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WORK JERK: If you're in a bad mood at work, you'll see mistakes more easily, become more critical and less forgiving, says Professor Martin Seligman.

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MOVERS & SHAKERS

Unisys has appointed **David Barnes** as managing director, Australia and New Zealand. Barnes joins Unisys from SAP where he spent the last seven years in senior leadership roles, the most recent being chief operating officer for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Building renovation franchise group Fix It Building Services has appointed **Russell Poole** as its general manager. The new position was created when Fix It's managing director **Robin La Pere** stepped aside to focus on expansion opportunities for the group in New Zealand and Australia. Formerly the group's southern regional manager and latterly business performance manager, Poole has a background in engineering, human resources, and regional and general management.

Sales and marketing specialist recruitment firm Gaulter Russell has confirmed **Fiona McCrostie** to drive their search business in New Zealand. Originally qualifying as a lawyer, Fiona has had 13 years executive level recruitment experience across a broad range of functional areas, including three years specialist experience with Gaulter Russell. Richard Smith has been appointed into a consulting role at Gaulter Russell, where he will help to develop their retail and category management offering. He comes from a sales management position with Retailworld Resourcing, where he specialised in executive level retail recruitment.

Keep NZ Beautiful, an environmental charitable organisation, has appointed an Interim CEO, **Simon Johnston**, to lead the organisation with a strategy to increase the education and profile of environmental issues such as litter abatement, recycling, graffiti and in citizenship of each individual to keep NZ beautiful.

For inclusion in Movers & Shakers, email appointment notices to careers@nzherald.co.nz

Happy workers are Prozac to profits

Positivity is the key to good business, says a US professor (and reformed grouch)

THE HAPPIER you are, the better you will do at work. That's the view of Professor Martin Seligman.

Seligman is a firm believer that positive psychology, a branch of psychology that focuses on the study of such things as positive emotions, strengths-based character and healthy institutions, can bring about positive changes in people.

Seligman says it is possible to be happier, to feel more satisfied, to be more engaged with life, find more meaning, have higher hopes and probably even laugh more, regardless of one's personal circumstances.

However, Seligman says he wasn't always a supporter of waking up every morning determined to feel happy — in fact, he spent 30 years avoiding the positive side of life. And he agrees that there are plenty of arguments against positive psychology; not least that it is all a lot of "fluff".

"I believed that until about 10 years ago," he says. "But the evidence shows that it's not only when you're doing well in the world that you feel happy, that's obvious. It turns out that happy people do better in the world."

"And the evidence is quite strong for this; [happy] people seem to do better intellectually, they do better in their jobs, they do better socially and



STEVE HART

they do better physically."

Seligman says he assumed the relationship of wealth to life satisfaction was linear; the more money one had, the happier one became.

"It turns out that if you're below the [financial] safety net, then every increment in income produces an increase in happiness," he says.

But once you're at your income level, more money doesn't mean more happiness.

"You get dramatically diminishing returns above the safety net. Even though so much of our lives are spent on trying to earn more money — it turns out it doesn't work."

Seligman has written more than 20 books and 170 articles on motivation and personality, including the book *Learned Optimism*. He is the director of the University of Pennsylvania's positive psychology centre.

He says not only does having a positive outlook improve your prospects,

but happy and optimistic people live around nine years longer than pessimistic people.

"The positive side of life is here for evolutionary reasons because it increases psychological capital, it increases intellectual capital, social capital and physical capital."

Seligman has an experiment he says proves that what people tell themselves can alter the way they feel.

"If I want you to become miserable I can give you a set of index cards and ask you to read each one aloud."

"The first one reads: 'today is a day like any other day'. And the second one says: 'things are not going perfectly today', and the 10th card says: 'everything I touch turns to s***'."

Seligman says when he does this experiment he sees people who read the negative cards dissolve before his eyes. He also has a set of cards with uplifting phrases that he says can make people feel happier.

He says positive and negative emotions jolt us into different behaviour and that if you're in a bad mood at work, you'll see mistakes more easily — you become more critical, less forgiving and an overall bad egg.

If companies want their staff to be creative and demonstrate what Seligman calls top-down thinking, then those staff need to be in a positive mood. But that feeling of happiness has to come from within.

One of those who has embraced Seligman's findings and actively promotes his work is Jamie Ford, director

of the Foresight Institute in Auckland.

He says Seligman's research shows that businesses with the best emotional environments also have the highest profit and customer satisfaction. In those high-performing businesses, people are also much more positive when talking with colleagues.

However, Ford says pessimistic thinking is undermining many businesses and the country as a whole.

"Pessimism is holding back New Zealand, our companies and people — not just from achieving, but also from being happier," he says.

"No matter how wealthy we become, unless we also learn to think more positively, become more engaged and find more meaning in all aspects of our lives, we won't be any happier or feel better off as a country."

Ford says that by applying Seligman's methods for increasing optimism and happiness, New Zealanders would not only become more productive and wealthier, but would gain more lasting happiness "out of every aspect of their lives".

"If politicians started focusing on how to turn around the national pessimism, they would find they had to put

much less effort into focusing on wealth creation.

"It ought to be a concern that as we head further into recession, the majority of people on my courses are saying that in New Zealand's workplaces the communication ratio is more negative than positive, and that will only exacerbate the situation."

"The business climate now needs as much positive thinking and positive comments as possible."

"Organisations that focus on ensuring there is a 'happy' place to work will flourish in spite of circumstances, minimise the negative impact that external factors will have on individual workplace productivity and will be well-positioned to progress faster than competitors when the economy turns the corner."

So if a workplace has low morale, staff are unhappy and people aren't performing well, what does Ford advise?

He says that the major reason for our moods and emotions lies in our thinking habits.

"Many of these habits began in childhood, but as adults we've never scrutinised them."

Some people develop bad attitudes at work by assuming bad intentions on the part of others.

"Nine times out of 10 when a member of your team is bleating about the way a co-worker has upset them, the other guy will probably have no idea what they are talking about when challenged. It's staggering the way people

pass the responsibility for their moods and emotions over to others. Every time you catch yourself blaming someone else for upsetting you, then you are passing the buck."

Ford likens people's negative attitudes to a badly written computer program.

"When a computer program is corrupted, you replace it with a better one. So the dud or corrupt thinking programs you installed, as a child, may no longer be adequate."

"Have a good vocabulary of adjectives for describing and naming your emotions. This gives you power over them. And managers could make it normal behaviour to acknowledge emotions and move to rational thinking."

And for those people unhappy at work, Ford has one piece of advice.

"Sometimes, rather than changing their attitude, someone might decide to change their job. But never make a move when you are in a down mood — because things probably aren't as bad as they seem."

"Thoughts are free and there are millions to choose from. So the next time you find yourself being unnecessarily negative about work, remind yourself you had a 'bad thought attack' and choose a new thought."

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