


# The ABCs of Work: Be Happy

**Career Development**



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic is learning how to **Be Happy**.

Last time we talked about doing a Good Job, in the sense that you must do a good job in your current

job before you're ready to move on to the next one. Today we talk about how to manage your happiness, whatever stage your career is at.



Wherever you are in your career, it is important to be happy. Mary Long / *Shutterstock.com*

## Oh, is that all?

If only it were so easy, right? By identifying the importance of being happy, we can just flip a switch and decide to be happy. (It's almost like thinking that attending a 30-minute training on unconscious bias can overcome deeply rooted and inherent elements of the human condition. But that's a separate topic.)

I first discussed the idea of seeking happiness and satisfaction at work in an early and enduringly popular article Career Path: The Stoic Career. That article highlights why our career ambitions risk making us miserable. I provide advice there on how to change the ways we think about what work offers us.

In The Stoic Career, we read quotes on happiness:

> A wise man is content with his lot, whatever it be — without wishing for what he has not.
>
> Seneca

> Be content with what you have, rejoice in the way things are. When you realize nothing is lacking, the entire world belongs to you.
>
> Lao Tzu

Excellent words, but they tell us what we seek, not necessarily how to get there.

I can offer more specific guidance. Consider these methods to **cultivate a positive mindset**:

- **Express gratitude**. Every day, take a few minutes to acknowledge one or two things you are thankful for. They can be trivial, such as sunny weather or the fact you took the stairs instead of the elevator. The key is to habituate yourself to recognizing and appreciating good things. We do it at the family dinner table, where each person takes a turn. It is one of my favorite parts of the day.
- **Write down some thoughts**. Also known as journaling, but no need to be fancy. The method here is simplicity itself. Take the first five minutes at work to write down whatever's on your mind. That's it. Don't worry whether it's profound, or interesting, or even coherent. Just expressing thoughts like this tends to create a calmer mind.
- **Connect with people in your network**. Once a week, send a short message to a few people in your network, personal or professional. If you are regular in your habit, you'll interact with many people over a year. Even brief social encounters do wonders for our long-term happiness.
- **Exercise**. Keeping with the simplicity theme, just get up and walk around for five minutes every two hours. That alone is sufficient to improve a sedentary person's health. If you want to do more, by all means. An exercise habit is an all-round superstar in unlocking life benefits.
- **Keep a task list**. In addition to whatever fancy method you use, try writing on a piece of paper each day some tasks you wish to accomplish. The simpler the better. Then cross off the items you complete. So satisfying. Do it daily, and you'll be that person who regularly gets things done.

> Even brief social encounters do wonders for our long-term happiness.

## Is this just another case of faking it?

Now you might be thinking, "James, are you suggesting that if I try these simplistic hacks, I can trick myself into being happy? I've got problems and stress you know nothing about!" I acknowledge you are each unique, and that you may be in some tough situations. But yes, I also assert that you can hack your way to happiness.

But don't take my word for it. Run some experiments on yourself. The beauty of this approach is that with a few minutes' investment, you aren't sacrificing much of your day. The potential upside is pretty great, and the cost is minimal. So give being happy a try, and you can thank me for it later.

## Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as being happy. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But, the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here, to finish, are some honorable mentions to serve as food for thought:

- **Heavy lifting.** I could also have said Hard Work for this one. I've written before in Career Path: Hard Work Doesn't Make You a Hero that simply working hard will not guarantee your success. But provided you're working on your strategic priorities, hard work will certainly help you make progress. Look, our jobs are not easy. Sometimes we just need to put our heads down and invest quality time. Not everyone can do it, and if you can you will pull ahead.
- **Helpful**. Just like people prefer to work with happy people, we also love to be around helpful people. When we're busy, it is easy to jealously guard our time and focus on our own priorities. Doing so is essential to avoid being overwhelmed. On that, see Career Path: Can You Be Too Good at Your Job? Yet some of the busiest people I know still find time to help their colleagues: making a connection, passing on a helpful reference, answering a question. A few minutes is often all it takes to greatly help someone. They're much more inclined to help you when the tables are turned.

Be well.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

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