

The Eleven Characteristics of Happy People

Happiness Is... a million dollars? love? success? a warm puppy? The “11 Essentials” for a Positive Mental Attitude

For the majority, happiness is what life is all about and the search never goes out of fashion. Most decisions are made on the basis *Will it make me happy?* Our goals, dreams, aspirations, and even our fantasies revolve around happiness. Happiness is the balm of the heart and soul as well as medicine for the body. Studies indicate that the happier you are, the fewer physical ills you suffer, the slower you age, and the longer you live.

So what's the magic recipe? There's just no such thing as a one-size-fits-all formula for contentment. People are too different to find joy in the same things. However, certain factors seem to contribute to meaningful happiness. Here are the top eleven (each person has a different "priority order"):

- 1. Love yourself.** You'll never be completely happy until you do. Self-esteem is the foundation of contentment. If you love yourself you feel worthy, competent, ready to achieve, to work and love. How do you get there?
 - 1) With your mind (Positive Self-talk): I am a _____ (effective, intelligent, nice, neat, cool, fun, pleasant, etc.) person. It's especially important to engage in positive self-talk when you've just accomplished something you're proud of - like making a high grade on an exam or getting very good feedback on a difficult project you've just done well.
 - 2) With your body: Eat right (proper nutrition), sleep (7.5 hours/night minimum), don't abuse substances and **exercise**. The body and mind influence each other. Studies show exercise increases self-esteem, relieves anxiety, improves attentiveness, dissipates stress, and elevates moods. (Effective people ALWAYS have an exercise program.)
 - 3) With experiences: When you've made a significant accomplishment, reward yourself "because I'm worth it". Have a good meal, take a trip, get a massage, spend time with a friend, watch a favorite movie, etc.
- 2. Love other people.** Almost any kind of loving relationship can contribute to happiness and help us better tolerate life's misfortunes. Focusing attention on someone else helps you feel better about yourself. So if you don't have a loving relationship, get involved in a small group with a purpose and establish some social bonds. **Spend time** with the people you care about.
 - a) **Master** “The 7 Principles of Bonding” (6 principles from Dale Carnegie’s best-seller “How to Win Friends & Influence People” + a 7th (Self Disclosure) from Manuel Smith’s book “When I Say No, I Feel guilty”; see references at the end of these notes. For a concise version of “The 7 Principles of Bonding”, see separate list in this website).
 - b) **The Behavioral Definition of Love:** “To be **totally** committed to helping the other person be everything they want to be in the present and become everything they want to be in the future.” If you would like to understand Love in this much deeper sense, read the LOVE chapter of “The Road Less Traveled” by Scott Peck.
 - c) Centenarians have “positive relationships with friends & family; i.e. they have learned to love other people - and this has been a factor in their living to be 100.
 - d) “A bell’s not a bell ‘til you ring it / A Song’s not a song ‘till you sing it / And the love in your heart wasn’t put there to stay / ‘Cause love isn’t love ‘til you give it away. “ Love is one of the few items in the world such that the more of it you give away, the more of it you have!
- 3. Believe YOU are in control of your life and act accordingly.** I “am master of my fate, captain of my soul”, not “a leaf blowing in the wind”. Take time to think about how **you** made decisions that determined what direction your life took. Have an INTERNAL Locus of Control (LoC) - which means

that you believe there is a direct correlation between your effort and the outcome. With an EXTERNAL LoC, you believe that no matter what your effort, your outcome is determined by chance. (Determine whether you have an Internal or External LoC using the website at the end of these notes.)

