This Simple Trick Will Make You Better and Happier at Your Job

Tech startups are famous for installing nap pods and break rooms to attract Millennial workers. But most people work in offices where slipping off for a snooze or a foosball match would put a big dent in their promotion prospects. Even for self-employed or remote workers who don’t have a boss peering over their shoulder, taking anything more than a lunch break during work hours is anathema. But this “all work and no play” ethos may be harming employee health and productivity. The latest evidence suggests that taking short breaks during the work day makes employees happier and better at their jobs.

A recent study on call center employees found that taking short breaks to relax or socialize increased employees’ positive affect— basically, their on-the-job outlook, energy and enthusiasm—which translated to measurable gains in sales performance.

“Micro-breaks didn’t directly benefit performance, but they did so indirectly through their impact on the employees’ positive emotions,” says YoungAh Park, coauthor of that study and an assistant professor in the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois. Another of Park’s recent studies linked micro-breaks with reduced stress, which in turn lowered rates of negative mood and emotion at the end of the work day.

A micro-break, Park says, is “a totally voluntary mini-break that employees can take whenever they need.” This is different from a lunch break or some other “formal” respite decreed by an employer, she says.

Apart from the immediate mood and productivity perks linked to micro-breaks, research from Harvard Business School has linked short workplace breaks to lower rates of employee burnout, which could in turn boost employee retention—another incentive for employers.

So what does an ideal micro-break look like?

First of all, it should be unscheduled and informal, says Hannes Zacher, a professor and chair of work and organizational psychology at Leipzig University in Germany who has studied the benefits of micro-breaks. He recommends taking micro breaks in between work tasks—not in the middle of a task—to avoid interrupting workflow and concentration. A microbreak could last anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes, he says, and it should involve healthy and relaxing activities. “We found that going for a quick walk or having a friendly chat with a colleague is better for employees’ momentary well-being and motivation than, for instance, smoking or making a to-do list,” he says.

Anything work-related is a no-no. And when it comes to checking your phone or spending time online, the evidence is mixed. “Our research shows that using social media or making personal calls or emails during breaks does not have negative effects and, for most people, is associated with recovery from work demands,” he says. But he says the opposite is true if a person is checking their phone every five minutes, or spending long periods (roughly, 15 minutes every hour) on social media. Ditto if a person tends to feel anxious or angry after spending time on their phones or online.

For your own well-being and for the health of your businesses, it may be time to start thinking about short breaks as an important part of your work day.

Source: Markham Heid, Time
Educational Corner: Tips for Healthy Aging—It’s Healthy Aging Month!

1. Live An Active Life
Living an active life will help you stay fit enough to maintain your independence to go where you want to and perform your own activities. Regular exercise may prevent or even provide relief from many common chronic conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, depression, and arthritis, to name a few. The key is to stay active, so do something you will enjoy. Try to incorporate aerobic, balance, and muscle strengthening activities into your routine.

2. Maintain Your Brain
One in eight older adults (aged 65+) in the United States has Alzheimer’s disease, and some cognitive decline is a normal part of aging. Studies have shown that a lifestyle that includes cognitive stimulation through active learning slows cognitive decline. Never stop learning and challenging your mind! Take dance lessons, learn a new language, attend lectures at a local university, learn to play a musical instrument, or read a book.

3. Cultivate Your Relationships
Twenty-eight percent of older adults live alone, and living alone is the strongest risk factor for loneliness. Common life changes in older adulthood, such as retirement, health issues, or the loss of a spouse, may lead to social isolation. Schedule regular time to meet with friends and family — over coffee, during a weekly shared meal, or around a common interest. Reach out to friends who might be isolated or feel lonely.

4. Reduce Stress
As we age, our stressors change and so does our ability to deal with stress. Long-term stress can damage brain cells and lead to depression. Stress may also cause memory loss, fatigue, and decreased ability to fight off and recover from infection. In fact, it is estimated that more than 90% of illness is either caused or complicated by stress. Take care of yourself when you are stressed by getting enough sleep, exercising, and eating nutritious foods. Talk to a loved one or counselor about your stress, and try some relaxation techniques, such as circular breathing, yoga, or meditation.

