

Happiness and Morale

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

Are morale and happiness really the same thing? We say that people at work have high morale when they are happy, but does one always follow the other? I can imagine that they are linked in some way, usually, but I suspect it is possible to have high morale even if you do not particularly like your job.

Think about some job or activity that you have had in the past that you really did not enjoy very much. You were not cheerful while on the job, but you might have had high morale because it was getting you somewhere. A good example might be working toward a college degree. I recognize that, for most people, reading books, writing papers, and taking exams are not fun activities. I remember being very unhappy as a student many times, as the stress would get to me. Yet, while not enjoying the work at all, I still had very high morale because I knew the education would pay off in the end, which it did.

Let's find an example of the reverse situation: Happy but with low morale. There are numerous ways this can happen. You might be in a situation where you are working for a leader you do not respect and who tries to bribe people into being engaged in the work by letting them get away with things and giving away perks beyond a reasonable level. This leader has one thing in mind, make people at work happy. Well, he can accomplish this and make me happy about all the goodies he is providing and that he lets me go home early whenever I want. It is not hard to imagine my morale being rather low after a while. Reason: I am not challenged and am given things that I do not deserve.

Another example might be when working on a specific project that I know is important. I am working in a not-for-profit organization. Here I am happy because my labor is going for a good cause. The result of my work is helping many needy families. I have to tolerate the fact that my boss is a hopeless micromanager who needs to know the details of everything I do and wants me to do everything how he would do it. I can be

happy with the contribution I am making to society, but my morale is low because of the working conditions I must endure for the privilege of making that contribution.

Most of the time we see a linking of happiness and morale. Workers who are satisfied usually also exhibit high motivation, but it does not always have to be so. In fact, Frederick Herzberg taught us over 60 years ago, with his Two Factor Theory, that the controlling factors for satisfaction are different from those that generally cause motivation. He called the things that keep people from becoming unhappy "hygiene factors." These would be things like pay, bonuses, nice offices, clean restrooms, comfortable furniture, and parking close to the building. If the hygiene factors are missing, then people are going to become dissatisfied, but piling on more hygiene factors is not the way to create higher motivation or morale. The "motivating factors" of responsibility, accountability, autonomy, flexibility, caring, and other less tangible factors have more power to create morale and motivation.

We see that there is a general trend that happy workers have high morale, and I grant that is usually the case. The two concepts are not the same, and neither are they hard-wired together. To have the most productive workers, not only do they need to be reasonably happy, but they must simultaneously have high morale. Leaders need to test for both conditions.

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