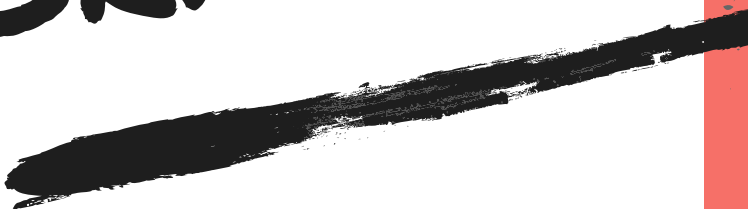SALLY ROBINSON

GUIDE TO CREATING A HAPPIER WORKPLACE

Great tips on fostering a better office environment.

Our resident expert Sally Robinson has a unique blend of professional experience in a variety of different industries. Drawing from her wealth of experience, she has compiled this excellent guide on how to create a happier workplace:

You name the place, I've probably worked there. OK, that's perhaps an exaggeration but in my 20 years as a professional I have tried my hand at a vast number of things. Before co-founding Splunch Club, I was CRHO at a leading tech company in Dublin. Over the years I've done everything, from customer support agent in Berlin, to yoga instructor in Bali to HR Operations in San Francisco. This exposure to multiple different work environments and cultures has really helped me to clearly identify the essential ingredients to any happy workplace. This guide aims to share this insight and give you plenty of actionable takeaways so you can start to make your team happier and more productive today.

In general, each one of us spends 40 hours per week at work. Personally,

I'm lucky enough to sleep for at least nine hours every night so that means about 40% of my waking hours are spent at work. 40%! Just think of how important it is for one's well-being and sanity that this precious time is spent in an emotionally healthy environment. Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean skipping merrily to work on a Monday morning but overall it is crucial that one derives happiness from their workplace.

Plus, happy employees are generally far more productive, satisfied and are retained for a much longer time. They are also likely to become evangelists for your company and promote a positive company image outside of the office doors. We all know this to be true but exactly which components are needed to create this magical office environment?

>>>Ethos and values<<<
I know it to be 100% true that companies which have a clear vision and are transparent with their employees have far superior retention and employee satisfaction scores than those that don't. This doesn't need to

be a long-winded process. The first step I would advise making is defining the core characteristics you wish every one of your employees to have. Is it humility? Creativity? Or just plain old grit? I recommend identifying what your company values most. Be as specific as possible. Make sure everyone on your team is on the same page and adjust your hiring efforts accordingly. At Splunch Club, for example, we value employees who are passionate and determined. We look for these qualities throughout the interview process and seek tangible examples of this in our candidate's professional history. This way we know that all of our new hires are food obsessed and tenacious - two key criteria you need to fulfill to succeed at Splunch Club.

Employees also need to be connected with what they're doing in order to gain fulfillment. A striking example that springs to mind for me is a call centre I worked in in Germany. Every day I'd come in, process 60 - 80 calls and leave again. Nothing was communicated to me or my team about how our role impacted the company as a whole and there was

absolutely no talk about growth or values. Needless to say, people didn't stick around very long. I lasted six months. Contrast this with a very similar company I worked in in London where every few weeks we would receive up to date information on company progress and plans from the executives. We would also collaboratively brainstorm on how we could better help our customers and play an active role in improving our processes. The company was an open book and I felt truly valued. This had a powerful impact. I was excited by my work and could identify the overall impact my efforts had on the business. Granted, this transparency inevitably gets a little more difficult as companies grow but if you want to have the best culture possible, it is absolutely necessary.

>>Office design and furnishings<< Next, let's talk about the inside of your office. I've seen the full spectrum of office design. From spacious new age playgrounds with hammocks to tiny, cramped rooms with people fiercely contending for desk space. And I have to say, there is definitely a strong case for

the modern tech company approach to office design. Bright spaces optimized for maximum comfort and enjoyment tend to make employees happier. Not surprising! Of course, not every company has the budget to adorn their offices as lavishly as Google, for example, but I'll go through some key factors are crucial to give your office that feng shui factor.

Firstly, insofar as you can, create a comfortable environment for people to be. This goes hand and hand with a casual, comfortable dress code. Where possible, provide your employees with intelligently designed furniture such as ergonomic chairs and standing desks to help prevent pain and maximize comfort. If you are an office manager, some lower cost options worth considering are making use of plants and windows. Research shows that office plants have a significant impact on mood levels and even help people to concentrate. Ever notice how adding a few potted plants to your

sitting room makes the place look instantly more cheery? The same can be said for your office. Also make sure window spaces are uncluttered and allow natural light to shine through.

Additionally, make sure there's a communal lunch area available to all. These foster a real sense of community in the office and allow people to form lasting relationships with their co-workers.

>>Importance of wellness and nutrition<<
In my experience, wellness and nutrition is really the most important step you can take to make your workplace a happier one. Providing healthy snacks and lunch options will not only help your employees to associate work with health and wellbeing but will also have a surprisingly significant impact on productivity and energy levels. Fruits, vegetables and nuts are great examples of healthy snacks which give your employees that boost they need when energy levels are waning. There are also many reasonably priced cafes, restaurants

and catering services which deliver salads and healthy dishes to offices at lunch time. This doesn't have to cost a fortune, there are plenty of low cost options out there. Sugary and fatty snacks are not only detrimental to one's health but also take their toll on happiness and productivity in the office. I know all too well how tempting it is to pop out and binge on a pizza on a busy and stressful day. However if there are healthy and nutritious options readily available onsite, employees are much more likely to choose wisely. As more and more research reveals the significant health benefits of healthy office snack, get ahead of the curve and show your employees you value their health and wellbeing but giving them a real choice.

>>>Social events<<<

I discussed the importance of communal lunch areas above and their role in bringing employees together. You should also consider other ways in which you can help your employees get together. Effective ways of encouraging people to mix include office tag rugby teams, beer nights on a Friday and movie clubs. These don't have to be extra curricular either, consider a pot luck lunch club or a book club at lunch

time? The charity group in my last company worked fantastically well, not only in terms of fundraising money for worthwhile causes but also bringing groups of different people together. You don't necessarily have to have a foosball or ping pong table in the break area (although it helps!), just think of some simple ways you can make your office a more enjoyable place to be. A few board games or speakers can make the world of difference.

>>>Finally, be flexible<<<
Treat your employees like grown ups, not naughty school children. Offer some flexibility around arrival, departure times and breaks. Within reason of course. Also consider giving your team the option to work from home now and again where possible. Employees with children won't be able to thank you enough for this flexible approach. In environments where management is sensitive to work and personal life, employees are much more motivated to exceed expectations.

I speak from experience in saying that taking the time and effort to implement some or all of the steps above will turn

your office into a much happier workplace. Remember, bad moods and stress can have a corrosive impact on the atmosphere in your office which directly affects productivity, retention and inevitably revenue. To recap: focus on redefining and improving your values, optimizing your office space, providing healthy and nutritious food, organizing social events and be more flexible in your approach! Do this and you will quickly begin to reap the benefits. You'll feel it in the vibe in the office but also achieve tangible results in terms of employee satisfaction levels, productivity, attracting better quality employees and retaining them and that all-important revenue growth.