

## 10 Ways to Be Happier at Work Without Changing Jobs

<http://www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/10-ways-be-happier-work-without-changing-jobs>

Can eating the same thing for breakfast, turning off the radio, or telling a joke make you happier in your job? According to a new book, *Before Happiness* (available September 10, 2013), the answer is yes. We spoke with author [Shawn Achor](#), a happiness researcher, leading positive psychology expert, and distinguished former Harvard professor, to find out how simple actions like these can in fact help you become happier, healthier, and more successful at work and in your everyday life.

### 1 of 10 Ask a Coworker Out for a Drink

If you've been feeling down at work, doing something nice for someone else can help you feel better. In fact, the greatest buffer against depression is altruism, Achor says. His research found that people who put more effort into their work relationships were 10 times more likely to be highly engaged in their work and twice as likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Most notably, these pro-social workers were more successful and had more promotions than the less friendly employees. "If you're not giving back, you're not getting ahead either," Achor says.



Volunteer at a soup kitchen, offer to drive someone to the airport, or send a handwritten thank-you note. It can even be as minor as asking a coworker who you don't know well to grab a drink after work.

### 2 of 10 Get a Head Start On a Big Goal

When [marathon runners](#) reach 26.1 miles into the 26.2-mile race, a fascinating cognitive event occurs. When runners can finally see the finish line, their brains release a flood of endorphins and other chemicals that give them the energy to accelerate through that final leg of the race. Researchers have named this location the X-spot. "The X-spot illustrates how powerful the [finish line](#) can be in terms of increased energy and focus," Achor says. "In other words, the closer you perceive success to be the faster you move toward it."

To duplicate this effect in your job, give yourself a head start by designing your goals with some progress already worked in. For example, when you make your to-do list, write down things you have already done today and check those off immediately. Also include three routine tasks that you know you're going to do anyway, like attend a weekly staff meeting. This increases the likelihood of an X-spot experience because [checking](#) things off your to-do list highlights how much progress you've made over the course of the day.



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### 3 of 10 Take a Coffee Break at the Same Time Each Day

We've all been there: when you're burnt out at the end of the day, any task—whether it's writing a quick email or looking over a report—can seem daunting. Achor's research shows that when your [brain](#) focuses on making multiple decisions for a sustained time period, you'll suffer from mental fatigue, making you more likely to procrastinate and quit the task at hand. We need to avoid this burnout to have the cognitive strength to work efficiently and effectively, all day long.

One simple way to do so is [budget](#) brainpower wisely by keeping the basic, day-to-day decisions just that—basic. Try to routinize the smaller things you do have control over: what time you get to work, what you have for breakfast, when you take coffee breaks, so you don't waste valuable mental energy deciding whether to eat eggs or oatmeal for breakfast, or whether to take your [coffee](#) break at 10:30 a.m. or 11 a.m



### 4 of 10 Make Big Decisions After Lunch

Choosing the right time of day to make a big decision or an important presentation at work plays a crucial role in your brain's ability to summon its full strength, Achor says. A recent study of parole board hearings found that right after [lunch](#), judges granted parole to 60 percent of offenders, but right before lunch, when their stomachs were rumbling, they granted parole to only 20 percent.

The takeaway? Time your presentations or decisions so that you'll have eaten right before to give your brain the energy it needs. Achor also notes that it's been proven to be equally as important to get a full night's sleep—seven or eight hours—to avoid feeling run down at work. Eating on a regular schedule and [getting enough sleep](#) is a key step to feeling more positive and performing better on the job.



### 5 of 10 Keep On "Pinning"—the Right Way

If you're obsessed with [Pinterest](#), you're already using one technique that can help you stay focused on your professional and personal goals. But first, some bad news: a vision board filled with unrealistic, commercially motivated images can actually make us feel worse because it makes us think we're missing out, according to [researchers](#) at New York University.

