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Get Loony with Play and Other Positive Interventions: Positive Psychology Recommendations and Interventions for the Great Lake Loons

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Get Loony with Play and Other Positive Interventions: Positive Psychology Recommendations and Interventions for the Great Lake Loons

Abstract

The Great Lakes Loons nonprofit minor league baseball team is built on high quality connections among its staff and between its staff and fans. But after a year of stress and uncertainty resulting from Covid-19 and its consequences, the organization confronted challenges including workplace stress and lingering negative emotions and cognitions related to employee downsizing. The organization may benefit from recommended interventions at the individual, organizational, and community level. At the individual level, the Loons may benefit from supporting staff to develop coping mechanisms for stress and positive psychology strategies for increasing hope, optimism, and other aspects of wellbeing. At the organizational level, the Loons may benefit from increasing play and humor within their workplace culture to build on their strong foundation of high quality connections. And at the community level, the organization may benefit from hosting an Appreciative Inquiry summit to reconnect with the community and reinvigorate the meaning staff derive from their work. A full intervention, including development of the Get Loony Playbook, to assist the organization with increasing playfulness and fun at work is included. Organizations that seek to increase positive emotions and high quality connections can look to this intervention for inspiration.

Keywords

high quality connections, play, burnout, workplace stress, positive psychology

Disciplines

Other Psychology

**Getting Loony with Play and Other Positive Interventions:
Positive Psychology Recommendations and Interventions for the Great Lakes Loons**

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Master of Applied Positive Psychology Program, University of Pennsylvania

MAPP 714: Service Learning Project

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May 8, 2022

Abstract

The Great Lakes Loons nonprofit minor league baseball team is built on high quality connections among its staff and between its staff and fans. But after a year of stress and uncertainty resulting from Covid-19 and its consequences, the organization confronted challenges including workplace stress and lingering negative emotions and cognitions related to employee downsizing. The organization may benefit from recommended interventions at the individual, organizational, and community level. At the individual level, the Loons may benefit from supporting staff to develop coping mechanisms for stress and positive psychology strategies for increasing hope, optimism, and other aspects of wellbeing. At the organizational level, the Loons may benefit from increasing play and humor within their workplace culture to build on their strong foundation of high quality connections. And at the community level, the organization may benefit from hosting an Appreciative Inquiry summit to reconnect with the community and reinvigorate the meaning staff derive from their work. A full intervention, including development of the *Get Loony Playbook*, to assist the organization with increasing playfulness and fun at work is included. Organizations that seek to increase positive emotions and high quality connections can look to this intervention for inspiration.

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Introduction and Background

In the fall of 2021, the Great Lakes Loons, a High-A Minor League Baseball (MiLB) team located in Midland, Michigan—a small town with a population of 42,000 in a county of 87,000 people—and the nation’s only nonprofit professional sports team, agreed to participate as a service-learning partner in the University of Pennsylvania Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) service-learning program with a goal of cultivating a thriving culture and overcoming workplace stress after two years of change brought about by Covid-19. The MAPP team consisting of Kimberly Dickman, Mark O’Brien, Devon Still, and KC White met with the Loons’ President and General Manager Chris Mundhenk, Vice President of Baseball Operations Tiffany Wardynski, Assistant General Manager Dan Straley, Chief Operating Officer Eric Ramseyer, Midland community member and MAPP student Peggy Sczepanski, and Midland Area Community Foundation President Sharon Mortensen to develop an understanding of the Loons’ history, strengths, and challenges, as well as opportunities for positive psychology interventions to enhance the organization’s family culture and track record of excellence.

Minor League Baseball

Minor League Baseball (MiLB) is an integral part of Major League Baseball (MLB). Hoffmann et al. (2003) describe MiLB as “a training ground for players with aspirations of playing in the major leagues” (p. 4). According to current Major League Baseball Commissioner Robert Manfred, MiLB is “a pipeline to the Majors” (Mayo, 2021). For the past century, the minor leagues have operated independently of MLB (Carp, 2021). However, a recent restructuring has combined the two leagues into one entity. Under the new structure, MLB requires all MiLB facilities to meet certain requirements to improve the working conditions for players and staff (Carp, 2021). These are major changes for MiLB organizations.

Although MiLB has historically been described dismissively as “backyard baseball” (Hoffmann et al., 2003, p. 7) or “small-town America” (Johnson, 1995, xi), MiLB now “entertains millions of families in hundreds of communities” (Mayo, 2021). Under the umbrella of Minor League Baseball, there are 209 teams across nineteen leagues in forty-four states and four provinces (Mayo, 2021). The growing popularity of MiLB has transformed it from just a “farm system” for MLB (Hoffmann et al., 2003, pg. 4) into an engine of economic and community development (Johnson, 1998).

Unfortunately, the recent global pandemic put a temporary halt to much of the progress MiLB was making. Safety measures to slow down the rapid spread of COVID-19 that caused roughly four billion people to be confined to their homes (Pancani et al., 2021) forced MiLB to cancel its 2020 season. Since MiLB teams derive nearly all their revenue derived from stadium activities such as ticket sales, concessions, in-stadium advertising, and merchandise sales (CBS News, 2021), front offices had to be creative about generating revenue and cutting costs. One team’s VP of marketing reported that, “It was either shut the doors and close down and lay people off or come up with other creative ways to bring people here to the ballpark” (CBS News, 2021). Despite the efforts of minor league front offices across the nation, escaping the financial impact of COVID-19 was not possible for most teams, including the Loons.

Great Lakes Loons Background

When we spoke with Chris Mundhenk, the Loons President and General Manager, he explained the unique history of the Loons as the only professional sports team in the United States owned by a non-profit foundation. In 2006, a group of community leaders led by former Dow Chemical Company CEO William Stavropoulos formed the Michigan Baseball Foundation (MBF), a 501(c)3 public charity, to bring a minor league baseball team to the Great Lakes Bay

region (Great Lakes Loons, n.d.). The MBF purchased the Southwest Michigan Devil Rays and moved them to Midland to play at Dow Diamond, a newly built baseball stadium named “Best New Ballpark” by Baseball Digest in 2007. On April 13, 2007, the Loons, part of the Midwest League consisting of twelve High-A minor league teams, played their first home game against the Lansing Lugnuts in front of a sold-out crowd of 5,454 (Great Lakes Loons, n.d.).

According to Mundhenk, the mission of the Great Lakes Loons is to enrich the lives of community members— fans, their parent club the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Loons’ full-time staff of 27, and their game-day staff of up to 300, as well as corporate partners and vendors— by creating memorable experiences and including everyone in the Loons family (personal communication, January 21, 2022). The Loons’ vision statement is “uniting, enriching, and uplifting our communities through our people, passion, and purpose.” The Loons organization prides itself on a strong values system that includes integrity, respect, service excellence, results, teamwork, and innovation (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Midland Area Community Foundation President Sharon Mortensen reports that the Loons are seen as an important part of both the Midland community and their region (personal communication, February 16, 2022).

The MBF does more than operate the Loons; it aims to improve the quality of life in the Great Lakes Bay region by enhancing economic development in downtown Midland and providing grant support to local community programs, especially those that serve youth (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). As the owner of the Loons, the MBF derives its revenues from corporate sponsorships, ticket sales, game-day retail, food, and beverage sales, and parking (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). The MBF also derives income from two other holdings, Dow Diamond and ESPN 100.9 FM, the

radio flagship of the Great Lakes Loons (Great Lakes Loons, n.d.). MBF built Dow Diamond to be a hub of community development in Midland. In addition to the Loons' 70 home games each season, Dow Diamond has hosted over 1000 special events, including the 2008 and 2017 MWL All-Star Games as well as major concerts, corporate events, and other functions (Great Lakes Loons, n.d.). In addition to the Loons' 70 home games each season, Dow Diamond has hosted over 1000 special events, including the 2008 and 2017 Midwest League All-Star Games, major concerts, corporate events, graduations, cub scout campouts, and fun runs to support school athletics (P. Szczepanski, personal communication, February 7, 2022; Great Lakes Loons, n.d.). Dow Diamond provides employment opportunities for many high school students and high school teachers during the summer (P. Szczepanski, personal communication, February 7, 2022).

While most professional sports teams return profits to their ownership group in the form of dividends at the end of each fiscal year, the Loons' profits are used for two quite different purposes: supporting upkeep and improvement of Dow Diamond and providing funds for community grants (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). To date, the MBF has awarded almost 1.3 million dollars in the form of 334 grants to 14 counties in the Great Lakes Bay region (Michigan Baseball Foundation, n.d.). According to the MBF website, grants are awarded to organizations in the mid-Michigan area based on one or more of the following criteria:

- The organization contributes to regional economic development;
- The organization serves young people;
- Or the project promotes amateur sports, fitness, and overall good health.

In 2019, for example, MBF awarded grants to several youth baseball organizations to build new dugouts or refurbish existing fields (Michigan Baseball Foundation, n.d.). One county

received a grant to help build a splash park, and two grants paid for the construction of new playgrounds. MBF's largest grant in 2019 was \$50,000 to build the Miracle Field complex, which is a fully accessible, soft-surface baseball field for players of all ages with physical or cognitive disabilities (Michigan Baseball Foundation, n.d.). After a hiatus in grantmaking during 2020 and 2021 because of financial losses from COVID, MBF expects to resume charitable giving in 2022 (Great Lakes Loons, n.d.).

