

The Happy Dozen

12 Ways to be Happy at Work

by Jon K. Nielsen



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Introduction

The best jobs in the worlds?

In my home country of Denmark, the labour market is considered amongst the most developed in the world. More than a hundred years of (mostly) peaceful cooperation between labour unions, employers' associations and changing governments, a cooperation know as The Danish Model, has created a solid foundation for good jobs. Salaries are in the high range, vacation is plenty, paid maternity leave generous and strict laws protect from hazardous physical work environments.

However, all these niceties are just that: Nice. Herzberg, the american psychologist, put this straight already in 1959 when he described the *hygiene factors* in the workplace. Hygiene factors do not motivate us, but merely gets us to show up, and they include job security, pay level, policies, perks, physical environment, methods of control and that coffee machine with a dozen choices.

Real motivation comes from inside and has to do with factors like achievement, recognition, personal growth, responsibility, autonomy, fruitful relationships as well as the actual job carried out. These factors are also what makes us happy at work, and, increasingly so, here lies also the critical source to the much sought-after competitive advantage. *Happy companies make more money, period.* Reason: Happiness at work affects the running of the business (private or public) in a numbers of ways, increasing productivity, creativity, service, sales, quality and loyalty, all the while reducing employee turnover and sick leave. Couple this with an increase in stress-related deaths and illnesses (even in happy Denmark, stress now kills five times more people that traffic accidents do), and the case for creating happiness at work is clear-cut.

Unmatched results

A case in point for happiness at work is *Middelfart Savings&Loan* (sorry, but that *is* the actual name of the city where this bank is from). In the early 1990s they changed their perspective on leadership, replacing rules and control with values and self-leading work teams. Twenty years down the road, they have now spent a decade on the

Top Ten of Great Places to Work in Denmark, topping the list in 2005, 2008 and 2009. In 2007 they were even named the Best Workplace in the Financial Sector in Europe, as well as European Trust Champion, a honor given only to six companies that year. In 2011 they really hit the jackpot, when a large customer survey named them number one in the industry. There are more than a hundred different banks in Denmark, and it turns out costumers are happiest with the one where the employees are happiest. Coincidence? Think again.

Lotte, a small Copenhagen home for the elderly, is another example. For more than ten years, under the leadership of legendary Thyra Frank (now a Member of Parliament), they boasted sick leave at around 2-3%, or a third of the national average. They have a waiting list not only for the elderly, but also for staffers wanting to work there, and it all started with the staff coming together and deciding to create a home where they themselves would want to grow old, as an alternative to just coming to work to run an institution. Oh, and I did I mention that once a senior citizen moves in to the home, their life expectancy is double that of other homes (four years of remaining life, as compared to a national average of two years).

The promised land

The danes like to complain that our country holds the world record for highest income tax. Around half your salary goes towards taxes, and as much as two-thirds of any increase in salary you never get to see due to the progressive (aggressive is more like it) taxation of the last Crown earned. But when it comes down to it, tax can't matter all that much, since we are still the happiest people on the planet. One in three danes live flourishing lives (meaning it can't get any better) according to psychologist Martin Seligmann. In the United Kingdom, just a 90 minute flight away, the number is half that. Another record: Two out of three danes report being happy at work - in the US it's one in six. 80% of danes would trust a stranger, but only 37% of Germans (they live just next door to us) and 10% of people in Los Angeles.

So, does this mean that Denmark is Nirvana, Paradise, Atlantis, Never-Never Land or some other far-away promised land that we can only dream of? Yep, thats it, and there is nothing you can do about it. Or maybe there is...

Denmark is only special in that it has a high *average* on matters of happiness in and outside of work. Some of the coolest, happiest and most successful companies I have encountered are *not* in or from Denmark, and they still rock. That means that happiness at work can be taught and it can be created through deliberate effort.

The how-to of happiness at work

Enter my writings and my seminars and workshop on happiness at work. Over the years I have gathered more than 100 specific ways, small and big, to create happiness at work by making big small changes in your own workday and the culture of your workplace. This ebook came about as I was collecting 100 tools for a printed book, realizing that I had too much material. I also noted that the material could be divided into three broad sections. Section one targets your happiness as an individual, with tools to use for yourself. Section two deals with the group and how we can create a happier department, team or office. Section three is for managers only, instituting changes to the company DNA. For this e-book, I decided to pick a dozen tips all relating to your own happiness, as this would be relevant to everyone.

