

Secret to workplace happiness? Remember what you love about the job, study urges

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Urging employees to simply rethink their jobs was enough to drop absenteeism by 60 per cent and turnover by 75 per cent, a new University of Alberta study shows.

A 'Spirit at Work' intervention program, designed to engage employees and give a sense of purpose, significantly boosted morale and job retention for a group of long-term health-care workers at the center of the study.

"We discovered that people who are able to find meaning and purpose in their work, and can see how they make a difference through that work, are healthier, happier and more productive employees," said Val Kinjerski, a University of Alberta PhD graduate who co-authored the study and now works with organizations to cultivate productive workplaces.

The results were published recently in the *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*.

The study focused on two groups of long-term health-care workers from two different care facilities in Canada. One group of 24 employees attended a Spirit at Work one-day workshop, followed by eight weekly booster sessions offered at shift changes. The workers were led through a variety of exercises designed to help staff create personal action plans to enhance spirit at work. They were asked to consider concepts like the deeper purpose of their work, being of service, appreciation of

themselves and others, sense of community and self-care.

The second group of 34 workers was offered no support program.

The result for the intervention group was a 23 per cent increase in teamwork, a 10 per cent hike in job satisfaction and a 17 per cent jump in workplace morale. In addition, employer costs related to absenteeism were almost \$12,000 less for the five months following the workshop than for the same period in the previous year. The employees also showed an increased interest in and focus on their patients, Kinjerski said.

"They really had a sense of what they were there to do, to be of service to their clients. This notion of being of service is important in all work, but in the field of long-term health care, it is of utmost importance."

Ultimately, the findings will aid employers in retaining and fostering a happier, more motivated workforce, said Berna Skrypnek, a human ecology professor at the U of A and co-author of the study. "This has become a leading concern in the long-term health-care field and for that matter, in any field, as labour markets become tighter and employees are demanding meaning and fulfillment from their work."

Source: University of Alberta

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