Keys to Job Satisfaction

Do you get a satisfied feeling after a hard day at work?

If some job satisfaction surveys are to be believed then as many as a third of us are considering a change of job. Clearly many are finding it hard to get that feeling of satisfaction from work.

Job satisfaction is important not just because it boosts work performance but also because it increases our quality of life. Many people spend so much time at work that when it becomes dissatisfying, the rest of their life soon follows.

Everyone's job is different but here are 10 factors that psychologists regularly find are important in how satisfied people are with their jobs.

**1. Little hassles**

Actually people's job satisfaction is surprisingly sensitive to daily hassles. It might not seem like much but when it happens almost every day and it's beyond our control, it hits job satisfaction hard.

This category is one of the easiest wins for boosting employee satisfaction. Managers should find out about those little daily hassles and address them—your employees will love you for it.

**2. Achievement**

People feel more satisfied with their job if they've achieved something. In some jobs achievements are obvious, but for others they're not. As smaller cogs in larger machines it may be difficult to tell what we're contributing.

**3. Feedback**

There's nothing worse than not knowing whether or not you're doing a good job. When it comes to job satisfaction, no news is bad news. Getting negative feedback can be painful but at least it tells you where improvements can be made. On the other hand positive feedback can make all the difference to how satisfied people feel.

**4 Complexity and variety**

People generally find jobs more satisfying if they are more complex and offer more variety. People seem to like complex (but not impossible) jobs, perhaps because it pushes them more. Too easy and people get bored.

To be satisfied people need to be challenged a little and they need some variety in the tasks they carry out. It sounds easy when put like that but many jobs offer neither complexity nor variety.

**5. Control**

You may have certain tasks you have to do, but how you do them should be up to you. The more control people perceive in how they carry out their job, the more satisfaction they experience.

If people aren't given some control, they will attempt to retake it by cutting corners, stealing small amounts or finding other ways to undermine the system. Psychologists have found that people who work in jobs where they have little latitude - at every level - find their work very stressful and consequently unsatisfying.

**6. Organisational support**

Workers want to know their organisation cares about them: that they are getting something back for what they are putting in. This is primarily communicated through things like how bosses treat us, the kinds of fringe benefits we get and other subtle messages. If people perceive more organisational support, they experience higher job satisfaction.

Remember: it's not just whether the organisation is actually being supportive, it's whether it appears that way. The point being that appearances are really important here. If people don't perceive it, then for them it might as well not exist. That's why great managers need a politician's touch.

7. Work-home overflow

Low job satisfaction isn't only the boss' or organisation's fault, sometimes it's down to home-life. T rouble at home breeds trouble at the office.

Some research, though, suggests that trouble at the office is more likely to spill over into the family domain compared with the other way around. Either way finding ways of distancing yourself from work while at home are likely to protect you against job stressors.

**8. Easily pleased?**

Some of us are more easily satisfied (or dissatisfied) than others, no matter how good (or bad) the job is. To misquote a famous cliché: You can't satisfy all the people all the time.

Still, some jobs do seem better suited to certain types of people. A lot of work has been done on person-environment fit but because jobs vary so much it's difficult to summarise.

One generalisation we can make, though, is that people get more satisfied with their jobs as they get older. Perhaps this is because the older people are, the more likely they are to have found the right work for them. There's little evidence for this but I'd certainly like to think it was true.

On my darker days, though, I tend to think it's because young people have sky-high expectations (which are soon dashed) and older people have learned to live with their lot, however uninspiring it is.

**Why can't we all be satisfied?**

When you look at this list of what makes for a satisfying job, you might wonder why everyone can't have one. With a little thought, most of the predictors of satisfaction can be provided.

The answer is probably quite simple. Organisations pay lip-service to keeping their employees satisfied, but many don't really believe it makes a difference. What this research shows is that it can make a huge difference.

If you're a manager looking to improve satisfaction at your workplace then start with point number 1: find out about people's little hassles and address them. It might not look like much but people will really appreciate it.

**Consider strategies to improve job satisfaction**

Depending on the underlying cause of your lack of job satisfaction, you may have many options for increasing your job satisfaction. For example:

Create new challenges

Take on a project that can motivate you and give you a sense of control. Start small, such as organizing a work-related celebration, before moving on to larger goals. Working on something you care about can boost your confidence and job satisfaction.

Mentor a colleague

Once you've mastered a job, you may find it becoming routine. Helping a new team member or an intern advance his or her skills can restore the challenge and the job satisfaction you desire.

Break up the monotony

If you're feeling bored or unchallenged, talk with your supervisor about cross-training. Perhaps you could train for new or additional tasks. If you hear that your company is launching a new project, volunteer for the team.

Stay positive

Use positive thinking to reframe your thoughts about your job. When you catch yourself thinking your job is terrible, stop the thought in its tracks. Remember, everyone encounters good days and bad days on the job.

Look for the silver lining

Imagine that you receive a less than stellar performance appraisal. Instead of taking it personally or starting to search for another job, look for the silver lining — such as the opportunity to attend continuing education classes or work with a performance coach. Take satisfaction in your ability to put performance feedback to work.

Learn from your mistakes

Don't let failure defeat you or erode your job satisfaction. When you make a mistake at work, learn from it and try again. Perhaps the mistake will eventually lead to a great success.

Be grateful

Gratitude can help you focus on what's positive about your job. Ask yourself, "What am I grateful for at work today?" If it's only that you're having lunch with a friendly colleague, that's OK. Find at least one thing you're grateful for and savor it.

Nurture your passion

If your job satisfaction has waned but seeking a new job isn't a realistic option, you might consider your current job as a welcome paycheck that allows you to focus your energy on an important hobby or interest outside of work. Sometimes work is simply a means to enjoy those things you're truly passionate about.

**More job satisfaction can mean less stress**

Whether your work is a job, a career or a calling, you can take steps to restore meaning to your job. Make the best of difficult work situations by maintaining a positive attitude. Be creative as you think of ways to change your circumstances — or how you view your circumstances. Doing so can help you manage your stress and experience the rewards of your profession.