



The Most Innovative Keynote
Speakers
in Europe to
Watch in 2026



Annika Månsson
Founder & CEO of Happy at Work

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Self-awareness, self-care,
and self-leadership are
not soft skills. They are
survival skills in today's
work environment





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We spend close to a third
of our lives at work. If that
time makes people sick,
then something in the
system is fundamentally
wrong
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Helping Organisations Align Human Well-Being with Long-Term Performance

Work has changed quietly but deeply over the last few decades. The pace has increased, boundaries between work and life have blurred, and pressure has become constant rather than occasional. Many people are not struggling because they lack skill or motivation, but because the way work is organised today leaves little room for recovery, reflection, or balance. Burnout, once seen as an exception, has become part of everyday conversation, raising uncomfortable questions about how sustainable modern work really is.

These questions sit at the centre of *Annika Månsson's* work. For over eighteen years, she has worked with leaders, teams, and individuals across industries to understand how workplaces can support both performance and human well-being.

As *founder & CEO of Happy at Work*, founded in Geneva, Switzerland, she brings together coaching, leadership development, and keynote speaking to focus on practical ways of building healthier working environments. Rather than asking people to push harder, her work looks at how leadership behaviour, team culture, and everyday habits shape how work is experienced, helping organisations create conditions where people can stay engaged, resilient, and effective over time.

Seeing Work Through a Human Lens

After spending nearly fifteen years with the Danone Group, working on the Evian brand, Annika slowly began to look at work differently. Over time, she became more aware of how much of life is shaped by our jobs. When she realised that most people spend close to 10,000 days at work, almost a third of their lives, the thought stayed with her. It made her question what those years feel like for the people living them.

Her experience in a demanding and competitive corporate environment showed her how strongly performance is pushed and measured. At the same time, it revealed something equally important that was often overlooked. The way people are treated, how engaged they feel, and how they cope emotionally all play a significant role in how well they perform over the long term. Through her everyday work and interactions, Annika saw that sustainable success depends on people feeling respected and supported, not just driven to deliver results.

Annika is Swedish and lived in Sweden for the first twenty years of her life. She has kept the farm where she was born in the south of Sweden, where she owns land and forest. Part of the land is used for organic cultivation, and she is currently learning how to manage the forest in a sustainable way. The time she spends there is deeply restorative for her, offering space to slow down, reflect, and recharge. This connection to nature continues to shape how she thinks about sustainability, balance, and long-term well-being, both in life and at work.

As these observations grew stronger, her interests began to shift. She found herself wanting to work more closely with people rather than staying focused on products and processes. Around her, she noticed colleagues and friends becoming exhausted, stressed, and burnt out. What troubled her was not only the exhaustion itself, but the fact that it was rarely addressed openly or constructively. Stress had become normalised, and the expectation seemed to be that people simply had to cope. Annika felt strongly that work should never make someone unwell or sick.

That decision led Annika to start Happy at Work in 2008. It grew out of what she had seen and experienced over the years, not from ideas on paper or passing conversations. She wanted to change how organisations think about work by bringing the focus back to the people doing it every day. At the heart of her work was a belief she still holds closely. When people feel supported and cared for at work, they are more likely to stay healthy, engaged, and do their work well over time.

Understanding Work Through People's Experiences

As Annika's work grew beyond her own corporate experience, she began working closely with people across countries, industries, and roles. Over time, she has worked with more than 12,000 individuals, listening to their experiences of work, stress, motivation, and purpose. What stood out to her was not how different their stories were, but how often the same concerns kept coming up.

From these conversations, Annika noticed that one of the strongest needs people have at work is connection. People want to feel supported and know there is someone they can speak to when things become difficult. Trust, recognition, and honest feedback shape how safe people feel at work. When these elements are missing, engagement drops, even among capable and motivated individuals.

As she continued listening, another pattern became clear. People want their work to feel meaningful. While earning a salary is necessary, it rarely sustains motivation on its own. Many people want to see the impact of what they do and feel that their skills are being used. Annika often saw people working far below their potential, not because they lacked ability, but because they lacked clarity, resources, or a clear sense of direction.

