

Does Success = Happiness?

I read an interesting article recently from the organization Positive Psychology Program titled, “Success Versus Happiness – What Is More Important?” The article shed new light on the old ideas of success and happiness beginning with what these two terms mean.

Happiness

Happiness is a state of mind, not a destination. We all like to be happy, but to see it as a destination, an end state, is misleading. The degree of happiness we feel varies from moment to moment and no one is supremely happy all the time. But, because we would like to be, you could say that all our decisions are intended to move us from our normal level of happiness, what researchers call our “set-point” of happiness, toward greater happiness.

Your Happiness Set-Point

The point between the extremes of happiness and unhappiness is called your set-point. This is where you live most of the time and it is, for the most part, constant. For most people, their set-point of happiness is a little above neutral. If you win the lottery, for example, your level of happiness will go up for some time and then will come back down to your set-point. If you are injured in an accident, your level of happiness will take a dip but will eventually come back up to your set-point. On the other hand, while your happiness is internal and for the most part constant, success is external and varies depending on circumstances.

Success

We determine our success by comparing our level of success to the success of others. A generally accepted definition of success is “... the attainment of wealth, honors, position.” We also can be successful in love, relationships, and health. Perhaps the best definition of success is author Steven Covey’s statement, “If you carefully consider what you want to be said of you in the funeral experience, you will find your definition of success.” Achieving success depends on your efforts and on random factors that you have little or no control over. If it makes you happy to be successful, does that automatically mean that you aren’t happy *unless* you are successful?

In other words, how do success and happiness relate to one another?

Success Does Not = Happiness

Success and happiness are not the same thing and they don’t automatically go together. Happiness can be a part of success, but you can also be successful and not happy. Likewise, you can be happy and not successful.

While your happiness set point is for the most part constant, success is fleeting. For example, when you attain a financial goal you get an increase in happiness for a while. Then it wears off and your level of happiness returns to your set point. What can you do to be a little happier?

6 Best-Practices to Enhance Happiness

Moving your happiness set point up is the result of practicing things that make you happy. It's like becoming more physically fit. If you make a habit of eating well, exercising regularly and getting a good night's sleep, your fitness level will increase. However, there is no end-point, no final goal of fitness that you can reach that means that you can stop eating well, exercising and getting good sleep. Staying fit is a process, not a program. And so it is with increasing happiness. You can bump up your set point of happiness by making a habit of the following practices.

1. Express Gratitude – Start every day by writing down three things you are grateful for. It is important to write them down because doing so takes them out of your head and puts them on paper where they are objective and more real, rather than just fleeting thoughts.
2. Do Acts of Kindness – Look for ways to show a little kindness to the people around you: family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers. Pay for the coffee of the person behind you at Starbucks. When you eat out, tip extravagantly (the money you tip means more to the person you tip than it does to you.)
3. Exercise – Fifteen minutes of exercise a day reduces your risk of heart attack, makes you feel better, and helps you think more clearly. And it is easy to do. Throughout the day look for opportunities to walk more. Park at the far end of the parking lot, take the stairs, have a walking-and-talking meeting. Instead of looking for the shortest path, sometimes look for the longest path.
4. Meditate – Incense and mantra are not required. Just take five or ten minutes to sit quietly, relax and clear your mind. Focus on your breath. You will find this difficult, especially at first. Pesky thoughts keep intruding. This is normal and NOT a sign you can't meditate. The goal of meditation is not to get to a point where thoughts never intrude. No one, not even Buddhist monks who meditate for hours a day, are perfect at it. The goal is to get better at re-focusing on your breath. Practice makes better, not perfect. So, practice.
5. Positive Journaling – Write about a good day you had recently or a small “win.” What made it a good day? Why was it a win? Faced with the daily battle with things that go wrong that we all fight, it is easy to lose sight of the good things that happen to us. Make sure your daily score card is balanced by writing down the good stuff, large and small, that happens to you.
6. Foster Relationships – Our relationships with family, friends and coworkers are, or should be, the source of much of our happiness. And, like everything else in life, relationships take work to maintain. Therefore, every day look for ways, large and small, to enhance all your relationships.

Dale Carnegie, one of the first developers of courses in self-improvement, salesmanship, and more, knew something about both success and happiness. After a long career in corporate training, he summed it up:

“Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get.”