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Looking at Happiness as a Choice

Are you a person who can answer tough questions?

Questions like: What am I grateful for? What choices do I have? What actions can I take to improve my life? What are my primary strengths? How can I live a more balanced life?

People who can answer these questions likely also describe themselves as happy.

“Happiness is neither a mood nor an emotion. Mood is a biochemical condition, and emotions are transitory feelings,” says Dan Baker, Ph.D., director of the Life Enhancement Program at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Ariz., and author of *What Happy People Know*. “Happiness is a way of life, an overriding outlook composed of qualities like love, optimism, courage, and a sense of freedom. It’s not something that changes every time your situation changes.”

People often think happiness is something you’re born with, but you can learn the qualities of happiness by mastering Dr. Baker’s happiness tools described here.

Appreciation

This is the most fundamental tool. It is a form of love that asks for nothing and gives everything.

“Taking time each day to appreciate what you have, to think about people who have made a difference, to acknowledge the love you have or have had. Each of these things can turn your attention to the good in your life,” says Dr. Baker. “This process shifts your attention away from fear, which is often the basis of unhappiness.”

Choice

Feeling like you have no choices or options in life is like being in jail. It leads to depression, anxiety, and learned helplessness.

“Unhappy people make the mistake of giving in to fear, which limits their perception of the choices they have,” says Dr. Baker. “Happy people turn away from fear and find they have an array of choices they can make in almost every situation.”

Personal power

Personal power has two components: taking responsibility and taking action. It means realizing your life belongs to you and then doing something about it.

“When you’re secure in your personal power, it keeps you from becoming a victim,” says Dr. Baker. “When you have it, you know you can handle whatever life dishes out.”

Lead with your strengths

Focusing on your weaknesses reinforces unhappiness. Focus on your strengths and you can solve problems and improve situations.

“Building and broadening your talents and positive qualities feels good and improves your rate of success in every endeavor,” says Dr. Baker. “People get energy from building on their successes, not fighting their failures.”

Power of language

You think in words, and those words have the power to limit you or set you free. Similarly, the stories you tell yourself about your life eventually become your life.

“Self-talk is powerful, so it’s important to choose your words carefully,” says Dr. Baker. “If you use destructive or critical language, you’ll push yourself deeper into fear. Even something as simple as calling an unexpected situation a possibility instead of a problem can change the way you look at it.”

A good rule to follow in self-talk is to talk to yourself the way you want others to talk to you.

Multidimensional living

There are three primary components of life: relationships, health and purpose, or work. Many people, though, put all their energy into just one area.

“But doing so never works,” says Dr. Baker. “Happiness comes from living a full life.”

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