The Dozen Ways supplements my seminars where I cover the fundamentals of happiness at work and what makes for a good place to work, including recognition, relationships, help & support, positivity, celebration and more. This book, therefore, does not in any way replace parts of my talks or workshops, but rather goes hand in hand.

Those you can read more about on HappyWays.com, where I also share tips from the upcoming, larger book.

Feedback and questions as well as your own best tips are welcomed via email to Jon@HappyWays.com or through the [Facebook page HappyWays](#). Would be nice to hear from you :o)

Copenhagen, October 2012

Jon Kjaer Nielsen

I love my job because...

Focus on the qualities of your work with a personal essay

Have you ever wondered what it is you like about your job? What you appreciate? Appreciation is a key factor in determining happiness at work, and researchers have shown how our wellbeing increases when we actively appreciate the life we live. Letting yourself dwell on the good aspects of your work makes for a better day, and problems seem smaller and easier to handle. But to be honest, how often do you take the time to reflect on the sunny side of work?

Activity: Write an essay to yourself

Write a small essay, just for you, on this simple topic: What do I appreciate about my job and the work I do?

Write three or four paragraphs, perhaps a page. Note down the good stuff, the things that work really well, and the things you are grateful for. It's important to stay on the positive track here, and avoid the temptation to write things *not* working. Try reading your essay the next day to see if anything is missing, now that you've had a chance to sleep on it.

If you feel like doing something extra and sharing your experience, print out your essay and hang it for everyone at work to read.

Face your fears

Often, the only thing we have to fear, is fear itself

Many people have asked me if being happy at work means walking around without a care in the world, smiling and feeling happy all the time. The answer to that question: Definitely not. In fact, the biggest joys in life come only when we have something to compare them to. Happiness is relative, so to speak. Night comes before the dawn, and it must rain sometime for us to enjoy the sun.

It is said, that if you hold a dog down, and then let go after a while, the dog become quite happy (honestly, this one I did not test myself, and neither should you. Some dogs bite, you know). To the dog, happiness is relative, and the new-found freedom is a positive experience. This example might not be the most elegant, but you're a clever person and I'm sure you get the point.

To us humans, something similar is in effect. We can become happy and experience elation after we overcome a major challenge, push our limits, solve a problem or get a weight off our shoulders. Likewise, we can be completely paralyzed when facing a problem we mentally make a huge issue of. Just like the fellow in the bar who can't find the courage to go and talk to a nice girl. Yet another situation I haven't found myself in, of course...

The important thing is, that when you succeed in doing something you are afraid of, success can feel quite amazing, and the joy and the relief of getting rid of a long-time worry can be magnificent.

Activity: Do one thing you are afraid of

Ask yourself if there is something you've been postponing because it feels unpleasant or scares you. Maybe you've avoiding that awkward conversation with a colleague, or it might be a really challenging task you've been afraid to take on. You could also ask

yourself: If I were to do one thing that would drastically improve my situation or career, what would it be?

The first part is easy enough. Then comes the action part, and postponing what needs to be done gets you nowhere except down. So get to it, and do it now. I promise you, it will absolutely rock.

Break bread with a coworker

When the Peace Pipe is stopped by a ban on smoking

Eating together has been a peace-making activity since the dawn of time. You don't eat with your enemy, so breaking bread has been a way to signal friendship. In present day life, when smoking has lost its innocence, bread is therefore more useful than the Peace Pipe.

Despite this, the value of a simple lunch is often overlooked. Many people today are too busy and have working lunches or eat alone at their desks. That's getting your priorities wrong, since everyone needs a break now and then, and relationships need to be nurtured. You will *not* be more productive just by working more, but only by working better, happier and with a clear mind. This has been studied quite thoroughly for the modern knowledge worker, and it turns out that there is *no connection* between hours put in, and results achieved. Ok, there is one: Constant overtime has been shown to *reduce* productivity!

The IT company *37signals* has taken it a step further. Every year, from May until October, they celebrate the coming of the summer by reducing the work week to four days and the total hours to 32. They do this only to grant employees an extra day off during the best time of the year. Their experiences are quite amazing: The employees get the same amount of work done in four days as they managed before in five days. When they can do in four days what should take five, then you will have no trouble doing your work even if you decide to actually take a break during lunch break. The human mind needs breaks, and lunch can be used to both get a well-earned time-out while at the same time strengthening ties and increasing your level of happiness.

