Creating a Positive Workplace
For Staff

The benefits of a workplace characterised by staff that are happy seem almost self-evident. These advantages include higher morale and team spirit, improved job satisfaction, better productivity and outcomes, enhanced health and wellbeing and a more positive environment for clients and customers.

What does a positive workplace look and feel like?

The most successful workplaces are those in which everyone works well together to create a positive work environment. There is recognition by staff and managers that:

- our beliefs and behaviours can affect others
- building our own and others' strengths and abilities is the right focus
- each individual is unique and has the right to be treated with dignity and respect
- a person's motivation for being in a workplace can influence their expectations of it.

From: State Services Authority | About Us | Values and Employment Principles | Positive Work Environment | www.ssa.vic.gov.au | 10 Jun 2010

A positive work environment is therefore best characterised by:

- a high degree of trust and respect between all levels of staff
- a warm and friendly climate in which colleagues feel valued, and have a strong sense of loyalty to the organisation
- high quality leadership and management
- open discussion that leads to resolution of conflict
- a measure of self-determination over how work is undertaken
- a culture where diversity is respected and valued
- a lack of exclusive 'clubs' and cliques

- opportunities for personal development and career progression
- a high level of creativity and job satisfaction, arising from teamwork and cooperation.

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To achieve a positive work environment, positive staff deliberately increase the flow of positive emotions within their work teams. They choose to do this not just because it is a 'nice' thing to do, but because it leads to a measurable increase in positive team morale and a happier and cooperative work environment – which is turn helps the team achieve their work goals. Studies show that positive work environments create workgroups with:

- a more positive mood
- enhanced job satisfaction
- greater engagement
- improved performance

What differentiates positive colleagues from the rest?

A negative colleague creates an entirely different way of thinking from a positive colleague. When we are feeling negative, we seem to become critics of each other, with negativity engendering a warrior mode of thinking. Such a win-lose approach to problems will concentrate attention on what is wrong, and a negative team members will make sure everyone knows about it. In turn, the client or customer will often receive the tail end of a 'can't do' rather than 'can do' attitude. Instead of being concerned with what they can blame on or get out of their workplace, positive staff will search for opportunities to create a supportive environment for everyone who works with them. They view each interaction with another person as an opportunity to increase his or her positive emotions and achieve his or her work goals or career aspirations for the betterment of the client/customer and organisation.
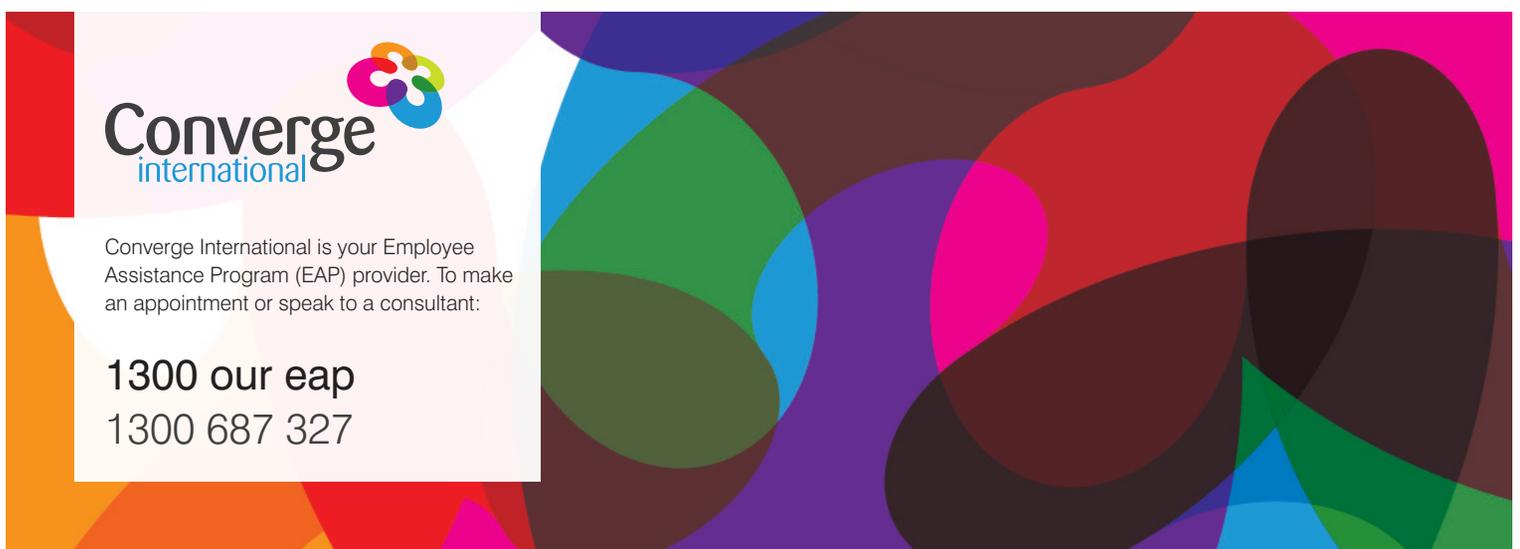
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1. The best teacher is a 'good example'
First examine your own behaviour. Are you walking the positive talk or are you mumbling beneath your breath, "3 more days 'til Friday." Take great care to listen to your own language. Do you frame things in the positive, or do you often start your sentences with "No." Do you say "Yes, but..." a lot, negating the first half of your sentence with your last? Work on becoming a positive role model in your team.

2. Learn (and teach) the power of positive self-talk
Often our internal chatter is negative. Re-program your own chatter and then listen carefully for signs of it in others. Our bodies respond to our self-talk, if we tell ourselves we are disorganised, we behave just that way. Tell yourself, with conviction, you are an organised person, and the behaviour will begin to change. Our brain responds literally, like our computers. Learn to replace negative programming with positive.

3. Avoid whining
Avoid the temptation to participate in conversations that promote a toxic workplace environment. It is very easy to commiserate with a colleague who has had a bad day or to make disparaging remarks about a difficult client, but in offices, this type of negativity is often contagious. Stop it at the source. Try and ignore it or seek an opportunity to debrief in a more constructive manner with a colleague or supervisor.

4. Teach people the art of 'win/win'
In our competitive society we have a win/lose mentality. This may be a good strategy to fill a sports stadium, not a good way to work in a team. Help people to understand that thinking "win/win" opens up the possibility for new solutions and more effective teamwork.

5. Avoid the drama
Melodrama is something you don't need in your team. It saps valuable creative energy and has people running in all directions based on subjective and emotive statements to resolve or act on a perceived 'issue' or 'crises'. Instead, remain calm, try and identify the facts and respond accordingly if required. Otherwise try and avoid or contain these behaviours with the assistance of other colleagues and your supervisor.

6. Learn resilience techniques
Make sure you understand the role you play in controlling your own stress. We don't have control over our circumstances. We do have control of how we perceive them. Take a deep breath, count to ten, walk away (physically or mentally) when you have to, and learn good stress management skills for maintaining your own resilience levels.

7. Encourage people to live in the 'now'
Dwell on the past only long enough to figure out what you want to learn from it, and then move on. Stop talking about "the good old days." What is important is what is going on right now. Give your fullest attention to exactly what you are doing now. Do it well, do it right and enjoy it.

8. Smile
When you activate the smiling muscles in your face, you activate the "happy" brain chemicals that help you feel good. You can't be unhappy when you are smiling, and smiles are contagious. So, smile.