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It's not my job to make you happy

Before I took on the CEO's role at my company, I knew exactly the kind of changes I'd make so everyone would be delighted to work here.

I quickly learned that it's easy to second-guess the top guy when you have only your own point of view to consider. But you can never please everyone. Never. You make a decision that affects people and about half of them will be thrilled and half will think it's the worst thing ever. People don't necessarily want what I would want.

Of course, it's still my job to make decisions. And it's my job to be clear about our objectives and goals. Part of my role is to make sure our culture is clear to all constituents.

It's the employee's job to decide if our culture is in line with his or her own priorities. If they're aligned, great. If not, that employee won't be happy here. And if the employee doesn't care about alignment or our priorities, then I won't be happy with that employee.

That's why I am quick to say — maybe too quick — if you're not happy, you don't need to stick around.

Getting our priorities aligned: Part of me goes along with conventional wisdom that says a happy employee is a productive employee. I'd love to see us get 100 percent on all the questions in the annual employee survey and win one of those best-places-to-work awards.

Another part of me — let's call it the realist — sees the causal relationship reversed: A productive employee is a happy employee.

If someone isn't happy to work here, it's their job to figure out why, not mine. They may be upset that we don't provide free lunches, like Google does. But it seems far more likely that they're unhappy because they're not succeeding.

Even if my core belief is that unhappiness at work is about lack of success, that doesn't mean nothing about it is my responsibility.

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drought, and making sales is part of my responsibility, I have to do my part to get things rolling again.

All managers have a role. An employee's manager has an enormous impact on that person's morale. When a manager provides clear direction about the employee's responsibilities and the manager's expectations, the employee is much more likely to succeed.

In fact, everyone in the company has a responsibility to communicate clearly. Information about employee needs must percolate up to senior leaders. Expectations must filter down from senior leaders. If an issue is raised to me, it's my job to provide an answer — even if my answer is “No, we're not going to do that.” It's also my role to try to keep things fair and equitable. Each department can't have different rules or the whole team will be thrown out of balance and morale will suffer.

Why I care that employees care: While a productive employee is more likely to be happy than an unproductive one, a happy employee is not always productive.

An expert in happiness (or “subjective well-being”), Edward Diener, a University of Illinois psychologist, was cited on this topic in an Oct. 3, 2008, *Wall Street Journal* article. His studies showed that “college students who score super-high in happiness seldom

I know I can help people be successful. For example, I need to be sure we're adequately staffed, so our people have the support they need. I have to remember to thank the team for their hard work. I must help build the confidence of individual team members. And if our company

have the GPAs to match; the very perkier adults are usually outearned by their more even-keel colleagues; and a company filled with nothing but smiling faces runs the risk of playing second fiddle to one staffed with less-upbeat folks.”

You can see a little of this in yourself, can't you? If you're the least bit complacent, you don't perform as well — whether on the tennis court or in the boardroom. The power of positive thinking may not be enough, if that's what you're counting on to succeed. A sense of well-being shouldn't stop you from trying your hardest.

Passion about excellence is a big part of our culture. As a direct marketing agency, we are accountable for our clients' marketing successes. We hold our employees accountable in a similar way — and we reward them based on merit.

That's why, if employees aren't passionate about their job and what we do as an organization, they aren't a cultural fit for us.

I don't mind giving my employees perks like free dinners when they stay late or free soda all day long. It's meant to show how much I appreciate their hard work. It doesn't mean I'll be satisfied with their work if they're not doing their best.

I want people to like the work they do. I hope they throw themselves into it. It adds a lot to my own personal happiness quotient when I see that my co-workers are successful, empowered and growing professionally. I love it when we can reward them for their accomplishments.

Furthermore, I don't expect everyone to be just like me. Some people will be disappointed by some of my decisions. Everyone is different. There are always surprises. That's what makes our jobs interesting.

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