



# 15 MOST PRESSING HR QUESTIONS:

REAL-WORLD INSIGHT FROM A  
PEOPLE EXPERT



An in-depth Q&A with TEDX speaker and renowned blogger:  
**Perry Timms, founder of People & Transformational HR**





## A MUST-READ FOR:

*HR managers*  
*People and organisation managers*  
*Engagement managers*  
*Talent and acquisition managers*  
*Reward and recognition managers*  
*Business leaders*  
*C-suiters*



## WITH SPECIFIC INSIGHTS FOR:

*Office based organisations*  
*Organisations with remote staff*  
*Public sector*  
*Call centres*  
*Recruitment*  
*Retail*  
*Hospitality*



# Find new inspiration for improving your employee engagement strategy

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As HR's mandate to assist company growth and execute strategy grows, huge question marks hang over best practices. It's clear that a profitable, creative and sustainable business is a product of aligned, fulfilled and hard-working people, but how do I as an HR leader enable it to happen?

Is it possible to enhance office wellbeing on a shoestring budget? How do I go about convincing the boss to invest in people initiatives when he/she seemingly only cares about the bottom line and ROI? What's the single best way to increase office happiness?

In our recent webinar [Employee Happiness: HR's role in creating a more fulfilling workplace](#), we caught up with world-renowned writer, TEDX speaker, CEO and all-round HR guru, Perry Timms, to explore the role HR can play in shaping a more fulfilling future of work. As you can imagine, he was inundated with questions, so we've pulled together this whitepaper that gives each the time it deserves.

**Enjoy.**



## QUESTIONS

- Q1** How can typically old-school models such as call centres increase office wellbeing?
- Q2** Are people beginning to expect too much? Why do we need 'happy' offices?
- Q3** How do I convince my bottom line-focused boss that the pursuit is worthwhile?
- Q4** Is it possible to implement wellbeing initiatives on a tight budget? If so, how?
- Q5** How do I convince my international bosses to get behind wellbeing initiatives?
- Q6** The majority of my team are field-based, how can I ensure they're happy?
- Q7** What would you say is the single best way to increase office happiness?
- Q8** How could I introduce a wellbeing or happiness strategy in the public sector?
- Q9** Many successful companies take the opposite approach, what's so wrong with that?
- Q10** Once you've overmanaged staff how do you begin to build trust from scepticism?
- Q11** How do I promote wellbeing if my employees feel disconnected to HQ?
- Q12** How do I lead the change in our stressful and competitive recruitment office?
- Q13** We're trying these initiatives but people still complain, what can I do?
- Q14** Our staff think that we're hiding things from them, how can we prove we're not?
- Q15** I'm a team leader but have no influence over HR policies, what can I do?



# Q1

## How can typically old-school models such as call centres begin to promote workplace wellbeing?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Bin the scripts and turn off the stopwatch: trust your workforce's judgement. Ask them what they honestly think of their current working arrangement, and how they feel it could be made more fulfilling while maintaining (and raising) standards. Based on this information, start to redesign operations as an on-going project with regular reviews and feedback sessions.

### PERRY SAYS...

Big question. I know one or two call centres that have recently taken their scripts and binned them, relying on their people to use discretion and be compliant. It's interesting to know what's behind the continued adherence to a tighter operating method in the call centre – it sounds like the people cannot be trusted to operate in the way that other functions are now proving is better for both performance and people.



### Try this

Have a series of discussions with a sample of the call centre team – experienced, less experienced, brand new, part time, full time, different age groups, etc. – and ask them all the same two questions:



1. *How do you (honestly and frankly) feel about our way of working here?*
2. *What would help you get greater fulfillment from your work while maintaining and raising standards?*

Analyse the responses and use them to redesign some of the ways people are organised, supported and enabled. You could conduct experiments in parallel with the existing ways of working: make it a living experiment involving and co-designed by the people doing the work. In my view, improving this kind of team's working experience is in two parts:

- *Part one. Reducing any friction, interference and tension.*
- *Part two. Enhancing feelings of value, worth and achievement.*

Part two increases individual accountability – but people may need time to transition and unlearn their reliance on supervisory routines.