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The good news? Pinterest can help you achieve your goals when used correctly. Choose images that are *realistic* and *possible* in the near future, like a healthy dinner you want to make next week, rather than a photo of a stick-thin model. This ensures that the process of vision boarding can help us determine our *real goals*, like eating healthier, as opposed to the ones society and marketers want us to have, such as six-pack abs, Achor says.



### 6 of 10 Remove Facebook from Your Bookmark Bar

We know mindless noise can be distracting, but in Achor's definition, "noise" isn't only something we hear—it can be any information you process that's negative or unnecessary. This could mean TV, [Facebook](#), news articles, or simply your thoughts about an unfashionable shirt your coworker is wearing. To perform to our best ability at work, we need to tune out the needless noise and instead tune into the true, reliable information that will help us reach our fullest potential.

Fortunately this is easy to accomplish. Turn off the car radio for five minutes in the morning, mute commercials on TV or the Internet, remove distracting websites from your bookmark bar (Facebook, we're looking at you), limit the amount of negative news articles you consume, or listen to music without lyrics while you work. These small actions will free up more energy and resources for picking up and processing the important, real, and happy details in your job and in [your life](#).



### 7 of 10 Write Down 5 Things You Appreciate

If you're a frequent worrier or often feel anxious, you might be sabotaging your livelihood and your lifespan. Researchers found that phobic anxiety and fear cause a change in our chromosomes that dramatically speeds up the aging process. "If we want to truly do what's best not only for our loved ones but for our careers, our teams, and our companies, we need to let go of our death grip on fear, anxiety, pessimism, and worry," Achor says.



To help yourself release these negative habits, write a list of five things you feel passionate about, whether it's your children, your faith, or the great workout you had this morning. A study found that when people wrote about their positive feelings for a few minutes, they significantly lowered their levels of worry and pessimism and raised testing performance by 10 to 15 percent. With this one easy task, you'll not only be happier and more successful at work, but you'll live longer too!

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### 8 of 10 Smile More Every Day

At Ritz-Carlton hotels, a brand long associated with excellent customer service, employees adhere to what they call the "10/5 Way." If a guest walks by within 10 feet, make eye contact and smile. If a guest walks by within five feet, say hello. There's more to this than simply being friendly, though. Research shows that you can trick your brain into picking up other people's actions or emotions. Plus, your brain releases dopamine when you smile, which improves your mood as well.



Adopting this technique in the office can help improve your interactions and mood. Tomorrow at work, make an effort to smile at everyone who passes within 10 feet of you. Smile at a colleague in the elevator, at the barista when you order your morning coffee, and at a random stranger on your way home. It may sound silly, but you'll be amazed to see how quickly and powerfully this can change the tone of all interactions you have at work and elsewhere.

### 9 of 10 Tell a Joke

We all prefer going on a date with someone who makes us laugh, and when we're feeling down, we're more apt to call a friend with a great sense of humor than the one who's more ho-hum. Similarly, using humor is one of the most effective (and fun) ways to boost happiness in the workplace.

Achor explains that when you laugh, your parasympathetic nervous system activates, lowering stress and raising creativity, which in turn helps you stay in a high performance zone at work. Studies have also found that when your brain feels more positive, you have 31 percent higher levels of productivity. And don't worry, you don't have to be a stand-up comedian to make this work. Mention a funny story from the weekend or lighten the mood with a one-liner.



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### 10 of 10 Cross-Train Your Brain

If you feel stuck in a rut with your responsibilities at work, you might consider training your brain to look at problems in a new way. Drive a different way to work, go somewhere new for lunch, or even take a trip to an art museum. Looking at centuries-old paintings may seem pointless, but a study at the Yale Medical School found a class of med students who visited an art museum exhibited an astonishing 10 percent improvement in their ability to detect important medical details. Observe new details in paintings and places that you may not have noticed before, even if you've seen them dozens of times. Any of these small changes to your normal routine can help boost performance and improve your ability to see your job responsibilities in a new light.

