

# Creating a Positive Workplace

*Tips for Managers*

The benefits of a workplace characterised by people who are happy seem almost self-evident. These advantages include higher productivity, better outcomes, increased employee retention, healthier employees and a more positive environment for clients and customers.

## What does a positive workplace sound like?

The most successful workplaces are those in which everyone works well together to create a positive work environment. There is recognition 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](http://www.ssa.vic.gov.au) | 10 Jun 2010

## What does a positive workplace look like?

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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## What does a positive workplace achieve?

To achieve a positive work environment, positive leaders deliberately increase the flow of positive emotions within their organisation. They choose to do this not just because it is a 'nice' thing to do for the sake of improving morale, but because it leads to a measurable increase in performance. Studies show that organisational leaders who share positive emotions have workgroups with:

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

## What differentiates positive leaders from the rest?

A negative leader creates an entirely different way of thinking from a positive leader. When we are feeling negative, we seem to become critics of each other; with negativity engendering a warrior mode of thinking. With this win-lose approach to problems we concentrate on what is wrong and attempts to correct it.

Instead of being concerned with what they can get out of their employees, positive leaders search for opportunities to invest in everyone who works for them. They view each interaction with another person as an opportunity to increase his or her positive emotions.

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## Ten tips for developing a positive workplace environment

### 1. Build Trust

Trust is the basic tenant for all relationships, so building an environment of trust is one of the most important things you can do to create a positive work environment. It's a philosophy that must be demonstrated in everything you and your staff does. Trust is about doing what you say you are going to do and being who you say you are. It's about showing your staff in everything you do that you are reliable, responsible and accountable, and that they can rely on you for consistency. It is also letting them know you expect the same from them.

### 2. Communicate Positively and Openly.

In order to create a positive work environment each employee needs to feel valued. This is best accomplished through your listening to each person and honouring each one for what s/he has to say. By doing this you show that you value and respect every individual.

### 3. Expect the Best from Your Staff

There is a concept called 'The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy' which states that people generally will perform in the way others expect them to perform. So, if you have high expectations for your staff, treat them as if they are capable, competent people and expect them to function as such.

### 4. Create Team Spirit

One of our basic human needs is to feel we belong to something bigger than ourselves, and for many people that need is met by being part of a supportive work group. Convey to staff that every person plays an important role in the team. Encourage an attitude of cooperation rather than competition. When you create team spirit and identity, staff members will see themselves as a group of people all working for a common goal, rather than a bunch of individuals competing with each other.

### 5. Give Recognition and Appreciation

Give recognition and appreciation to everyone at every opportunity. For example: "Susan, I appreciate your organisational skills and the way you organized your team today to deliver the service." Or, "James, thank you for staying overtime yesterday. I really appreciate your positive, can-do attitude." When verbalising appreciation try to make it as personal as possible. Rather than just saying something vague like "good job", be specific about the personal quality or skill your team member brought to the task.

### 6. Give Credit and Take Responsibility

Always give credit for success to your staff, and take responsibility when things don't go well. As the boss it's your job to make sure your staff are well trained, capable and competent. If for some reason they fail to perform their job in the expected manner, it's your responsibility to ensure that they receive further direction and training so they will perform up to standards.

### 7. Be Approachable

Always present an attitude of approachability to your staff and clients/customers. Indicate by your manner that you are available and happy to speak with people from all levels and positions. Also, always be prepared to listen to whatever they want to share with you, and validate what you've heard. If they have concerns, tell them you will look into it and get back to them by a certain time. Then be sure you do! It's important that every day you go out and walk about in order to connect with people. Be sure that as you walk, you smile and make eye contact with everyone you pass. Act in a friendly manner, call people by name and show interest in what's going on.

### 8. Avoid the Drama

Constant reactivity creates melodrama that is something you don't need in your team. It saps valuable creative energy and promotes an environment of high stress that can potentially risk the health and wellbeing of staff over a prolonged period of time. If you've been using 'Crisis Management' as your modus operandi, invest in learning about new management strategies, benchmark with 'new thinkers' and learn a new style. Crisis management is passé, wasteful and destructive.

### 9. Make It Fun

Everyone wants to be where people are having fun, so make your workplace feel happy and festive. Find reasons to celebrate together, such as birthdays, birth of a baby or grandchild, moving into a new house, etc., and having small parties to celebrate these events. Ask your employees what would be fun for them and then implement what is feasible.

### 10. Better Outcomes for All

A positive workplace has been directly linked to a range of different performance-related behaviours, including greater helping behaviour, enhanced creativity, integrative thinking, inductive reasoning, more efficient decision-making, greater cooperation and the use of more successful negotiation strategies. A positive workplace stimulates people into a way of thinking that is creative, tolerant, constructive, generous, undefensive and lateral.

*The focus is not on what is wrong but on what is right.*