

Happiness: A Key To Success

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

We're all interested in making our workplaces more productive and successful. Most people believe that success leads to happiness, but the truth is happiness is the precursor to success, not the result. When you are happier, your success rates increase. According to research done by Shawn Achor at Harvard University, happy sales people outsell their unhappy colleagues. Students who are happy out-perform their unhappy peers. Happy doctors make more accurate diagnosis than unhappy doctors. Happy people are healthier people. The list goes on and on. The best part is that this isn't just a motivational speech—it's science. It's how our brains work. So I want to suggest strategies for living a happier life.

1. Take 100% responsibility for your own happiness. If you aren't happy, don't expect anyone else to make you happy. I have certainly done my share of blaming others and myself for the way I feel. The trap is giving over my power to what other people say, to what other people do, to the circumstances around me - and becoming a victim. A happy or unhappy life is your own creation. If you remember this, you won't find fault with anybody or anything, including yourself. You are your own best friend, even as you decide to learn to take responsibility for your happiness.

2. Decide to be happy. That's right. Happiness is a choice, a decision. It's an inside job. You don't need your external environment or circumstances to be different in order to be happy. I've met people dealing with cancer, or are the parents of a special needs child, or in the midst of a divorce or financial difficulties, but remain happy. Don't wait for retirement or a better boss or a better job or a better house or a better marriage to make you happy. If you aren't happy now, you won't be happy in the future. You can decide to start being happy now. As Abraham Lincoln said, "Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be." Happiness comes from within; it is independent of your externals. Happiness is not a destination; it's method of travel.

3. Accept unhappiness as a part of life. Where did we ever get the notion that we should be happy all the time? One of life's purposes is to learn and grow, and that won't happen if life is always easy. "Life is difficult," wrote Scott Peck. "Once you understand and accept that, then life is no longer difficult." Learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Otherwise you'll never grow, much less experience a lot of happiness in your life. Happy people aren't attached to being happy all the time, just like they aren't attached to the externals in their life to make them happy. They know happiness will return after the inevitable slumps. Extend some grace to yourself when you are unhappy, and you'll be kinder to others in the process.

4. Have a dream. What inspires you to get up early, to go the extra mile, to learn the extra skills? How can you be happy without a dream, without hope, without a cause, a vision beyond your own self-interest and daily to-do lists? The purpose of having a dream is not to achieve it but to inspire you to become the kind of person it takes to achieve it.

5. Maintain your self-respect through integrity. Integrity is about living your life in alignment with your values, resulting in self-respect which sustains happiness. Self-respect emerges from the integrity of keeping promises to yourself and others - being a person that can be counted on. A great way to build self-respect is to hold yourself accountable for consistent disciplines that are aligned with your values. Maintaining consistent habits - such as a regular exercise regime, a consistent spiritual practice, or keeping a habit of studying or developing a talent - in the face of the fluctuating demands and emotions of life, will help to keep your integrity, and thus your self-respect, in tact. Learning to live a disciplined life - choosing character over comfort - fuels self-respect and subsequent happiness.

6. Don't use unhappiness as a motivator. Our society is heavily conditioned not to change until we are unhappy enough. We *frighten* ourselves out of smoking cigarettes using threats of emphysema and lung cancer. We yell at our kids hoping that if we cause them enough pain they'll change. You don't have to cause intense suffering to yourself or those around you in order to change. You can make changes in your life even when you are choosing to be happy.

7. Practice service. Happy people are givers, people who give for the sake of giving. Bring a servant heart to your life. Look around you and you will find all kinds of ways to make the world a better place. Be a builder, not a destroyer. Be a giver, not a taker. Choose service over self-interest. Bring an abundant mind-set to everything you do. Self-centered people who live in a state of entitlement are not happy people.

8. Act your way into right feelings; don't feel your way into right actions. Don't wait for happiness to come to you. Take the right action, and happiness will result. If you are feeling unhappy, show caring and kindness for someone else. Be cheerful, even if you don't feel like it. Put in a good day's work. Take the right action, and the feeling of happiness will follow - eventually.

9. Hang out with happy people. If you swim in a cesspool it won't take you long to stink. Get rid of the complainers, the blamers, and the people who pull you down, and start hanging around people who challenge you, who inspire you, and who are fun to be with. Happy people care about others so it doesn't take long to feel apart of the happy crowd.

10. Choose gratitude. If you can't quite get your head around choosing happiness, start with gratitude. Don't wait for gratitude in order to be happy. Be grateful now. You can always find a reason to be grateful. Remember the old saying, "I used to complain I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet!"

Happiness is like a muscle that, for most of us, could use some developing. You can train your brain to be happy just as you can train any muscle to perform a challenging task. It starts with a simple decision that you are going to practice happiness, even when you might feel sorry for yourself. For some us, this training comes more easily than for others. But stick with it. There is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way.

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