

[Remote happiness, how to create it](#)

With the advent of forced remote, many CEOs are finding that some of their team members are profoundly unhappy. They see this when valued team members choose to leave the 500+ person company and move to another job, most often to an organization with just a few people (early startup or investment firm), or to no job at all. This move often appears illogical. The person is giving up lots of compensation. The CEO often feels personally insulted, and certainly confused.

There is no need to be confused. The reasons are actually logical.

In this remote world, many people are feeling disconnected which in turn leads to sadness, often intense sadness (ie- depression). For those in this state, they know that something needs to change, but they are not sure what. Job is the activity that consumes most of their day, so they often assume that is where the cause lies. **They believe that their disconnection comes from the fact that they are working at a "big company". If they leave for a small company, they will regain a sense of connection.**

Unfortunately, they rarely do. Because their disconnection is not coming from the size of their company, but rather the way in which they are working remotely.

Most managers feel that they are not allowed to ask about a report's personal life, and therefore are unwilling to ask about the report's home environment and daily routines. This is a mistake. The manager is a coach whose role is to help their report unpack and solve the issues that the report faces, whether those issues appear in their work or personal world.

Therefore, as a manager, if you sense that one of your reports is unhappy or experiencing mental/emotional pain, ask them about it. Ask them about their home environment and daily routine. I posit that you will likely discover that they do not do or have at least one of the following:

- Get outside
- See other people that they know
- Exercise
- Have access to a consistently uninterrupted space to take Zoom calls

I posit that humans need 4 things to feel mentally balanced:

- Connection to nature
- Connection to tribe
- Blood flow
- Uninterrupted work space

Pre-COVID, we could each achieve these to some degree simply by going to an office.

- We had to leave our residence each day to get to transportation which brought us to and from the office. By leaving our residence, we encountered outside air even if only briefly, and this created a connection to nature.
- We saw other people in the office who were familiar to us. They may not have been our best friends, but we knew them. We said hello and goodbye, maybe had lunch with them, maybe even met for drinks after work and shared an occasional laugh. This created connection to tribe.
- We had to physically walk to transport, which got our bodies moving a little bit and thus our blood flowing a bit. Many of us took advantage of being out by going to the gym and really getting our blood to flow.
- The office was geared for performance, with call booths, conference rooms or private offices for meetings and calls. Thus, we had uninterrupted work spaces.

We achieved these things unwittingly.

Rather than try to convince you that these elements create a feeling of peace and satisfaction, I simply challenge you to experiment with them.

While going to an in-person office naturally gave us each of these to a small degree, if we are intentional about creating them in a work-from-home environment, we can achieve them to a much higher degree, and therefore feel even greater personal satisfaction than we did when going to the office.

Here is how I do it:

- Connection to nature.
 - I take a 5-minute walk outside at the beginning of the day before I start work. And I take a 5-minute walk at the end of the day once I have stopped work.
 - This not only creates a connection to nature by getting me into outside air, it also is a nice signal of the transition to and from work. Before the morning and after the evening transition, I do not allow myself to do work, leaving me space to focus on family and personal activities.
 - I also take breaks regularly throughout the day. I only schedule 25- and 50-minute meetings, and I end all of them on time. This allows me a break to go to do one or more of the following:
 - go to the bathroom
 - get a drink of water
 - get a snack
 - get outside
 - prepare for the next meeting

- When I get outside (which I do at least once every 2 hours), I
 - Close my eyes and face the sun (even if its cloudy) for 1 minute. This creates an intense and quick connection to nature.
 - While doing so, I stretch my hip flexors while taking 5 deep breaths. This gets my blood flowing.
 - Then I find my wife or one of my children and give them a 1-minute hug. (Truth be told, only my wife puts up with this. My kids top out at 10 seconds when they are willing to hug me at all.) This creates for me an intense and quick connection to tribe.
- Connection to tribe:
 - In addition to the 1-minute hugs mentioned above, I schedule in-person socially-distant gatherings at least once a week.
 - I put zero effort into hosting. I am only willing to send an email stating the time and location of the gathering.
 - Sometimes it is at an open-air restaurant/bar for a drink or meal. Sometimes it is on my patio where each guest must bring whatever they want to drink or eat.
 - My intent is not to be rude, but rather to make organizing and hosting incredibly easy for me, increasing the likelihood that I will continue to do so.
 - The purpose of these gatherings for me is laughter. I invite those with whom I am able to generate that laughter.
- Blood flow.
 - In addition to the short walks at the beginning and end of the day, and the 1-minute stretches during breaks, I also run on the treadmill. But rather than see how much I can do, I have experimented with how little I can do and still get the benefit of a feeling of peace and calm in my body that lasts for more than 24 hours. For me that time is 3 minutes at 4.0 speed. I end up running for 5 minutes just to be safe.
 - Once again, my goal is to make this step so easy (ie- short and slow) that there is no reason for me not to do it each day.
 - I should note that I often skip the morning walk in favor of the 5 minutes on the treadmill, because my treadmill is in an unattached garage, so I have to go outside to get to it. Thus, I am getting my connection to nature anyway.
- Uninterrupted work space
 - I have converted a back room into a Zoom studio. It is far from the locus of kids' activities, and I am able to lock the door so that no one accidentally wanders in.
 - Many of your team members do not have a large enough home, or an unused room, to create such an uninterrupted space. The answer for them is either

