



The Magic of Positivity and Recognition at Work

with Dr. Tina Hallis

How you can start using positivity
to increase performance, creativity
and happiness in the workplace.

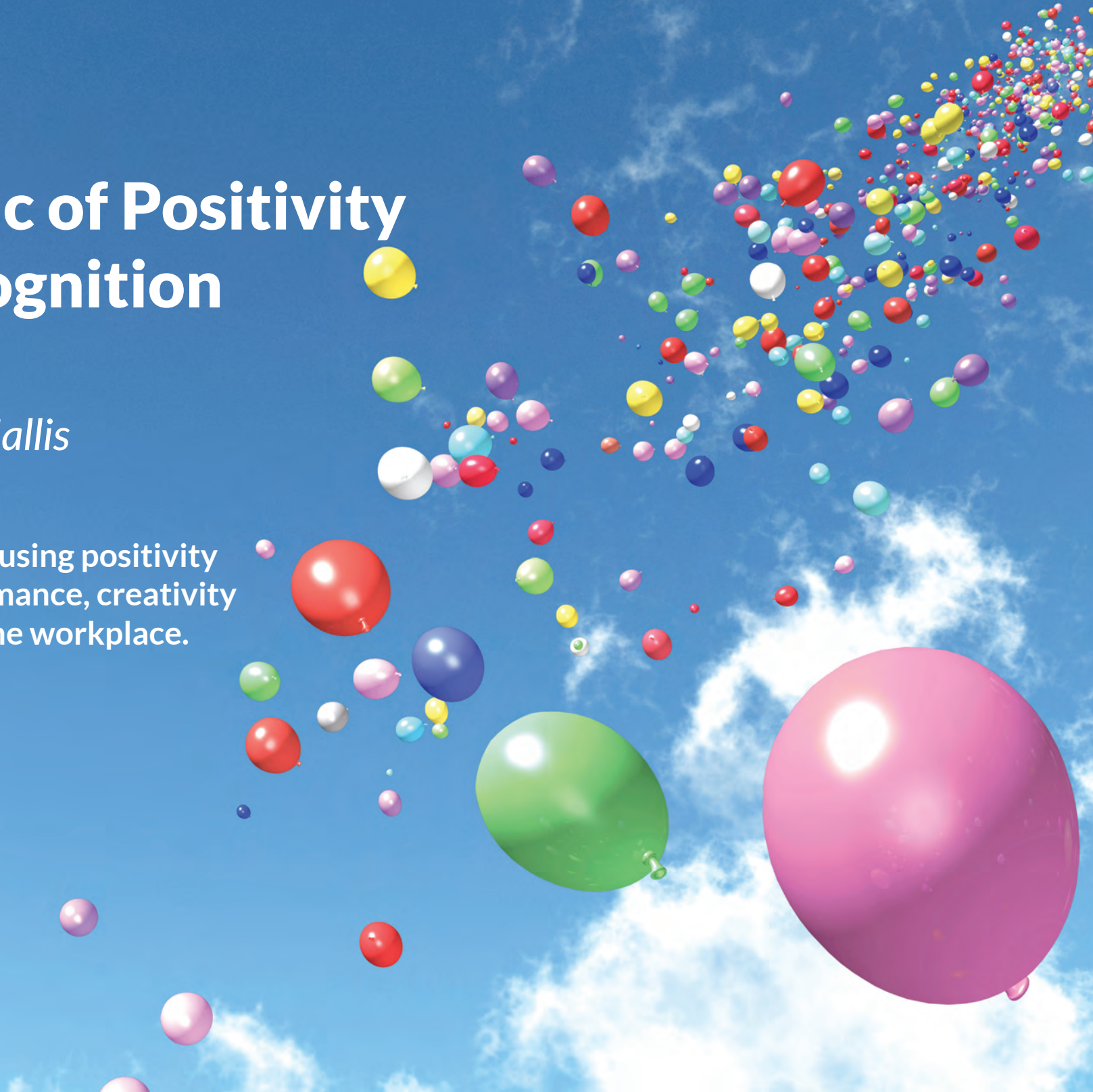
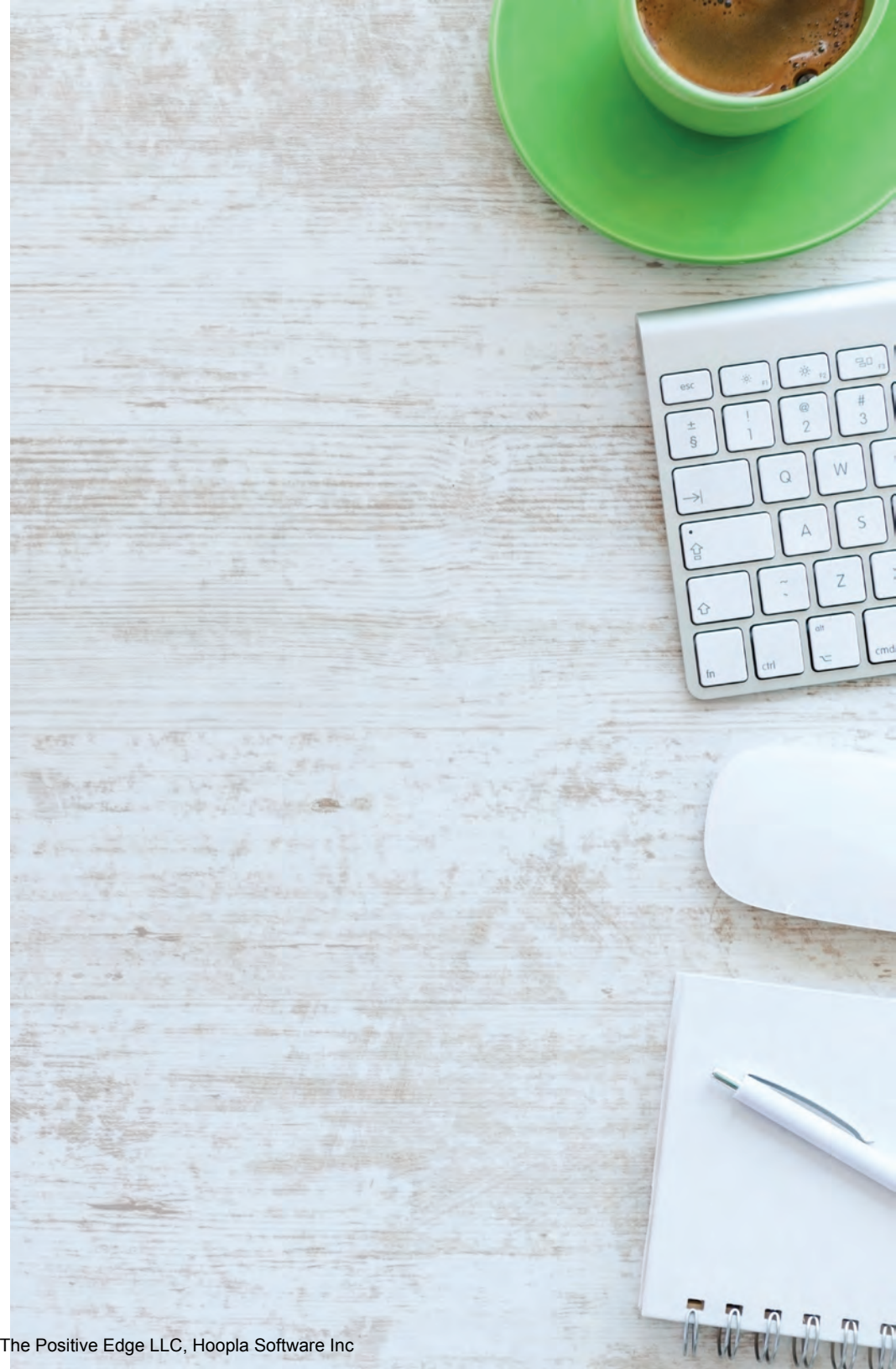


