

Why Be Happy?

Why should we put forth all this effort in order to be happier? In case anyone needed convincing, the scientific evidence reveals many compelling reasons to aspire for greater happiness and fulfillment. The evidence proves that becoming happier doesn't just make you "feel good", it turns out that happiness brings with it multiple fringe benefits. Compared with their less happy peers, happier people are more sociable and energetic, more charitable and cooperative and better liked by others. Not surprisingly then, happier people are more likely to get married and to stay married and to have richer networks of friends and social support. They also show more flexibility and ingenuity in their thinking and are more productive in their jobs. They are better leaders and negotiators and earn more money. They are more resilient in the face of hardship, have stronger immune systems, and are physically healthier. Happy people even live longer.



I use the term happiness to refer to the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful and worthwhile. However most of us don't need a definition of happiness because we instinctively know whether we are happy or not.

So, how do you measure the degree to which you are a happy or an unhappy person? Because no appropriate happiness thermometer exist, researchers generally rely on self-reports. But we do know that one of the great obstacles to attaining happiness is that most of our beliefs about what will make us happy are in fact erroneous. Yet they have been drummed into us, socialized by parents and families and role models and reinforced by the stories and images ever present in our culture. Let's take a look at the three major myths about happiness that we tend to fall for.

Myth No. 1--Happiness Must Be "Found"

The first myth is that happiness is something that we must find, that it is out there somewhere, a place just beyond our reach. We could get there, yes, but only if the right things would come to pass. Don't be the person who is waiting for this, that, or the other thing to happen before you can be happy. If you're not happy today then you won't be happy tomorrow unless you take things into your own hands and take action. Happiness is not out there for us to find. The reason it's not out there it that it's inside us. It is a state of mind, a way of perceiving and approaching ourselves and the world in which we reside. So, if you want to be happy tomorrow, the day after, and for the rest of your life, you can do it by choosing to change and manage your state of mind.

Myth No. 2—Happiness Lies In Changing Our Circumstances

Another big fallacy is the notion that if only something about the circumstances of our lives would change, then we would be happy. This kind of thinking is what is called “I would be happy IF _____” or “I will be happy WHEN _____”. This logic is shared by some of us who remember periods in our lives when we experienced real happiness but think that we could never recapture the exact set of circumstances that brought this real happiness about. The reality is that the elements that determined our happiness in the past, and can make for future happiness, are with us right now and are right here waiting to be taken advantage of.

Myth No. 3—You Either Have It Or You Don’t

This notion that we are born happy or unhappy is totally wrong. Many of us, especially those of us who are not very happy, believe that our unhappiness is genetic and there’s really nothing we can do about it. To the contrary growing research demonstrates persuasively that we can overcome our genetic programming.

I hope that you have now accepted the fact that the specifics of your life circumstance, unless they are truly dire, are really not the crux of your unhappiness. If you’re unhappy with your job, your friends, your marriage, your salary or your looks, the first step you should take toward reaching greater lasting happiness is to put those things aside in your mind for now. Hard as it is, try not to reflect on them. Keep reminding yourself that these are really not what are preventing you from getting happier. It will take a great of discipline and self-control, and you may lapse, but it’s important to unlearn this commonly held but false belief.

There are some things that we can do every day to increase our happiness. There are three happiness-increasing activities that will aim to transform the way we think about our lives, finding something to be glad about, and not sweating the small stuff.

Happiness Activity No. 1-Expressing Gratitude

Gratitude is many things to many people. It is defined as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life.” Gratitude is an antidote to negative emotions, a neutralizer of envy, hostility, worry and irritation. People who are consistently grateful have been found to be relatively happier, more energetic and more hopeful and to report experiencing more frequent positive emotions. So list five things you are grateful for now.

Happiness Activity No. 2-Cultivating Optimism

Being optimistic involves a choice about how you see the world. Looking on the bright side, finding the silver lining in a cloud, noticing what’s right (rather than what’s wrong), giving yourself the benefit of



the doubt, feeling good about your future and the future of the world, or simply trusting that you can get through the day all are optimism strategies. Cultivating optimism has a lot in common with cultivating gratitude. Both strategies involve the habit of striving to make out the positive side of your situation. Building optimism, however, is about not only celebrating the present and the past but anticipating a bright future.

For cultivating optimism you can begin to practice it today by identifying your long range goals and then break them into weekly goals. Then decide on the steps each week you need to take to get to your goal. When you write your goal down, you will release within you an energy or power called Achievement Drive which will propel you toward your goals.

Happiness Activity No. 3-Nuturing Social Relationships

Happy people are exceptionally good at their friendships, families, and intimate relationships. The happier a person is the more likely he or she is to have a large circle of friends or companions, a romantic partner and ample social support.

If you begin today to improve and cultivate your relationships, you will reap the gift of positive emotions. In turn, the enhanced feelings of happiness will help you attract more and higher-quality relationships, which will make you even happier, and so on in a continuous positive feedback loop.

Following are some strategies for increasing your happiness in this area.

- Friendships don't just happen, they are made.
- Show interest in other people and offer them encouragement.
- Once a friendship is formed create rituals that allow you to get together and be in touch on a regular basis.
- Be helpful and supportive when your friends need it, and affirm their successes.

There are multiple perspectives of the world, of yourself, your family, your career, your living situation. Deciding to become happier entails making a choice about which perspective you take and acknowledging that ***“the choice is in your hands”***.

By Alice Taylor Baker
CEO
Success Coach Systems