In my experience, the removal of part one leads to part two. Similarly, understanding part two will often lead you to reengineer part one, thus achieving both. The key here is to involve the team in designing its own version – perhaps based on what's working well elsewhere in your company.



# Q2

I'm a big advocate of making workplaces happy, but the devil inside of me asks: are people beginning to expect too much? Why do we need 'happy' offices?

## QUICK ANSWER...

People take things for granted. The best antidote to this is to remove yourself from your comfort zone. Leaders should get out of the boardroom and meet the customer, teams should go and volunteer for the local community. These experiences will remind you of your privileges (and hopefully do some good on top).

## PERRY SAYS...

I think we take things for granted – this is true of liberty, safety and running water. So how do we avoid this? Help others experience different things that remind them of the fortunate place they're in.



## Try this

For leaders, that means vacating the boardroom and going to where your customers and suppliers are. For those in design studios, go to where your designs are being used. For those in research labs, go handle some calls.

Tangerine Bank in Canada do this well – they have a 'work swarming' mentality. When a new product is launched, everyone in the company including the CEO down their usual tools and get on the support lines and chat streams and go into the branches.



You cannot beat experiences for reminding people of their privileges. Helping charitable organisations, educational work, community services, voluntary support for less fortunate than you is what CSR is really about. If you don't already do this kind of work, start small, see the impact, then roll it out company wide.

### *Need inspiration?*

Look up the work of Tangerine Bank and Interface (a carpet tiles company that do lots of work for developing countries and the environment).





# Q3

## How do I convince my bottom line-focused boss that the pursuit is worthwhile?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Find out what makes them tick – money is only a means to an end. The likelihood is they'll be motivated in some way by exceeding in business, something that's a by-product of having a fulfilled, engaged and hard-working team. It turns out you're on the same page.

### PERRY SAYS...

By finding out what makes them happy. Surely not even the most capital C of capitalists only have wealth as their happiness indicator? Wealth allows them to experience the finest dining, exotic parts of the world – whatever they're into. So I'd sit with this person, look them in the eye and ask myself: 'What brings you to life?' Then see if that links to the pursuit of business excellence, profit, market share, or whatever.



If it does, there's a chance you can show them how to bring these aspirations to life. Show them that when people are truly aligned, fulfilled and working hard, then the profits, creativity and sustainability of the company are in the best hands possible; people who are there for more than the transactional exchange of labour for cash. Let their creativity, beliefs and determination build a company that's worth more than its asset value.



# Q4

## Is it possible to implement wellbeing initiatives on a tight budget? If so, how?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Take baby steps. Lots of little tweaks will eventually make a big differences.

### PERRY SAYS...

Use financial restraints to create creative tension. How can we, in spite of our lack of fiscal enablement, do things that make a difference?



### *For example*

Toyota's leaders once asked their engineers to create a smaller car with all the luxurious features of a larger car – just without the budget. The engineers said it was impossible, but the leaders persevered and said: 'Do whatever you can to make this so.' And they did, by using the accumulated marginal gains philosophy of tiny changes, but lots of them.

So I'd go for tiny gestures (a good friend of mine calls them 'tiny triumphs') that can, collectively, add up to a big difference.



# Q5

## How do I convince my international bosses to get behind wellbeing initiatives?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Whether it's the distance alone or a more deeply rooted cultural difference, you should appeal to the human element. Shift the conversation away from material gain and focus on something bigger – making a difference is a common desire among those in pursuit of a happier life.

### PERRY SAYS...

It could be about understanding that different geographical regions and cultures have a different sense of what expressed happiness is and looks like. So understanding those differences is important for a start.



If the distance alone is considered a barrier, use it to create a new challenge: something people can all rally behind to increase fulfillment, appreciation and sense of worth and value. I know of one company that's using photography and images to build a community of artistic representations of how their people experience and live using their product. It's brought people from across time zones together, there's an energy and creative outlet that's palpable – plus it all links to the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

This links to a bigger planetary agenda, and has lifted people's spirits through sharing an artistic interpretation of life, and product. I think we have to take it away from individualistic material gain towards something bigger.



