



Shadowmatch®

**EMPLOYEE WELLNESS:
NOT A LUXURY BUT A MUST**

January 2018

By Pieter de Villiers

Employee Wellness: Not a luxury but a must.

We often discuss the question about the purpose of everything. What is the purpose of life? What is the purpose of every individual persons' life, the meaning and fulfillment so many people are in search of?

At the Shadowmatch office, the team shares a few basic values. One such value is about work. We do everything we can to share and emphasize the point that we do not work for and report to people. We work for the Shadowmatch system. We do what is best for the system. We make the system available to employers to recruit people with the highest propensity of success in the unique workplace at a specific company. We want employees to be successful because success breeds success and our happiness is largely (if not fully) reliant on continuous moments of the successes we experience.

This places a very specific demand on the way people work as a team. Before we share the Shadowmatch way of building a positive, friendly and developing workplace, we need to clarify the basics of our philosophy. If an employer wants to be a successful employer, it must be understood that the ultimate purpose of business is four-fold: Firstly, it has to provide real value to its clients, at an honest price without ever charging any fee without providing value in exchange. Secondly, it has to at least partially own the success, fulfillment, development and happiness of its employees. Thirdly, it has to generate profits for growth so that investors could get a reasonable return on their investment. Lastly, it must respect and protect the environment. This paper focusses on the second part of the building blocks towards being a successful business.

When recruitment is done, it is important to understand that the employer has a responsibility towards the wellbeing of employees. Employee wellbeing has four building blocks:

1. **Success:** Being successful is the foundation of a strong ego position, a sense of self-worth and a source of energy to develop, innovate and to take on more challenging tasks. A successful employer must enable all employees to be successful. If an employer has any management processes that allows people to fail, such an employer could not be regarded as a successful business or a credible employer. If there is an argument that some employees are failures irrespective of the way they are managed, such an employer must be willing to accept that its recruitment has

failed and/ or there are negative management practices in place. Success must not only be limited to direct job performances. It must expand to help the employee build personal success wider than the office. The working environment must contribute to the global success of the employee. This means that work success must be such that it supports success in all other areas of the employee's life such as marriage, sport, social, family, etc.

2. **Development:** One of the most basic components of a healthy mind is curiosity, learning and progress. Once a job stagnates, energy is lost, innovation is compromised and the individual loses interest. Frustration starts to build-up and the employee is deprived of success, this results in the building blocks of fulfillment in the workplace to fade. Successful employment keeps the energy of employees alive by continuous change, innovation and dynamic positive change. A workplace that stagnates has a very negative impact on employees. Employees will also stagnate, the collective energy will die and it will become a collection point of negative energy and possible destructive behavior.
3. **Buy-in:** Employees must be fully informed with a vested interest in the future of the business: Successful employment is to capture the imagination of employees about a better future for all. Seeing and fully understanding the future of the business, its growth and improved capabilities, are critical towards becoming a successful credible and trustworthy employer. This is all about capturing the imagination of everybody. Employees must continuously be aware of the fact that they are working towards a dream. A dream they share, that is realistic and possible. A dream that energizes them. A dream that makes them feel the calling of making the world a better place. Everyone must be aware of their role towards making the dream a reality. This dream must always be alive, shared and be an active part of the working consciousness of everybody in the business.
4. **Moments of Fun:** The successful workplace has space where employees can experience joy, laughter, meaning and constructive activities to relax, refocus and take a full breakaway from work. The optimal escape 'Moment of Fun' has a few critical building blocks: It must be totally different from what the work entails. It must be fun. For people working with intense conceptual content, it should preferably be a physical activity. It must bring teams together across the different

functions of the business. It must have purpose and if the business really wants this to create energy, it should be competitive with fun-like winners and losers.

This article wants to share the way the Shadowmatch team has implemented an initiative to address the fourth building block of a successful employer. Building blocks one to three are also in place but that is a different topic.

The Shadowmatch office is in a building that was changed from a residential dwelling to an office. There is a piece of land of approximately 100 square meters that wasn't used. This land has been divided into small vegetable beds measuring 8 meters long and 1.2 meters wide. Each employee received one bed with the challenge to micro-farm with vegetables. There is a strong water supply and the harvest could be used by every 'micro-farmer' for whatever they prefer to do with it; eat, hand out as gifts to family and friends or share with each other.