Over time, the effect of constant pressure also became impossible to ignore. Annika saw how physical and mental fatigue were affecting people's ability to cope. Stress had become a daily reality for many, yet few knew how to recover from it. For her, resilience is about maintaining balance and being able to regain energy when things become demanding or uncertain. It is also closely tied to purpose, as people want to understand why their work matters in the larger picture of their lives.

Looking at these patterns across thousands of conversations, Annika came to see that stress and burnout are not isolated issues. A large part of the global workforce reports feeling stressed on a daily basis, with many showing early signs of burnout. She views this not as a narrow workplace problem, but as a wider issue that affects individuals, organisations, and society as a whole.

Putting People Back at the Centre of Work

After talking about how widespread stress and burnout have become, Annika comes back to a core point. People spend a huge part of their lives at work, and that time cannot be treated lightly. If work takes up so many years, it has to be something people can live with, grow through, and stay healthy in.

She often says that even as technology and artificial intelligence continue to shape how we work, leadership will always come back to people. Tools may change, and systems may become faster, but empathy, trust, and psychological safety remain essential. In her view, leaders are not replaced by technology, but they do risk being left behind if they ignore how their people feel and function at work.

Annika also sees a clear shift in expectations among younger generations entering the workforce. Many are no longer willing to stay in roles simply for security or routine. They want a reason to be there. They want to feel valued, understood, and supported. For her, this shift is not a problem to manage, but a signal that work needs to evolve.

From her perspective, the ability to attract and retain people now depends largely on how organisations lead and treat them. This means being willing to question existing habits, pressures, and definitions of success. In fast-moving environments, the real challenge is finding ways to stay competitive without losing sight of the people doing the work.

When Annika began her work in this space in 2008, conversations around workplace well-being were still rare. She never saw well-being as an added benefit or a bonus. For her, it was always something basic. Over the years, that belief has only deepened. Reducing burnout, supporting mental health, and helping people stay engaged are not optional if organisations want to last. They are part of what makes work sustainable for both people and businesses.



Well-being at work is not a luxury, and it is not a nice thing to add later. Today, it is a real competitive advantage

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The future of leadership
is still deeply human.
Empathy, trust, and
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Taking the Conversation to Larger Rooms

As Annika's coaching work began to grow, keynote speaking followed almost naturally. People who attended her sessions started asking her to speak to larger groups about the same topics she was already working on in smaller settings. Questions around emotional intelligence, leadership, and how people work together were coming up repeatedly, and there was a clear demand to address them at a broader level.

Alongside her coaching practice, Annika was already leading workshops and delivering keynote talks. Over time, this became a steady part of her work rather than a separate path. She continued working closely with individuals, particularly in areas such as post-burnout recovery and leadership development, while also spending a significant part of her time inside organisations, training managers and leadership teams.

What appealed to her was the balance between the two. Coaching allowed her to work deeply with individuals, while keynote speaking gave her the opportunity to reach more people at once and spark reflection on a larger scale. Through workshops and talks, she could challenge leaders and teams to think differently about how they work, lead, and take care of people over the long term.

Annika found that speaking to live audiences brought a different kind of energy into her work. The interaction, the questions, and the shared moments of recognition were deeply motivating for her. It reinforced what she already believed. Inspiring leaders to create healthier and more balanced workplaces was not just part of her work; it was her purpose. For Annika, sustainable performance begins with healthy people, and speaking became one of the ways she could carry that message forward.

Turning Ideas into Everyday Practice

One of the most meaningful experiences in Annika's work came through a long-term engagement with a global pharmaceutical company. The organisation had teams spread across several countries, including Switzerland, India, and the United States. People from many nationalities were working together, which added layers of complexity to leadership, communication, and collaboration.

Annika worked closely with the leader of these teams for nearly a year. Alongside this, she regularly supported the teams through workshops and group sessions, both in person and online. The focus was not on pushing for fast results, but on building steady ways of working together. Small, concrete practices were introduced to help people share more openly, reflect on how they were feeling, and better understand one another.

The work addressed several challenges at the same time. Leadership behaviours were examined, well-being and resilience were discussed openly, and cultural differences were brought into the conversation rather than ignored. In the early stages, progress felt slow. With different expectations and ways of working, hesitation and resistance were common.

Gradually, things began to shift. Communication became more open, trust started to grow, and collaboration felt less strained. These changes were reflected in everyday work. Engagement levels improved, absenteeism reduced, and people showed a stronger commitment to staying with their teams.

