

Happy employees are productive ones, startup leaders share their thoughts for the International Week of Happiness at Work

The International Week of Happiness at Work can be a catalyst for startup businesses, fostering a positive work environment and employee well-being, boosting creativity and productivity - vital elements for entrepreneurial success in today's competitive landscape. By prioritising happiness, startups can attract and retain top talent, leading to sustainable growth and innovation.

This week is the International Week of Happiness at Work; a time to encourage employers and employees to reflect on their happiness levels in the workplace and how they could be improved.

Our feelings at work often dictate how we feel outside of work, and there are a

number of ways to improve workplace wellbeing — as you will learn from the thoughts of our tech industry experts below. Take a read below.

Violeta Martin, Vice President, Commercial Sales EMEA, DocuSign:

“As a leader of over 200 people, building strong teamship is a crucial part of my role. Happier people produce better work. Understanding what your team values and finding the best solutions to align to these can boost morale, meaning, productivity and — ultimately — a high-performing team.

“Our Digital Maturity Report found that the “daily grind” of repetitive, low-value tasks are a top reason staff would consider leaving. 1 in 4 workers surveyed would consider moving roles due to frustration with systems, processes, or ways of working. This shows us that digitisation and automation are key in attracting and retaining the right talent and satisfying the needs of the workforce. Our research reveals that eliminating repetitive tasks that can be automated could create a 25% productivity boost.

“People are central to a successful team, so have their best interests at heart. This helps to build the trust that fuels effective team dynamics and builds a better business.”

Paulo Rodriguez, Head Of International, Vanta:

“All businesses deal with a variety of pressures and setbacks. Without the right culture, skills, and tools, employee happiness inevitably takes a hit. One example of an often high stress area is security and compliance. Keeping on top of the complex and manual work of managing these programmes is vital for building customer trust and unlocking growth. However, it can involve many teams across a business and take employees away from the jobs they were hired to do.

“To foster happiness at work, businesses must strike a balance between keeping on track with the requirements of compliance and regulation, whilst helping employees stay focused on the work they are passionate about. Many leaders are realising that the use of automation can move routine but vital tasks off their teams’ plate. These include manually collecting evidence and screenshots for audits, answering security questionnaires, and keeping track of vendors or system access as employees join and leave the organisation.

“Leveraging automation for tedious and time-consuming manual tasks and continuous security monitoring frees up employees to focus on strategic and creative work. These tasks are much more conducive to real employee happiness.”

Bukki Adedapo, UK Country Manager, Fiverr:

“International Happiness at Work Week presents an opportunity for companies to review their practices and policies, ensuring they are in harmony to cultivate a more joyful workplace. A recent Fiverr study revealed the factors that contribute to positivity in the workplace – for example nearly half of UK workers agree that offices or co-working spaces are their optimal working environment. Understanding insights like this will subsequently, increase productivity, innovation, and engagement.

“A commitment to happiness at work can encompass various initiatives, such as providing flexible work arrangements whilst providing office and co-working spaces, promoting skill development, and offering opportunities for career advancement. By acknowledging the significance of wellbeing on both an individual and collective level, we can lay the foundation for workplaces where people not only excel but also contribute to the overall success of businesses.”

Jai Toy, Chief People Officer, Intuit Mailchimp:

“Happiness at work should be a given. It benefits both employees and businesses alike, and yet it is clear that there is still much work to do. According to recent research, an alarming 87% of employees report feeling a sense of dread at least once a month – through a combination of workplace instability, productivity pressure and rising expectations.

“At Intuit Mailchimp, our employees have access to a wide range of life coaching and digital mindfulness tools, designed to help support these issues. We also offer unconscious bias training, which is mandatory for our senior leaders, and helps create psychological safety for all of our employees. We recently went one step further and joined forces with Headspace to combat the day-to-day stress experienced by busy professionals and business owners, offering a series of videos designed to unlock a better balance between their mental health and career.

“As we mark International Happiness at Work Week, we are reminded that leaders should focus their efforts on connecting, engaging, and empowering their people within a culture of learning and discovery. By creating opportunities for individuals to be themselves and use their talents to help benefit the wider team, employee engagement, happiness and productivity will all improve in turn.”

Joe Militello, Chief People Officer, PagerDuty:

“Now more than ever it’s important for employers to help their employees find fulfilment at work. Happy employees are more engaged, act as culture carriers, attract new talent, boost productivity and help achieve better financial results.

“The tech industry has faced many challenges in recent years, including a

difficult macroeconomic environment, a pandemic, the move to remote work and then the transition to hybrid work, and important social conversations. However, despite these factors, I believe that talented employees are always employable and retainable if an organisation adopts a People First philosophy, celebrates their culture, and upholds their values.

“At PagerDuty, our mission-driven approach – providing value for customers but also recognising there’s no way we can support our customers unless we are taking care of our employees – is why I joined, and why I stay. We have big goals, and we are pursuing them with kindness, empathy, conviction, and collaboration.”

Liina Adov, PhD, Senior Personal Coach, Pipedrive:

“There’s a clear link between being happy in your workplace and a multitude of positive effects on productivity – and life outside of work, too. Sadly, there are many stories of people being unhappy with their jobs, colleagues, or their whole career. Good leaders, mentors, and coaches do everything they can to turn that around – for the person and the business.

“As a coach, I see both culture and personal agency as equally important for creating a thriving workplace. Getting culture and happiness right is a massive force multiplier because it supports talented people in being their best, every day, whatever challenges they might be facing. A senior leader who is sincerely interested in people and culture must be empowered to investigate, enable, and energise their organisation.

