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Broaden and Build Theory

Your 10-Minute Guide to Using Positive Emotions to Build a Successful Team



**Broaden, then build,
for a happy, productive team.**

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Find out how to use this theory to help your people be happier and more productive.

Think about the last time you went into work feeling negative.

Chances are, you had a difficult time coming up with creative ideas, your interactions with colleagues were uninspiring or strained, and your productivity was lower than usual.

When you go into work feeling positive, however, possibilities and opportunities seem to be everywhere.

You feel open and receptive to new ideas, your relationships are easy and supportive, and you get things done.

Most of us know intuitively that, when we're in a positive frame of mind, we work better that day. However, we may not appreciate that, when we're happy, we also become more effective in the longer term. This forms the basis of Broaden and Build Theory.

In this article, we'll explore this theory, and we'll look at how you can use the ideas behind it to help your people be happier and more effective.

This guide looks how you can use Broaden and Build Theory to build a happy team.

Please feel free to share it inside your organization.



About the Theory

Broaden and Build Theory was developed by social psychologist, professor Barbara Fredrickson, in 1998. Although the theory is now associated with the field of positive psychology, Fredrickson originally created it to explore how positive emotions can contribute to survival.

The theory says that positive emotions do much more than cause us happiness, joy and contentment in the moments we experience them. They also broaden behaviors (“thought-action repertoires”), such as awareness, play, discovery, and curiosity. The more positive emotions we experience, the wider the range of thought-action repertoires we have – in other words, the happier we are, the more flexible and creative we are in the way that we work.

Think about it this way – if someone is being chased by a tiger, he’d better be very focused on survival: it could be disastrous to waste “energy” on play, discovery or curiosity! By contrast, a designer who’s worried about her job is unlikely to come up with daring, innovative, award-winning designs – she’s focused on safety and survival, and not much else.

Over time, when we’re happy, our broadened behaviors help us build rich work-related knowledge, skills and abilities (also called “personal, physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources”).

These resources last much longer than the initial positive emotions that led to their creation, and they contribute significantly to our long-term well-being and success. These broadened resources also help us cope with stress, and unhappy emotions or situations – essentially, we have stronger skills, and these help us deal better with difficult situations.

Applying the Theory

There are two steps to take to apply Broaden and Build Theory with your people.

First, you need to help them broaden their emotions by providing a positive workplace, in which they can be happy, and in which they can experience positive emotions.

You then need to make sure that people have the means and resources to build on these positive emotions. This, in turn, can improve morale, strengthen team bonds, boost productivity, encourage innovation, and enhance communication.

Step 1: Broaden

First, you need to help your people experience more positive emotions while they’re at work. These emotions include joy, contentment, interest, peace, gratitude, hope, pride, amusement, friendship, and inspiration. When people experience these emotions regularly, they’ll broaden their thoughts and awareness, and start to flourish.

Begin by thinking about motivation. [Herzberg’s Motivation and Hygiene Factor Theory](#) helps you deal with workplace factors that can make people unhappy. [McClelland’s Human Motivation Theory](#), [Sirota’s Three Factor Theory](#), and [Amabile and Kramer’s Progress Theory](#) help you think about the factors that help people find their work satisfying and inspiring.

A healthy team is a happy team, so create a [healthy workplace](#) for your people. If your workspace is depressing, take steps to redesign or redecorate it, with your people’s comfort, health and productivity in mind.

Another important way to help people feel happier is simply to say “[thank you](#)” regularly. All of us want to feel that our work is appreciated and valued, so a wonderful way to raise people’s spirits is to let your them know that you appreciate their good work.

Also, make sure that you increase the amount of [positive feedback](#) that you give your team.

Stress kills positive emotions and productivity. If a team member is experiencing [stress](#) and seems unable to cope, support him as best you can, and help him [build his self-confidence](#) if necessary.

Anything that you can do to help your team feel happy, content, grateful, and excited will help people broaden their outlook and lead directly to the next step, building.

Tip 1:

Remember that how your people perceive your own emotions will have a bearing on how they feel too. Learn to [manage your emotions at work](#), and be a [good role model](#).

Tip 2:

Be sensible when you apply this idea with your team. When people aren’t performing well, you may need to give them appropriate negative feedback.

Step 2: Build

Once your people are experiencing more positive emotions, you can help them build their skills and mental resources by giving them the tools they need to do this.

Are your people trained to do everything that they need to do? If you're not sure, do a [Training Needs Assessment](#) so that you can see clearly where everyone stands. You'll not only help your people develop professionally, you'll raise their morale as well. You can also [cross-train](#) people to develop their interests, skills and flexibility.

Also, make sure that people have the right [tools and resources](#) at their disposal to do their jobs properly. (This includes help and support, as well as resources like equipment.)

As your people feel happier, they'll also become more creative. Make sure that you can take advantage of this by [creating an environment](#) that values and fosters creative thinking, and [praise](#) and [reward](#) them as they

build their skills. (These rewards don't necessarily have to be financial.)

Key Points

Broaden and Build Theory was developed by positive psychologist, professor Barbara Fredrickson.

The theory says that positive emotions do much more than make us feel good in the moment. Rather, when we experience them consistently, it helps us build our physical, intellectual, social, and professional resources over the long-term. In short, when your people are happy, they become increasingly innovative, effective and resilient.

You can use this theory with your team by first creating an atmosphere that encourages positive emotions. You can then make sure that your people have the right tools and resources to develop their skills and grow professionally. If you couple this with an environment that values and supports creative thinking, you've got a real recipe for success!

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