinking, not everything that needs to be done can be elevated to a calling, and you're right. But while there's no magic spell to make employees see their job as a calling, there are ways to elevate the experience to have some of the elements of that level of work. The ways in which a calling is different from a job or a career step is in the way it fulfills the emotional need everyone has to do something meaningful and enjoy social connection and derive joy from that.

By that measure, even the most routine work has the potential to fulfill. It's a matter of how much the culture and leadership supplies this:

### ***Other People's Emotional Needs***

But before you can supply what people need, you have to first understand what it is they value. The best answer to that, lies within your answer to this question: What do you value in others?

## Who Would You Miss Most?

Here's a simple exercise to help you find that answer. Think of someone you work with or have worked with in the past who made work a little more enjoyable (hopefully, someone comes to mind). What is it that makes you think of them fondly and be the reason you'd miss them more than anyone else if they were no longer part of your day.?



Take a moment and list one or two of the characteristics or their habits that makes you feel that way (cue Jeopardy theme).

What did you come up with? Their kindness? Their ability to listen without judgement? Their willingness to help? Their positivity, smile or the way they make you laugh? Probably not their amazing punctuality, right?

It's not that being on time isn't important but the emotional value that others add to your life will almost always beat anything else.

Here's the more important question. What would the people you lead or work with miss about *you*? If you're struggling to think of anything, maybe you just need some help. It's for that possibility that this little book was created.

Dee Ward Hock, founder and former CEO of Visa puts it succinctly when he says,

*Make a short list of all the things done to you that you abhorred. Don't do that to others. Ever. Make another list of all the things done to you that you loved. Do them to others. Always.*

Could it be that simple? A list of the things that made us feel good or bad and then doing the good ones and rejecting the bad ones? In a word, yes. But thinking of those things and understanding why they work is trickier than it sounds.

## **Getting Personal**

The first step to providing for the emotional needs of others in ways that will lead to a happier workplace is understanding the deficiencies of the status quo. We live in an increasingly connected and increasingly isolated world. We fuel up at self-serve pumps (or plug in electric vehicles at home), we bank by mobile apps, buy virtually or use self checkout kiosks, get food delivered to our doors and lock out the rest of the world with ear pods and screens even when we find ourselves in the company of others.

And the pandemic has only made us more used to being remote, separated and anonymous. Even before 2020, it was possible to go through an entire day of normal transactions without experiencing a single personal interaction. Maybe we aren't good at creating connection and joy because, well, we're out of practice.

And at work, when do you get out of your space to engage directly with someone else? When you need something from them or when a problem comes up. If the only time you heard from your spouse was when something was wrong, how strong would you guess the relationship would be?

### **The Magic Ratio**

John Gottman is a marriage expert who can, in a few minutes of observation, assess the strength of a couple's relationship. By listening to their conversation exchange he counts the positive to negative nature of their interactions and has found that if the ratio of positive to negative is less than 5:1, their marriage may be headed for trouble. In a work relationship, the ratio is estimated to be a more manageable 3:1 positive to negative. But in this more impersonal and remote brave new world in which we live it won't happen without intentionally expressing your gratitude, laughter, celebration and kindness,

## Your Mission

In the old Mission Impossible series with Peter Graves as Mr. Phelps, who never jumped Tom Cruise-style out of a helicopter or sprinted along the top of an express train or even, come to think of it, found a reason to break into a jog, there was always a line at the end of the self-destructing tape that said, "Your mission, Jim, *should you decide to accept it...*" It was a tough mission, but it was his choice.

If you're like most organizations, you probably have a formal mission statement. Most mission statements have two basic elements. It identifies who you serve--your customers, patients, students or community. The second is how you'll define success at that service (excellence and quality, etc). But there's a third part that might not be included in many official statements but should be: "And find ways to bring joy to the process." So that's your mission, should you decide to accept it.

## **How To Change the World**

When tennis legend, Arthur Ashe, became the first African American to win a Grand Slam tennis title, he changed the world. But his greatest impact wasn't even on the court. It was the money he raised and the changes he advocated for after he learned he had AIDS. When someone asked him about how a regular person without celebrity and his accomplishments could change the world as he had in the last months of his life, he offered this simple solution, "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

For the next 30 days, make this same resolution to change the world and the culture around you right where you are and with what you already have--your smile, your kind heart, and your sense of humor--to do what you can to accomplish that unwritten third part of your mission. To get you started are 30 suggestions. Do all of them or some of them in any order. But do them and watch what happens.

# Day 1

## **GREET THEM BY NAME**

How you start affects  
what you get. Start  
the day with a smile  
and a personal  
greeting



# Day 2

## SAY THANKS

Perhaps the greatest force for happiness you have is gratitude.

65% of surveyed workers claimed that they hadn't been thanked once in the past 12 months.

Change that today  
(and every day)

# Day 3

## **BE A SUPERMODEL**

For the next 30 days, resolve to consciously model the attitude, joy and positivity you want to see in others.

Changing the world around you starts where you are

# **Day 4**

## **FOCUS ON STRENGTHS**

According to Tom Rath (author of How Full is Your Bucket?) leaders who focus on strengths can eliminate 99% of employee disengagement

# Day 5

## **TELL THEM WHY WHAT THEY DO MATTERS**

People who feel a sense of purpose feel happier. Success doesn't breed happiness, happiness breeds success!

# Day 6

## NOTICE THE LITTLE THINGS

Use the Magic Ratio of 3 positive to every 1 less positive comments or interactions. Think of it as a way to keep a positive human capital balance

# Day 7

## **CELEBRATE TOGETHER**

Holidays, birthdays, hitting a sales target, or really anything at all. Celebration is just paying joyful attention to a shared experience. What matters is that you do it together.