# Q6

A lot of these ideas are great for office-based staff, but as a training company the majority of my team are field-based, how can I ensure they're happy?

## QUICK ANSWER...

Technology annihilates distance. Use tools such as Zoom and Skype to get your far-flung workforce sharing experiences and collaborating where possible. On top of that, arrange monthly, quarterly – even yearly – meetups to develop the human connection.

## PERRY SAYS...

The remoteness of a lot of people at work is an issue, but one that in itself can be used to create a stronger sense of bond. Who do these people download to? Share ideas with? Celebrate successful ventures with? People could partner up with their colleagues and use remote chat and video links to have regular sharing sessions. Zoom and Skype are great tools for connecting people as physically as possible.



I'd also use something like monthly or quarterly get-togethers, where the discussion isn't about business performance or strategies, but shared learning, ideas and human connection.



# Q7

## If you had to recommend one thing to increase workplace happiness, what would it be?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Dismantle workplace misery in three areas: irrelevance, invisibility, and immeasurement.

(And read Patrick Lencioni to help you do it.)

### PERRY SAYS...

Ask people about what matters to them. Three Signs of a Miserable Job is a book by Patrick Lencioni, in which he codified why people experience misery at work:



- *Irrelevance*
- *Invisibility*
- *Immeasurement*

So with contact, dialogue and thereby appreciation, you can overcome these three things.



# Q8

## How could I introduce a wellbeing or happiness strategy in the public sector (a space that's typically more service-focused than people-focused)?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Don't label it as a happiness strategy. Back up the wellbeing initiative proposal with statistics that will appeal to the discerning public sector bosses. And remember: it's a manager's duty to look after their people, regardless of what sector they're in.

### PERRY SAYS...

I think you could simply remind people of the duty that care employers (i.e. managers) have in looking after their people. It's not a part of the manager's job it *is* the manager's job to be there for their people. So I'd not label it as a happiness strategy – bill it as a wellbeing strategy backed up by statistics on stress, attrition and lost productivity caused by overworked and underappreciated people.



### Try this

The public sector more than most needs a sense of kinship, as they're typically up against continued pay freezes and budget cuts. Managers' work needs to be recalibrated from task to team; from paperwork to people; from inbox to in-person. So that's what I'd suggest you do.



# Q9

## Some companies thrive on taking what could be seen as the opposite approach to employee wellbeing, why shouldn't they be able to maximise profits?

### QUICK ANSWER...

It can't be denied: some companies that choose to treat people as livestock are financially successful. Fortunately, though, every exposé of oppressive work regimes highlights their unacceptability, putting us a step closer to regulation and fairness.

### PERRY SAYS...

It's not uncommon to see successful companies have less than desirable working routines and methods. They've made a conscious choice to asset-like rank their people alongside inanimate objects like stock, warehouses and vehicles. Stories of oppressive working regimes spread like wildfire, and can besmirch reputation and therefore damage capital. The more such stories come out, the better placed we are to pressure either regulators or the Government to act and vote with our purchasing feet.



I think we only have to look at the turnaround in some industries to realise it gets to a point where it's not good for business or people, so it's shifted around. McJobs is the classic example of where this bad reputation and image has been turned on its head. Still not perfect I'm sure, but better as an experience of work.

If I had a definitive answer to this I'd be nearing Jeff Bezos' wealth, but if we simply keep pushing the message that it's not right to treat people oppressively then eventually more and more companies will get the message and adapt.



# Q10

## Once you've overmanaged staff how do you begin to build trust from scepticism?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Start off slowly and demonstrate commitment through regular communication. Don't expect a quick turnaround – be patient and persistent.

### PERRY SAYS...

Gradually and sincerely, openly and inclusively. It has to start somewhere, so start small and prove it's part of a bigger intent that you are committed to. Be prepared for low energy towards this and persevere, communicate regularly.

Let people within the company who others trust do the communication without any guidance or censorship.





# Q11

## How do I promote wellbeing if my employees feel disconnected to HQ?

### QUICK ANSWER...

Take the time to understand what the other teams do. A good way to achieve this is through cross-discipline learning partnerships.

