

Unhappiness is the new pandemic. Are we designing workplaces to heal it?

Happiest Workplaces Annual Conclave 2026 | Happiness as Strategy. Growth as Outcome. An initiative by HappyPlus, held at Taj Lands End, Mumbai, on 20th March 2026, Media Partner ET HRWorld.



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Updated On Mar 31, 2026 at 01:26 PM IST



“Unhappiness is the biggest pandemic the world is going through today.” — Dr. Ashish Ambasta, CEO, HappyPlus Consulting.

We began with this thought. And it stayed.

Because if we pause for a moment and look around, the signals are clear. The world itself is going through a phase of deep distress — rising conflict, uncertainty and a constant sense of instability. Today, millions of people are living in environments shaped by fear, unpredictability and disruption. This is no longer an exception. It is becoming the norm.

Dr. Ambasta pointed out that this macro reality is not staying outside. It is entering our lives. People are working harder than ever, yet feeling more disconnected. There is a growing fear — *of becoming irrelevant, of being replaced, of not being able to keep up in a world where skills are evolving faster than careers*. Organizations are trying to perform, but leaders are struggling to balance results and people. Employees are experiencing rising burnout, stress and disengagement.

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What is even more concerning is this — stress is not staying at work anymore. It is traveling back home, shaping conversations, impacting relationships and affecting how people show up in life.

This is not just a work problem. This is a life problem. And that is exactly why the Happiest Workplaces Annual Conclave 2026 was designed — *not as a conference, but as a space to pause, reflect and rethink what we are truly building.*

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As the day unfolded, one idea began to challenge everything we have traditionally believed. We often think happiness is an outcome — something that comes with money, success. Something that will come later, not as a regular part of life. But the truth is — it is not. Happiness is a systematic effort — created through conscious choices to lead with meaning and purpose, by building the mental muscle, every single day.

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Through the WOW Life framework — Meaning, Being, Achievement, Time, Relationships and Work & Life — along with the identification of natural talent and strengths, the conclave explored life not in parts, but as a whole. Not through models or slides, but through real stories that brought each pillar to life.

There were moments that stayed.

Rajaram, known as “Human Lifeboat” of Navi Mumbai, who has saved countless lives without recognition, reminding us that meaning is often built in the quietest acts of service. Neehaari Mandali, a burn survivor who rebuilt her life with courage and dignity, showing that achievement is not just about success, but about resilience. Pradip Sarmah (Founder, Rickshaw Bank), who stands beside people in their most difficult moments, reinforcing that relationships are not a soft idea — they are the foundation of trust.

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R. P. Singh, former Indian cricketer and 2007 World Cup winner, who shared the journey behind the jersey, reminding us that achievement is built on discipline, setbacks and resilience. Ankit Sakhiya, film director and maker of Laalo movie, who reflected on the flow between work, life and creativity, showing that fulfilment comes from alignment. Zaiba Sarang (Co-founder, iThink Logistics), who built her journey with purpose and grit, demonstrating that achievement is driven by belief and intent.

Alongside them, voices like Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai (Author), [Subhash Bhaskaran](#) (Author), Sarbjeet Singh (Humanitarian from Shimla), Shashank Jha (CEO, Artson Ltd., a TATA Enterprise), Dr. Sanjay Singh (CEO, Gennova Biopharmaceuticals), and Srinivasa Bharathy (MD & CEO, Adrenalin eSystems) brought diverse perspectives — connecting time, leadership, relationships and technology to one simple truth: happiness is not accidental, it is built.

These were not just stories of inspiration. They were reflections of reality. And somewhere through the day, a shift began. Happiness cannot be created through one activity. It cannot be sustained by intent alone. It requires a fundamental rethink.

It demands a rethink of the workplaces too — in how we hire people, how leaders show up, how strengths are understood and how talent is truly recognized.

This shift from awareness to action became real through the Happiness Experience Lab at the conclave, offered a glimpse into how a simple experience of happiness can begin to change the narrative of life. In just a few minutes, participants could see where they stood across the six pillars, experience a small yet meaningful shift and realize something powerful — change does not require scale, it requires attention and intention. And it leaves you with a deeper thought — if each of us begins to build our habits around these pillars, aligned with our natural talent, imagine the kind of transformation that can unfold.

By the end of the day, what leaders carried back was not frameworks or notes. It was a shift in thinking – how to reshape workplace culture. A clarity that happiness is attainable, a conviction that it drives performance and a realization that this is not an HR agenda — it is an individual responsibility.

The awards that followed reflected this belief in action. They were not just about recognition, but about acknowledging organizations that are consciously choosing to build environments where people can grow, contribute and belong.

The Happiest Workplaces Awards 2026 included organizations:

- Aditya Birla Education Trust
- Anudip Foundation
- Axis Securities Limited
- Freestone Infotech Pvt Ltd
- Hindustan Zinc Limited
- Mother Dairy Fruit & Vegetable Pvt Ltd
- Petronet LNG Limited, Kochi Terminal
- Serum Institute of India
- Sterlite Copper (A Unit of Vedanta Limited)
- Suzlon Energy Limited
- Tata Consulting Engineers Limited
- Tata Projects Limited
- Vedanta Aluminium Business

Alongside organizations, leaders who have made happiness a strategic priority were also recognized. The CEO Vision & Impact Awards were presented to Pranab Kumar Bhattacharyya (Vedanta Alumina Business), Dr. Sanjay Singh (Genova Biopharmaceuticals) and Anil Chadha (ITC Hotels).

The CHRO Visionary People Leader Awards recognized leaders including Anupam Sirbhैया (Bajaj Finserv), Dr. Praveen Purohit (Vedanta Aluminium Business), Mahendra Inge (Serum Institute of India), Rajendra Mehta (Suzlon Group), Ruzbeh Irani (Mahindra Group), Salil Lal (Maruti [Suzuki India](#)), Sanjay Bose (ITC Hotels), Kiran Singh (Mother Dairy Fruit & Vegetable Pvt Ltd), [Shirley Burla](#) (TATA Projects) and [Soonu Wadewala](#) (Axis Securities).

Out of a wide pool of organizations studied through happiest workplaces research, only a small and carefully curated set stood out for their consistency and intent. And that is what made this recognition truly meaningful.

If there is one message that stayed beyond the day, it is this — the future of work will not be defined by technology alone. It will be defined by how we design human experience within it.

Organizations that understand this will not just grow faster. They will build places where people choose to stay, contribute and thrive.

And as people walked out of the room, there was a visible shift. Not just in what they had learned, but in what they felt.

A sense of conviction.

And a quiet, powerful belief — Yes, we can build this.