Activity: Take someone to lunch

When inviting a coworker to lunch it's fine to go to the canteen or corner café - whatever you usually do is fine. Picking a nice restaurant adds something extra, but you

make your own choice of place. It sounds simple enough, but you have to break a habit: Invite someone you don't usually have lunch with.



All of us are to a large degree creatures of habit. Over time this leads to a wealth of predictable behavior, one of them being us eating with the same people, and even sitting in the same seats. I see this play out on multiple-day seminars where my participants almost without exception choose the same seats on day two that they for the first time ever sat in the day before. Habits are that strong, and forms that fast.

This needs to be challenged, at least for a day. Eat your lunch with someone you don't usually talk to. Then get to know them better.

Do not talk about work. Ask instead how life is going and what he or she has experienced lately. Make it a priority to learn something new about this person. Does he or she have a hobby or are they into sports? Where in the county did they grow up, what school did they go to, and do they have special talents or skills you didn't know about?

This is a NET-Activity: *No Extra Time*. You were going to have lunch anyway, so use in to build on your relationships. Enjoy your meal.

A measure of achievement

Don't stress out over the hill before you - enjoy the mountain you left behind

If you have ever felt overwhelmed by your *To-Do* list, this method can be an uplifting experience. Many people look at long To-Do lists with dread, since these lists are an endless source of things that need to be done. Chores, tasks, action items, promises made and requests received all tend to come in a never-ending supply. Your e-mail client works in the same way, and it excels at telling you how many emails you have yet to look at, but never how many you have read and responded to. Since happiness at work is to a great extent dependent on the results you *accomplish*, it's worthwhile to actually track your *have-done* items during your day.

For most modern-day workers it has come to be expected that you will never run out of things to do. Time and resources simply never match up to the work load, and there is nothing you can do but give it your best effort, and then accept that it will have to suffice. I have seen many workplaces, both public and private sector, where there is absolutely no chance that they will ever reach the bottom of the pile. All you can do is view this as a condition, not a problem. That means that you should focus not on the end result that never comes, but on the continual progress made.

Activity: Measure your achievements, not your to-dos

First figure out what would make sense for you to measure, if you are to track progress. It depends a lot on the job, and might be:

- Number of emails written or replied to
- Calls made
- Clients, citizens and/or coworkers you have helped
- Products sold or customers served
- Letters posted, bills paid, cases files, pages written

It has to be a kind of results that makes sense to you in the work you do. Note down *everything* you get done.



You could do this by:

- Writing the names of everyone you have helped
- Constantly sum up all calls and emails
- Eat a piece of candy every time you finish something
- Put a sticky note on your door for each task done. Your yellow door tells a story of things achieved!
- Stand up and shout “Bingo” when you finish something.

You choose your own way of measuring results, and give it a try for one week. See how much you actually achieve. Feel what measuring results means to you. Highlighting progress makes it easier to remain an optimist despite tough odds, and don't even get me started on how optimists live longer and achieve more success in life.

The smiling answering machine

You have reached Superheroes Incorporated...

You hear the sound of a soda can being opened... A voice then says: "That was the sound a of Coke... An ice cold Coke being opened. I'm going to drink it now, and so I don't have time to talk to you. But leave a message, and I get back to you."

My friend Ulrik from way back is still the owner of the funniest answering machine, but the really cool ones are on the rise. The machine serves as your personal receptionist and welcome desk, and how it receives people matters.

The Bat Cave, this is Alfred. The Master is not here at the moment, but allow me to take your message.



How do you actually sound on your own machine? Stop reading and give yourself a ring. Do you sound happy? Or are you sad and lacking energy? Can you hear a smile? Do YOU feel like talking to you? Do you make others smile?

You have called Susan. I'm taking some time off, and have switched off my phone. In case of emergency please dial 9-1-1.

No matter how you might sound at present, I'm sure you can do more to make your automated voice even more alive and funny.

Activity: Record a new greeting

You already figured this one out. Record a new greeting for your machine and make it real happy, or pull a prank on the caller. It helps to stand up and maybe talk louder and more enthusiastically.

You have reached the tree house in Peters back yard. I thought I'd take a nap after playing with my friends, so leave a message, and I'll get back to you when I wake up.

The moment of truth comes when you later listen to the messages people leave for you. Hopefully you can actually tell they are more happy than before.

