



Cass Business School
CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Why compulsory happiness at work is making us miserable

Chief Happiness Officers, 'funsultants', and office playgrounds: André Spicer and Carl Cederström, authors of The Wellness Syndrome discuss the happiness initiatives misleading today's workforce

André Spicer and Carl Cederström have sat through numerous seminars that teach employers how best to motivate their staff. The message? Being happy at work will make you more productive, healthier, kinder and more likely to get promoted.

The authors of *The Wellness Syndrome* felt the trend of 'happiness initiatives' in the workplace were well-intentioned but hollow. Surely, prioritising employee happiness is a good thing? Not necessarily. Recent evidence suggests that increasing happiness at work might not always lead to good outcomes.

"Being constantly up-beat can be hard work," said André Spicer, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at Cass Business School, City University London. "These happiness initiatives are being sold as a way to increase employee productivity but that's not always the case. Research has shown that constantly trying to be happy can be exhausting, make us over-react, drain our personal life of meaning, increase our vulnerability, make us more gullible, selfish and lonely. But what is most striking is that consciously pursuing happiness can actually drain the sense of joy we usually get from good things.

During their research both academics also found that being constantly cheerful was not always advantageous for all jobs. Some types of work, such as customer services benefited from happier staff, however, there were other forms of employment where an upbeat attitude would be a liability. One study found that people who were in a good mood were worse at picking out acts of deception than those who were in a bad mood. Another study found that people who were angry during a negotiation achieved better outcomes than people who were happy.

There is a strong case for rethinking our expectations that work should always make us happy. Feeling good about our work and our employer is important. But the obsession with happiness, currently seen in a lot of workplaces, can create significant problems.

Carl Cederström, Assistant Professor in Organisation Theory at Stockholm Business School, said, "The reality is work – like all other aspects of life – is likely to make us feel a wide range of emotions. If your job feels depressing and meaningless, it might be because it is depressing and meaningless. Pretending otherwise would just make it worse. Happiness is a great thing to experience, but nothing that can be willed into existence. Ironically, the less we seek to actively pursue happiness through our jobs, the more likely we will be to actually experience a sense of joy – a joy which is spontaneous and enjoyable, and not constructed and oppressive."

To find out more about *The Wellness Syndrome* by Carl Cederström and André Spicer, please visit: http://wellness-syndrome.com/Wellness_Syndrome/About_the_book.html

Media enquiries:

Kyla Njoku, Senior Communications Officer, Cass Business School
Tel: +44 (0) 207 040 3013
E-mail: kyla.njoku@city.ac.uk

Notes to Editors:

Cass Business School, which is part of City University London, delivers innovative, relevant and forward-looking education, consultancy and research.

Cass is located in the heart of one of the world's leading financial centres. It has strong links to both the City of London and its corporate, financial and professional service firms, as well as to the thriving entrepreneurial hub of Tech City – located close to the School.

Cass's MBA, specialist Masters and undergraduate degrees have a global reputation for excellence, and the School supports nearly 100 PhD students.

Cass offers one of the widest portfolio of specialist Masters programmes in Europe. It also has the largest faculties of Finance and Actuarial Science and Insurance in the region.

As examples of recent independent rankings of our research, Cass is ranked number 3 in Europe for its finance research, number 2 in Europe and number 11 in the world for banking research, and number 1 in Europe and number 2 in the world for actuarial science research.

Cass is a place where students, academics, industry experts, business leaders and policy makers can enrich each other's thinking. www.cass.city.ac.uk [@Cassinthenews](https://twitter.com/Cassinthenews)