

## **The 9-to-5 Happy Hour**

**By**

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Don't let morale go the way of the economy, adopt these spirit-lifting strategies, writes David Wilson.

The assumption that happiness and productivity go together appears hard to contest. Common sense suggests that psychologically healthy, as opposed to complacent, workers with a smile outshine grouches.

Support for that view comes from a raft of research including a Kansas State University study that surfaced earlier this year, which found that staff with high wellbeing make better decisions, show superior interpersonal skills and are less inclined to quit.

According to Harvard Business School research, workers in a good mood on any given day are more likely to have creative ideas that day and the next. A positive cognitive process sets in, sparking "flexible, fluent and original thinking".

One way to promote a feel-good glow in the workplace is for bosses to dish out more praise.

According to research website Gallup.com, everyone has a thirst for recognition that must be met on a weekly, even daily, basis.

Yoon Cannon, chief executive of Paramount Business Coach, says inspirational leadership counts.

"Strong leaders inspire, encourage and bring out the best in their people through positive motivation tactics and genuine interest in their people," Cannon says.

Organisational psychologist Christopher Shen believes bringing out the best is a two-way process between staff and managers, which hinges on culture rather than pay. Pay rises may even be counter-productive, Shen says, highlighting the risk of complacency and envy.

Shen, Cannon and work psychologist Tom Crvenkovic give their top tips on how to nurture an atmosphere where staff feel engaged, even look forward to Monday, despite the downturn. The tactics pinpointed, which go beyond tenpin bowling sessions and birthday celebrations, should apply to everyone - from the intern up.

### **Define a vision**

People are happiest when working towards a goal. Workplaces thrive when everyone works towards a common one. Many companies have their vision typed out somewhere in the form of a mission statement but fail to convey it clearly and consistently. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," Cannon says, quoting the Old Testament.

### **Foster a culture of openness**

It is vital that staff feel free to explore new ideas without being ridiculed or criticised, Shen says.

"Thus, staff learn to associate attempting stressful new activities with choice and control," he adds. In addition, cultivate critical self-awareness of strengths and

"development areas" and learn to feel comfortable conceding faults and limitations.

### **Focus on the process**

Focus on optimising processes, skills and strategies and avoid concentrating on outcomes, Shen advises. "When staff focus predominantly on outcomes, they can become demotivated, disheartened and their productivity may decline - especially if their goals seem far away and unattainable." A focus on process prompts creativity and enthusiasm.

### **Cut the coffee**

Limit your intake of coffee and other stimulants such as energy drinks, says Crvenkovic. More than two to three coffees a day may trigger increased anxiety, irritability and moodiness, thanks to accumulated neurotoxins, and can sabotage sleep.

### **Refrain from ranting**

Be flexible in your thinking. Your ideas may be good but you will achieve more if you respect other people's instead of adopting a hectoring or vindictive stance. When petty point-scoring is banished from company culture, everyone feels more confident exchanging ideas.

### **Allow privacy**

Respect people's boundaries - your own included. You are entitled to keep some secrets. Likewise, if a colleague chooses to be a little cagey, respect that, Crvenkovic says. People value their privacy just as much as they appreciate recognition for achievements.

### **Unplug the computer**

Or at least let it go into hibernation mode. In the LinkedIn age, that step may sound like sacrilege but many workplace experts advise bursts of abstinence. Treating your eyes to a rest from the screen will broaden your horizons and open your mind.

### **Avoid happy-hour hook-ups**

Resist romance. Even though an office affair is tempting and may seem convenient, beware. The cost can outweigh the gain. Do you really want to set the rumour mill churning and then, when the flirtation sours, feel forced to dodge your old flame indefinitely - or even resign?

### **Green Detox**

Much has been written about "toxic workplaces" in the sense of bitter, vindictive staff. Offices can also get toxic in a physical sense. Computing equipment, floor coverings, paint and wallpaper emit substances that tarnish the indoor climate. The potential result: sore eyes, headaches, skin complaints and more. So why not embrace the benefits of plants? More than just visually soothing, plants promote a healthier, happier indoor climate through two biological processes. First, just like people, when they breathe, plants emit water vapour back into the air. Second, they absorb heat and filter dust and harmful substances.

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, Christopher Shen Consulting brings organisational psychology solutions to workplaces, helping people become stronger leaders and teams become better performers.

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