4. **Be optimistic.** Fight against pessimism. Always view the glass as “half full” as opposed to “half empty”. “I’m OK. You’re OK. The world’s OK. And things are gonna get even better.” If you’re not sure how optimistic you are, ask your friends..... or take the test in Martin Seligman’s excellent book “Learned Optimism”.
5. **Focus on the world outside of yourself.** (Your Myers-Briggs Personality Type: E vs. I; E's find it easier to "focus on the world outside of themselves" & the people in it; I's also do this but it requires “more emotional energy”)
 - a. Give your Life Structure by Joining the Workaday World. Although people complain about work, most consider it crucial to happiness. We get a sense of being loved from the respect and admiration our work generates. Completion of a challenging task generates a thrilling sense of triumph. Working makes you feel good about yourself. Those who don't work should do other things that make them feel good such as volunteer work, hobbies, etc. (AND STUDENTS IN COLLEGE HAVE A JOB! 14 semester hours credit + 2 hours study for each credit hour = 14 + 28 = 42 hours = a 40-hour work week + 2 hours of overtime!!!!)
 - b. Enjoy the Power of Touch. Touching is vital to our well-being. It fulfills a large share of our human needs thus leading to happiness. Touching someone can affirm friendship or approval, communicate important messages, promote health, and bring love. (However, people put up barriers to effective touching. Society tends to equate touching with sex or violence. Thus, many people avoid simple touching that affirms goodwill such as pats on the back, cordial hugs, and heartfelt handshakes. All relationships need touching that implies caring and affection.)
 - c. Give to Others. Reaching out to others or putting others ahead of your own ego can block out depression, lessen awareness of perceived inadequacies, help you surmount personal problems, and increase well-being. Without some connection to others, life doesn't have much meaning. Give in little ways: “I’m going to the store; can I get you something?” Give in big ways: “After your operation, I’ll stay at the hospital with you until you recover.”
6. **Search for Meaning.** People who lack meaning in their life tend to be unhappy with all aspects of life. They usually suffer all sorts of physical and psychological symptoms. These people lack a set of guiding principles, a durable sense of purpose, and a feeling that life is worthwhile. You must have a belief system or collection of values to make sense out of life, recognize your self-worth, and maintain an identity.
7. **Live One Day at a Time.** Too many people fret about the past - what was or might have been. Since you can't change the past and the future may not arrive (at least not in the form you think it will), you should live as fully as possible in the here and now. Psychologists call this “present-moment living”.
8. **Turn On the Laughter.** A sense of humor keeps us from concentrating too much on misfortunes and the tragic side of life. It can help us get over the worst things and take the sting out of failures and stupidities. Consciously look for life's inanities and the jolly aspects of situations. “The time we need MOST to laugh & smile is the time we feel LEAST like laughing & smiling.”
9. **Avoid Self-Defeating Behaviors.** Anger, Blaming, Complaining, Guilt, Worry (ABC Gone with the Wind) Happy people avoid these 5 behaviors LIKE THE PLAGUE! To eliminate these behaviors from your life, read the incredible book “Your Erroneous Zones” by Wayne Dyer. He has a chapter about EACH self-defeating behavior (a behavior that has an immediate pay-off but the long-term consequences are negative). He explains WHY we do the behavior, WHAT the short-term pay-off is, WHAT the long-term negative consequence is and HOW TO ELIMINATE THE BEHAVIOR.

10. Take Time to Waste Time. Squander your time in leisure. Lose yourself in its pleasure and celebration. Take time to play. It usually lifts depression and increases your feeling of well-being.

11. Be Thankful.

- a. To your friends & family - tell 'em you're thankful they are a part of your life & how much you appreciate all they do for you.
- b. (If you believe in a Higher Power) To the Higher Power in your life for the blessings that have been bestowed on you.
- c. Internally (To yourself), for your **state of being** ("I'm grateful/thankful that - I live in a free country - I have a high standard of living - I'm healthy - I'm doing well in college - I have many friends - my life is exciting & full of adventure - I'm intelligent - I'm good-looking - and on & on! This is different from Positive self-talk (#1 above); Self-talk = I AM... Thankfulness = I'm THANKFUL FOR.....).

Happiness is a journey that is powered by these 11 actions... and the road goes on forever... and the party never ends.

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Ed Diener developed a scale that accurately determines how happy a person is. The psychological term for "happy" is Subjective Wellbeing and Satisfaction with Life. Go to the following website to figure out how happy you are:

<http://web4health.info/en/answers/psy-swls-scale.htm>

Do a Google search on "Myers Briggs Personality Type" and you will find multiple web sites that will allow you to quickly determine your type. Two such sites Are:

<http://similarminds.com/jung.html> and www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win//Jtypes2.asp

Do a Google search on "Rotter, Locus of Control" and you will find multiple web sites that will allow you to quickly determine whether you have an INTERNAL or EXTERNAL Locus of Control. One such site is:

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~studskl/locinternet.html>

The website above suggests 3 sites to determine LoC. Try 2 or 3 sites and see if you get approximately the same results.

References

(**Bold Numbers** refer to Characteristic Number listed in these notes)

2. “How to Win Friends & Influence People” by Dale Carnegie; Part Two: “Six ways to make people like you”

“When I Say No, I Feel Guilty” by Manuel Smith; Part five: “Assertive Social conversation and Communication” (Self disclosure, pages 88 - 99)

“The Road Less Traveled” by Scott Peck; Chapter II: “Love” (This is hard reading; it’s written by a psychiatrist - but it’s really worth it.)

“Why We Love” by Helen Fisher

4. “Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life” by Martin E. Seligman

1 & 9. “Your Erroneous Zones” by Wayne Dyer; Chapters 1 & 2 (Love yourself); Chapters 9 (Anger), 7 (Blaming), 2 (Complaining), 5 (Guilt & Worry)

1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11. Time Magazine, January 17, 2005 issue. “The Science of Happiness”

More Articles on HAPPINESS by Myers & Diener can be found at:

<http://www.davidmyers.org/Brix?pageID=47>

AND

<http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~ediener/>

A recent book (2002) by Martin E Seligman: “Authentic Happiness” explores the psychological roots of happiness.