The Myth Of Happiness Part 2: How to Be Happy Without Really Trying

April 28, 2012 By Alexander Avila

Did I get your attention with this title? Being happy without really trying; it sure sounds good, doesn't it? The truth is that most good things in life take effort, but there are actually at least two ways to be happy without any effort. And, there is one lasting way to be happy with some effort. Let's take a look at some the happiness possibilities:

How to Be Happy With No Effort

BE BORN HAPPY

The first way to be happy without really trying is by being born happy. Yes, there is increasing evidence that happiness--a state of well-being characterized by contentment and intense joy--is at least partly genetic. According to researchers, happy people have more activity in the left prefrontal cortex of their brain (our thinking and personality center) than less happy individuals. Moreover, depressed or sad people tend to have more activity in the right prefrontal cortex part of their brain. Researchers, therefore, estimate that up to 50% of our happiness level is based on a genetic set point--a certain predetermined level of happiness that we are born with.

This happiness set point determines how happy we will be throughout our lives, despite any momentary ups or downs in our happiness based on external circumstances like winning a prize or losing a job. Of course, since we can't pick our moms and dads (and their genetic happiness levels) we're kind of stuck with the happiness (or sadness) genes we inherited.

BE LUCKY (OR SMART) IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT

If you're not born happy, your second best bet is to get lucky (or be smart) in your life choices.

Researchers estimate that another 10% of our happiness level is based on our environment or external circumstances. Are we fortunate enough to choose the right career, make profitable investment decisions, and marry the most compatible mate? If so, chances are, our happiness will increase. However, there are limits to how much our happiness will increase based on external circumstances.

Take money for example. Many people believe that having more money makes you happier. It is

true that, at the lowest economic levels, a jump in salary can cause a definite spike in happiness. However, at the higher income levels, further increases in income don't significantly increase a person's happiness. For example, those who make $10 million or more annually are not that much happier than their office employees who make far less.

Marriage is another factor this is often correlated with higher rates of happiness. While it is true that a happy marriage can increase your personal happiness, there are other factors to consider: For example, how happy where you before you got married? Typically, happy single people become happy married people. Also, most of us are usually happy in the beginning of the relationship--the honeymoon stage--when all of those pleasure-inducing chemicals are released in our brains to make us feel good. Unfortunately, the chemicals wear off eventually, and then we have to evaluate the relationship as it is.

Finally, in a marriage happiness study conducted in 16 countries, it was found that married people only had a 4% happiness advantage over single people in the "very happy" category: 25% of married people were "very happy," while 21% of single people were "very happy."

MAKE YOURSELF HAPPY

Now, we come to the final happiness solution: Make yourself happy. Happiness researchers estimate that up to 40% of your happiness is determined by intentional activity--things you can do to create happiness (or misery) in your life. For example, several interesting studies have indicated that practicing loving kindness meditation (LKM) on a daily basis can significantly increase our happiness levels. Loving Kindness Meditation involves directing positive and loving energy toward real or imagined people in a meditative setting.

LKM has been found to significantly increase the level of positive emotions--love and compassion--that we feel toward ourselves and others. Moreover, the consistent practice of LKM has also been shown to improve relationships, increase life satisfaction and environmental mastery, while reducing the risk of illness and depression.

START YOUR LKM PROGRAM TODAY

To raise your overall happiness level, begin to practice LKM meditation as follows: Every morning (or evening) sit in a quiet place, close your eyes, and imagine that two people (or animals) you care about are sitting next to you. Also, imagine that you are sending positive emotional energy to your loved ones through a beam of light. Imagine a color for the light, perhaps blue, green, or yellow. Imagine that you are sending the loving light to them, and they are sending the loving energy right back to you.

After, a few minutes, redirect your light energy of love and compassion outward to people you know casually, perhaps your dentist or doctor, your neighbor down the block, or the person who serves you sandwiches at the local deli.

Finally, imagine that you are spreading your loving energy light out to your entire city, bathing everyone in it: men, women, and children; young and old; people from all races, ethnicities, and religions. Feel the joy and contentment, serenity and peace, that come from spreading your loving energy out to all of the living creatures in your environment.
This exercise has been proven to be remarkably effective for enhancing our emotional state of mind.

Researchers have found that LKM increases at least seven positive emotions ranging from awe to gratitude. Moreover, even brief LKM sessions can significantly improve your psychological and physical health over a long period of time.

Earlier, I mentioned that we seem to have a genetically determined happiness set point--a preset range of happiness. The good news is that meditation has actually been shown to increase our happiness set point: overall, we become happier people throughout our day, regardless of the circustances. Brain scans, for example, show that regular meditation results in greater activity in the happiness areas of our brain--the left prefrontal cortex. This means that if we meditate regularly we can actually change our brain and make ourselves happier!

Before long, LMK will become a natural action for you. You won’t even think much about it; you will just do it because it makes you feel good and helps improve your life. Give LKM a try, and let me know how you do with it. Also, make sure that you send me a little bit of that loving energy over here, and I’ll send some back right at you.

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