Home Ordering Network Services. All operators are busy, please call again later.

Come on, go ahead. It only takes a minute. OK, so maybe a few minutes, if you have to give it a few tries before you got it locked down.

My positivity list

When being diagnosed positive is a good thing

It's easy to be a self critic, and many people have experienced an internal dialogue wherein they convinced themselves that they weren't any good. When we doubt our own ability to handle a challenge, or try to gauge if we deserve a promotion or some form of recognition, a lot of us look for flaws. We discover shortcomings and blow them out of proportion.

Psychologists talk about *negativity bias*: A person experiencing both a positive and a negative event will feel *worse than neutral* despite judging the events to be of equal importance and magnitude. The poor experience simply matters more to us.

The same thing happens when we look at lists of pros and cons, where we automatically assign greater value to the negative aspects. Similarly, many people spot threats before opportunities. Early in human evolution, this was quite useful, as we struggled every day to stay alive. Notice the animal creeping up on you, and don't forget which plants might kill you if you eat them, and you stand a better chance of surviving, and thus to pass on you genes. And so we all have ancestors who excelled at spotting potential problems. Useful in today's world? To a degree, no doubt. But we can benefit greatly if we focus our attention more on what's right and what's working for us, since that's what we need more of if we are to be successful - and happy!

In today's modern work environment, our love for the negative and our keen eye for potential hazards can be an unnecessary burden we carry with us. However, there is hope. By seeing the world through a more positive lens, we can counter our instincts. It's time to notice what's good in the world.

Activity: Write down all advantages and positive aspects

Sit down, grab a piece of paper or your journal, and write "List of positives" at the top. Then proceed to making a list of all the things that count in your favor. The topic you

focus on can be broad: *What am I good at?* It can also be more specific: *Reasons why I'm qualified for the job I want to apply for*, or *Evidence that I can handle this project*. This activity works at home as well: *Evidence that I can manage my finances*, or how about *The advantages regarding my current living conditions*. You'll find positive evidence in past successes and experiences, feedback, education and training, recognition from others and so on.

Please note, that we are not talking about deceiving ourselves with false evidence. Recognizing the natural pull of bad news and negative aspects, all we are doing is balancing the evidence and thus leveling the playing field by giving the actual and real positive sides the attention they deserve. This comes not by itself, but it can make all the difference in your level of happiness. Try it out - set aside 15 minutes to come up with your list, and see how it adds perspective.

Fixing moods and energy levels

Be less of a slave to your emotions, and design a great day

Sitting on a chair all day long? Working indoors? Get up and get out! I remember an article in the New York Times that went as far as to claim that your chair is killing you. Dramatic, yes, but there is evidence to back up the claim.

Studies have shown how people sitting down during most of their working hours have a higher risk of heart problems and weight gain. Also, energy levels can drop when we are physically inactive, and productivity is reduced. No big surprises there, but the increased risk also applies to people living active lives outside work, getting regular exercise and working out, something we have been taught should take care of that health issue. Sitting down is just bad for you, period.



A related problem is feeling low. We all know the feeling of being in a lousy mood and having an off day. Maybe you got off on the wrong foot this morning, with kids that were impossible, nightmarish traffic and a boss that was late for his class in anger management. Unless you're willing to just accept it, you're left with two options: Go home and take the day off, or do something to actively change moods and get the energy back up. Since a lot of jobs don't allow for people to take the first option, let's look at what we can do to change our state of mind instead.

Activity: Break the pattern, move, and lift your spirits

It can be very simple. Get up and get out. Get some fresh air and some sun during the day. Light stimulates our hormonal balance, and especially in winter times we need more of it. Fresh air wakes you up and clears your head, and moving about is good for both body and spirit. After a brisk walk you'll feel both better and better suited to work. Here are some alternatives to walking. Pick something that appeals to you.

- Play with your coworkers, or grab a game of Wii or PlayStation
- Find a quiz online, or do the crosswords
- Throw crumpled-up paper balls or shoot rubber bands. Be childish
- Watch a funny clip on YouTube
- Read in a book. Many experience being able to shut off the outside world when reading, and you might find yourself in a better mood, when you emerge afterwards
- Do some simple task, like cleaning. If at home, cooking or gardening are options
- Laugh. Either by just faking it (it still has an effect) or, if that freaks you out, watching some stand-up or sharing jokes
- Eat something that provides energy without draining you afterwards. Water and fruit is good, cake is bad. Carrots are awesome, candy a disaster. Food with fast carbohydrates (sugars) makes your blood sugar soar, only to crash 30 minutes later.
- Company policies permitting, run to the store for some wine (my girlfriend and her coworkers love that one...).