Loons' Strengths

The Loons have a number of strengths that have made them a successful organization over their fifteen years of operations. First is their sense of cohesiveness. When we talked to Mundhenk, he described the Loons as a family (personal communication, January 21, 2022), and he would know. Mundhenk is the last remaining employee from the inaugural season and the Loons' longest tenured employee. He moved into his current position in 2021. Eric Ramseyer, Loons' Chief Operating Officer, reinforced the point, explaining that "culture is king" at the Loons and that Loons' employees care about each other and would do anything to support each other (personal communication, February 16, 2022). And Loons' Assistant General Manager Dan Straley described how the family feeling of the Loons and its people is what has kept him with the organization for the last twelve years (personal communication, February 14, 2022).

The Loons' culture contributes to the organization's success in employee retention. According to Mundhenk, the typical tenure for an employee in minor league baseball is three and a half years, but among the Loons' 27 current employees, 12 having been there for more than 10 years. Mundhenk attributed the Loons' success in employee retention not only to the sense of family connectedness the organization cultivates but also to thoughtful team-building activities. The organization has hosted off-site, multi-day team-building retreats and held movie nights and

staff curling events at the ballpark, among other activities, to build a culture of belonging.

Mundhenk also pointed out that Loons' employees find meaning in the organization's focus on grant giving and their belief that their hard work is for a higher good (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). The Loons are a special organization, and its mission to improve the community is an important reason that employees choose to stay (T. Wardynski, personal communication, February 16, 2022).

Mundhenk also highlighted the responsibility the Loons expect their employees to carry both inside and outside of work (personal communication, January 21, 2022). Loons' employees are committed to upholding the highest standards and representing the organization well, not just on game days and at work, but also when they are in the community or out in their neighborhoods. Mundhenk described the Loons' reputation as stellar and told us about its employees' sense of pride in being a part of the Loons family. The Loons pride themselves on being committed to excellence and turning every experience at the ballpark into a positive one (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Straley regularly reminds the staff he supervises that many fans come to the park only once a year, and their role as Loons is to make it a great experience (personal communication, February 14, 2022). Mundhenk called this consistent commitment to excellence the "Wow Factor" (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022).

From our discussion with Mundhenk, it was obvious that he appreciates and cares for Loons' employees and expects the same of all Loons' leaders (personal communication, January 21, 2022). Mundhenk described his pride in the staff's commitment and hard work. He described how those employees who "dive in" and surpass expectations are recognized with annual MVP awards and trophies. Awards include titles like: Value Hunter, Solutions Finder, Communication

Performer, and The Wow Factor. According to Mundhenk, every member of the Loons team, no matter what their title or position, is important to the organization's success (personal communication, January 21, 2022).

The Loons have a strong culture focused on excellence, teamwork, and fun. Mundhenk and his leadership team truly care for their Loon family, and these strengths have contributed to their ability to weather the challenges of two years of Covid restrictions.

Loons' Challenges

Even though the Loons have tremendous strengths, the last two years have been difficult for the Loons. Covid-19 has had a substantial impact on the team, creating stress and potential burnout among Loons' employees (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). The Loons' 2020 season was canceled, resulting in a 98 percent loss in revenue. The financial consequences prompted layoffs and pay cuts, forcing the organization to decrease the number of its employees by 40 percent without a comparable reduction in total workload. In other words, after layoffs, there were 40 percent fewer people to do substantially the same amount of work. This has required remaining employees to take on a greater volume of work—the Loons report that many employees work 70-80 hours a week—and perform duties that were previously outside the scope of their jobs (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022).

Taking on new roles and coping with reduced staffing, including difficulty securing adequate gameday staffing, combine with uncertainty about the reasons for their retention when others were let go and concerns about their own job security to make this a particularly stressful time for employees who have remained with the organization (E. Ramseyer, personal communication, February 16, 2022). One of the Loons' strengths is that while employees have been willing to step up, the additional workload could take its toll on morale and mental health

(T. Wardynski, personal communication, February 16, 2022). In addition to concerns about their own security and the increased workload, remaining staff also worried about their colleagues who were let go and experienced guilt over their ability to remain with the organization (D. Straley, personal communication, February 14, 2022). On top of these challenges, temporary pay cuts represented a significant burden for many, particularly those with spouses who also lost jobs or income due to Covid-19. (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022).

Even with a substantially smaller workforce, the Loons have continued to strive for the exceptional level of service, enthusiasm, and engagement they call the “Wow Factor” (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Employees may have felt high levels of pressure to perform even as they grappled with the stress of increased workloads and new responsibilities and their emotional responses to having so many of their colleagues depart the organization.

The Loons have made strong efforts to address these challenges, demonstrating their continued commitment to the wellbeing of their staff. The Loons’ leadership has attempted to relieve the workload and time pressures on staff by requiring people to take Mondays and half of Tuesdays off after home stands and use more of their compensation time (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). They have tried to rotate staff and be more flexible with work schedules so everyone gets time off without leaving the office empty (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Pandemic-related remote work arrangements contributed to a new understanding that even amidst the demands of a high workload, some job responsibilities could be performed from home, contributing to greater balance between work and personal life (E. Ramseyer, personal communication, February 16, 2022). And staff who felt their voices were ignored by previous leaders know that Mundhenk listens and has their best

interests at heart (T. Wardynski, personal communication, February 16, 2022). These factors are helping to heal the organization and rebuild trust among staff (T. Wardynski, personal communication, February 16, 2022).

Despite these efforts, Mundhenk has observed the emergence of signs of stress from the last two years (personal communication, January 21, 2022). There has been a decline in the quality and frequency of positive interactions among staff and between staff and fans. Full-time staff have grown less willing to assist part-time gameday staff, and their interactions have become more frequently terse. Employees also found themselves in the middle of a culture-war battle, having to enforce Covid-related masking requirements against angry fans at their games (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022; S. Mortensen, personal communication, February 16, 2022). Mundhenk worries about the impact that the reduced frequency of pleasant exchanges is having on the staff (personal communication, January 21, 2022).

Finally, though there is an expectation that the regular season schedule will resume in 2022, uncertainty about Covid remains, and the next five years will see continued financial pressure on the organization (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Under the new MLB facilities requirements, the team must spend two million dollars on improvements to facilities and new amenities for players (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). And at the same time, Dow Chemical, one of the Loons' largest customers for ticket sales, has placed a freeze on purchases of season tickets for the upcoming season, and the head of ticket sales recently departed the organization, raising concerns about the organization's ability to meet its ticket sales goals (E. Ramseyer, personal communication, February 16, 2022). Yet, always focused on surpassing expectations, the Loons aim to outperform their net profit from the

last five years so they can give back more to the community (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). The remaining uncertainty and pressure may contribute to employee stress, calling for continued investment in the wellbeing of staff. The Loons want to feel good about what they are doing, and for the organization's leadership, that includes a commitment to growing without creating undue stress for the staff (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022).

Literature Review

Our situation analysis reveals an organization with tremendous strengths. The Loons organization is committed to excellence and driven to increase the wellbeing of all its community members, from its fans, parent club, and partners to its full-time and gameday staff. The Loons staff is like a family, and its leadership has made significant investments in supporting staff wellbeing. The organization takes pride in living by its values of integrity, respect, service excellence, results, teamwork, and innovation, and its employees work hard to create the "Wow Factor" on gameday and uphold the organization's reputation for excellence at work and in the community.

The Loons also confront significant, but not insurmountable, challenges. The staff works hard in a demanding environment where expectations of service excellence are high. These demands have combined with the societal and organizational consequences of Covid-19 to create the risk of burnout, stress, anxiety, and disengagement at work. The Loons' leadership is committed to improving its staff's wellbeing, and positive psychology offers insights not only to bolster the many strengths of the organization but also to reduce risks and buffer against the negative consequences of stress and uncertainty.

Our goal, then, is twofold: to use positive psychology findings, principles, and practices to recommend strategies to buffer the organization against the potential negative effects of challenges they have confronted and to build on the Loons' strengths and bolster its best organizational qualities to increase wellbeing and thriving among its employees. Our literature review is divided into two parts. In Part 1, we examine scientific literature about some of the risks and challenges the Loons may wish to mitigate: stress, burnout, and negative responses to layoffs. In Part 2, we discuss findings related to strengths they may wish to bolster: hope, optimism, meaning, and high quality connections.

Part 1: Risks and challenges

Burnout

Burnout—a sustained response to workplace stress characterized by fatigue, disenchantment and disengagement, and feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment—typically reflects a mismatch between the work setting and employee capacities and expectations (Maslach, 2003). Burnout is most likely in situations in which employees feel the workload or job demands exceed their capabilities, where available resources are not adequate to meet expectations, or where employees feel they have limited control over their work (Maslach, 2003).

Workplace stress may also result from feelings of job insecurity, long hours without downtime, and workplace cultures that create expectations of long hours without overtime pay (Michie, 2002). Uncertainty about one's role, conflicting responsibilities, and major organizational changes like downsizing can lead to burnout, especially when employees perceive changes to have violated their "psychological contract"—the implied expectations they have about the terms of their employment relationship with the organization (Leiter et al., 2015).

Burnout contributes to reduced creativity and commitment, disengagement from various aspects of one's job, interpersonal conflicts, and even mental and physical health problems (Leiter et al., 2015). Fortunately, there are both individual and organizational strategies that have been shown to reduce burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). At the individual level, organizations can support employees with efforts to moderate workloads, change negative thinking patterns, increase social support, leverage relaxation techniques, and improve physical health and fitness. At the organizational level, strategies to improve the fit between employees and their job responsibilities (called job crafting) or to enhance the frequency of pleasant workplace interactions—what we will refer to as high quality connections in the strengths section of our literature review—have shown positive results (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Employee responses to downsizing

Downsizing, often used interchangeably with layoffs, refers to the practice of reducing an organization's workforce to improve efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness (West, 2020). Although downsizing may result in some positive outcomes for organizations (West, 2020), a large body of research suggests that many organizations experience negative consequences related to the wellbeing and performance of surviving staff.