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Is Your Workplace Infested With Negativity? Then Exterminate It!

Has Negativity Poisoned Your Workplace? There Is An Antidote!

There can be many reasons that negativity invades a workplace; getting stuck in survival mode from the recent financial gloom, changes in regulations, policies, leadership, technology, etc. Or, it could even be due to a single individual that has a contagious bad attitude. This negativity doesn't just sap the joy from your workplace; it literally steals from your bottom line due to lost productivity and turnover. The result is an environment where people are doing the best they can considering how little they care. No one wants to take responsibility for the poor morale and lost employee performance, although many people are happy to point fingers.

Who's to Blame?

The Employees?

Let's start with the easiest of the three - the employee. The attitude people bring to work plays a huge role in their performance. If they are motivated, optimistic, and open-minded, they will be more productive, innovative, and engaged.

This isn't just the mindset they have at work, but the view they take on life as a whole. They are problem solvers, not victims; they are collaborative, not back-stabbers; and they look for possibilities, not excuses. At the end of the day, they get the job done and do it well.

Their attitude is contagious and they positively influence those around them to raise the level of performance of their colleagues too. Interestingly, maintaining and strengthening this positive mindset also strongly depends on the situation they find themselves in at work.





The Manager?

How about the manager? This person can easily make or break the ability of the employee to bring their best to work. We've all experienced it; the boss who ignores us, doesn't appreciate our work, doesn't provide feedback unless it's on our mistakes. They may even berate us in front of others. We leave work feeling like the life and joy have been drained out of us. Compare this to the boss who cares about us, encourages and appreciates us, and wants us to succeed.

They are interested in our ideas; they help us use our strengths to learn and grow and to see how our work contributes to the big picture. But, an even bigger influencer is the mindset of the manager. Attitudes are contagious, and when it's the attitude of the boss, it has the biggest impact. Their moods can permeate the entire department. Our open limbic system and mirror neurons provide the physiological means for employees to be strongly affected by their boss' frustration, anxiety or even disengagement.

The Company?

So that leaves “the company”. What I mean by “company” is the leaders, the policies, and the benefits - all those things that are out of control of the manager and the employee. Although a good deal of attention has been put on the company culture, it is our everyday work environment that has the biggest impact on our performance.

Rather than focusing on the company culture itself (especially in bigger companies), how can the leaders provide policies and programs that support employees’ personal development, fulfillment, and overall well-being? Here’s the key - it’s not just what the leaders do, but *why* they do it. All the training modules, recognition programs, and mission statements will only make a difference if people feel like the company cares; otherwise it’s just empty gestures done to “check the box,” which creates suspicion and distrust. Leaders need to take the time to sincerely understand the needs of their managers and employees and how they

can best serve them.

It’s not about blame, but about employees, managers and the company EACH taking responsibility for their roles in employee performance. When everyone can forget the “we” vs “them” mindset, the true potential of not only individuals, but of the entire organization can be realized. Work is more enjoyable and companies are more successful.





Shifting Employees into Positive Gear

What Can Individuals Do? 6 Steps

We all have the responsibility of bringing our best to work everyday, as employees at any level, including managers, but this can be much easier said than done. It's so easy to get stuck thinking about all the things we don't like about our job. Why?

It turns out survival has played a big role. If we go back to prehistoric times when our life expectancy was a little bit shorter than today, we had many more life and death interactions. It was really important that we notice and anticipate the danger so we could take action to keep ourselves safe. If our brains perceived the situation as good, it could ignore it. There was nothing we needed to do. So evolution left us with a strong negative bias, which means we more easily focus on everything and anything potentially bad, with little attention to the good. But today we need a better balance.

The challenge is to remember that in every moment we have a choice. We can choose what we think about. We can choose to notice the good stuff in our jobs and in our lives. Or we can let our survival instincts dominate and keep us focused on all the negatives.

Research has found a number of strategies that can help us train our minds to make the choice easier. Interestingly, different approaches work differently for each of us, depending on our lifestyle, personality, life experiences, etc. The best way to find one that works for you is to experiment. Give one or two a try for a couple of weeks and see if you notice any changes.

Here are a few to get you started:



1. Remember positive moments in your day

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to come home from work and vent about all the problems we had with customers, colleagues, traffic, etc? This is common because our brains naturally focus on what we don't like.

