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CORNWALL



The Problem With Happiness – And the Solution

Ask almost anyone what they want for themselves and they will tell you they want to be happy. On the face of it this seems a reasonable enough aspiration that we can all understand and agree with. That is, until we actually sit back and think about it. My profession means that I **do** have to sit back and think about it and happiness is actually a bit of a problem.

Let's take the word 'Happiness' what does it mean? I have to assume that most people who come to me claiming to want to be happy, do not envisage a perpetual state of "belly laugh" euphoria. This kind of happiness is great for an evening but unrealistic, and downright painful in any sustainable sense. So, what do they mean? What do **you** envisage when you say you want to be happy?

I think that the notion of happiness is bound up in a number of differing states and that happiness to one person, is not the same as happiness to another. Talking to clients, their ideas of happiness range from satisfaction and contentment, through to pleasure and enjoyment. You may have your own ideas but the one thing that seems true of all definitions is that happiness is not a permanent, long lasting character trait. Happiness is a fleeting and fluctuating state, bound up in positive feelings and emotions.

This is not what most people want to hear. It's not what they had in mind and it suddenly makes their simple wish to be 'happy' seem unattainable. When we look around us to the people who are in possession of everything that we seek to be happy; the privileged, successful, attractive and let's face it, wealthy elite, they are often no happier than us. Behind the mansions, and models, the monopolies and money, they are shown to be addicts and abusers, mad, bad and sad. How can this happen? How can it be? If they can't be happy, how can we?

Don't be despondent. This is actually great news. Rather than moving happiness out of your grasp, once you understand the answer to this question, happiness is within touching distance. One of the main problems in achieving happiness is that we confuse it with pleasure. Now don't get me wrong, a little pleasure can be a great medicine but like any drug it can be abused.

Pleasure is a great short-term solution to soothe discomfort and smooth over the emotional cracks. It feeds our appetites and stimulates the pleasure centres in our brains placing chemical bookmarks that actively encourage us to rinse and repeat.....'the pleasure treadmill'. People for whom money is no option, those who

have power and a great deal of time on their hands (and a great deal of emptiness within) have the means and the motive to take up residence in the pleasure dome. Before long, a habit has formed and they are addicted, need has become necessity, pleasure is their prison and the freedom to be happy is their ultimate loss.

Here's the thing, in our privileged western world this is true of most of us to some extent. What are we addicted to? Stuff mostly; for some it's footwear, for some it's branded clothes, for others it's a massive car that is mostly underoccupied. Some overdo food, others are addicted to sex or romance, some like booze or getting stoned and who isn't addicted to their mobile phone? If it feels good, we do it! We confuse pleasure with happiness and so when the negative feelings surface we push them down with the "feel good" factor.

If you remember nothing else from this blog remember this, there is no thing and no one that can make you happy. The only exception is the person reading these words. Yay!!!

This is surely some of the best news that you can ever receive. The state of happiness does not come from outside of yourself and it certainly cannot be bought. It may seem un-believable, but **happiness is a choice**. If you want to be happy you must choose to be happy. However, It is a choice you must make every day and multiple times a day. In exactly the same way that you choose your addiction of choice to get pleasure from stuff and people, you must choose to recognise, appreciate and actively pursue and embrace happiness. You have to develop a happiness habit.

In the beginning it will feel strange. Developing a positive habit is not always easy at first. The best way to do it, is to attach it to habits you already have. Do it in small steps and persevere. It takes about 21 days to develop a habit. We are more likely to succeed if it is fun, if we have support and if others are sharing the journey. Don't worry, you don't have to give up your other addictions (unless you want to because they are destructive); you just have to add one more. It is likely that your existing addictions will fade somewhat as you become happier, you simply won't need them in the same way.

So, are you prepared to give about 10-20 minutes a day over the next 21 days to see if you can develop the happiness habit?

See the next article for some ideas on how...

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The Path To Happiness (Following on from The Problem With Happiness)

What do you think when you look at this photo?