Emotional responses to downsizing can have a significant negative effect on employees. Researchers have found that survivors of layoffs may experience grief at the loss of their former co-workers (Guiniven, 2001) or guilt or shame over their ability to remain with the organization (Hareli & Tzafir, 2006). The Loons describe their culture as one in which staff feel like part of a family (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022; E. Ramseyer, personal communication, February 16, 2022), and these emotional connections may heighten the potential for negative emotional effects. When survivors' guilt becomes intense, it can even lead to

physical symptoms of distress (Ramlall et al., 2014). If staff attribute their retention to luck or other external factors beyond their control (rather than to their own performance), they may also feel their future with the organization is threatened (Hareli & Tzafrir, 2006).

Layoffs may impact not only the individuals who remain but their relationship with the organization and its work. As many as 50 percent of layoff survivors may experience increased stress and risk of burnout. Employees may also exhibit declining trust, morale, and commitment to the organization (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). When an outplacement firm did a survey of layoff survivors, for example, 74 percent of senior managers reported that employee trust and morale (as well as productivity) declined after downsizing (Cascio, 1993).

Trust is particularly critical because trust in an organization's management and perceptions that layoffs were conducted fairly may minimize survivors' appraisal of the threat posed by layoffs, potentially leading to more constructive responses. Survivors who believe that the organization's management is concerned about their interests (and not acting solely in its own interest), competent to successfully steer the organization through the downsizing, and reliable, open, and honest are also likely to appraise layoffs as less threatening (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998).

One strategy for restoring trust that may have been damaged by layoffs is Appreciative Inquiry (AI; Calabrese, 2006). We discuss below the potential for AI to contribute to meaning within the organization while also addressing practical challenges the organization confronts and increasing trust.

The Loons confront challenges, including the risk of burnout and negative emotional responses to layoffs, primarily as a result of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and response requirements on the organization. Fortunately, these types of challenges are not uncommon, and

there are evidence-informed strategies for responding to them. Not only that, the Loons possess tremendous strengths that can be harnessed and enhanced to potentially overcome the challenges they face.

Part 2: Strengths and opportunities

Hope and optimism

Theorist Charles Snyder defines hope as a positive emotional state with two component parts: agency and pathways (Snyder et al., 1991). Agency allows people to believe in their own ability to accomplish goals based on past successes (Snyder et al., 1991). Pathways represent one's belief that the path to success is available to them (Snyder et al., 1991). In other words, when people believe they can take the right steps to achieve their goals, they have a better chance of success. Within this construct of hope, the idea that "where there is a will, there is a way" is insufficient. Hope takes will (agency), but will does not always lead to the way (pathways). Identifying the pathway takes effort as well. Furthermore, finding the will and the way is not a one-time effort. Hope requires sustained determination to exercise agency and access pathways to goal achievement (Snyder et al., 1991).

Setting and accomplishing goals in the workplace can activate hope. The agency part of hope allows people to believe in their abilities to get started on a goal, while the pathways element of hope keeps them going when they face a setback or obstacle (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). An employee with higher levels of hope will not only likely have the motivation to work toward their goals, but they will also be more likely to find alternative paths when faced with setbacks in order to achieve them.

Youssef & Luthans (2007) set out to study the impact of hope, optimism and resilience in the workplace as they relate to job satisfaction, work happiness and organizational commitment.

They conducted two studies, one with a sample size of 1,032 employees (44 percent male, 56 percent female) and the other with a sample size of 232 employees (53 percent male, 47 percent female) (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). In the first study, they collected data through self-reports, while in the second study they relied on organizational performance appraisals. They hypothesized that employees' hope, optimism, and resilience would each uniquely and positively contribute to the outcomes of job performance, satisfaction, happiness, and commitment. Hope stood above both optimism and resilience with the greatest positive association with better outcomes. In both studies, higher levels of hope correlated with higher levels of job satisfaction, work happiness and organizational commitment. In one study, hope had a positive impact on job performance as well (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Theorist Charles Snyder maps out several strategies for developing goals and using hope to accomplish them (Snyder et al., 2000). The first step is to set goals that are specific and challenging, using data metrics to ensure that the goals represent substantial but not insurmountable challenges. Next, it is important to break down the goal into manageable sub steps and celebrate each small accomplishment along the way. Every achieved step helps a person cultivate greater self-efficacy, which in turns leads to more hope. It is also vital to proactively develop contingency plans along with the action plan so that setbacks do not derail progress. Finally, and perhaps counterintuitively, it is important to know when hope itself has become the barrier to success. Sometimes the original goal is just not feasible and having false hope can be a trap. Knowing when to make a new goal or “re-goal” is vital to an employee’s success (Snyder et al., 2000).

Additional strategies for developing hope include visualizing the steps it takes to accomplish the goal—people should envision themselves as if watching a movie of

themselves—as well as hope-finding, -bonding and -reminding techniques. Finding hope can emerge from informal strategies like seeking out hopeful stories, either in one’s own life or in fiction (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). Sharing such stories with another person is a form of hope-bonding. Hope-reminding strategies include reviewing one’s favorite hope narratives or personal hope statements (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015).

Meaning at Work and Appreciative Inquiry

We heard from Loons’ employees that their relationship with the community is of great importance to them (T. Wardynski, personal communication, February 16, 2022). Loons’ employees derive meaning from working hard to give back to their community and create an environment that promotes their fans’ happiness and enjoyment. Loons’ Vice President of Baseball Operations Tiffany Wardynski (personal communication, February 16, 2022) described a workplace full of givers, people who prefer to give more to others than they get in return (Grant, 2013). It matters to givers at the Loons that their organization is an anchor in their town. They are proud to work for a respected and successful organization that generates funds for other nonprofits in their community. This motivates them to work harder and longer, but there is a risk that comes with giving so much.

When givers who no longer see the benefits of their work to others, it can be hard to stay motivated and engaged (Grant, 2013). The last two years have been difficult for the Loons, and part of the challenge has been a reduction in their ability to provide grants in the community and feel connected to the community as well as the loss of opportunities to create memorable experiences for their fans (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Reconnecting with the community and the benefits of their work to others could support the Loons to restore their sense of meaningfulness in their work.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offers one potential strategy for restoring the Loons' connections with their community. AI is a developmental leadership practice and organizational change process that underlines the fundamental premise that "human systems move toward what they study" (Cooperrider, 2012, p. 111). Instead of identifying problems and developing action plans to fix what is wrong, AI identifies and further develops the existing strengths of an organization in order to create a future of prosperity.

AI embodies the true meaning of team— together, everyone achieves more. Among the many applications of AI is the AI summit., a large-scale meeting that brings together key stakeholders of an organization— employees, customers, vendors, and community members—to discover and develop an organization's strengths and convert them into strategic and creative business processes such as customer service, product development, marketing, and human resources development (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998). Many organizations struggle with the idea of bringing external stakeholders and frontline workers to the strategy table, especially if there is an organizational crisis or lack of cohesiveness at the executive level. However, Cooperrider (2012) argues that separateness brings out the worst in human systems. Organizations that reject the status quo and embrace AI experience a variety of positive business outcomes, including increased sales and revenues (Cooperrider, 2012), confidence and commitment (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998), competitive advantage (Coghlan et al., 2003), reduction in employee turnover (Cooperrider, 2012), enriched relationships amongst all stakeholders (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998), and improved trust (Calabrese, 2006).

Although every summit has its own design, it is common for summits to last a period of two to five days. During the AI summit, organizations work through the appreciative inquiry 4-D process (Cooperrider, 2012): discovery, dream, design, and deploy. The discovery phase

identifies and appreciates what is best within the organization. An effective discovery phase focuses on peak times of organizational excellence to understand the factors that contributed to the success. Envisioning the organization's best potential for positive influence and global impact is the goal of the dream phase. During the design phase, attention shifts to creating an organization capable of achieving the dream. In the final stage of the appreciative inquiry 4-D process, deploy, the organization puts in place the practical strategies and projects developed in previous stages. Though the summit is short, the results can be long-lasting.

By bringing together the Loons' stakeholders, not only those who are internal to the organization but also their customers and grant recipients, for an AI Summit, the Loons may develop strengths-based strategies for addressing some of the practical challenges they confront as well as restore trust in the organization's direction and renew their meaningful relationship with the Midland community.

High Quality Connections

Workplace interactions are significant drivers of employee satisfaction. High quality connections—individual interpersonal interactions characterized by mutual positive regard and subjectively positive experience—are associated with individual wellbeing as well as organizational flourishing (Stephens et al., 2011). High quality connections (HQCs) are critical for organizational success (Stephens et al., 2011). Having positive connections among employees who are responsive and available for each other facilitates collective compassion. The relational bonds of HQCs promote flexibility under pressure (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), and HQCs increase employees' awareness of small changes indicating suffering in others which can prompt more empathetic responses (Eisenberg, 2000). HQCs enable honest conversations; employees may feel safe to communicate when workloads become overwhelming, creating additional protection

against the risk of burnout. HQCs build relationships and encourage relational resiliency (Stephens et al., 2011).