### PERRY SAYS...

This is a regular occurrence that comes from a lack of understanding and appreciation of what each aspect does. In truth, both are needed but people don't always know why and how.



### Try this

My suggestion is talking about the real people and their stories. Share openly and without agendas. Letting people see, understand and appreciate their colleagues is the only way. Create learning partnerships if you wish to connect people from multiple disciplines. Let them discover what they both need to work on, and allow them to do it together despite distance.



# Q12

## How do I lead the change in our stressful and competitive recruitment office?

### QUICK ANSWER...

In industries where pressure and stress is inevitable, the best thing managers can do is identify and address one or two areas that contribute towards the most negativity. Set aside time to think about how you work, and think of ways to streamline it.

### PERRY SAYS...

The stress and competitiveness isn't likely to disappear, so I use the analogy: be the white water canoeist, not the dam builder.

### Try this

Collectively figure out where the most stress lies and work out a contra activity to it. For example, if the stress comes from quarterly financial reporting, get everyone together either before or after.

- *Before: prepare the team to get the review done.*
- *After: celebrate you've done it.*

If it's daily stress, do something small to counter it each day.



Working creatively to counter stress and competitiveness is in itself cathartic and energising – the fact that it also creates solutions is a bonus. If you don't pay attention to how you work then it'll always be this way. Devote 10% of your attention to how you work and it'll start to bring benefits to the remaining 90%.



# Q13

We're trying wellbeing initiatives but people still complain. How do you provide the platform for each employee to flourish when their wants and needs vary so much?

## QUICK ANSWER...

Those who criticise wellbeing initiatives need to be armed with rational arguments. If the employee is put off by something, they need to mobilise other disgruntled colleagues and lead the change to find a solution.

## PERRY SAYS...

With a complaint comes a responsibility: to be at the centre of the resolution. If you push back, you're partly responsible for sourcing the solution. If you get enough support for your proposal, you'll win as you'll remove the tension or interference. If no-one else believes in it enough to help overcome it, you have to look inside you for what it is about you that can change.



## *Need inspiration?*

Look into how Nearsoft in Mexico resolve issues. If you are taxed by something, you lead it. If no-one wants to follow you, you have to lead yourself to a solution of your own making.



# Q14

Despite arranging communication sessions and company updates our staff think that we're hiding things from them, how can we prove we're not?

## QUICK ANSWER...

For complete transparency, bring a trusted member of the sceptical workforce into the leadership team's meetings. This independent source will help to convince the others of your good intentions.

## PERRY SAYS...

Bring a figure that your people trust into the leadership team's meetings – like an internal ombudsman. The independent source should take stage to openly share what's making the people feel this way, and in what way they think things are kept from them.



Use that to open up dialogue with the wider company and continue in this direction with frequent and uncensored two-way communication.



# Q15

I'm a team leader of 14 people in a large organisation but have no influence over HR policies, what can I do?

## QUICK ANSWER...

If you don't have official backing from the department but still want to engage your team, ask two simple questions: what brings your team to life? And how can this be achieved?

Changing the 'them' to 'us' is a powerful move.

## PERRY SAYS...

I think you should keep it tight. Explain the constraints that come with a lack of HR clout, but ask your people two simple questions:

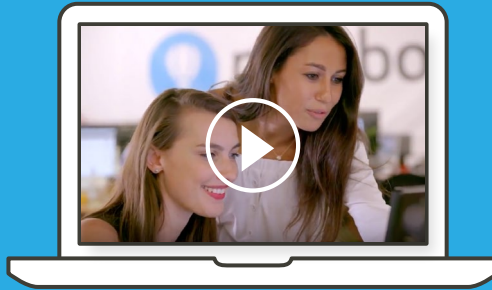


1. *What brings you to life?*
2. *How can all 15 of us make everyone's lot better with these constraints?*

You might be surprised about what you get, what you can achieve and how people react.

Just keep it focused, cheap and energising.





At Perkbox, we believe that happy employees perform better and stick around for longer. To that end, we've created a platform that offers teams a wide range of rewards and recognition to help build happier, more productive company cultures.

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