“On the personal agency side, everyone must ensure they are in control of a work-life balance, and they understand their stressors and how to manage them. These are key for an enjoyable working experience and personal happiness and fulfilment.

“But employees are human and won’t have all the answers. Reach out for workplace opportunities or find them outside the business, for example coaching or mentoring, to help find your way (back) to productivity, efficiency, and happiness at work. The most important thing to understand is most people can be truly excellent – but we often need help to find our best selves.

“It’s important to take the time to plan, reflect, take feedback, and steer your own path as well as the organisation’s culture to intentionally co-create the workplace everyone wants to turn up to every day.’

Chris Mills, Head of Customer Success, EMEA, Slack:

“This International Happiness at Work Week let’s think about how we can improve a common source of workplace frustration: meetings. Almost everyone

has experienced the pain of unnecessary meetings or suffered the productivity vampire of back to back video calls. But it doesn't need to be like that. Business leaders can create more engaging and impactful modes of collaboration that drive productivity, rather than drain our diaries.

"Whether it's embracing shorter spontaneous huddles instead of 30 minute diary blocks, using video clips for people to catch up on a status update in their own time or even blocking no meeting days every week, there are plenty of ways to break from the meeting-only mindset. By using a productivity platform that opens up these better ways to connect and engage, we can make work simpler, more pleasant and impactful for us all."

Fie Fisker, People and Culture Domain Lead, *Pleo*:

"Today, more than ever, there's a spotlight shining on company culture and employee happiness. Or specifically, what business leaders are doing to improve it. Recent research has highlighted serious gaps in employee happiness - with 26% of Gen Z unhappy at work, and 17% thinking about quitting their jobs. This is despite it being widely accepted that happy employees are productive ones.

"As we mark International Happiness at Work Week, leaders are presented with an opportunity to truly understand what feeling happy and engaged at work means - and then deliver it. For business leaders to create an environment where their teams are happy and thriving, they need to stop telling and start listening. This means facilitating meaningful conversations and nurturing an environment where they can ask the right questions. Open discussions can shed light on what's missing when it comes to a positive culture and can help restore employee happiness to the workplace.

"Of course, employee experience is not a one-size-fits-all, and leaders must cater to different people with different needs at different stages of the employee lifecycle - both today and every day. In order to really get this right, leaders must stop telling and start listening."

James Mensforth, Sales Director UK&I, *Aircall*:

"The ongoing trend of 'quiet quitting' - employees fulfilling the basic tasks of their role, but lacking motivation to go above and beyond - points towards a major lack of employee engagement in the workplace and shows that many people are unhappy at work. While, on the other hand, 'quiet thriving' is about employees taking control of their career, being positive and pursuing new interests and relationships. And it's clear which one business leaders and employees would prefer.

"But making the transition from quitting to thriving isn't as easy as flipping a

switch. One thing that can speed up the transition though and improve happiness at work is coaching. It might be something businesses today are struggling to make time for, with our own research showing how 43% of SMB employees suffer from poor materials or a lack of them. But technology can help solve this – particularly AI-supported tools. These are invaluable in their ability to sift through hours of calls and voicemails to uncover insights and trends which can be turned into resources such as playlists of good and bad calls, playbooks and best practice methods. Harnessing these tools could help businesses find capacity for coaching again, and pivot employees away from ‘quiet quitting’ to quiet and even loud thriving – something that, in turn, will transform their happiness at work.”

Sonja Gittens Ottley, Head of Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging, Asana:

“As we mark International Week of Happiness at Work, we are reminded that employee engagement often directly influences happiness. Engagement is a critical component of business success — and yet research shows that only 34% of employees are actively engaged at work. In the modern age, employees want to do more than work, they want to make a difference. But often, they can’t see the connection between their work and the organisation’s purpose. By ensuring daily work is closely aligned with wider company objectives, individuals can see how they are contributing to the success of the whole team. And when employees feel their work has value, engagement, happiness, productivity and motivation are all boosted in turn — the latter even doubling according to our Anatomy of Work Index.

“Over the course of my career, I have learnt that when working to build an inclusive culture, replicating the approach we use for building a tech product is highly effective. This means not treating company culture as a check-box exercise but instead undertaking constant assessment and evolution through employee consultation, data analysis and policy review. This must be a priority for business leaders moving forward — not just this week, but every day of the year.”

Ivan Cossu, Co-founder & CEO, Deskbird:

“As business leaders, we know the importance of driving results, achieving growth, and increasing profits. But we mustn’t forget the crucial role that happiness plays in the workplace to help achieve these goals.

“The Saïd Business School’s study, Does Happiness Improve Worker Productivity?, shows a sustained link between happiness and business productivity – with happier workers 12% more productive than their unhappy counterparts.

“Leadership and effective management play a huge part in employee

experience, without this we risk losing valuable talent – 79% of employees are quitting their jobs due to a lack of appreciation. Workers need to be listened to and supported, whether they're in the office or working remotely. Offering career mobility and a purpose-driven mission is essential to increasing employee happiness.

“Whether using technology to communicate with co-workers, implementing automated tools to improve day-to-day efficiencies, or offering support through a wellness app, workplace technology offers an abundance of solutions to increase both your employees’ happiness and productivity.

“And while the ability to work flexibly has a significant impact on workers’ mood and satisfaction, so does human interaction and the positive impact of in-person collaboration. Using the right tech to connect your colleagues, allowing them to meet face-to-face and experience social positivity, is arguably more important than ever, given the ease with which remote working has taken off.

“Leaders must think hard about the hybrid and flexible working practices they support and facilitate ways for the teams to connect and meet with fewer clicks and screens. Employees and businesses will immediately feel the benefit.”

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