HQCs are built on respectful interpersonal engagement and task enabling (behaviors that make it possible for others to perform their jobs; Stephens et al., 2011), two factors that are abundant in the Loons' culture, though, as Mundhenk indicated in our conversations, these strong organizational qualities have suffered under the stress and uncertainty of the last two years. Research also shows that HQCs can be increased when play and humor are part of workplace culture (Stephens et al., 2011).

Play at Work

Adult play includes many of the same attributes as childhood play. Key components include creativity, curiosity, humor, pleasure, and spontaneity (Guitard et al., 2005). Yet, play at work is also different from childhood play and adult play that happens outside the work context (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Although play has the power to reduce hierarchy and bureaucracy (Dutton, 2003), power differences among people are an inherent workplace attribute (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Three factors that make play work at work include:

- Behavior or activity carried out with the goal of amusement and fun;
- An enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude or approach, and;
- High interactivity among play partners or with the activity itself (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015).

Play not only increases HQCs, contributing directly to individual and organizational wellbeing; it can also be tailored to incorporate other ingredients researchers have identified as contributing to human and organizational flourishing. For example, play can incorporate physical activity, movement of the body, which is critical to optimal brain functioning. Physical activity

impacts the way people think and feel. It prepares our brains to learn and focus while improving our positive mood and reducing anxiety. (Ratey, J. J., 2008). Play can also involve creativity, the generation of novel ideas, which is a key requirement for the growth and adaptability of organizations. It is a source of organizational success and competitive advantage. Creativity increases interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, and personal challenge in the workplace (Amabile & Pillemer, 2015). Finally, play can increase positive emotions in the workplace. Positive Emotions like joy, connection, awe and amusement can improve health, wellbeing, and personal resources. These emotions can reverse the effects of negative emotions, broaden awareness, and encourage novel, exploratory thoughts and actions. Over time this can build useful skills and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2000). These ingredients and others amplify the positive organizational and individual benefits of play, making play at work a force-multiplier of organizational thriving.

The role of play in fostering HQCs is especially important in sports organizations. Sport affinity, which is defined as a shared appreciation for the sport of their organization, has an important impact on the wellbeing of employees (Oja et al., 2019). In other words, sports employees who feel psychologically aligned to the sport of their organization are more likely to feel connected to the organization and to each other. Furthermore, employees with sports affinity are more likely to value self-improvement and persist in their work efforts to help the organization (Oja et al., 2019). When sports employees feel a part of the team, they have higher levels of hope, optimism and resilience. For this reason, it is believed that incorporating play, especially play that is related to the game of baseball, has the strong potential to increase the Loons' affinity with their sport and their overall wellbeing.

The Loons possess tremendous strengths that can be built upon to improve the wellbeing of employees and enhance the organization's performance. Hope, optimism, meaning, and high quality connections also have the potential to assist employees and the organization to overcome the challenges it confronts. In the next section, we will offer recommendations and develop an intervention to increase wellbeing and enhance strengths within the Loons organization.

Application Plan

As humans, we are hardwired to focus on negative events, information, and experiences (Kiken & Shook, 2011). Although this negativity bias (Ito et al., 1998) provides a strong evolutionary advantage—being attuned to harmful stimuli is critical for survival—our propensity to focus on the negative can make it hard to build healthy organizations in which people can flourish. When organizations adopt a deficit-based approach, many neglect their core competencies and strengths, resulting in missed opportunities for sustainable growth (Cooperrider, 2012). Therefore, organizations need to harness the transformative power of a strengths-based approach, especially in challenging times.

The Loons confront stress and uncertainty attributable to external factors beyond their control and internal realities that are unlikely to change. It would be easy to focus on the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the potential loss of ticket sales to Dow chemical, and the pain of downsizing. Yet, the Loons also possess tremendous strengths including a family culture that supports high quality connections (HQCs) among its staff and new leadership that is trusted and committed to the wellbeing of its employees.

Recognizing that the stress and uncertainty in the Loons' current situation is not something we are in a position to change, our application plan aims to support the Loons to better appreciate the positive aspects of the organization, develop skills for coping with stress,

strengthen HQCs, have more fun and positive emotion at work, and renew the Loons' connection with the Midland community.

Three Levels of Intervention

In this application plan, we are proposing interventions at the individual, organizational, and community levels. At the individual level, we aim to enhance the ability of employees to thrive amidst an environment that may feel stressful and uncertain. At the organizational level, we aim to increase positive emotions and high quality connections by cultivating a more playful workplace culture. And at the community level, we aim to reinvigorate the relationship between the Loons and the community using an Appreciative Inquiry summit.

Our interventions aim primarily to benefit the Loons' 26 full-time employees. Employees are adults residing in the vicinity of Midland, Michigan. Many full-time employees have worked with the organization for several years, while others are recent hires. We anticipate that our interventions may also benefit other segments of the Loons' community. The Loons' community consists of their full-time and gameday staff, fans, the Los Angeles Dodgers, corporate partners, vendors, and the Midland community (C. Mundhenk, personal communication, January 21, 2022). Some of these segments will benefit indirectly from the positive environment unleashed by a more joyful Loons full-time staff. Some segments may also benefit directly if the interventions we propose are expanded to include their participation.

We are aware that our capacity to effectively support interventions at these three levels is limited by the scope and nature of our service-learning assignment, and so we propose to provide recommendations and information for the Loons to begin work at the individual and community levels while providing more in-depth and comprehensive support for implementation of play interventions at the organizational level.

Individual Level Interventions: Increasing Individual Wellbeing

At the individual level, we recommend that the Loons incorporate strategies and exercises for cultivating individual wellbeing at work. While we believe it is important not to place the onus for managing the stress within the Loons organization solely on individual employees, improving individual wellbeing should be a part of a comprehensive organizational approach to flourishing.

We recommend that the Loons highlight one strategy or exercise for cultivating individual wellbeing each month in their staff meetings and encourage staff to try them out. These could include strategies and exercises for coping with workplace stress, cultivating hope and optimism, and appreciating the positive aspects of their jobs and work environments. For example, as discussed above in our literature review, changing negative thinking patterns, improving physical health and fitness, leveraging relaxation techniques, and seeking social support can help people cope with workplace stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Setting challenging and specific but achievable goals and celebrating interim successes can increase hope and optimism (Snyder et al., 2000).

We recommend that the Loons connect with the Midland Area Wellbeing Coalition (www.midlandareawellbeing.org) to explore opportunities for partnership and consider the organization's Wellbeing Life Hacks (www.midlandareawellbeing.org/wellbeing-life-hacks) as additional exercises that could be incorporated as monthly exercises to share with Loons' employees.

Organizational Level Interventions: Cultivating a Culture of Play

At the organizational level, we recommend that the Loons cultivate a playful workplace culture. As discussed above, workplace interactions are significant drivers of employee

satisfaction. HQCs contribute to individual wellbeing and help organizations flourish (Stephens et al., 2011). In our conversations with Loons' employees, we heard so many wonderful things about the family environment among the Loons' full-time staff. The Loons have a strong foundation of HQCs. Incorporating play into the culture has the potential to increase the frequency and intensity of these enriching interactions (Stephens et al., 2011), while also increasing job satisfaction, creativity, engagement, learning, communication, and positive emotions and reducing fatigue, burnout, and stress (Petelczyc et al., 2018).

As the Loons continue to make magical experiences for their customers, the organization should also aim to build the "Wow Factor" into the Loons' workplace culture by increasing opportunities for playful interactions among staff. Play can become a part of the organization's everyday culture. It can be incorporated into meetings and other regular events. And it can be the basis for fun events and activities that represent departures from business as usual.

We further develop a strategy for increasing play within the Loons organization in the Play Intervention section below.

Community Level Intervention: The Appreciative Inquiry Summit

At the community level, we recommend that the Loons plan and host an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) summit focused on reinvigorating the connection between the Loons and the Midland community. During challenging times, many organizations approach strategic planning with a deficit bias. The deficit bias suggests that organizations focus 80 percent of their attention on problem analysis, dedicating only 20 percent to strengths analysis (Cooperrider, 2012). However, Coopersmith (2012) argues that organizations are "universes-of-strengths" rather than "problems-to-be-solved." They flourish only when they adopt a strengths-based approach, such as AI.

An AI summit that brings together the Loons' internal and external stakeholders—employees, customers, the Los Angeles Dodgers, corporate partners, vendors, and the Midland community members— to discover and develop their core strengths while renewing their relationship with the community has many possible benefits for the organization. Some of these benefits include the potential to refocus attention on positive aspects of the Loons organization (Cooperrider, 2012), amend trust issues (Calabrese, 2006), increase the meaning and motivation they derive as givers from being a part of the organization (Grant, 2013), and even address some of the underlying causes of stress and uncertainty by increasing ticket sales and interest in gameday employment (Cooperrider, 2012).

Appreciative Inquiry Summits are almost always conducted by external consultants and experts (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). Therefore, we recommend that the Loons hire a facilitator with experience in AI and positive psychology.

Play Intervention

The thought of playing at work may feel a little silly to some employees at first, conjuring up images of immature, time-wasting, and unprofessional goofing off. It is important to remember that the human capacity to play is developed over our life-time; it is a part of who we are. And not only that, play has been shown to increase HQCs and improve interactions at work (Stephens et al., 2011). Play enables co-workers to engage in interactions that depart from their typical work roles, allowing people to appreciate each other in new and different ways (Dutton, 2003). There are tremendous individual and organizational benefits to play at work (Petelczyc et al., 2018), and helping employees understand these benefits may reduce some of the initial discomfort with the idea of having more fun at work. Play activities should remain

optional so discomfort does not morph into annoyance or resentment, but even the most reserved employees may eventually find the enjoyment of play irresistible.

