

How to Keep a Positive Attitude at Work

There are several factors that may contribute to unhappiness at work—a difficult supervisor, tasks that are too mundane, too stressful, or too difficult, challenging coworkers, or maybe just a general dissatisfaction with where you are as opposed to where you want to be in your career. The good news is that job satisfaction has much more to do with internal factors—such as having positive expectations, developing a healthy self-image, and being flexible—than it does external factors—such as the work itself or the people it involves. Research confirms that we are only as happy or unhappy as we make up our minds to be, therefore, we each have the power to choose if we want to respond to our jobs and to the world around us positively or negatively. The following are some tips for how you can develop a more positive attitude at work, no matter how dissatisfied you may feel in your current position:



- ◆ **Identify your negative thoughts.** Negative thoughts cause negative feelings. Pay attention to what you're telling yourself throughout the day (Ex: "I hate my job," "I can't believe I have to be here," etc.) and recognize that thinking negatively about your job doesn't change anything about your situation. However, thinking positively (Ex: "This job is giving me great experience to add to my resume," "I'm grateful that this job can help me pay my bills while I search for a better position," etc.) can improve your attitude which can then improve your relationships at work, improve the quality of work that you do, and help to make your day more enjoyable overall.
- ◆ **Look for other points of view.** Keep in mind that you are viewing your situation from only one perspective. While you may not think that your work situation is ideal, other people may envy certain aspects of your job. Think about how you could view your situation differently. (Ex: "I may not like certain things about my job, but I do like that I work consistent hours, have my own office space, get to work with a variety of people, etc."). Seek support from others, such as a friend, family member, or mental health professional—Sometimes an outsider can help give you some ideas about your situation that you may not have otherwise considered.
- ◆ **Be sure to take breaks.** Of course, follow your workplace guidelines about timing and duration, but make the most of your allotted time by physically removing yourself from your work station, touching base with someone from the "outside world" (friend, family member, etc.), or simply taking a few moments to breathe deeply and do nothing. Remember that you are not a machine—You need regular breaks to renew your energy throughout the day.

- ◆ **Improve your skills.** Try out some new communication strategies at work. For instance, try matching a positive comment to every negative comment you say or hear to set a more positive tone to the conversation. You may be surprised to learn how contagious a positive outlook can be to those around you. Work on improving your assertiveness skills by standing up for yourself when necessary, but also stay professional and polite and accept responsibility for your own feelings and actions. Treat everyone around you with respect, whether or not you feel you are getting the same in return. At the end of the day, you will leave feeling much better about yourself for not lowering yourself to the level of your difficult supervisor, coworkers, or customers.
- ◆ **Leave work at work.** Your home should be a place in which you can safely leave behind the daily stresses of your job. Use a ritual, such as stopping by the gym, going for a walk, changing out of your work clothes, etc., that serves as a buffer between work and home. If you really have to finish a work project or task before the next work day, opt to stay later at the office rather than take your work home with you. Just the presence of work-related activities in your home subtly tells you that you cannot “escape” your job.
- ◆ **Improve your life outside of work.** Pursue personal interests and hobbies outside of your job, spend more quality time with your friends and family, and/or do something generous for someone else (Ex: fill up a stranger’s parking meter, donate money or items to charity, visit someone in a hospital or nursing home, etc.). Do anything that reminds you that work is not your life and that life is about much more than just doing your job.
- ◆ **Explore your options.** When you’re employed, you have the luxury of searching for a position you really like, not just one that you need. Explore different positions with your same employer, find out if a promotion is possible in your area, look for the same type of job with a different employer, or look into a new career altogether. Preparing for your next job could mean anything from going back to school to searching online for job openings. Take this time to determine what you think your next step should be and commit to making it happen.
- ◆ **Design long-term goals.** Instead of dwelling on how bad you think things are right now, focus on what you would like your life to be like in five, ten, even twenty years. Write down where you’d like to be professionally, financially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and socially and set attainable goals for yourself. Research these goals by reading books, viewing software, taking an interest/ability test at your local community college or workforce center, etc. Remember that these goals are not necessarily set in stone—You can change your mind about something down the road, but setting goals for yourself now will help give you a feeling that you have something to strive for.

