



6 strategies for being happier at work

BY HEATHER HUDSON

Sharissa Sebastian was absolutely miserable at work.

After 13 years of achieving—first degrees and then progressively senior positions in technology leadership—she was burnt out. She began to need a few minutes each morning to breathe deeply in her car before she gathered the will to walk into the office. Eventually, the ritual became an hour-long process.

What was wrong? Bad boss? Toxic workplace? Dull job? An avalanche of responsibilities?

It was all and none of the above. She knew she was unhappy, but she couldn't put her finger on exactly what it was she needed to change.

Sebastian was hardly alone. Gallup statistics suggest that 55 to 80 percent of workers are unhappy in their jobs. And a Randstad U.S. survey discovered that unhappy workers admitted to soothing their unhappiness at work by drinking, taking naps, checking social media, shopping online, and even watching Netflix!

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than 1 in 3 employees would give up \$5,000 a year in salary to be happier at work. When you consider that we spend an average of [90,000 hours](#) at work over the course of our lifetime, making an effort to find happiness is crucial.

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Sebastian began to search her soul and hired a coach. “We worked through the process of uncovering who I am, what I bring to the table, my strengths and passions and how they align with what I want to do in the world.”

Ultimately, she discovered leadership and executive coaching and realized her real passion lies in helping others in their own pursuit of happiness and fulfillment in the workplace. She began to avidly research the topic, which led her to uncover a number of insights that anyone can use. (You can see all of them in her TEDx Talk, [“The Pursuit of Happiness in the Workplace.”](#))

She says many of us erroneously search for the right career, the right workplace, the right salary and the right leaders and colleagues as we pursue happiness at work. “Happiness is a lot more attainable than we think. It’s easy to blame the boss or wish we had better pay, but real happiness is in our control, no matter where we work or what we do,” she said.

She points to a study in which people who recently won the lottery or suffered permanent paralysis were asked to rate their happiness and were compared to a control group. The lottery winners were slightly happier and the newly paralyzed were slightly less happy, but the difference between all three groups was not drastic. And three months later, the lottery winners and the disabled had returned to their baseline level of happiness.

Happiness = 80% Psychology + 20% Strategy

Sebastian’s equation for happiness is simple: The majority of what leads to happiness lies in psychology—a positive perception of what is happening around you, a growth mindset and optimistic, constructive beliefs.

“If you embrace what’s going on, even if it’s not the best, you’ll have a completely different way of experiencing it. It’s important to see the best in yourself and others and engage in empowering self-talk,” she said.

One way to help shape your perception is to be crystal clear on your personal values. Using a popular [values exercise](#) to unearth hers, Sebastian discovered they include faith, fun, freedom, family, and flexibility. “I wrote them out on sticky notes and put them on a vision board that I look at daily. When I have a big decision to make or I feel stressed out, I go back to my values to see where I need to get into alignment.

“When what you believe is in line with what you do on a daily basis, you’ll feel happier. Even if the environment is not set up to support you the way it should, your actions will still be in line with what’s important to you. Knowing that you’re acting with purpose and integrity contributes to happiness,” said Sebastian.

Sebastian’s 6 strategies for happiness

Once you’re clear on the psychology part of the happiness quotient, you can put strategies into place. Sebastian has identified six that help you work toward satisfaction:

Express gratitude. Rather than ruminating on what’s going wrong, find reasons to be grateful. She points to a Tony Robbins nugget of wisdom: “You can’t be angry or fearful and grateful at the same time.” Gratitude helps put you in a more resourceful position.

Be intentional. Take control of your happiness by looking for ways to create it. It could be as simple as moving your desk or changing the environment in which you work. Have things around you that uplift you. Be purposeful about what you want to do next and set goals to get there.

Learn and grow. In every situation, ask “What’s great about this and what can I learn from this?”

Give back. Volunteers are notoriously more cheerful people. This comes from feeling valued. Pick a cause you care about and see how much better you feel overall when you work at helping others.

Surround yourself with happiness. We become like the people we spend time with, so choose relationships with people who are positive and optimistic.

Practice self-care. Do small, simple and regular things that tend to your mind, body and spirit. It could be as simple as a stroll in the park at lunchtime, getting a full 8 hours of sleep or taking a few minutes every day to consider what you’re grateful for and visualize what you want.

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Sebastian made a number of changes as a result of her deep dive into seeking happiness at work and life. She quit her job and moved from Dallas to Florida with her young daughter to be closer to Disney—the happiest place on earth—and the beach.

Her daily happiness habits include:

- Meditation and prayer—Including identifying 3 things she’s grateful for, for 5-10 minutes every day
- Visualizing her day—Going through the upcoming challenges and pre-solving them, thinking about her bigger goals and imagining what she wants in work and life
- Uplifting reading—Daily devotional, self-help books, anything that feeds her soul and helps her grow
- Taking time for herself—Planning fun activities (one of her values) and making sure they’re as prioritized as work and other obligations

It may not be realistic to expect to be happy in every moment, especially when you’re in a challenging job. But Sebastian says there’s always satisfaction to be found in any situation.

“If you perceive that everything that’s happening to you is happening for you and it’s up to you to unwrap that gift, it becomes easier to go through the day and see that not-ideal situations are opportunities to grow and improve,” she said.

And when you’re clear on what you want in life, you’ll know whether your current workplace is truly a good fit or if you have to make a change—within yourself.