There are three settings in which we envision play could be incorporated within the Loons' organization. Play can become a part of the organization's everyday culture. It can be incorporated into meetings and other regular events. And it can be the basis for fun events and activities that represent departures from business as usual.

Get Loony Playbook

To support the development of a more playful culture, we are attaching a *Get Loony Playbook* consisting of ideas for cultivating play at work. The *Get Loony Playbook* includes an introduction explaining the benefits and purposes of increasing play, fun, and humor in the Loons' organization. It identifies and explains ingredients that can be incorporated into play activities to enhance play's contribution to individual and organizational flourishing. And it describes twelve play activities for the Loons to try out or tailor to better fit their organization. For each play idea, we include the name of the game or activity, the equipment required to play, the number of people who can participate, the expected amount of time to play, instructions for play, and the active ingredients of the activity (e.g. positive emotions, physical activity, creativity, and cooperation).

Workgroup on Play

In addition to providing ideas for incorporating play into the Loons' organization, we hope that the *Get Loony Playbook* will help the organization develop a culture of playfulness and begin incorporating their own ideas and approaches to play into their work. And we have already seen this start to happen. During our conversation with Chris Mundhenk in which we presented to him our idea for developing a play-based intervention for the Loons, Mundhenk became

excited about the idea and decided to immediately pull together a Workgroup on Play to implement the intervention and develop their own ideas for play at work (personal communication, March 9, 2022). The Workgroup will include veteran full-time staff as well as newer employees, and Mundhenk believes it will be a great way to integrate new employees into the culture of the organization.

Evaluation

To measure the effectiveness of these interventions, the Loons should consider using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule scales (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) for measuring positive and negative affect (emotions) before, during, and after implementation. The PANAS scales continue to be used by top companies to measure employees' affect (Mark et al., 2014). While we expect the interventions to be associated with increases in positive affect, the Loons should remain mindful that confounding factors may influence outcomes. For example, employees may experience higher stress during the baseball season, especially during homestands when demands are higher. Stress and uncertainty may also wane as a result of changing circumstances, for example if ticket sales pick up or Covid's impact on the organization subsides. It is important to know that changes in these measures may not reflect a cause and effect relationship between the interventions and changes they measure.

For these reasons, we recommend administering the PANAS (found in the back of the *Get Loony Playbook*) before beginning implementation (pre-testing) and every six weeks thereafter for at least a year. This will provide a more complete picture of how positive and negative affect fluctuate throughout the yearly cycle of the organization and help clarify ambiguous results that may arise from short-term or situational changes in the organization that affect employees' emotions.

It is important to know that positive and negative affect are independent of each other (Wedderhoff et al., 2021). In other words, people can experience high positive affect and high negative affect or low positive and low negative affect. We expect that the recommended interventions will lead to statistically significant increases in positive affect and may also lead to lower negative affect.

We also recommend administering an employee satisfaction survey before beginning implementation of these interventions and every six weeks thereafter for a year along with the PANAS scales. While not a scientifically validated instrument, we are including a model survey for the Loons to use for this purpose. The Loons can consider how often to administer the PANAS scales and employee satisfaction survey beyond the first year.

Conclusion

The Loons are a strong organization built on meaningful relationships— both among their staff and with their fans and community. Stress and uncertainty are, unfortunately, a fact of life for the Loons right now. Some of the factors contributing to these realities are beyond their control. Yet, working in an environment that may be stressful and uncertain does not mean the Loons cannot enjoy their work. By increasing their employees' individual wellbeing, the Loons can enhance the quality of life they experience and reduce the potential for burnout. By building on their foundation of high quality connections with a renewed focus on play, fun, and humor, the Loons can reclaim their dynamic and enjoyable culture and contribute to greater experiences of positive emotions in their full-time staff. And by renewing their relationship with the community in an AI Summit, the Loons can increase motivation and meaning in their work and potentially reduce the impact of two causes of stress and uncertainty: declining ticket sales and difficulty hiring gameday staff.

The benefits of the recommended interventions in this document are not guaranteed, and we want to acknowledge that there are limitations in the research we relied upon to develop them. First, very little of the research we examined tested our recommended interventions within a sports organization. Many have shown strong results for organizations in other industries, but we cannot be certain that results will translate perfectly to the Loons and its employees. And while there is substantial scholarship on the benefits of play for adults, few studies have implemented and tested the results of new play interventions in the workplace setting. There is also a question of cost. At a time of financial uncertainty, hiring a consultant and hosting a large-scale AI summit may be too costly for the Loons. Yet, the Loons have a history of success, a commitment to excellence, people who care about each other, and leadership dedicated to uplifting all their stakeholders. With these interventions, we believe the Loons will take flight. It's time to dive in!

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Appendix: *Get Loony Playbook*

GET LOONY PLAYBOOK








*When you have fun, it changes all
the pressure into pleasure*

-Ken Griffey, Jr



A collection of PLAY interventions created for
the Great Lakes Loons by Kimberly Dickman,
Mark O'Brien, Devon Still and KC White

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*"When you start the game, they don't say
'Work Ball!' They say, 'Play ball!'"
- Willie Stargell*

Letter to the Loons

Welcome to the Get Loony Playbook!

Dear Loons,

It has been such an incredible pleasure getting to know the Loons' family over the last several months! We are so grateful to have gotten to know such a great organization and so many of the wonderful people who work there.

One of the Loons' greatest strengths is its people and the connections you share with each other. Many of you describe being a Loon as being a part of a family. You're proud of creating magical experiences for your fans at the stadium and contributing to a flourishing Midland. You care about each other, and you work hard to maintain the Loons' famous Wow Factor for all its community members.

Having great people means also having great opportunities to have great fun together. That's why we're excited to offer this *Get Loony Playbook* to ignite a fun-loving culture of play and take your relationships with each other and with your work to the next level.

It might seem strange to think about playing when you're at work. But as a professional sports organization, the Loons know the value of play to bring people together and bring out our best. The truth is, play is good for us as individuals, and it's also good for the organizations and groups we're a part of.

We hope you'll have fun with the ideas we recommend and take what we share in the following pages about the powerful ingredients in play that can boost your well-being to tailor and create additional fun activities for Loons to enjoy for years to come.

Here's to some loony times ahead!

Devon, KC, Kimberly, and Mark

Introduction

Well, hey there, Loon! Yes, you there, holding this document. It's good to see you. You must be wondering what this whole *Get Loony Playbook* thing is all about.

Yeah, I kinda was. Can you just give me a quick summary?

Sure thing! Building on cutting-edge research on individual and organizational thriving from the field of positive psychology, the *Get Loony Playbook* (the document in your hand, Loon) is a manual for deliberately enhancing play and fun at work to increase individual well-being and organizational success.

Hmmm. That sounds nice. But what the heck is positive psychology?

Glad you asked! Positive psychology is the branch of psychology concerned with identifying and helping people to cultivate the ingredients of a life well-lived. It is particularly focused on enhancing human flourishing at both the individual and organizational levels (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Top positive psychology researchers have suggested that well-being consists of things like positive emotions, good relationships, meaning (Seligman, 2018), feeling a sense of belonging within a group (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2019), and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2016). They all tend to agree that relationships and groups are important. "Other people matter," as distinguished professor Chris Peterson famously summed it up (Park & Seligman, 2013).

Gotcha. What does that have to do with work though?

It turns out our relationships at work may be as important as those in our personal lives. Workplace interactions are major drivers of our satisfaction with our jobs and the success of our organizations. High quality connections—interactions where we feel good about the other person, the situation, and ourselves—are associated with individual well-being as well as organizational flourishing (Stephens et al., 2011). These powerful interactions promote flexibility under pressure (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), increase empathy (Eisenberg, 2000) and protect against burnout (Stephens et al., 2011).

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Okay. But you said this was about play and fun.

Yeah. I was just getting there. Increasing play and humor at work has a number of benefits. In terms of our relationships at work, when they are a part of the workplace culture, play and humor increase high quality connections (Stephens et al., 2011). Playing more at work can also increase job satisfaction, creativity, engagement, learning, communication, and positive emotions while reducing fatigue, burnout, and stress (Petelczyc et al., 2018).

Wow! That sounds amazing. Why doesn't everyone play more at work?

Beats me. I guess for some people the thought of playing at work may feel a little silly at first, conjuring up images of immature, time-wasting, and unprofessional goofing off (which, of course, is *only one* of the many ways to have fun). I try to remind people that the human capacity to play is developed over our entire lifetime; it is literally a part of who we are. Playing at work lets us get out of our typical work roles and appreciate each other in new ways (Dutton, 2003). There are tremendous individual and organizational benefits to playing (Petelczyc et al., 2018). But fun isn't for everyone, so play activities should always remain optional (and if people opt out, they should be able to opt back in when they see all the fun that's happening!).

Fair enough. If it's not just immature and unprofessional goofing off, what do you mean when you say play?

Play comes in so many shapes and sizes. Like childhood play, components of workplace play include things like creativity, curiosity, humor, pleasure, and spontaneity (Guitard et al., 2005). Play can involve games, challenges, or puzzles or have no objectives at all. It can be imaginative or creative. It can be done individually or in groups, cooperatively or competitively.

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There are three primary ingredients to play at work:

- Behavior or activity carried out with the goal of amusement and fun;
- An enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude or approach, and;
- High interactivity among play partners or with the activity itself (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015).

