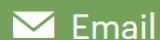


Workers, bosses share job satisfaction



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By David Goll –

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Stephanie Simi didn't fancy herself a paper-pushing administrator, but that's increasingly the role she found herself playing in the Livermore office of IES Language Foundation, a nationwide nonprofit that provides after-school enrichment programs for public school students.

"I was definitely frustrated with the direction my job was taking," said Simi, the company's executive director of operations.

She decided consult Joel Garfinkle, a San Leandro-based job coach, who told Simi she could still find job satisfaction with her current employer. Perhaps, Garfinkle told her, she could reshape her job to better reflect her personality and interests.

Simi then approached her boss, who permitted her to shift duties.

"I began to do more in marketing and public relations, which are much more suited to me since I'm very people-oriented," Simi said. "I started traveling to the schools where we have programs to assess how we were doing, and visit new schools to promote our company. Then they hired someone else to handle the administrative aspects of the job. I was a lot happier getting out to visit the sites and talk to people."

Garfinkle said Simi is hardly unusual. When he stages workshops for job-seekers or those looking for new careers, a whopping 90 percent of participants typically raise their hands when asked if they dislike their present jobs.

"Many of us take jobs for the wrong reasons," Garfinkle said.

"We might get good salaries and lots of recognition and prestige, but we really don't enjoy doing the work. We do it for a lifestyle, not for love of the work itself."

People tend to stick with careers for many reasons, which Garfinkle refers to as "trappings" ♦ which range from hefty salaries and stock options to family obligations or the investment of time and money into education and training. It might even be that a job is in a convenient location.

"Often, people have to lose their sense of personal identity before they realize how unhappy they've become," he said.

Before someone gets to that point, Garfinkle recommends the following exercise to see if attitude adjustment might be all that's needed:

? Slow down. Don't rush to finish assignments. Take time to find some enjoyment in the process.

? Express appreciation for work done by a co-worker.

? Appreciate yourself. Take yourself out to lunch once a week

and assess your recent accomplishments.



? Ask for positive feedback. Seek comments for work done on a current project and make sure the person understands they're addressing only positive aspects of your performance.

? Consider what you have to be grateful for in your job. Spend a few minutes during lunch or a break thinking about the things you appreciate.

? Create an enjoyable project to work on. Think of something you'd love to do and propose it to your supervisor.



? Take a 15-minute break to do something fun. Read a funny story, do a crossword puzzle or listen to an audiotope of a favorite comedian.

? Brainstorm with co-workers. Form a support group that meets periodically to discuss solutions to problems and ways to make the workplace more pleasant.

Garfinkle stressed it's also vital for employers  along with individual employees  to consider the importance of good

working conditions. Given the robust economy, workers in many fields have plenty of jobs from which to choose. The result is employee retention has become a major issue today, whether in corporations, start-ups or small mom-and-pop businesses.

"So much of business is focused on profitability that the issue of employees loving their jobs isn't a priority," Garfinkle said. "But with retention becoming more important, employers are realizing the `soft' people skills are no longer a luxury."

But Garfinkle still urges individuals  whether they be a corporate CEO or front-desk receptionist  to take the lion's share of responsibility for their employment satisfaction.

"If we spend a third of our lives at work, we should certainly try to be as fulfilled as possible while we're there," he said. "If we let bad work situations continue, it takes a toll on every other part of our lives."

Garfinkle, who also publishes a monthly newsletter on workplace issues, can be reached at 1-888-326-2248. His Web

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Equal Time focuses on workplace issues. To comment or suggest stories, contact David Goll at dgoll@bizjournals.com or 925-598-1436.