When you have a bad day it can easily mean zero productivity all day long. So you might as well write off the day when it's not working for you, and then make the most of it. Spending some time to lift your mood and energy is therefore a good investment, and the sooner you get at it, the better. You always have a chance to bring it around.

Go clean up your room

When you can't see the forest for the trees, it's time to clear the jungle

Can't find what you're looking for? Do relevant stuff sometimes appear from the piles right *after* the important deadline? Running out of space? A bombed out office and a buried desk can be a source of daily frustration and a guilty conscience. On the other hand, sorting things, creating order out of chaos and throwing out the unnecessary baggage can be liberating and a huge load off your shoulder.



If small improvements can make a big difference, and they really can, going all the way can revolutionize the way you work. When Lars Kolind took over as CEO of Oticon, now the world's leading manufacturer of hearing aids, he spearheaded a movement where they created what was celebrated as the world's first paper-free office.

Processes were changed and they carried out a huge operation where all files were scanned and then thrown out. All incoming mail was converted into electronic format upon arrival. A huge, clear plastic chute was set up at the center of the office, so everyone could see for themselves the amounts of paper that was being made redundant. That story went around the world back in the day, but you can take less drastic measures.

Activity: Clear out and clean up

Set aside some time to clear your mess at work. I'm not talking about the daily routine of washing your coffee mug and emptying the wastebasket, but really getting at it and sorting through everything. Completely clear your desk or workspace. Shelves and bookcases should look straighter than an arrow. Old notes are sorted and thrown away or filed. Things you haven't used for the past year get a stare-down and are then sent to their final resting place. You might even be able to scan important letters and documents and then get rid of the hard copies? Be sure to use IT systems with automated backups.

You can probably spend the better part of a day doing this. Pick a day where nothing urgent is going on, *or* deliberately do this on a day when you feel a bit stressed and need to get your mind off work and do something less demanding. Turn on the radio and put on some coffee. When you are done and can enjoy the results, ask yourself: What about this is better than before? What will I do differently from here on to keep it like this?

It might seem simple, but still obstacles can appear. Just getting started can be tricky, since we always have something more important going on. Add to that the squirrelmentality of storing everything we lay our hands on, just in case it might come in handy at a later date. It won't. You're up against a fearsome opponent here, but the struggle, however, is worth it. So get to it. The joy of simplicity and tidiness is a great one.

Just say no

Getting rid of what wights you down to make space for what matters

Helping others is one of life's' joys. Psychologists have documented how helping others makes us happier and improves relations. But sometimes helping goes too far.

You can probably think of a time then you said yes to something somebody asked of you, or you volunteered because it seemed like a good idea at the time. Later, things got more complicated, and you didn't get the job done. A guilty conscience is sure to follow, and frustration kicks in. Maybe you simply didn't have the time, or it was the task itself that was a real killer, and you should have stayed well clear of it. If you mention your troubles to anyone, you might be met with the mandatory *it's a question of priorities*, which in reality means that others just want you to work harder on *their* priorities. Avoiding ending up in situations like these will do wonders for your happiness levels, so make saying no at the right times a priority.

Activity: Decide on something not to do

It's not about avoiding helping others, since that *is* a good thing, and please, by all means, do give to others, willfully and selflessly. But *also* guard your own happiness at work and through it your productivity, by reducing those commitments that lead to a guilty conscience and feelings of frustration. It *is* a question of priorities, and some things shouldn't get prioritized at all.

Step one: Learn to keep your hand down a bit longer

If you often experience walking out from meetings carrying new to-dos, despite many people being present and the job only requiring one volunteer, then try this simple technique: Patience. The next time someone asks "so, who will do this?" avoid the temptation to put your hand up until all others have had ample time to volunteer. By ample time I mean *at least* ten seconds on embarrassing silence (try counting: *one one-*

thousand, two one-thousand...). Wait until several others have said out loud things like “I’d love to, but...”. I promise you, most times someone will crack and go “OK, I’ll do it” before you get very far. Again, it’s OK to volunteer and help the team, but if it’s you at every occasion, learn to hold back a bit more.