Part of this journey unfolded during the COVID period, which brought additional pressure and uncertainty. Despite this, the teams remained connected and continued to perform well. Annika supported not only the leader but also individual team members when needed, alongside longer training sessions that allowed for deeper reflection.

What stood out in this experience was not a single breakthrough moment, but the way change built up over time. Consistent support, honest conversations, and a willingness to look at how people work together created a lasting impact. For Annika, it reaffirmed that meaningful change is rarely immediate, but it becomes visible when people feel supported and heard.

Creating Energy That Leads to Action

The experience with global teams also shaped how Annika approaches keynote speaking. Working closely with leaders and teams over time showed her that change does not come from listening alone. People may agree with ideas in the moment, but a real shift happens when they experience those ideas for themselves.

This understanding strongly influences how Annika designs her keynotes. Rather than delivering a talk where people sit back and listen, she focuses on activating the room. Participants are invited to engage from the start through simple exercises, shared reflections, and practical tools. Even in a short keynote, she creates moments where people interact, move, and think together.

Energy plays an important role in this approach, not as performance, but as involvement. When people are engaged physically and mentally, the message lands differently. Annika uses this energy to help people connect the ideas being discussed to their own work and leadership challenges, rather than leaving them as abstract concepts.



Because of this, her sessions tend to feel less like speeches and more like shared experiences. People leave with tools they can use immediately and a clearer sense of how small changes can show up in their daily work. For Annika, speaking is about helping people experience new ways of working and leading, so the impact continues well beyond the room.

Making Well-Being Part of Daily Work

What Annika believes strongly is that a keynote should not end when people leave the room. Ideas may stay for a while, but habits only change when people know what to do next. That is why her sessions always include practical tools that participants can start using immediately, often as early as the next day.



One of the first tools she introduces helps people pause and take stock of their well-being at work. Instead of abstract discussions, participants are invited to reflect on practical questions: How do they feel at work right now? How sustainable does their current pace feel? What is working well, and what feels off?

Annika uses a concrete tool, the well-being wheel, based on the “3R” methodology she developed. ‘Relations, Results, and Resilience,’ inspired by Daniel Kahneman’s work. By completing the wheel in just a few minutes, followed by reflection or a conversation between participants, each person gains a clear picture of their priorities and the actions they can take to improve.

It is also an excellent tool for managers to open up meaningful, concrete conversations about well-being and mental health, both one-to-one and within their teams—because it provides a shared language and a clear starting point.

The aim is not judgment, but awareness. Once people see where they stand, it becomes easier to decide what needs attention.

She also works with tools that focus on relationships at work. Through hands-on exercises and concrete examples, participants explore how they communicate, how they support one another, and how trust is built in everyday interactions. These are not theoretical models, but small shifts that can change how teams work together.

Another important area Annika focuses on is how people use their strengths. She often introduces what she calls the “genius zone,” the type of work where people feel fully engaged and in flow. Participants reflect on what they enjoy doing, what they are naturally good at, and how often they actually get to use those strengths. From there, the conversation moves to how they can shape their roles or daily tasks to spend more time in that zone, which supports both performance and long-term sustainability.



Resilience is the third pillar of her work. Annika shares tools that help individuals and teams understand their energy levels, recognise stress signals, and build routines that support recovery. Drawing from her background in positive psychology and neuroscience, she also introduces simple practices that support mental clarity and focus at work. This includes caring for the brain through rest, focus, connection, and meaningful breaks, not as extras, but as part of everyday working life.

For leaders in the room, these tools serve another purpose. Annika wants them to leave with a clear sense that they can do something differently. Whether it is changing how they communicate, how they check in with their teams, or how they manage pressure, the goal is always the same. Make well-being and performance part of daily work, not something discussed once and forgotten.

The Moments That Define the Work

Because Annika’s work is grounded in practical tools and everyday application, the way she measures success is equally grounded. Formal awards or public recognition have never been central to how she evaluates her impact. What matters more to her is what happens after the session is over.

Over the years, she has received consistent feedback from people who tell her that something shifted for them. A leader, realising their responsibility, goes beyond results. A manager notices how their way of communicating affects their team. Someone recognising a pattern in their behaviour and deciding to change it. These moments, she says, are what give meaning to her work.