- A co-working space outside the home.
- Rent a home in a cheaper part of the country where they can afford a much larger space.
 - I recommend that the company give a rent stipend that can be used toward either a co-work space or the remote residence.
- My wife and I have hired a homeschool teacher to be with our children.
 - Many of your team members cannot afford to do this on their own. For them, you can:
 - Change the culture in the company. Re-frame a child walking into a Zoom call as a welcome introduction of the team member's family to their co-workers. Ask the meeting owner to look forward to these moments as a way to increase team bonding by getting to know each other as humans.
 - Do what Gitlab does and create Juicebox Zoom calls that bring families together for remote playdates throughout the day. And introduces them to children in a myriad of locations that they would otherwise never have access to.
 - Encourage parents to partner with other families to create a microschool (hire a teacher jointly).

With these steps above, I feel connected, grounded and peaceful throughout the day. Even when I have back-to-back-to-back Zoom calls throughout the entire day, I feel energized as long as I actually take a break between each call, and actually get outside during those breaks.

There are other things that contribute to my sense of well-being. They are:

Desk set-up:

- I have a standing desk. Because of it, my neck, back and body do not get sore or stiff. (Before I had a standing desk, I used an neck pillow with pressure knobs for a few minutes during breaks and at the end of the day to relieve the tension in my neck and back.)
- I have placed my desk directly in front of a window. This achieves two purposes:
 - It allows me to look outside at nature throughout the day. I also open the window to allow in fresh air when the weather cooperates. This gives me connection to nature.
 - The natural light on my face is akin to professional video lighting, allowing me to appear fully present during video calls.

Morning routine:

- I follow [Tim Ferriss's morning routine suggestion](#).
 - Meditate for 10 minutes (while still in bed) using the Waking Up app.

- Journal (while still in bed) using the 5-Minute Journal..
- Make my bed.
- Drink a large glass of water.
- 5-minute run on the treadmill.
- Every other day, I do push-ups using the Just 6 Weeks app.
- This 20-30 minute routine invigorates me and launches me with energy and clarity into the tasks of the day.

Meals:

- I try to eat every meal and snack sitting outside.

Entertainment:

- I try (with decent success) to not look at an electronic device for entertainment. This means that I no longer look at my phone to view news, Twitter, YouTube, etc.
- Without electronic entertainment, I am forced to do other activities during non-work times. I end up:
 - Sitting outside and staring at the leaves blowing in the wind (intense connection to nature)
 - Talking with my wife (connection to tribe)
 - Talking and playing with my kids (connection to tribe)
 - Reading a paper book (soothing)
- All of these activities bring me a sense of peace, whereas looking at my phone or a screen never did.

Time away:

- I do not work at all on the weekends, guaranteeing myself 2 days of rejuvenation each week. And I take a long weekend with my family once every few months.
 - Plaid recently looked at vacation days and found that their team members weren't taking them ... at all. So, Plaid scheduled two 4-day weekends for 2H20. During these long weekends, no one at Plaid is allowed to work. (Of course, Plaid can't stop the sales team from responding to emails. But hopefully they will be doing so from a nice location.)
 - I recommend that you do the same.

Please think of these suggestions as things to experiment with. There are many other ways to create connection to nature, connection to tribe, blood flow and uninterrupted work space.

Find the ways that work for you. Simply make sure that you do them every day, and several times each day.

And as a Manager, make sure that your reports are doing so as well. If you do, I posit that you and your team members will retain a lasting sense of connection, peace and well-being. And your team members will therefore stay with the company.