Step two: Bailing out in a good way

Turning back on a commitment is a modern tabu. The saying *In for a penny, in for a pound* expressed this. In a world of zero pressure and plenty of time to consider all options, this would make sense, but the world doesn’t operate that way.

From time to time we end up saying yes for the wrong reasons. We are trying not to come across as self-centered, or we more or less secretly want to bathe in the recognition that can come from volunteering. It might also stem from a more or less conscious need for control and to assert our influence, and so we say yes. Nothing new about these motives, and nothing wrong either, unless it makes you take on tasks that end up dragging you down.

If you find yourself making no progress on a task, fearing it will be the end of you (even objectively small tasks can lead to this emotion) then consider bailing out. It can be a tough decision, and we fear the reaction of others. When acting it out, do it in the best way possible, without pointing fingers. Explain that you feel terrible about saying yes in the first place, but you were too late to realize how this is not a job for you, instead creating frustrations not helping the situation. Remember, there is actually no-one else to blame here, and so you are also the only one that can correct the mistake. People will not hate you for it, and you’ll feel better for it. Be sure to learn from this experience, so you reduce the chance that it will happen again.

Years ago, I couldn’t attend a meeting on anything big or small without finding myself with a pile of work afterwards. I never received help for my condition, but down the road I learned the hard way that sometimes it’s OK to let a challenge pass me by, and that not all causes are worth fighting for. I still volunteer and do my fair share, working for NGOs and helping strangers and friends where I find it meaningful. Find your balance, and don’t be afraid to make some tough choices.

Coffee on the phone

Getting comfy from afar

Coffee is opium for the working class, and besides a mildly intoxicating effect a cup of coffee can also provide a moments rest and comfort in an otherwise busy day. The same goes for tea. Since I like coffee more, I'll use that word in the following to describe both.



There is a social side to coffee as well. Coffee is present at most meetings, and we often chat over a cup. In many workplaces, the coffee machine is the most popular place to hang out.

The positive associations attached to a cup of coffee doesn't have to be limited to a physical meeting, and you can easily drink a cup while on the phone. But have you ever deliberately arranged a coffee-on-the-phone session?

Activity: Arrange for coffee on the phone

Make arrangements for coffee on the phone, with a coworker. Choose someone you don't see every single day, maybe someone from another department or branch, or from across the country. You can also choose to schedule it while one or both of you are working from home, if you have that option, to keep interruptions to a minimum.

Agree in the time and topic of the call, and make sure to have your coffee ready. The challenge is to create the same calm and pleasant atmosphere as if you sat in the same living room. Speak calmly, and ask questions that require a bit of thought. Exchange points of view, present new ideas or seek advice. Avoid jumping to conclusions, but explore options instead. Be sure to avoid the gossip-trap, and don't use the opportunity to complain about your work, your boss, the weather or what not. If you do, you'll find yourself leaving the chat being *less* happy instead of more so.

A variation on the theme is the after-work drink or nightcap - on the phone. Shortly before finishing this e-book I spent three hours on the phone with a friend from across the country, with each of us finishing off a couple of beers and a scotch.

The Media Detox

Going cold turkey in a era of information overload

The world of today is buzzing with information, and there is talk of a global village. The whole planet seems to exist right next door, and it's possible to stay up to date on anything and everything. The media does battle over our attention, and we are constantly bombarded with impressions, messages and advertisements.

In the last twenty years, the news coverage we are exposed to has gone from the daily printed newspaper and the late night news on TV to up-to-the-minute *breaking news*. A legion of media sources and businesses offer to provide us with updates, newsletters, feeds and alerts as soon as something happens, big or small. If we do miss out on something, social media like Facebook or Twitter is quick to assist, at the same time informing us of our friends views and opinions.

The longterm effect of these changes to our media consumption are not yet fully understood, but there is increasing talk about *media addiction*. This coincides with more and more people reporting living stressed-out lives, and burn-out and depression are in many countries reaching record-high levels.

It's easy to throw your arms up and declare that the world is moving at a faster and faster pace, but that that fails to recognize the options and choices open to us. It is in our power to shut out many of the sources of background noise, giving us more time and energy to focus on issues that actually matter to us. I recommend that you don't just take my word on this, but I urge you to instead conduct an experiment to test what effect reducing input will have on your quality of life and your levels of happiness.

Activity: Shut out all media sources

Each of us has a limited capacity for dealing with information, but the world cares not for your limitations. However, with deliberate effort you can shut out irrelevant input

and thereby free resources for the things you choose to involve yourself in, including your work. I suggest you test this by going to extremes.