If you think “Brrrrr! That looks cold and dangerous, forbidding and isolated”. I would urge you to read on and hear me out. If you think, “That looks magical and clean, inviting and refreshing”. This blog is for you too because It’s all a matter of perspective.

Perspective really matters, perspective can be the difference between life and death, it can also be the difference between happiness and unhappiness. My knowledge of Positive Psychology and the routes to happiness means that I am going to share my journey with you and also challenge you to ask yourself some questions about your journey.

Know What Brings You Joy And Inject Joy Into Your Every Day

Anyone who knows me knows I like to walk in the countryside. I like taking photos of the natural world. The feelings I get from these activities are not just pleasure, they bring curiosity, interest, learning and a deep sense of joy.

Question: *What 3-5 things bring you positive emotions and feelings that you can insert into your day?*

Share Your Joy, Do Something For Others

During lockdown I shared my walks via my photos with my friends who can't get out or who live in more urban settings. I edit them and send them whenever I go for a walk. It takes time and commitment, but I know how much some people like to receive them and the sharing brings my friends closer to me.

Question: *How can you share your positives with others (bring a smile to their faces, bring them some interest or fun)?*

Value yourself, Be realistic And Be Safe

When it snowed, I couldn't wait to get out for a walk. Let's be clear though, I prepared. I had my phone, hat, gloves, wellies, 2-3 layers of warm clothes and I told people my route and when I planned to be back. I chose a familiar and relatively short route that had pathways and I left with plenty of time before it got dark.

Question: *How do you demonstrate your value and care for yourself on a daily basis?*

Don't Let Challenge Stunt Your Growth

Had I not prepared in this way I may well have felt ...cold, endangered, scared, and isolated. I also knew I had to be mindful of hidden dangers underfoot; branches, holes, mud, and ice. It's good to take care and be realistic about both your potential and your limitations.

It's also good to get out there, to travel hopefully and breathe, experience the magic of what's around the corner, gain a different perspective and change and grow every day.

Question: *In what ways do you travel hopefully? What do you hope for? How do you share that hope?*

Savour The Joy

When I stood on top of the ridge in that crisp air, I literally jumped for joy. I sang a happy song and savoured that moment. This may not seem sophisticated and grown up of me and I just don't care!

Little kids are great at savouring life. It's because they live in the moment. Little kids are also learning and growing in ways that we adults have simply abandoned. So, take some time to notice the season, the sights, sounds, smells and sensations of the world (you get all of this for free and it's the difference between existing and really living). Imagine that you are experiencing the world for the first time.

Question: *How often do you STOP and take some time just for you. BREATHE in the positives. Look at the world through the eyes of a happy child? Try it. I double dare you!!!!*

My Learning Today

Even when the world seems strange, and you feel a bit lost or disoriented there is always a path forward. My snowy walk lost much of its colour, it would have been easy to walk off the edge of a path. Strangely though, the signposts really seemed so much more prominent against all that white. I could see them from far off, mapping my route. At the same time, I noted that the dog walkers and farmers had been out before me. I walked in their footsteps and let their knowledge guide me. Just for the record looking back was only useful to note where I had been and how far I had travelled. You can't safely move forward whilst looking back. Sometimes we need to change our perspective to find our way forward and at other times there is no shame in walking in someone else's footsteps or taking a helping hand.

Question: *Who's footsteps have you walked in? Who follows you? Who can you offer a helping hand to?*

Positive Psychology has found that to move our world experience from negativity to positivity, we need to have a 3:1 ratio. So, for every one instance of frustration, anger, anxiety, and disappointment etc. we need 3 small flashes of, enthusiasm, happiness, contentment, and optimism etc. So, it's important to recognise, acknowledge and savour the good feelings.

Positive sharing grows happiness, as does helping others. Valuing ourselves and being compassionate to others are also positivity nourishers. Dwelling on the past and the negatives (regret and resentment) grow negativity, slow us down, keep us stuck and in some cases cause so much dis-ease (stress) that we get ill. Have a go at answering the questions above and see over the next week or two how you can grow the positives in your life and the lives of others.

This will influence your relationships, engagement in work and play, achievements, health and meaning in life, positively too and you will flourish.

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