

Noticing Good Things at Work

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Adapted from



1 Read the story. Underline interesting or good ideas.
Highlight new words or things you don't understand.

Good and bad things happen at work every day. Most people focus mainly on negative experiences. They're what you focus on, mentally recycle (re-think?), and talk about to your coworkers and friends. It sometimes feels good to talk about the negatives: It feels like stress release.



If someone were to tell you to focus only on the positive experiences in your day, you might think that is silly. People tend to associate too much positivity with inexperienced managers. It seems like trying to get a little more work out of employees. It might even seem like a “keep smiling” poster on the break room wall.

What most people don't realize is that positive experiences — even small ones — provide you with valuable resources. They can reduce stress. They lessen physical problems like headaches or tense muscles. They make it easier for you to “leave work problems at the office” at the end of the day.

Our research found that having a system to thinking about positive events is healthy. Don't mentally recycle negative things. Instead, try to “savor” — relive, enjoy, and share — the positive events of your day.

For most people, this doesn't happen naturally. Over thousands of years, humans learned to be careful about negative things. On the plains of Africa, negative things might have killed out ancestors. Also, people quickly get used to positives. We hardly notice them. But a simple task can help overcome both these habits.

Here's the experiment we did to study the “three good things” strategy in the workplace. Research shows that “three good things” helps depressed* people. We wanted to know if it would lower stress in healthy workers.

We asked workers to log onto a website at the end of their work day. They took a survey — but they didn't know what we were studying. The survey had them to spend five to 10 minutes writing about things that had gone “really well” at work that day. They could be large or small things. They also explained *why* they had gone well.

Workers had a wide range of good events: • Bringing delicious food for lunch, • The fact that it was Friday, • Nice comments from customers or co-workers. • Knowing what to do to solve a work problem.

After three weeks, stress levels dropped. The workers had fewer mental and physical problems. They changes were small but significant.* Also, on days they focused on good things, they were more able to turn-off stressful job-related thoughts after they went home.

This simple practice — writing about three good things that happened — creates a real change in what people think about. It changes how they think about their work lives. People who reflect on good things that happened during the day are more likely to share those things with family and friends. Sharing positive events with others creates connections between people. It can even improve sleep. That leads to greater alertness* and better mood. Of course, those things lead to more positive things happening the next day.

The exercise is easy-to-do and inexpensive. It might lead to more creative thinking and innovation*. Growth, development, and forward thinking come from positive emotions.

Complaining about your boss and coworkers is common. And can even be valuable if it helps you feel understood. But there are downsides to negativity. Research is not clear on whether focusing on negative events actually relieves stress. And in a workplace, negative comments can spread through the organization. That can create a negative workplace culture.

It is unlikely that people will stop talking about negative experiences at work. It is natural. But focusing on positive events can provide balance. Companies can take steps to help people notice and share positive experiences. For example, how about starting a meeting with a review of what has gone well recently? This might be better than focusing on what needs to be improved?

What's great about this exercise, however, is the power it gives to each of us on a daily basis. As you are leaving work, take a moment to reflect on the good things that happened that day. This can help you make use of the small, natural flow of daily positive events. These are a huge source of strength and well-being.

② Discuss the article with a partner. Look at each paragraph. What did you understand? What ideas do you like. Help you partner with things they don't understand.

③ Try it yourself. For the next week, try to write 3 good things that happen each day. Write **why** (*Why they happened* or *Why they were good.*). We'll talk about your answers next week.

*** Vocabulary:**

depressed = 落ち込んだ

significant = 重要な

alertness = 警戒

innovation = 革新

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