For the next two weeks your task is to filter incoming information of any kind mercilessly. Anything not *directly related* to the job you are carrying out today has to go, and information is only actively sought out if and when it is needed. When not at work, shut out all noise in the guise of mindless entertainment and interruptions. This takes real courage and stamina, but it will feel like nothing else.



Remember: We are not remodeling your way of life here, but merely testing what effect massive amounts of information has on your wellbeing, ability to focus and concentrate, and your overall happiness. When the test is done, you are better equipped to practice selective input when you deem it beneficial, i.e. when you are facing a tight deadline and so on.

But for now, take this very seriously and completely avoid the following:

- Newspapers and magazines
- The news update on your radio, as well as all talk radio (in effect: no radio)
- All advertisements
- News on television, as well as channel surfing
- All irrelevant email such as ads, newsletters and mass-distribution information
- Facebook, Twitter and the like. You could leave a note saying “gone until the 23rd”.

It’s OK to:

- Read a book
- Watch a movie you choose to put on
- Listen to music
- Ask others “So, what’s the world coming to this week?” if you really need to make sure that war hasn’t broken out.

For some, the biggest test is when they get up in the morning and face a set ritual of breakfast with radio or television. Others realize that their TV is on the whole day, and the silence almost shouts at them (put on a record). Danger also lurks during transit, breaks or idle-time, when it is all too easy to use your smartphone to check Facebook or browse the headlines. Bring a piece of fiction literature instead.

Many families will discover a minor revolution in the quality of time spent together, simply by turning off the TV for a few weeks. If you’re not living alone, I strongly urge you to try this out. A few years back I saw a documentary (it’s ironic, I know) about a family who had lived without television for two weeks, leading to substantial improvements in their family life.

I’ve completed the media detox several times, and it has helped me keep my emerging media addiction in check. It frees time and energy for what matters in my life, gives me greater focus, more calm thoughts, less stress and more spare time. Perhaps the biggest single benefit comes from not being constantly swamped with bad news and negativity.

Try it out for yourself, and see what benefits await. Can you go for days without watching the news? Or do without radio? Or how about completing an entire romantic date at a restaurant without checking your email? We all have different battles to fight, so let’s get started.

The Farewell Speech

We are gathered here today to celebrate a legendary coworker

Imagine, after having been in your current job for several years, that the time has come to move on, or maybe even retire. Today is the last day at work, and all your coworkers, as well as family and friends are invited to a goodbye reception.

At the reception, someone holds a farewell speech. The speech covers:

- The things you are really good at
- What you stood for
- Results you have achieved
- People you have helped, and how you did it
- What your coworkers really appreciated about working with you
- Why you will be missed.

Activity: Write that speech

Your task is to write the speech you hope will be given to you at the farewell reception. It doesn't have to be long; three to five paragraphs highlighting the good stuff will suffice. Remember, a proper farewell speech is never used to point out flaws and failures. On the contrary, it will always be a good and positive speech.

The real question is: What do you want people to remember you for? How do you want to be remembered? What do you want to leave in this company as your legacy?

When you're done, look at your speech and ask yourself what you need to change in order for you to live up to the words written. Is anything keeping you from doing that now?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jon Kjær Nielsen is a professional speaker and author.

Through his talks and workshops he inspires workplaces to be more happy, and he shares tips on how to take action. He has spoken at hundreds of events at both private companies and in the public sector, as well as at a number of conferences in a dozen countries.

Coming from Denmark, the worlds' happiest country for the past 40 years, he is passionate about creating cultural revolutions at work. The changes can be big or small, but the goal is clear: Make workplaces more happy, thereby both making people more happy and businesses more productive.

Jon holds an M.Sc. in engineering, and loves to engineer workplaces more than physical products. After leaving a job as a Human Resources Specialist in the financial sector he started his own business in 2006. Besides giving talks and leading workshops he enjoys blogging about happiness at work, leadership and workplace culture, both in his native danish as well as english. His first book, *Happy at Work in 6 Weeks*, co-written with former colleague Alexander Kjerulf, was published 2009 (Libris publishing, danish only) and spent time on the Top 10 list of business books. Read more about Jon and his services at HappyWays.com.

The Happy Dozen - 12 Ways to be Happy at Work

by Jon Kjaer Nielsen

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