Source: Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center

Healthy Cooking: Slow-Cooker Chicken Pot Pie Soup

**Ingredients:**
- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- Salt and pepper
- Half an onion, diced
- 2-3 cloves garlic, minced
- A sprig of fresh or pinch of dried rosemary
- A sprig of fresh or pinch of dried thyme
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 large russet potato, peeled and diced
- 1 package frozen peas and carrots (about 2-3 cups)
- 2 tbsp. flour
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 3 tbsp. cornstarch

**Directions:**
1. Place the chicken, salt and pepper, onion, garlic, rosemary, thyme, chicken broth, potato, and pea/carrot mixture into a slow cooker. Cook on high for 3 hours. Remove the chicken, shred, and return to the pot. Remove the herb sprigs.
2. In a separate bowl, mix the flour and cream together until smooth. Add to the slow cooker. Keep it on high heat for another hour. For a thicker soup, whisk the cornstarch with a bit of cold water and add it to the soup in the slow cooker.
3. Cut your puff pastry into hearts, circles, triangles, or squares—these will top your soup. Bake as directed.
4. Stir the parsley into the soup. Divide the soup among the bowls, and top with the puff pastry.
The Art of Packing Lunch: Six Nutrition-Boosting Tips

Soon it’s the time to rinse the sand out of your hair, pack up the beach gear, and honor the rhythm of fall. Yes, campers, it’s time to get back to school and recommit to work and career. It’s also an excellent time, during this transition of fall, to consider taking regular time out to be quiet and rest, as work has a way of taking over every spare moment and drop of attention you provide. Rest and repletion are non-negotiable.

One way to take care of yourself and your family is to pack beautiful and balanced lunches—gifts you make by hand to be unwrapped throughout the day. Packing lunch is part of a morning ritual that determines overall nutritional wellness.

When it comes to packing nutritious lunches, we as a nation have room for improvement. A recent report by the School Nutrition Association noted that only 27 percent of packed lunches that kids brought to school met even some of the national recommendations for balanced, quality nutrition. We can do better!

Here are six tips for transforming your brown bags into nutritional care packages.

1. **Embrace the challenge.** You’re the chef, and every choice you make in favor of nutrient density (a measure of food quality—nutrients per calorie) in place of processed, sugar-heavy foods will help build resilient genes, bodies, and minds.

2. **Think balance.** As you plan and assemble packed lunches, imagine the food on a plate—is half the plate made up of colorful fruit and vegetables? Is there a serving of high-quality protein (beans, tofu, or plant-based or grass-fed animal foods, for example)? Are there a variety of colors and flavors? Does it give a nod to the season via the plants and flavors you choose? (For fall, try yellow squash with cinnamon, broccoli with mustard, apples and pears, and spiced nuts.)

3. **Make sure you have options and variety.** Think about the day you’ll have, and pack accordingly. Having an extra snack of nuts and fruit in your lunch might help you avoid what nutritionist call “food emergencies”—when you’re hungry and have nothing healthy available, so you end up going for something less than ideal. Make a list of two or three snacks you like, and change them up to keep things interesting.

4. **Go for high quality vs. convenience.** Packing your own lunch will save you cold, hard cash. Put your savings into high-quality (and yes, more expensive) ingredients, like grass-fed, organic animal foods; locally grown vegetables; and flavor-filled condiments like pesto or chutney.

5. **Get out of (or into) the box.** There are great lunchbox choices available now, from Japanese-inspired bento boxes to classic Batman boxes with a thermos. Express yourself! Packing a set of real silverware, or having nice napkins stashed in your desk, can make lunch a little more special.

6. **Feel the love.** Taking the time and energy to pack a colorful, balanced lunch is excellent self-care—whether you’re packing for yourself or a family member. Take a moment or two to notice how good it feels to do this for yourself or your loved one. Pat yourself on the back, and repeat.

Source: Kripalu.org
What’s Happiness, Anyways?

What is happiness? People have agonized over this question for centuries, but only recently has science begun to weigh in on the debate. Before I get into what the science has concluded, let me start by giving some answers to a somewhat easier question: what isn’t happiness?

It’s not always a good mood. Recent research suggests that a balanced mood is more psychologically healthy than a mood in which you achieve great heights of happiness regularly—after all, what goes up must come down. Furthermore, when you ask people what makes their lives worth living, they rarely say anything about their mood. They are more likely to cite things that they find meaningful, such as their work or relationships. Recent research even suggests that if you focus too much on trying to feel good all the time, you’ll actually undermine your ability to feel good at all.

It’s not about the money. While living below the poverty line certainly makes it hard to be happy, beyond that, money does not appear to buy happiness. Imagine you unexpectedly get a $10,000/year raise. While you would certainly be excited in the short term, it would only be a matter of time before your expectations change to fit your new budget. Before you know it, you’re just as happy as you were before the raise! This holds true for new houses, new cars, new gadgets, and all of the other material goods that people spend so much time pining for. The only exception to this rule is when you spend your money on experiences with other people.

The research suggests that happiness is a combination of how satisfied you are with your life (for example, finding meaning in your work) and how good you feel on a day-to-day basis. Both of these are relatively stable—that is, our life changes, and our mood fluctuates, but our general happiness is more genetically determined than anything else. The good news is, with consistent effort, this can be offset. So it goes, too, with happiness.

Source: Happify.com