She sees this most clearly in the conversations that follow her sessions. During one intervention with a large audit firm, the topic was leading with empathy. It was a high-pressure environment, highly competitive, and driven by performance. Empathy was not something people openly talked about or felt comfortable exploring.

What followed stood out. The questions that came from the group were thoughtful and honest. People engaged deeply with the topic, not in theory, but in practice. Through guided exercises, listening simulations, and real-time interactions, participants began to see how empathy plays out in daily work, in meetings, feedback conversations, and leadership decisions.

Many shared that they had never looked at their role in that way before. More importantly, they felt they now had the tools to act differently. For Annika, this kind of response is the most meaningful form of recognition. When people leave with greater awareness and the confidence to change how they work with others, she knows the work has landed.

Redefining What Good Leadership Means

As Annika's work evolved, her focus became sharper. For her, well-being at work was never meant to be an optional extra or a passing initiative. She saw it as a real advantage for organisations that want to attract people, keep them, and help them grow over time. Without it, she believes, talent eventually walks away.

At the centre of her work is a simple idea. Work should feel like a choice, not a constant state of survival. Across different countries and cultures, she has seen how many people stay in roles because they feel they have no alternative, even when the cost to their health is high. That belief has shaped how she approaches leadership, culture, and change.

Additionally, as technology and artificial intelligence continue to reshape work, Annika does not see leadership becoming less important. She sees it becoming more human. Tools may change, roles may shift, but leaders who ignore engagement, well-being, and mental health will struggle to hold on to people. The future, in her view, belongs to leaders who know how to work with technology without losing sight of the people behind it.

This thinking has also shaped her current writing. Annika is working on her first book, centred around a question many employees quietly ask: why should I work for you? The book explores how leaders can become places people want to grow, rather than reasons they leave. It looks at burnout prevention, mental health, and how workplaces can be designed to support people over the long run.

Creating Space for People to Breathe

Alongside her work with organisations, Annika remains deeply concerned with individuals who are struggling at work. Over the years, she has supported hundreds of people dealing with stress, exhaustion, and burnout. Many reached a breaking point after ignoring the signs for too long. From these experiences, one message comes up again and again. This is not a sprint. Working life spans decades, and sustainability matters.

She encourages people to stay connected to themselves, to notice early signals of stress, and to ask for help before reaching exhaustion. Constant connectivity, digital overload, and uncertainty place heavy demands on the mind. Without conscious care, people lose their ability to listen to their own limits.

Annika often speaks about three practices she believes everyone can learn. Self-awareness, noticing how work is affecting the body and mind. Self-care, taking responsibility for rest, recovery, and balance. And self-leadership, making intentional choices rather than running on autopilot.

During the COVID period, this approach became especially visible. When a large engineering institution in Switzerland grew concerned about the well-being of thousands of employees working in isolation, Annika helped set up an anonymous coaching programme. People from around the world were given access to confidential support during a time of extreme uncertainty. Through this work, she believes many were able to regain stability and avoid burnout.

For Annika, this is what the work is ultimately about. Helping people stay well enough to keep going. Helping leaders understand their responsibility. And helping organisations build cultures where performance does not come at the cost of people's health.

Shaping What Comes Next at Work

When Annika thinks about what comes next, she does not see a sharp change in direction. Instead, she wants to go deeper into the same questions that have guided her work for years, now made more urgent by AI-driven change. How can work be designed so that it does not wear people down? How can mental health be protected before people reach a breaking point? And how can leaders become people others genuinely want to work with, especially when roles and expectations are constantly shifting?

She is particularly interested in how leadership needs to evolve as work speeds up. Technology and artificial intelligence are transforming tasks and decision-making, but Annika believes the human side of leadership matters more than ever. People still need clarity, trust, and a sense that their work has meaning. Without that, no system or tool can hold a team together for long.

These ideas also sit at the heart of the book she is currently writing. Through it, Annika explores what makes people stay, grow, and feel committed to their work. She looks at burnout, leadership behaviour, and the small everyday choices that shape whether work feels sustainable or exhausting.

Going forward, Annika wants to keep working with leaders and organisations that are willing to ask uncomfortable questions and make thoughtful changes. For her, the future of work is not about chasing trends. It is about creating environments where people can do good work without losing themselves in the process.

“My work is about helping workplaces become a choice, not a survival mode”



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