



DRIP FED TO DEPRESSION (Happiness in the Workplace).

Comment by Conrad Wildsmith, Workplace Consultant, SHCA London.

Every morning we awake to a new day of possibilities and opportunities. This should be enough to make us leap out of the bed, fling open the curtains and joyfully yell 'Bring it on'.

Unfortunately for most of us who have jobs that require some form of interaction with the outside world, it's once we start to 'bring it on' that the problems begin.

From the moment that we let any “human generated” influence in (e.g. turning on the news or reading a paper) we are opening ourselves up to a constant drip feed of negativity.....

- Drip Bad news
- Drip Fear
- Drip Loathing
- Drip Hatred
- Drip Jealousy
- Drip Anger
- Drip Shame

Drip Drip Drip Drip Drip Drip Drip

I was aware of the negative media bias in this country (as I believe most people are), but decided to take a closer look. I reviewed the bold front page headline of a daily newspaper that commuters would, more often than not, read on the way to work. I covered the period from July 2008 to Dec 2009 and broke the headlines down into positive, neutral and negative. I was shocked by the results. Even allowing some positive slack on my assessment so as to be as unbiased as possible, I found the results disturbing.

Over 80% of the headlines were negative, with approximately 6% being genuinely positive. These positive results mostly comprised reports on sport (the Olympic Games success, the England Cricket Team’s Ashes win) and the ascendancy and eventual inauguration of Barack Obama!

When you add this daily drip feed of negativity to the hassle of travelling into work, especially if you use public transport with its barrage of warnings and unnecessary announcements, it is all too likely that you will arrive at work in a state of some stress and dissatisfaction, quite possibly ready to scream at the first person who dares to cross you.

So how and what does this have to do with the workplace and more importantly happiness in the workplace?.

Given this drip feed of negativity and stress most of us encounter on our way into work every morning, the workplace should offer some form of refuge. It should be somewhere to relax and carry out a productive days work in a relatively stress free and efficient environment.

From my numerous briefing interviews conducted for SHCA projects, the overriding client requirement is a workplace that 'works'. Having a bright shiny newly designed workplace is great, but if it doesn't function the way employees need, the novelty soon wears off and the daily irritation of not being able to do your job easily starts to take over. This results in unhappy and unproductive employees.

As part of the Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) process, we conduct on-line questionnaires to obtain feedback on the current workplace. This is followed by an identical questionnaire, 3 to 6 months after the a move into new building or refurbished space. The focus is mainly on the workplace facilities and environment which provides invaluable feedback, especially for the design team and Facilities Management.

What I am beginning to incorporate more into the POE is an evaluation of what makes the person 'happy' in the workplace. On two recent projects, the feedback from employees on the workplace facilities and especially the environment was fairly damning, yet the workforce seemed very happy indeed. When I investigated these findings, it appeared that the general feeling of being part of an extended family unit and congenial environment made the employees very happy at work, despite the issues with the actual physical workplace.

There have been numerous attempts to measure the relationship between the workplace and productivity levels. Historically it has been notoriously difficult to quantify. However in my mind there is a very simple metric that can be applied as a starting point

"A happy workplace is a productive workplace"