Besides that, it's about being creative and having fun for the sake of having fun.

I'm really curious. What do you think makes play so awesome?

Besides the fun, joy, individual well-being, and organizational success? Hmm. Well, on its own, play can have a positive impact on all of us. But the specific way we play also matters.

In addition to the three primary ingredients above, play activities can incorporate endless ingredients, and positive psychology has discovered that many of these ingredients provide unique benefits for our well-being. So, different ways of playing increase our well-being in different ways. We're going to tell you more about the ingredients in the next section.

I can hardly wait. In the meantime, are there ingredients we should avoid?

Great question. Play at work has the power to reduce hierarchy and bureaucracy (Dutton, 2003), but power differences among people are still a pretty normal workplace attribute (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). So, we should keep in mind that people may not be as comfortable playing at work as they would be in other contexts. Play activities should always remain optional, and people should never feel pressured to play if they don't want to or can't. It's important to think of ways to keep play accessible for people from all backgrounds and with all types of abilities. And stay away from themes and topics that could be hurtful, uncomfortable, or divisive.

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We definitely want it fun for everyone, but when are we supposed to find time for this?

Play can happen at designated times, and it sometimes takes time to have a good time. But play can also happen spontaneously, occur over very short durations, or integrate into interactions that we would be having anyway. You can find time to incorporate play at several levels at the Loons. Play can become a part of the organization's everyday culture. For example, you could play harmless pranks on each other, tell workplace-appropriate jokes, or hold impromptu desk chair races. Play can be incorporated into meetings and other regular events. For example, you could ask silly or thought-provoking questions at the beginnings of meetings or toss a foam baseball to whoever is speaking. And play can be the basis for fun events and activities that represent departures from business as usual. These events require more planning, like a kickball game or ropes course excursion.

It sounds nice. How do we get started?

In the next section, we'll tell you a little more about some of the play ingredients positive psychology has identified as beneficial. After that, flip the page, and you will arrive at the first of a dozen play activities we've curated for the Loons to consider. For each activity, you will find the estimated duration and number of players who can participate as well as a list of necessary supplies. We'll tell you the active ingredients to remind you about the many ways play can positively influence life at the Loons.

I'm sold. Now, what do we do after we finish all the ideas in the *Get Loony Playbook*?

The games and activities we outline on the coming pages are only a sample of the fun you can have getting loony from now on. We hope you will enjoy each of them, but we also hope you won't stop there. We want you to tweak and tailor them so they fit even better with your unique workplace culture. Learn about the ingredients that make the biggest differences for the Loons, and use those to find and create new ways to play. Already, the Loons have convened an employee

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workgroup to focus on integrating more play into the Loons' culture. We have included some of the ideas they've already come up with in an appendix to this booklet.

How do we know if it's working?

That's really important. Symptoms of success may include the sight of more smiles on your co-workers' faces as well as the sound of laughter echoing down the hallway. You may notice a little extra pep in your step or find yourself eager to get into the office.

For a bit more scientific evaluation, we recommend using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule scales (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) for measuring positive and negative emotions and getting a sense of how people are feeling. You should ask everyone to take it before you get started with any play interventions and then every six weeks after that for about a year. Then less frequently as the organization finds it useful. This will provide a more complete picture of how positive and negative feelings fluctuate throughout the Loons' yearly cycle and help prevent short-term or situational changes in the organization from obscuring the longer term shifts.

You can find the PANAS as well as instructions for administering and scoring it at the end of this booklet. We also provide a short survey to gauge employee satisfaction before beginning to play and at one month, six months, and one year after getting started. All surveys should be offered anonymously. The goal is to identify broad trends in the organization rather than to track individuals' scores.



PLAY
INGREDIENTS

Ingredients

Belonging is a subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics. Feeling a sense of belonging buffers against stress and behavioral issues (Mahar et al., 2012).

Communication is critical for effective team building. Through setting priorities and the reiterative process of feedback, communication throughout an organization builds effective teams (Fapohunda, 2013).

Connectedness is the experience of belonging and relatedness between people. Social connections build physical health and emotional well-being (Van Bel et al., 2009).

Cooperation benefits organizations by encouraging people to work together. Practicing cooperation, on and off the field, helps teams reach common goals (Tarricon & Luca, 2002).

Creativity, the generation of novel ideas, is a key requirement for the growth and adaptability of organizations. It is a source of organizational success and competitive advantage. Creativity increases interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, and personal challenge in the workplace (Amabile & Pillemer, 2015).

Energizing means positive affective experiences that stimulate the feeling of being eager to act and capable of acting. High energy workplaces produce high quality connections that build valuable resources for employees (Quinn, 2007).

Hivishness is our evolutionary impulse to cohere and work together. We have descended from groups that survived by cooperating and outcompeting other groups. Hivishness helps human switch from a mindset of self-interest to one of group cooperation (Haidt et al., 2008).

Ingredients

Humor is amusing communication that produces positive emotions and cognitions in individuals, groups, or organizations. Humor leads to better communication, development of group goals, productivity, and group viability (Romero & Pescosolido, 2008).

Motor Synchrony is when two or more people synchronize the movements of their bodies, parts of their bodies, or their vocalizations. Synchronized movement and chanting have been shown to promote bonding (Rennung & Göritz, 2016) and build trust within groups of people (Haidt, 2012).

Physical Activity, moving our bodies, is critical to optimal brain functioning. It impacts the way we think and how we feel. Movement prepares our brains to learn and focus while improving our positive mood and reducing anxiety (Ratey, 2008).

Positive Emotions like joy, connection, awe and amusement can improve health, well-being, and personal resources. These emotions can reverse the effects of negative emotions, broaden awareness, and encourage novel, exploratory thoughts and actions. Over time this can build useful skills and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2000).

Teamwork is a set of behavioral processes that people use to accomplish interdependent work, and/or the affective, cognitive, and motivation states that emerge during that work. High functioning teams make better decisions, manage complex tasks more efficiently, and better coordinate actions and knowledge (Valentine et al., 2015).

**We don't stop playing because we grow old...
we grow old because we stop playing.
-George Bernard Shaw**



PLAY
INTERVENTIONS

WAILING WEDNESDAY

Ingredients: Humor, Hivishness, Connectedness

Time: Less than a minute

Group Size: 1-100+

You'll Need: No equipment needed.

Instructions

- On Wednesdays, initial greetings and meetings start with a Loon wail call instead of a typical greeting (e.g., hi, good morning).



BIGGEST FAN

Ingredients: Belonging, Positive Emotions, Teamwork, Energizing

Time: 10-15 minutes

Group Size: 10-50+

You'll Need: No equipment needed!

Instructions

- Find a partner.
- Each pair of two will play Rock, Paper, Scissors against each other. 1 - 2 - 3 and shoot. (Display your choice on shoot). The losing person immediately becomes the winner's "biggest fan," following them around the room chanting their name, clapping, and cheering for them.
- The winner and their new fan find another person and their new fan to challenge in Rock, Paper, Scissors. The losing player and their "biggest fan" now become the "biggest fans" of the winning player, and the winning player now has three biggest fans: their previous fan and their opponent and their fan.
- The winning player again challenges a new group. The game continues until there are two players left each with a large crowd of fans cheering for them. These players face off to determine the winner.
- Everyone becomes a "biggest fan" of the winner and cheers them enthusiastically.

*The last match can be made even more fun by pausing the game and announcing the two competitors names and getting their fans pumped up.



MINUTE TO WIN IT GAMES

Ingredients: Physical Activity, Positive Emotions, Humor, Energizing

Time: 20 -30 Minutes

Group Size: 2+

You'll Need: Cookies, 25 Pennies, 25 M&Ms, Straws, 40 Red Solo Cups, 1 Blue Solo Cup, Package of Balloons

Instructions

COOKIE FACE:

This is a great game to kick off the party because all players can compete at the same time (or you can break it down into several rounds of game play). Each player places a cookie on their forehead, and the goal is to get the cookie into your mouth using only your facial muscles in under 1 minute. No hands! This is tougher than it looks!

STACK IT UP:

Players must move 25 pennies into a single stack in under a minute using only one hand (number of pennies can be increased as desired). This game works well with 3 players competing in each round of play.

SUCK IT UP:

Players place a straw in their mouth and use suction to transfer a pile of 25 M&M's from one plate to another in under one minute. Only one hand may be used to hold the straw. Everyone gets to eat their candy when the round is finished! This game also works well with 3 players competing in each round.

MOVIN' ON UP:

Each player starts with a stack of 40 red cups with one blue cup at the top of the stack. Start by moving the top blue cup to the bottom of the stack and continue moving cups from the top to the bottom until the blue cup is back at the bottom of the stack again.

DEFY GRAVITY:

Using only one hand, players must keep two balloons from touching the ground for one minute. For a more challenging game, increase the amount to three balloons per player (and use different colored balloons for each player to make it easy to differentiate!). No holding the balloons! 2 players per round of competition works well to give the players ample space to move their balloons around.

(Kundin, n.d.)

