

In the 1937 Disney movie [“Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”](#) the dwarfs sang the tune [“Whistle While You Work”](#). Is it possible that Walt Disney



understood the Science of Mindful Attention by [Adele Diamond](#)? *“That what nourishes the human spirit, the whole person, it turns out, also hones our minds.”*

In my last article [Happiness is a Choice](#), I discussed how the brain’s limbic system is primal and its function is to protect or defend one from “danger”. When one is **Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired**, the stress response kicks in. This causes a [Happiness HALT](#). The limbic system goes into survival mode. Often unhealthy choices are made that essentially numb our emotional self. We choose to disconnect and disengage instead of choosing to connect and contribute. [Gallup’s engagement surveys](#) reveal that employees prefer to follow leaders that make them “feel” connected as valued contributors.

Primal Need to Feel Good About Oneself

We all have a “primal need to belong and “feel” we are making a meaningful contribution. For many, the need to connect and contribute is achieved through one’s work. For most, work is as much about [significance](#) as it is about salary. Even when salary is seen as the biggest carrot, it is often because the money goes toward a higher purpose such as raising a family or public service.

It’s estimated that more than half the population is operating on [autopilot at work](#). In fact, many of us work and live in a state of perpetual non-engagement, just showing up physically but not emotionally engaged. Is it any

wonder employees often turn to unhealthy habits to feel connected, to relieve stress, or to supplement boredom?

A 1996 *Fortune* magazine survey indicated that eight out of ten people would continue working even if they became rich enough that they did not need the money. Why? Most replied that they need to feel they are providing a “higher” service through meaningful connection and contribution. As mentioned earlier, research from the Gallup Organization reveals that less than one third of the U.S. workforce feel truly engaged (happy) in their work. The other two-thirds are either just showing up not really “feeling” good about themselves or most likely, not making others feel good either.

[Laura Graves’ research](#)

asked 357 managers how much they enjoyed their work and how driven they were to do it, their level of career engagement and how much emotional strain they were experiencing. Laura’s research team asked people who interacted with them frequently to answer the same questions. Again, people who rated their enjoyment higher were also better performers, experienced and caused, less emotional strain in the workplace, and most important felt higher career engagement (happiness). The study reinforces if you want your workers to be more productive, keep them intrinsically motivated (happy) to do the job.



[Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs](#) is often used to gauge work engagement and satisfaction. The graphic on the next page shows how only 15% of employees “whistle while they work”. Just satisfying the lower level needs of survival and security will not trigger happy feelings of engagement. The happy “engagement” motivators include feelings of connection, importance (contribution), and higher self-esteem!



More recently, psychologist [Martin Seligman's research on optimism and happiness](#) proposes five elements of well-being to increase happiness at work. One of my favorite books of Martin Seligman's is [Flourish](#). Flourishing is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Individuals who have a high level of flourishing (psychological well-being) tend to learn more deeply, work more productively, are more likely to contribute to their community,

and have better health and life expectancy. The book focuses on how to have "the good life" in our relationships and at work – the essence of happiness. Seligman argues that just learning about happiness makes people happier! When [coaching leaders and teams](#), I often introduce Seligman's five elements of "happiness" based on the acronym PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishments.

Five Elements of Happiness

Positive Emotion: Feelings of happiness attract more positive people and joyful events.	<i>What can you do this week that will spark laughter and play?</i>
Engagement: Emotionally absorbed and inspired by your contributions.	<i>How will you share a strength this week?"</i>
Relationships: Nurture Relationships that bring happiness and well-being into one's life/career.	<i>"How do you make others "feel" good about themselves?</i>
Meaning: Daily habits make you feel connected and valued.	<i>What habits make you "feel" connected and valued?</i>
Accomplishment: A need and desire to achieve meaningful goals achievement	<i>What can you achieve this week makes you feel significant and connected?</i>

SHOULD LEADERS WHISTLE WHILE THEY WORK? YES

The Paradox of Choice

When is the right time to pay attention to the science of “happiness”? According to blogger [Eric Barker](#), leaders should learn to say No to success and “Yes” to happiness habits. Leaders who “feel” happy say YES to events and people that make them feel good about themselves. Happy leaders are open to opportunities that provide them with new and interesting experiences. They are vulnerable and interact with people at a deeper, human level. And, leaders who enjoy their work are not only productive; they and their team are happier and

stay longer with the organization. Leaders that practice happiness habits lead others to success and significance.

I strongly believe the goal of any leadership initiative or coaching program is to use the science of happiness to get your leaders, and their teams to whistle while they work. *What experiences will you start to say yes to that will bring you and others more positive connection, contribution and joy?*

I love to hear about leadership best practices that spark others to “Whistle While You Work”.

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