

**A Full Return to Work in November:
It's Okay to Feel Hesitant while You Rediscover Joy at Work**

You may notice some of your colleagues hesitate when asked how they're doing. This hesitancy may be linked to the fact that many of us have mixed emotions these days. People hesitate to share their ambivalent emotions with colleagues because they fear they'll taint the mood or appear emotionally vulnerable — like they don't have it all together. You can help others embrace their ambivalence and even harness its benefits. Start by showing that feeling torn is okay and even encouraged.

In conversations, ask guiding questions to surface mixed emotions as a model for flexible thinking. For example, "Frances, tell me one thing you're excited about regarding the new project and one thing you're nervous about." You can also normalize emotional ambivalence by modeling it yourself. Instead of displaying relentless positivity in meetings, which can alienate people, explain when you feel more than one way about something. You might say something like, "I'm excited about the opportunities coming up next semester but nervous about how the Delta variant might disrupt our plans." Doing so will help employees who are also torn feel seen, affirmed, connected, and less alone.

As you address these mixed feelings, acknowledge that a year and a half of the pandemic has left many of us missing the joy we once felt at work. This isn't just an idle need for something fluffy — research (Newton) has shown that joy is an emotional response and outlook vital to our well-being, cognitive functioning, and performance. So how can we go about getting some positivity back? Here are three strategies to help.

1. Build your strengths into your day. Ask yourself: "When are recent times that I've felt energized at work? In these situations, what was I doing?" Then carve out time in your schedule for those sorts of tasks.
2. Share with a trusted colleague. Identify a few people you feel comfortable opening to, and in one-on-one conversations, reflect on what you've experienced over the last year. You could share what's been challenging but also what you're grateful for.
3. Rebuild relationships through work. To combat feelings of isolation, reconnect with colleagues — and it's okay to talk about work. Try a "walk and talk" with coworkers to understand what's most important to them right now or areas of mutual interest. This connection will bolster your sense of energy and joy and benefit the entire team.

This tip is adapted from "Embracing the Power of Ambivalence," by Naomi B. Rothman et al. and "Rediscover Joy at Work," by Rebecca Newton

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