

Eight Ways To Happiness: Steps Towards A More Satisfying Life

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Ways To Happiness: Can You Get Any Happier?

Is it possible to find ways to happiness, or are we stuck with a level of happiness determined by our nature? If our happiness is only defined by our genetic inheritance, then there would be little we could do to affect it. Researchers do think that a proportion of our happiness is fixed by our genes (called our set-point level), but this only accounts for about fifty percent of our propensity to be happy.



How much of our happiness is due to external circumstances? Not as much as you'd think. It's estimated that only 10% is due to circumstances, leaving around 40% open to influences under our own control. Work done by a number of positive psychologists has found that there are things we can do to lift our levels of happiness. Not just momentarily but on a more sustained basis.

Sonja Lyubomirsky (left), Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside, refers to "intentional activities" as ways in which we can influence our own happiness. Her research indicates that we can build habits which could help us

feel happier, and more satisfied, with work and life. Perhaps there *are* some practical ways to happiness.

If only 10% of our happiness is due to external circumstances then perhaps Dale Carnegie's 1930's statement still has much relevance: **"everybody in the world is seeking happiness – and there is one sure way to find it. That is by controlling your thoughts. Happiness doesn't depend on outward conditions. It depends on inner conditions."**

He quotes Abraham Lincoln as saying:

"most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Eight Ways To Happiness

So let's look at some of the advice put forward by Professor Lyubomirsky.

The following activities are based on research into finding, not just ways to happiness, but how to build more *sustained* happiness. The steps below are adapted from her work and indicate some practical ways to happiness, and how they might relate to the happy manager. Think through these steps for both your job and your home life.



1. Count your blessings - The Grateful Manager

- Write down three to five things for which you are currently thankful. Do this once a week. All too easily we can let negative thoughts dominate. Think particularly about what you have to be thankful for in your job, what things have helped others, what good does your organization contribute, and what is your role in this?

2. Practice acts of kindness - The Kind Manager

- Try to do both random and systematic acts – both in your wider life and at work. What kind acts can you do for your staff, your customers, your manager, another department?

3. Savour life's joys - The Joyful Manager

- Pay closer attention to life's pleasures. Appreciate what is around you. So much is missed by the rush and busyness we submit ourselves to at work. Daniel Nettle, in his book "Happiness: The Science Behind the Smile", points out that simply asking people to do pleasant things often makes them happier. His tongue in cheek observation is that "this staggeringly complex technique consists of determining which activities are pleasant, and doing more of them." So savour life's joys!!

4. Thank a mentor - The Thankful Manager

- Is there someone you owe a debt of gratitude to? Take the time to say what it is that they do/have done for you. Build an attitude of acknowledging and valuing the contribution of others. More widely this can be applied to how we show our appreciation of what others around us do. A thankful manager is someone who is able to recognize, accept and receive from others. Often being able to receive, places us in a position where we have more to give!

5. Learn to forgive - The Forgiving Manager

- Let go of anger and resentment. Inability to forgive is associated with persistent dwelling on past situations and being unable to move on. Think of work situations where you need to let go of resentment, frustration and forgive someone. "Unforgiveness" is what lies behind a blame culture which all too often is cited as being rife in our organizations. The workplace can be an energy sapping place. Practicing forgiveness and learning to receive from others, whether it be help, advice or other forms of support, are crucial to generating positive energy in the workplace. And to renewing our own energy. Bearing grudges or anger and resentment is exhausting – let go!!

6. Invest time and energy in friends and family - The Giving Manager

- According to researchers, the biggest factor affecting our happiness satisfaction seems to be strong personal relationships. How have you invested time this week with friends and family? Build this into your priorities. Have you friends at work?



7. Take care of your body - The Healthy Manager

- Get plenty of sleep, exercise, smile and laugh. All these enhance your mood in the short term.

8. Develop strategies for coping with stress - The Mindful Manager

- There is no avoiding hard times. Being resilient enough to cope with them is something we can try to do. Building your own personal philosophy seems to help, whether it is religious, or enshrined in axioms such as: "this too shall pass" and "that which doesn't kill me can only make me stronger."

Adapted from Claudia Wallis: *The New Science of Happiness*, Time Magazine, January 2005

Is The Purpose Of Life To Be Happy?

Professor Lyubomirsky suggests that not all of these practices will fit everybody. Different people will find different activities more rewarding than others, and different ways to happiness. Don't overdo it! Lyubomirsky advises that you try and keep the activities fresh, stimulating and exciting. Overdoing it can have the effect of nullifying the advantage. "Happiness is often the by-product of an enjoyable experience, but perhaps it cannot be a deliberate goal in itself."

Sonja Lyubomirsky has an excellent web-site (<http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~sonja/papers.html>) which is well worth a visit. It contains both lengthy research papers and shorter articles covering many aspects of happiness. You might find two articles particularly useful: "Towards a Durable Happiness" and "Achieving Sustainable New Happiness: Prospects, Practices and Prescriptions." Lyubomirsky's forthcoming book: *The How of Happiness: A scientific guide to getting the life you want* (Penguin Press), is also something for happy managers to watch out for.

It might be tempting to read these "eight ways to happiness" quickly, but in doing so you could easily miss the significance of some of the steps. Instead, take your time in reading each, before taking action. Why not commit to trying some of these steps over a six week period, building some habits around them. Look for opportunities to build your own happiness, in your life, but especially at work. If they work for you, share them with someone else. Start the ball rolling!

Perhaps putting some of these habits and practices in place may move us toward the essence of Ralph Waldo Emerson's words:

"The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honourable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

Perhaps the way to happiness is not to focus on happiness!

So use the "eight ways to happiness" to make a difference to yourself and to others. A life lived and lived well.