Every year on 1 September, we have plant day. We take the day off and everybody can plant the seeds of their choice. Each 'farmer' must look after their 'farm', keep it clean, make sure plants are healthy and in good shape. Although this initiative is to relax and refocus, we have an underlying competitive spirit embedded in the fun. We have two peer assessment days. During these days, every employee scores the gardens of each of their colleagues and these scores are then processed to decide on a 'Farmer of the Year' winner. During the month of December, we have an awards day and the 'Farmer of the Year' is honored. This is a big day. We laugh, enjoy our harvests in salads and cooked food, share moments of farming with each other, try to outsmart our competitors and just enjoy the day as colleagues working towards building the same dream.

The farming season is from the beginning of September until the end of April. During the first two weeks of May we remove everything and the soil is prepared for the next season. This gives everybody a break and our energy then goes into planning, preparing the beds, deciding what to plant, the layout and all the detail necessary to win the 'Farmer of the Year' award. This is a big award and the 'Farmer of the Year' has specific benefits and privileges: these would for example include: getting first option to choose the preferred farming bed for the next season and a 'Farmer of the Year' prestige tag in the farming bed to indicate the status as 'Farmer of the Year' to all visitors. All employees are to respect the status of the 'Farmer of the Year'.

Benefits of this initiative:

1. Healthy and friendly but serious competitive atmosphere amongst employees.
Although we help each other, it remains a competition.
2. A space at work where employees can relax and enjoy moments away from computers, challenges with systems, project management, system testing, invoices, etc.
3. Continuous positive content to discuss without the need to be trapped in all kinds of negative news and depressing content.
4. A place where the families of employees can join and work in their gardens during weekends and in doing so, share the joy of the process.
5. Learning and development: The Shadowmatch system is a very advanced, sophisticated and intellectually challenging system to build, maintain and develop. One can easily suffer cognitive burnout if you have to work on this one complex system full-time, all the time, every day. Learning about vegetables, working in your micro-farm, harvesting your own produce and struggling to keep insects away from your vegetables is so far away from our focused business, that it creates an entire new learning and development opportunity for all.
6. Team building: The Shadowmatch team is not convinced that team building breakaway weekends or days are successful. It might be fun, however we tend to confuse the experience of fun with the long term success of working together as a team. This initiative is the strongest team building venture we have in the business. We continuously help each other, we compete, we share, learn together, take co-ownership of the collective success and, above all, we see something of each other's identity in what we do. Keep in mind that the employees of the Shadowmatch team are intelligent, well trained and sophisticated people. We learn aspects of each other that we would not learn without this initiative.
7. Workplace 'feel': It turns the Shadowmatch office into a space of work and fun. This is most critical towards being a successful employer.
8. Harvest: Although this is not at all part of the reason for our green farming initiative, it must be mentioned that we harvest more than what we can use. The produce is fresh, untreated, without any poison and organic.
9. Work breaks: It is general knowledge that we get brain fatigue if we have to focus on one subject, one challenge or a series of similar tasks over a period of more than

three hours. We all have a place where we can go and do something totally different, relax for a few moments and do something positive - there is always work on your 'farm'.

10. Morning meetings: The 'farms' have the ability to pull all of us together every morning and to be surprised by what happened during the night. Bugs can easily destroy your entire harvest in one night. Newly planted seeds may suddenly appear, some produce may suddenly be ready to harvest. Every morning we gather at our gardens, look at all the good and possible bad news, share, laugh and enjoy. This gives all of us an extremely positive start to the day.

General final comment

Employing people is a serious responsibility. We spend most of our best everyday-time at work. If this time is negative, it can destroy the happiness and success of the employee. If any employer doesn't take this responsibility serious, such an employer should consider to rather not employ people. If you however make the happiness and success of your employees a priority, the employees will make the success of the business their priority.

Author: Pieter de Villiers

Shadowmatch

Published in the public Space on 9 January 2018

www.shadowmatch.com