However, we can train our minds to get better at noticing the good things by creating a routine of intentionally taking time each evening to reflect back and think of something positive that happened.

When we share these or journal about them, we are physically changing the neural connections in our brains to get better at noticing the good all around us. These can be simple, little things like having time for your favorite cup of coffee or tea in the morning, crossing something off your "to do" list, or being on a project with a colleague you enjoy working with.

2. Purposely add positive moments to your day

We don't need to wait for something good to happen; we can make it happen. Again, these can be simple things like smiling at more people (and having them smile back), doing something nice for someone whether it's offering to help them with a project or just asking how they're doing. It could be taking time for a quick walk outside and getting some fresh air. Or maybe it's listening to one of your favorite songs.

When we add or notice something positive, we should savor it. By noticing how good we feel and letting the feeling last, we are helping to reinforce those new connections in our brains and make them stronger.



3. Make social connections

Did you know that there is a direct correlation between our ability to be positive and the strength of our social connections? Having people that care about us and caring about others does great things for our overall well being and health. We need to take time to spend with friends and family that we enjoy. It can be simply stopping in the hall to ask someone about their weekend, inviting a friend out for lunch, or making plans for the weekend. As our lives get busier and busier, it's easy to feel like we don't have the extra time, but investing in quality relationships is actually important for our mental and physical health.

4. Focus on gratitude

Gratitude is a strong antidote for negative emotions and can break the downward spiral of rumination. We can use reminders to be grateful throughout our day, or we can take time to reflect on them while writing in a gratitude journal.





We can be grateful for a variety of things including abilities, opportunities, things, events, situations, people, and even things we're glad we don't have.

Gratitude expert, Prof. Robert Emmons has found that regular grateful thinking can increase happiness by as much as 25 percent, while keeping a gratitude journal for as little as three weeks results in better sleep and more energy.

5. Categorize your stress

Would you be shocked to learn that some forms of stress are helpful and good for us? According to health psychologist Kelly McGonigal, recent research has shown that although chronic stress is generally hard on our health, certain forms of acute stress can be beneficial, especially when we *think* it's helpful.

If you believe you have too much stress in your life **and** you believe it's hard on your health, data indicates it **can** increase your health risks.

Instead, scientists recommend making a conscious choice to view stress as helpful, and the experience as an opportunity to learn and grow.

What can you do? Change the way you think by realizing you can use your stress. Make a list of the things in your work and in your life that are causing you stress and worry. Mark the ones you have no control over with an “X”. Label the items that you can do something about with an “A.” Now write how you can channel the energy from the stress for the “A” items to help you take action. What do you need to do? Maybe you need to talk to someone, change something, start or stop doing something, or just shift the way you think about it.

As far as the “X” items, ask yourself how you can learn or grow from them. Then remind yourself that dwelling on these things is a waste of energy since they are out of your control. Remember this saying, “Think of what you could achieve if you took the energy you spend on things you cannot change and invested it in things you can.”





6. Change your story

Have you ever found yourself jumping to the worst conclusion? Interestingly, this is normal and it's been an important part of our evolution to help us survive but it can cause us a lot of unnecessary stress in today's world. An example is the story we tell ourselves when someone doesn't return our phone call or email. It could be your boss or even a friend. We are wired to assume that the person is blowing us off and doesn't care about us. A great way to change our story is to use the ABCD approach:

A = Action (Your boss doesn't respond to your email asking for time off.)

B = Belief (You believe they're an uncaring jerk.)

C = Consequences (You get mad at them for being a jerk and feel unappreciated.)

D = Dispute (You can dispute your belief and remind yourself that you don't know why they didn't respond. They could be distracted and stressed by some crisis happening in their work or life or just forgetful).

Disputing your belief creates different consequences or emotions because you can make up a different story that lets you feel compassion and hope that they are OK or patience for their faults. Instead of getting defensive, you can ask them if there is a problem.

What can companies do?

Now more than ever, companies need the best and brightest people to gain a competitive edge. These are people who are motivated, innovative, and collaborative. Where do you find such great workers? Look again — they may already be in your organization. They've just been stuck in a haze of negativity so long they are hard to recognize because their energy and creativity have been sucked dry. Now is the time to help them shift into a more positive outlook and upbeat attitude so they can carry your company into a prosperous future.

