

# THE DISCIPLINE OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is under-rated. People think that happiness is a luxury that busy working people cannot afford. Worse yet, they think that happiness is trivial and not worth discussing. You are either happy or you're not, right? Wrong.

Happiness is a health issue. Years of medical research have shown that happy people are healthier and suffer less from depression or stress related ailments than their unhappy counterparts. Happiness actually regulates the heart's rhythm and puts the body into a synchronized state which optimizes the functions of the entire body.

Happiness is also a performance issue. Companies across industries are demanding outstanding performance from their employees. And, people who are concerned about keeping their jobs know that the better you perform, the better chance you have to stay employed. Happiness and working to your strengths are the two biggest contributors to high personal performance. There are many ways to attain short term high performance but sustained high performance levels are driven by happiness. Happiness breeds success, not the other way around.

There is a myth that happiness is a function of luck. Some people seem to lead charmed lives. Of course they would be happy. Anyone would be happy if they had that person's wealth, body, job, family. Wrong again. Happiness is a discipline. It is like good health. Without it, you will be alive but you won't be your best at home or at work. You control your own happiness much like you control your physical fitness. Happy people cultivate certain habits and practices that help them lead happy lives at work and at home—and often despite the trials and tribulations of their lives.

Happiness is important because it underlies and colors everything we do from the way we do our job to the way we raise our children. To be happy, you don't need to be rich or live on a desert island. You need to understand the components of a happy life and then cultivate them every day.

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## Happy Moms = Happy Children

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Happiness, as a health and performance factor, is important for everyone. For working mothers, it is doubly important. That is because the happiness of working mothers strongly influences their children. In fact, our research involving over 1000 working mothers around the world showed that the mothers set the emotional tone in the family. They also model behaviors. If you want to raise happy children into happy adults, you need to show them what a happy adult looks like.

The debate between stay at home vs. working mothers has raged for decades. For years, mothers who worked outside the home were told that they were damaging their children by going to work. In response, many highly skilled women stayed at home with their children, turning their back on graduate degrees or years of experience to give their children the best. Other mothers, who went to work, were racked by guilt and exhausted themselves trying to be supermom at the same time they were holding down a job. Recent studies have shown that there is no negative impact on children just because mom works outside the home. Children thrive when their mothers are happy - whether that means going to work or staying at home. When a woman is happy, she is more patient, more creative and more affectionate. She brings her best to her children when she has aligned her life to what she believes is important.

The happiness of mothers and their children, on an aggregate level, becomes a societal imperative. Happy children raised by happy, loving mothers (and fathers) are more likely to stay in school and reach their potential as fully contributing adults. The debate should not be whether it is better for children to have their mothers home full time or not. The debate should be how we help mothers cultivate their own happiness and share that with their family.

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## Happiness = Profit

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Happiness is also good for business. Some forward-thinking employers already are recognizing that happy employees make better employees and that happiness is reflected in the bottom line—happiness equals profit.

Companies can put a dollar value to the happiness of their workforce. If the costs of health care decrease, if employees take fewer sick days (including “mental health” days), and if the cost of employee turnover drops, companies decrease their expenses and increase their overall profit. That’s because when people work in a positive environment, they’re less stressed. Low stress means the different parts of the brain—the amygdala and the frontal cortex -- can work together optimally to make well-reasoned, ethical decisions. Just as stress causes high blood pressure and other physical health symptoms, low stress levels can reduce those symptoms, and the result is less employee time out for sickness.<sup>2</sup>

Fostering happy employees is the single greatest transformation a company can undergo to retain talent, improve its competitive position, and increase its top line revenue. It also has the potential to drastically reduce stress and medical-related workplace costs (and bottom lines in the process).

### **Cost of Unhappiness in Workplace = Health Benefit Costs + Number of Sick Days + Cost of Replacing Lost Talent**

“If employees feel happy about what they are doing, they become more committed and thus complete their tasks more efficiently and to a higher standard,” reports iOpener, a consulting firm in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and South Africa. “There is a particularly strong established correlation between happiness and productivity,” iOpener reports ([www.iopener.co.uk/index.php](http://www.iopener.co.uk/index.php)). “Business has inherently always been about success, and happiness was assumed to be a welcome but unnecessary by-product. However, as plenty of successful people would testify, success is not the same as happiness. We agree with this in that success alone does not lead to long-term business commitment, loyalty, or motivation, whereas being happy at work does.”

Employee engagement—the emotional connection people have to their work or their level of commitment to it—is a strong indicator of a successful business. According to studies done by Hewitt Associates, high-performing companies are those with employee engagement of 60 percent or higher. Happy employees are highly engaged employees. So, for a business to be considered a high performer in its industry, it needs happy and engaged workers.

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## Formula for Happiness

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Once you realize the importance of happiness to your health, the well being of your family and your performance at work, you will want to know how to attain and sustain happiness in your life. Our research has shown that the ingredients of a happy life are:

H - healthy in mind and in body

A - adaptive to change

P - proud of your family

P - proud of your work

Y - young at heart

All of these can be attained through self-awareness and discipline. Some people have a high happiness set point. Studies have shown that 50% of our happiness comes from genetics. For genetically happy people, the formula comes easily. The rest of us need to work at it. But if we do work at it, diligently every day, we can find happiness in the lives we have today or make the changes necessary to make ourselves happy.

Our book, "What Happy Working Mothers Know" (Wiley & Sons, September 2009) makes the research driven case for happiness. It also includes inspiring stories of real women who have found their happiness and provides practical tools for finding happiness in the life you have today. We do not advocate for or against mothers going into the workplace. We advocate for happiness. We support the individual decision of each mother to do what makes her happy because that is the best decision for her family and for society as a whole.

## **About the Authors of “What Happy Working Mothers Know”**

Cathy Greenberg, PhD, is an internationally recognized authority on leadership applying the new science of happiness. An acclaimed speaker and radio show host, she founded h2c - Happy Companies Healthy People in 2004 - the first organization to specialize in coaching leaders on the art and science of building happy, high-performance companies. She is the founder of h2c, LLC, a beacon for happy companies, healthy people and truly gifted leaders. At h2c, "Happiness = Profit" is our winning formula for executive development, where we focus on research and publications on "the new science of happiness." h2c achieves outstanding results transferring coaching knowledge, tools & techniques through peer networks providing enhanced personal awareness and development, greater career success and increased life satisfaction. You can also read more about Cathy by visiting [www.h2cleadership.com/resources/cathy-greenberg.shtml](http://www.h2cleadership.com/resources/cathy-greenberg.shtml)

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