LOONS CIRCLE DANCE

Ingredients: Positive Emotions, Energizing, Motor Synchrony, Hivishness

Time: 10-15 minutes

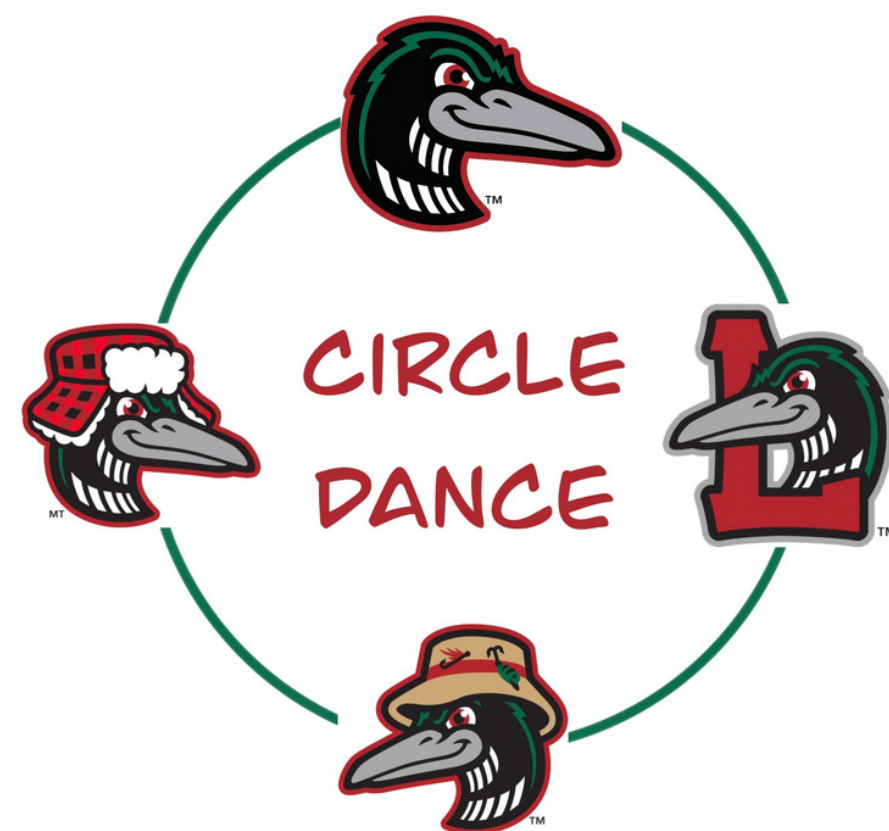
Group Size: Two or more

You'll Need: No equipment needed!

Instructions

Loons are social animals. They gather to feed, often doing a “circle dance”, where the birds swim in a circle and take turns diving into the water. During this dance they hoot, and flap and row their wings.

- Employees of the Great Lakes Loons will create their own “circle dance” that they can perform together at the end of meetings.
- This dance can be taught to Loons fans as well during an inning break of the Loons home games. This dance can be used to celebrate home runs, or strikeouts or wins.



FAST FRIENDS

Ingredients: Connectedness, Communication, Positive Emotions, Belonging

Time: 10-20 minutes, per session

Group Size: 20-100+

You'll Need: The list of 36 questions from researcher Arthur Aron

Instructions

This activity allows for teammates to be vulnerable with each other by answering the questions that elicit more opportunities to be open with progressively intimate questions.

- Download the questions at <http://sunshine-parenting.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Arons-36-Questions.pdf>
- Print the list of 36 questions and cut the pages into strips of paper with one question per strip.
- Pair up into teams of two.
- Each team chooses one player to pull strips of questions at random and read it for the team.
- Both members of the team take turns answering the question and sharing their answers verbally with each other.

*The team can decide to save the more intimate questions for later after doing a few rounds of less vulnerable questions. A good set to start with is:

- Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
- Would you like to be famous? In what way?
- What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
- If you could wake up tomorrow having gained one quality or ability, what would it be?

TANK DRIVER

Ingredients: Positive Emotions, Energizing, Cooperation, Communication, Teamwork

Time: 10-20 minutes, until the last team is out.

Group Size: 20-100+

You'll Need: Blindfold and a soft nerf ball for every two players; open space without anything in the way!

Instructions

- Players pair-up into teams of two. One person on each team is the tank and one person is the tank driver.
- Blindfold the tank driver and hand them the nerf ball. They are the only one who can hold and throw the nerf ball.
- Without ever touching the tank, the tank driver verbally directs the tank to guide them to get the other teams out by throwing the balls and hitting the tank or driver from the other team. The tank driver will give directions such as "walk forward", "turn to your right", "bend down", "grab the ball at your feet" and "throw!".
- When a ball is thrown and hits the ground, only the tank can pick it up.
- When the ball is thrown and hits another tank or tank driver, they are out!
- The last tank and driver team remaining are the winners.

ROUNDING THE BASES

Ingredients: Communication, Humor, Teamwork

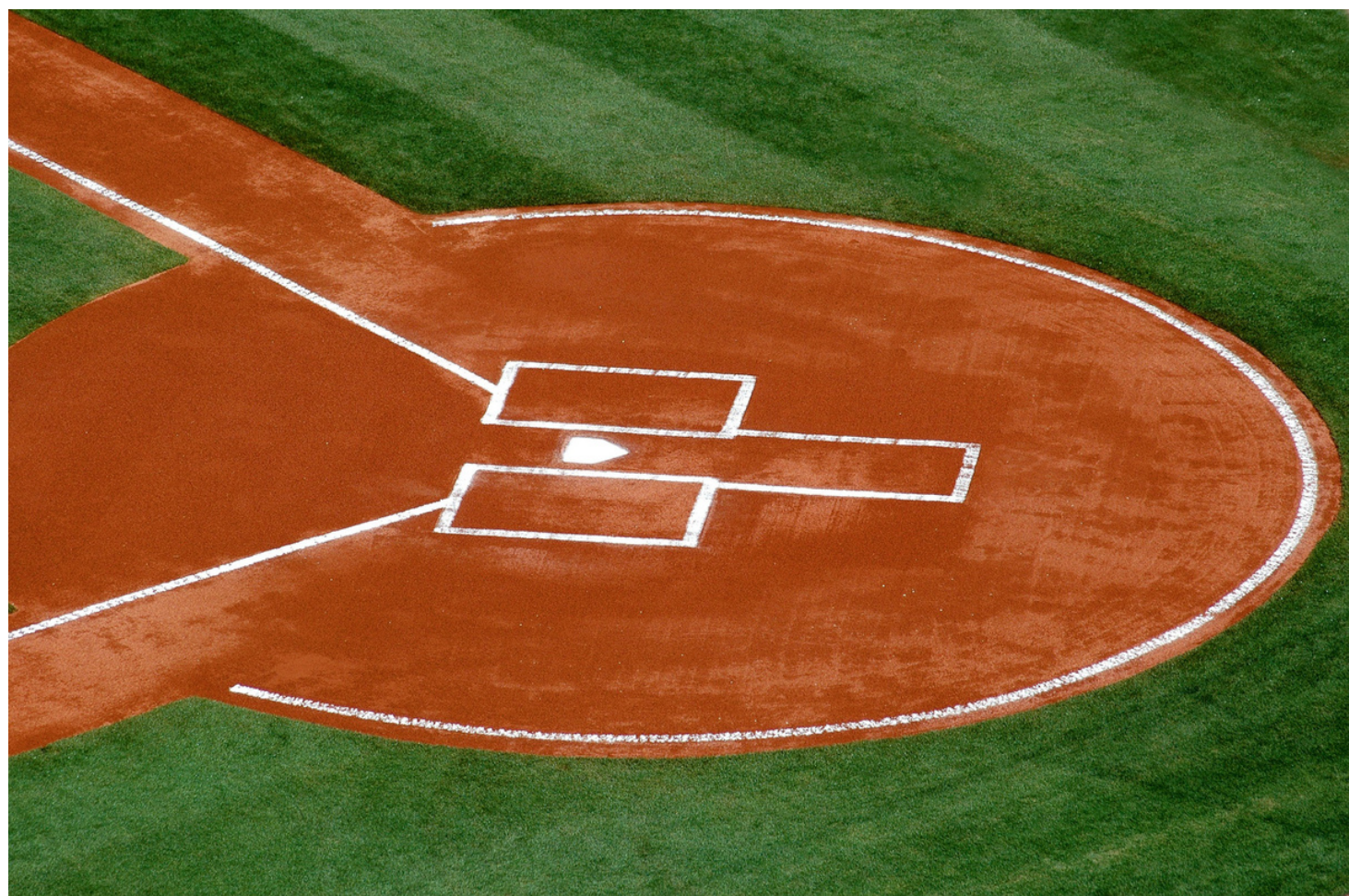
Time: 10-15 minutes

Group Size: 12 +

You'll Need: No equipment needed.

Instructions

- Get everybody to stand in a long line or circle.
- The first player must think of a short sentence— or you can provide them with one.
- They must then whisper this sentence into the ear of the person to their left.
- This second player may not ask for the sentence to be repeated but must tell the next player to their left what they heard.
- Players continue to pass the sentence down the line or around the circle until it's gone completely "around the bases."
- The last player announces the sentence they believe the first player started with, and the first player reveals the original sentence.



PIN THE TAIL ON THE LOON

Ingredients: Humor, Positive Emotions

Time: 30 minutes

Group Size: 2+

You'll Need: Loon poster, Loon tails, Dice & Blindfold

Instructions

- Mount a Loon poster on a vertical surface.
- Draw an "X" on the Loon where the tail would normally be placed, as a reference point for determining the winner.
- On their turn, each player rolls the dice to determine how many times they must spin around.
- Blindfold the participant using a dark colored cloth to thoroughly cover the participants eyes.
- Spin the blindfolded player in a stationary place the number of times shown on the dice.
- Hand the tail to the blindfolded player and help them face the image of the Loon
- The blindfolded player attempts to stick or pin the tail over the "X" on the Loons rear end.
- Repeat this process until every player has had a chance to pin the tail.
- Leave all the Loon tails pinned to the location they have been placed, until every player has had a turn.
- Determine which tail is "best placed." The winner is the player whose tail is closest to the marked "X."