# Day 8

## **EMPOWER THEM**

Autonomy is a key ingredient of happiness. What problem could you trust them to solve or decision to make without permission? You'll be amazed at smart they become.

# Day 9

## JOIN A CAUSE

Being part of a purpose bigger than ourselves lifts the spirit and builds bonds. Choose a way to serve the community, help a co-worker or support a good cause.



**Day 10**  
**LEARN**  
**SOMETHING**  
**TODAY**

The more you know  
about the people  
you work with, the  
more invested they  
know you are in  
them

# Day 11

## **CLEAN IT UP**

Take a look at the physical workspace. Clutter causes stress and undermines joy.

A clean well lit environment sends a message that the work and the people who do it matter

# **Day 12**

## **MAKE A PRAISE LINE**

Put up a line with cards and clothespins or a board with post-it notes and invite everyone to praise others for something they've done. Take time to look at it every day

# **Day 13**

## **JOURNAL**

### **GRATITUDE**

Nothing prepares your mind for happiness like gratitude. Give everyone a notebook as a gratitude journal and 2 minutes daily to write 3 things that they're thankful for.

# **Day 14**

## **FOCUS ON POSITIVES**

Set aside time to discuss what is working and make that an equal priority to what needs to be fixed. It may be how you begin each meeting or a daily good news report from you

# Day 15

## **SURPRISE THEM!**

Surprise your team with a treat just because (breakfast, a gift card, a chair massage from a local therapist). Don't make it a regular thing. It's the surprise that elicits joy.

# **Day 16**

## **DO-GOOD DOLLARS**

Give a few people a small amount of money (\$5-20) to do something kind for someone else. Meet and talk about what they did and how it made them feel.

# Day 17

## HELP THEM

## HELP OTHERS

Put up a box where people can submit a need that they know someone has and make it a way others can be of help or connect them with solutions



# **Day 18**

## **CATCH THEM DOING WELL**

Use the magic ratio  
by intentionally  
focusing and  
commenting on the  
littlest things that  
others do right or  
well.

# Day 19

## USE ASPIRATIONAL COMPLIMENTS

Pre-suasion author, Robert Cialdini, says that compliments can give others something to live up to. Not just, "good job doing XYZ," but, "You always do XYZ well."

# Day 20

## PICTURE IT

Post images of your team. When we see ourselves together in a shared experience it memorializes the moment and reinforces our connection to one another

# Day 21

## **MAKE A MOTTO**

Or a song or a secret handshake or really anything that is uniquely the right of those who belong to your tribe to use, say or do.

# Day 22

## FEED THEM

Food is at the center of many happy moments. Use that! Have a chili recipe contest, a favorite dessert day or a build the best burger, taco or omelet contest

# Day 23

## CREATE TRADITIONS

It can be a joke of the day, a wear-your-team-colors day, or an ugliest holiday sweater day, as long as it establishes a sense of belonging, it can boost workplace happiness

# Day 24

## KEEP THEM IN THE LOOP

Invite your people to share your view of the goals, challenges and future and invite their input. They should sense that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

# Day 25

## **REMOVE BARRIERS**

Find and remove an obstacle that steals their time, discourages service or over complicates a process. They are also barriers to productivity and happiness.



# Day 26

## LET THEM BE UNHAPPY (SOMETIMES)

Not every moment can be a happy one. Sometimes you don't feel happy. That's ok.

The goal isn't no unhappiness ever, it's happiness as a default mode

# Day 27

## **BE A CONNECTOR**

Work friendships are one of the best signs of a happiness and high morale. If you learn enough about the people around you, you can be a nexus for workplace friend-connections

# Day 28

## HUMOR THEM

Shared laughter is one of the most effective connectors of people. It is something healthy families share and groups that laugh together feel a bond of positive emotion and experience

# Day 29

## **ASK ABOUT THEM**

When you take the time to learn about your team you can know what else is important to them. Ask about their kids, grandchildren, parents or pets. It is a clear sign that they matter to you

# **Day 30**

## **DISCOVER THEIR GOALS**

Find out what their medium and long-term goals are and do what you can to help them reach them

## **Just the Beginning**

Thirty days isn't long and likely not long enough to change a culture. But it's enough time to make a start, establish some good habits begin to see an actually happier workplace.

But it's just a beginning. The most significant changes aren't the result of what you do one day or even for thirty days. Joy isn't an initiative, it's a lifestyle.

Now you have your mission (should you decide to accept it) and everything you need to start changing the workplace around you starting today . Hopefully, you will come up with a few of your own. Do me a favor and share your ideas and discoveries. I promise to share it with others to spread the gospel of a happier workplace with others.

Have fun!

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## **About the Author**

Story. Laughter. Action. That's the simple but effective approach Dave Caperton has used for over 20 years providing keynotes, breakouts and coaching for nearly 1000 top organizations and associations in business, education and healthcare he has worked with all over North America. Through a process of pure humor and storytelling, Dave leads each individual to understand how to "think small" to create big results. Dave's programs drive organizational change by focusing on the personal. The result is granular and sustainable choices that empower each person to make a positive impact on their work cultures, their perceptions, their connections to others and their own sense of balance.

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# Imagine a culture...

Imagine working in a culture where everyone is happy, where smiles are common and complaints are rare. Imagine what kind of positive energy and innovation and cooperation might be possible if employees radiated positivity and every person felt a personal responsibility to add value to others.

You probably think, "it would be nice, but it's not going to happen because

1. you can't change people
2. where would you even start?

It's true that you can't change others but you can create the conditions that make their decision to change more likely. And here's a month's worth of ideas to get you started.