What can a company do? Let's take a look at the science behind what motivates us.

If we look at data and research reported by Rochester experimental psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan along with other research summarized by author Daniel Pink in his book "Drive", we find four main areas that impact our motivation.

- **Autonomy** (feelings of control and adding value)
- **Belonging** (feelings of shared values and connection)
- **Mastery** (feelings of growing and using strengths)
- **Purpose** (feelings of alignment and meaning)





Although there are many “guaranteed” systems in books and programs that claim to have the answer to motivating your staff and improving attitudes, there is no “one size fits all” formula that works in every company or industry. Each organization is unique in its personality and people so it’s important to find what works for yours. However, using the above areas as guides can make it easier to think about ways to create a culture that promotes positive performance.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Purpose

Start meetings by providing the context of how the purpose of this meeting fits into the bigger vision/mission of the company. Why does the outcome of this meeting matter? If possible, share something positive that has happened related to the overall mission. It could be simply what is going well in a group or project. This sets the tone and mood for the rest of the meeting and helps people find meaning even in the little things they do.

When a company “talks and walks” its mission at every opportunity, it’s easier for people to see how their own values align with the company’s. The mission statement should be much more than a few lines on the wall or on the website. It should be a simple and clear message that creates focus, guides decisions, and helps people set their priorities.

Recognizing people when their actions uphold the mission and purpose of the company reinforces those behaviors. Motivation tools like Hoopla can help you to create visible recognition and positive feedback in the office. When employees see their progress and feel acknowledged for it, they perform better and are happier.

Mastery

People learn and grow much faster when they are allowed to use their strengths. Often, we are so used to our own talents, that we don’t see them as anything special. Using an assessment tool can help the employee and their manager understand what areas to focus on for the best return and most enjoyment.





Many studies have shown that investing in cultivating our strengths is a better use of our time than trying to fix our weaknesses. Be sure to actually discuss and use the information to adjust roles and responsibilities so people can put their best talents to work.

Autonomy

Let people know that their ideas and input are valued. Create situations where staff members feel comfortable sharing their ideas with management. You could organize small group lunches involving staff members and one or two management leaders, or you could create open office hours and encourage employees to drop in to chat. It also helps to have leaders walk through the company at least one or two times per week and ask several people about their work. Many employees have great ideas on how to improve their work or products and services, yet many either feel intimidated by management or assume they will be ignored. Make sure you ask your people for their input and then really listen.

Belonging

Create opportunities for employees to have fun together and get to know each other. Make sure there are fun spaces for breaks and lunches. Coordinate networking lunches with small groups from different departments. Support after-work activities that are chosen by employees. Have a favorite employee movies/books section in a newsletter so they can find common areas of interest.

Often times management is so focused on just getting the work done, they forget that real people are the ones doing the work. These people are more productive (and innovative) when they feel connected to others at work and less likely to leave for the competition.

The best ideas will come from your people. They know the work, the challenges, and the dynamics of your company. The ideas listed here are simply seeds to get conversations flowing. Remember, there are no bad ideas. Some suggestions that seem impossible or irrelevant can often lead to surprising possibilities.





Conclusion: Be The Company You Want To Be

The future belongs to forward-thinking companies that recognize the three critical factors that shape employee performance – the employee, the manager and the company. They understand the huge payoff in teaching their people strategies to improve their personal positivity and well-being. They hire and train managers that create a positive work environment for their people. They provide services, resources and policies that show they care about the success of their people.

As the economy improves, the best employees with the best attitudes will leave their unfulfilling jobs. They will be looking for those place that offer a positive workplace, where they can grow and add value. Companies that don't care about their people will be left with employees that don't care about their work, resulting in their downward spiral. Which path is your organization on?

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Tina Hallis, Ph.D., is a professional speaker and founder of The Positive Edge, a company dedicated to helping individuals and organizations increase their positivity to improve the quality of people's work lives and the quality of company cultures.

To learn more visit her website,
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