

# Why Law Firms Should Concentrate on Fostering Happiness

I'm infected. I'm pretty confident I passed it on recently and am very okay with that.

I'm talking about happiness, of course. What were you thinking?! It's really infectious!

Catherine Sanderson, professor of psychology at Amherst College, recently discussed "The Science of Happiness" as keynote speaker at the Legal Marketing Association's 2018 annual conference in New Orleans. The acclaimed "Professor of Happiness" has studied relationships and happiness for two decades, identifying why it matters in terms of productivity, health, life expectancy and how we treat others.

Her uplifting keynote offered insights into reasons why happiness is important, what makes us happy and how to become happier overall in both professional and personal levels.

## What Makes People Happy?

Sanderson said that we can **actively engage in behaviors that make us happy**, including:

- Eating – chocolate, high-fat foods – who doesn't like cookies and donuts at a meeting? They make everyone happy!
- Exercise – having exercised increases feelings of happiness from the endorphins.
- Shopping – happiness is higher in buying for someone else, so find and give that perfect gift.

**Age also makes a difference in happiness.** People ages 18 to 21 are really happy, as are those in their 70s; 80-year-olds are happier than 18-year-olds because older people focus on the quality of relationships, not quantity.

**Nature is also important.** Physically, neurologically and psychologically, nature affects our happiness. That doesn't have to mean physically being outside; even looking at scenes and photos of non-urban nature can relax us.

**Relationships matter for increasing happiness.** What builds happiness includes:

- Being around happy people.
- Having close friends and family.
- Having meaningful conversations (although meaningful conversations that could lead to happiness are decreased by the mere visible presence of a cellphone, even if it's just placed on a table. Make an effort to remove technology from sight during important work meetings).



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# What Are the Components of Happiness?

Sanderson identified three components of happiness, in order of importance:

1. **Pleasure.** Viewing art, hearing music, drinking wine. These are fleeting moments that provide immediate happiness, but it's the least important of these three because it's only in the moment.
2. **Engagement.** Participation and anticipation heighten happiness, like planning a trip. For example, in the weeks leading up to the Legal Marketing Association's annual conference, the excited chatter on the Legal Marketers Extraordinaire page on Facebook grew into a large organized dinner, plans were made for sightseeing tours during off hours, and parties and meetings were scheduled for drinks and local entertainment. The anticipation of reunions with old friends, and the opportunity to make new ones, was unmistakable. Of course, participants welcomed the prospect of the education to be gained from sessions, but the real happiness was visible in the connections that were happening on the personal level that started weeks before the actual event.
3. **Meaningful things.** When the Jaffe team members at the conference explained our booth's purpose (to share information about [Wine To Water](#) and how the water filters we were asking attendees to build would help families have clean water for more than 10 years), [we saw happiness spread](#). I witnessed physical changes to a state of happiness in the attendees who participated – we had infected them! Smiles widened, eyes took on a shine and postures became purposeful as they connected the filter pieces together. Their five-minute activity would directly affect and benefit one family for a very long time. They understood it, and it made them happy to help.

Similarly, [Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP](#) held a filter build program at their firm that brought together lawyers and staff in a significant, collaborative and caring effort. Michael R. Nestor, a partner in the firm's bankruptcy section and a member of the firm's management committee, said, "We are so inspired by the work that Wine To Water does and the numerous communities it helps."

## Law Firms and Happiness

"Happiness is contagious – Find something that brings meaning to your life – whether in your work life, home life, community – that is a profound predictor of happiness. What do you love?" said Sanderson.

Why should law firms care about happiness? Sanderson shared these reasons that have been proven and measured through science.

Happier people are:

- more helpful, and kinder
- less hostile
- more productive
- experience better health

[Baker Donelson's](#) culture has earned it a spot on FORTUNE magazine's "100 Best



Companies to Work For®" list for nine consecutive years, among many other accolades that recognize the firm's initiatives in creating a rewarding workplace environment. "Our lawyers and staff consistently collaborate across practices and offices to make sure we're bringing the right expertise to a given opportunity. We work hard and play hard, which leads to a happier work environment where people trust their colleagues immensely," said Adam Severson, Chief Marketing & Business Development Officer at Baker Donelson.

## How to Increase Happiness

Sanderson provided 10 strategies for increasing happiness, with expectations that everyone can find a few that are personally meaningful to focus on:

1. Change your behavior – sleep more, exercise, go outside, meditate
2. Find your strengths, what you love to do, what you love about who you are with, your job, family, friends, etc.
3. Read a book you love
4. Keep a gratitude journal and write down a few points nightly
5. Make a gratitude visit and write a letter to someone who has been important to you and why. Visit in person and read it out loud to them. Don't wait for a eulogy.
6. Smile, even when you're not happy – smiling more is also associated with living longer!
7. Perform random acts of kindness – pay it forward, volunteer, buy gifts for others
8. Spend money on the right things – experiences, travel, shows, not necessarily belongings
9. Avoid comparisons
10. Build and maintain close relationships – take the time, effort and energy; the quality of relationships is what matters

Happiness is a choice, Sanderson stressed. We can choose how to spend our time and with whom we spend it.

Plenty has been written about the balance of workplace and personal life, and how to achieve happiness at work. Fast Company recently wrote an article, "[The Science Of Happiness, In Four Simple Work Habits](#)" that provides a few more approaches to reaching workplace bliss.

"Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it ... And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it."

~  
Elizabeth  
h  
Gilbert

What does your law firm do to make you happier to work there? What strategies will you focus on to improve your own happiness? Leave a comment below or drop a note to me, Vivian Hood, at [vhood@jaffepr.com](mailto:vhood@jaffepr.com).