

Essay on how to achieve happiness



The Pursuit to Happiness “ Happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always just beyond our grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you” is what Nathaniel Hawthorne once said. (Palha)

Unfortunately there is no handbook that one may purchase to achieve happiness, because no one is the same. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for one to obtain happiness through someone else’s viewpoints and research, but there are in my opinion, basic needs that will jumpstart the road to happiness.

In contemplation and also through research I have come to the conclusion that people in our lives, experiences, privileges, and attitudes are the key components to achieve happiness. First and foremost, family plays an important role in happiness. One needs to know and trust their “ roots”, and also have a good relationship with family. A study produced by the Associated Press and MTV concluded that the top answer to the question “ what makes you happy” was “ spending time with family. Also, the same study concluded that 75% of the people that were questioned said that the relationship with their parents made them happy. (Emerson) Family is like the foundation of a house. Without the foundation there is no stability. Without stability in one’s family life would ultimately affect everything else around oneself. Families carry our history with them, and they generally share our future as well. Who better than siblings, parents, and other close relatives can reminisce with us about our childhoods, or remember pieces of ourselves that we have forgotten?

This connection to fond memories, support in times of need, and near-unconditional love is a unique way that family brings us happiness as well as

relief from stress. Friends are family we choose for ourselves. I am sure it is a saying that everyone has heard at some point. Friends share a different yet equally important bond with us just as our families do. One can confide in a friend about things that they may not feel comfortable expressing to their family. In a friendship one becomes emotionally invested, which explains the closeness just as a family would be.

In a Harvard Medical School study they examined nearly 5, 000 individuals looking for correlations between happiness and friends. In this study they concluded “...that when an individual becomes happy, the network effect can be measured up to three degrees. One person’s happiness triggers a chain reaction that benefits not only their friends, but their friends’ friends, and their friends’ friends’ friends. The effect lasts for up to one year. ”

(Christakis) That means that not only do ones friends make them happy, but happiness is also contagious; which in turn would also benefit other friends.

Most of all, our pursuit of happiness through friends includes continuing pleasure and peace of mind. Great friends are really essential in order to maintain our sanity in the fast paced lives in which we lead these days. Next, in the pursuit to happiness comes experience. Breaking down this broad topic comes 3 factors, traditions, memories, and the little things. Traditions are defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as “ the handing down of information, beliefs, or customs from one generation to another. ” This relates closely to history.

In Weiner’s search for the happiest places in the world he finds out that Qatar has no real history. He states “ ... an important ingredient in the good

life, the happy life, is connecting to something larger than ourselves, recognizing that we are not mere blips on the cosmic radar screen but part of something much bigger. "(110) Traditions and history create a sense of belonging, which then create memories. Memories bring back emotions that were felt at the time of occurrence. Also, reminiscing on the good old days can bring a sense of comfort.

Researcher Leaf Van Boven stated, " The memories of experiences such as vacations last longer and can contribute more to happiness than can material possessions... experiences are more open to positive reinterpretation years after the fact—your mental editing will help you forget how long you stood in line and remember more vividly your child's joy on the merry-go-round. We put this very favorable spin on experiences, and that's harder to do for material possessions, because they are what they are. " Lastly, the little things are just an unexplainable joyous feeling when least expected.

A little kid smiling in a grocery store, a person singing in their car, someone being appreciative, holding the door open for someone; those are all examples of the little things. The reason behind the warm and fuzzy feeling deals with the same logic as talked about previously in the study from Harvard Medical School, happiness is contagious. It is hard to be upset when those around you are joyous, besides if one had a chance to be happy odds are they would take the opportunity. Independence is also a main component of happiness.

It promotes a feeling of accomplishment, pride and empowerment. In 1990, a study was conducted on the use of interactive computer services to enhance the quality of life for long-term care patients. The results were amazing, just by teaching these residents how to use different software improved not only their disability, but their happiness as well due to being able to be self sufficient. In a response from one of the administrators, they stated, “ I have seen an improvement in these residents’ level of responsiveness, their self-image, as well as their self-esteem. Later in the article one of the doctors that conducted the study concluded “[the hypothesis examined created] an increase in overall sense of well-being caused by a sense of increased control, increased mental stimulation and challenge, and improves self esteem...personal control impacts directly on the quality of life. ” (McConatha) Looking at self sufficiency or independence in another way could just be paying bills on time. Money cannot buy happiness, sound familiar? It is a very commonly used phrase, but on the contrary, money does by happiness to an extent. Many economists, psychologists, scientists, etc. ave studied this exact phrase. Can money really buy happiness? The results from the many studies conducted have for the most part, all been conclusive to each other. In the past half-century, average income in industrialized countries has soared, yet happiness levels have plateaued. It seems absolute income does not make much difference once you have enough to meet your basic needs. Instead, they suggest “ the key seems to be whether you have more than your friends, neighbors and colleagues... money matters, but it’s not as important as the average citizen thinks. (Holmes) This suggests that the more money you have the higher status you earn and with a higher status comes higher self-esteem. Weiner

also talks about when a society becomes too rich and the effect it will have. “ In a wealthy, industrialized society, one where we are supposedly enjoying a bountiful harvest of leisure time, we are discouraged from doing anything that isn’t productive-either monetarily or in terms of immediate pleasure. “(77) Self sufficiency and money go hand in hand, but one does not outweigh the other and without each other, neither one of them will mean anything.

To finish up, the mindset that one carries with them is very powerful ammunition in the road to happiness. If the grass is always greener on the other side, odds are there are rare occasions of happiness. Being able to recognize and appreciate, as well as cherish what and who are in one’s life is a gift as well as a stepping stone to joy. Through my younger years in a vital transitioning period I stumbled upon a quote from Art Linkletter that had become my favorite quote/phrase. “ Things turnout best for those who make the best out of the way things turn out. Its meaning is literal, if one uses optimism and can find contentment from the things that get thrown at them in life, ultimately it will make life easier. A study that was conducted including a wide range of age asked people how they felt emotionally. It was concluded that elderly people were several times happier than those that were young. The suspected reason behind these results from the researchers was that elderly people expect life to be harder, and learn to live with it, or they are more realistic about their goals, only setting ones that they know they can achieve.

When an elderly man that was involved in the study was asked his feelings behind these results he stated, “[Elderly] people realize not only what they have, but also that what they have cannot last forever...a goodbye kiss to a

spouse at the age of 85, for example, may elicit far more differentiated and complex emotional responses than a similar kiss to a spouse at the age of 20. ” (Holmes) Meaning, ultimately one can choose to be happy, content, angry, etc. It is a matter of appreciation and choice. Overall, happiness is not just people in our lives, experiences, privileges, and attitudes.

It is a combination of all of the above and then some. Thus, buying and reading a how-to book from Barnes and Noble will not make one happy overnight. It may however offer the tools and knowledge in order for one to experience and learn on their own. There is no definite set of rules as to what happiness is and how to achieve it, but it is a journey in which one has to experience for themselves. Just keep in mind one idea, happiness is not something that can be pursued externally. We already have all the capacity for happiness that we need within ourselves. Works Cited * Palha, Sol.

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