*Consider writing player initials on each tail or writing them next to the pinned tail on the poster to keep track of which tail belongs to which player.

YOU ARE OUT!

Ingredients: Positive Emotions, Creativity, Energizing

Time: *Until the last player is out.*

Group Size: 20-100+

You'll Need: A set of rattling teeth for every player.

Instructions

- Identify the "umpire." This person will keep track of who is in and who is out of the game. The umpire creates a list of all the teammates who want to play. The umpire will then assign each person a "baserunner" to try to get out of the game.
- To get a baserunner out of the game, a player must place the chattering teeth in that player's office, coat, car, lunch box, etc without getting caught.
- If the baserunner or another player sees the player placing the chattering teeth, the player must keep their teeth and try again later.
- If the baserunner discovers the chattering teeth, and they chatter, then the baserunner is out.
- If the baserunner finds the teeth, but the teeth do not chatter, the baserunner may ask another player or someone not in the game to come and get the teeth.
- The baserunner is not out if the teeth do not chatter. The only way to be out is if the teeth chatter.
- If the baserunner is out, they must tell the umpire, and the umpire will assign another baserunner to the person who was successful in getting someone out.
- The game continues until there are two players left, and one is successful in getting the other out.
- The last player still in the game is the winner!

*It can be fun to ask each player to send a theme song (a Loony Tune, if you will). The theme song is played or announced when the person is out and the rest of the team guesses who was out based on their theme song.



HANDSHAKE OF THE WEEK

Ingredients: Positive Emotions, Energizing, Belonging, Connectedness, Motor Synchrony

Time: Several weeks or months if desired.

Group Size: 20-100+

You'll Need: No materials needed.

Instructions

- Each week, announce a new handshake of the week.
- Throughout that week, whenever teammates meet, they are encouraged to greet each other with the handshake and hold it for at least 15 seconds (it's long, but trust us!). Some handshakes can include:

The lumberjack

Two people face each other and reach out for a handshake. They wrap their finger around the other person's fingers. Both people put their thumb in the air. Each person then grabs their own thumb with their other hand. Both people then move their arms back-and-forth as if using a saw to cut a tree.

The butterfly

Two people face each other and hook their thumbs together. This leaves the other fingers to be waved in the air like butterfly wings.

The salmon

Two people face each other and grab high on the other person's forearm on the inside of the elbow. Both people tap gently on the inside of the other person's forearm like the tail of a salmon.

The milk the cow

Two people face each other and turn their hand so their thumb is facing the ground. They interlock their fingers while their thumb hangs towards the floor. They grab their thumb with the other hand and pull down on it as if milking a cow. Alternatively, one person can make two udders with their thumbs facing towards the ground and the other person can milk the cow. This one is udderly fun!

*Permit people to opt out if they are uncomfortable with handshakes due to Covid or other reasons. Or consider implementing after any concerns about Covid have waned.

HIDE THE FRUITCAKE

Ingredients: Positive Emotions, Creativity, Humor

Time: This is an Ongoing Game

Group Size: 20-100+

You'll Need: A Fruitcake, unopened

Instructions

There's always someone who gives you the dreaded fruitcake. How do you get rid of it? Just pass it on.

- One person starts with one, unopened fruitcake. They hide the fruitcake in someone's office, car, bag, etc. without getting caught.
- If another person sees the person leaving the fruitcake, the original person must keep the fruitcake and try again.
- The person who finds the fruitcake in their office, car, bag, etc then tries to pass it on to a different person as fast as they can without getting caught.

*This game can continue on for generations, and the fruitcake will still be edible! (Just one more reason why fruitcakes are suspicious).

*It can be fun to have a spreadsheet showing the "path" of the fruitcake by keeping track of who finds it and where it travels.

*Another spin is to use a mascot from a rival team of the Loons in place of the fruitcake. No one will want to have that mascot in their possession.



THE CHANGE UP

Ingredients: Belonging, Connectedness, Energizing, Positive Emotions

Time: Full Day

Group Size: Entire Staff

You'll Need: Trip Location

Instructions

- Cancel all work activities for the day and throw an out of office work function (e.g., bowling, site seeing, escape room, go-cart racing, volunteer, office BBQ, wine tasting tour, and more great ideas from the Loons available in the Appendix)





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APPENDIX

Loons Play Interventions

Below are play interventions created by the Loons Play Work Group

Incorporating Play into the Culture

- Squirt guns/nerf guns in the office
- Harmless pranks (e.g. everyone pretend that one staff person's sound is not working during a Zoom meeting)
- Random dance parties or leadership flash mobs
- Tri-cycle or chair races
- Games (board games, darts, ping pong, individual games) in a common area
- High-Five Thursday
- Baseball joke book - share a baseball-related humorous story, quote or joke at the beginning of meetings.
- Toss a ball to the speaker: If they drop it, everyone throws their hands into the air and shouts "You Loon!"

Events

- Host a kickball game or league: This could be a one-time event or a kickball season. Teams could include full-time employees and their families, full-time and gameday staff, or some combination. Staff could select songs to play over the loudspeakers when they come up to "bat."
- Loons Formal - After NYE event in early January. Annual themed event for Loons staff and significant others. Catered event (no staff working). Themed - 1st year 80's prom theme? Give staff an opportunity to nominate/vote on themes.
- Loonsgiving Feast - on concourse in November.
- Disc Golf Tournament - Purchase discs, Dan to die custom Loons theme on disc. Reverse awards for highest scores.
- Kayaking Trip - Rent kayaks from Ike's Mobile Kayak, half-day trip from Meridian launch to Chippewa Nature Center followed by drinks downtown.
- Cornhole League - Common off day, could utilize Larkin Beer Garden for Happy Hour (Mon-Wed).

Loons Play Interventions

Events (continued)

- Staff BP
- Bus trip to MI baseball game – Lansing, West Michigan, or Tigers. Loons cover cost of bussing, tickets, & stipend.
- Beach Day – Go to Higgins Lake, Tiff to coordinate.
- Season Wrap Party – Mudd’s house. Catered food & drinks. Full-time staff and families. Wiffle ball field and on-field promos in back yard. Hire DJ or band.
- The Gondy’s – Reinstitute. Season-end awards party for promotions & production teams. Create silly awards, show bloopers reel, food & drinks on the Loons.
- Bonfire @ Tiff’s house – Fall event?
- Halloween Staff party – Adults only, costume party. Could work with Sound
- Productions for DJ, lighting.
- Staff on-field promo day – Grill out for lunch, staff play on-field doing between inning promos. Could also make part of fall planning session. Task staff with creating a new between inning promo, staff votes on top 3, then execute on field last planning session day.
- Staff Lunch Cookouts - Buy a Blackstone for cooking out, plan for days when team is out of town, make a common day of week and commit to once per month in-season.

Advice from Loons

DIVE INTO LIFE

PANAS

Positive and Negative Affect

The PANAS scales consist of twenty words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each word and then circle the response that corresponds with the way you felt over the last few days.

All questions must be completed for this questionnaire to be scored.

		Very Slightly/Not At All	A Little	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
1	Interested	1	2	3	4	5
2	Distressed	1	2	3	4	5
3	Excited	1	2	3	4	5
4	Upset	1	2	3	4	5
5	Strong	1	2	3	4	5
6	Guilty	1	2	3	4	5
7	Scared	1	2	3	4	5
8	Hostile	1	2	3	4	5
9	Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
10	Proud	1	2	3	4	5
11	Irritable	1	2	3	4	5
12	Alert	1	2	3	4	5
13	Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
14	Inspired	1	2	3	4	5
15	Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
16	Determined	1	2	3	4	5
17	Attentive	1	2	3	4	5
18	Jittery	1	2	3	4	5
19	Active	1	2	3	4	5
20	Afraid	1	2	3	4	5

PANAS Scoring Procedure: Two Subscales, with Scores Ranging from 10 to 50

1. Positive Affect: Total sum for the following items- 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19
2. Negative Affect: Total sum for the following items- 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20

Higher scores on Positive Affect indicate greater intensity of positive emotions.

Higher scores on Negative Affect indicate greater intensity of negative emotions.

**Positive and negative affect can vary independently. They can go up together, down together, move in opposite directions, or remain unchanged.*

(Watson et al.,1988)

Employee Satisfaction

Employee Satisfaction Survey

The survey consists of five statements describing experiences and beliefs about the workplace. Read each statement and then circle the response that best corresponds to your experience.

All questions should be completed for this questionnaire to be scored.

1. Overall, I am satisfied with my position with the Loons and with the organization.

Strongly disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Strongly agree

2. I often look forward to arriving at work and seeing my colleagues.

Strongly disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Strongly agree

3. Working for the Loons is fun.

Strongly disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Strongly agree

4. My job is challenging, engaging, and meaningful to me.

Strongly disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Strongly agree

5. The Loons organization really takes care of its employees.

Strongly disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Strongly agree

Scoring Procedure

Employee satisfaction scores on this survey can range from 5-20, with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction with the workplace. Add the total score of each respondent, assigning the following point values to each response:

Strongly disagree: 1

Somewhat disagree: 2

Somewhat agree: 3

Strongly agree: 4

Add the total scores for all respondents and divide by the number of respondents to get an average score for the organization.