



It's Up to You

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Recently we've written a lot about weathering the current financial crisis. Mostly, we've tried to offer guidance and suggestions about how to navigate these times personally, emotionally, attitudinally and practically. But we really haven't addressed specifically how this might play out in your work life. To be sure many of the concepts we've discussed apply in the workplace, for example, keeping an optimistic attitude can help you deal with the ups and downs, but mostly the downs that employers, small and large are experiencing these days. And by the way, that includes all of types of organizations we serve: businesses, non-profits, healthcare, educational, municipalities and state agencies.



Some for sure, are being harder hit than others. But at the very least your place of work may have had some or all of these: budget cutbacks, furloughs, no raises, hiring freezes, layoffs, restructuring, early retirements and a variety of other measures to survive the next year or so.

Consequently, some people just aren't very happy these days. So what's a good worker to do to keep happy? The one thing I can come up with is: it's up to you. Your happiness is your responsibility and yours alone. Especially in these trying times you cannot expect your employer, boss, co-worker, family member or anyone else to make you happy. Well, they could at least stop making your life miserable, you say. Perhaps, but they're probably struggling like the rest of us and so the only thing you can do is:

1. Accept and ignore it. They'll get over it and you decide you won't let it get under your skin. In other words: "Serenity to Accept the things I cannot change."
2. Gently and politely ask them to change, modify or stop whatever it is they're doing to annoy you. In other words: "Courage to Change the things I can."
3. Stop, take a deep breathe and dispute your own crazy, irrational beliefs that everyone must or should behave in a way that you approve of and makes you happy. In other words: "Courage to Change the things I can."
4. Know when to use which strategy. In other words, "The wisdom to know the difference."

Of course WORK has a layer of politics, policies and dynamics that we must all be aware of. You don't go up to the head honcho and tell him or her to stop doing something that annoys you, but actually there are appropriate, assertive ways to ask for what you need to be effective and productive.

Once you start practicing this - yes, it does take a lot of practice - you can really take a look at what truly makes you happy and fulfilled at work, at home and anywhere you are.

In the next three weeks we will look at some "Happiness" principles that offer some suggestions on leading a happier life at work and at home.

Nine Lessons on Happiness, Learned from a House

The source is "From HAPPINESS@THESPEEDOFLIFE, by Jim Smith, The Executive Happiness Coach. He purchased and renovated an old house and these are the lessons on happiness from that experience. (Editors note: the first four appear this week.)

1. *Work on your wiring, first.*

In a house wired for 1950s needs, our first priority has been to upgrade the infrastructure. Without this rewiring, the increased demands of a Millennials' lifestyle (e.g. laptops in every room and a big-screen LCD TV) would blow the electrical grid.

So too, the first step in personal change is often a rewiring - of self-talk and personal practices. Perhaps you need to change the stories you tell yourself, about yourself; or shift some physical practice or attitude that no longer serves you. When you shift the flow of positive energy in your system, you're more likely to have the capacity to handle what life throws at you.



2. *Get rid of the old junk.*

The prior owners left a lot of stuff in the house. I'm sure that if we'd really investigated the matter, we could have tracked down an antiques-lover who'd have swooned over a 1955 electric stove with all the original components. But in the end, it was just old, tired junk.

Are you the sort of person who hangs on to old ideas and thoughts, sometimes beyond their useful life? Hey, if it no longer works well, pitch it. You'll love the space that opens up in your life for happiness.

3. *Envisioning the future is easier once you remove what's in the way.*

Until we removed all the junk, the rooms looked too small. Until we actually tore down the kitchen wall, no one could picture the larger space that was possible. Once we removed the obstacles, it became immensely easier to stand in the space and imagine the future.

I've worked with clients who remain "stuck" not because they lack motivation but because they can't picture where they're going. So we seek to remove barriers (e.g. old perspectives and assumptions) first. Only then do we try to define the future. What's in your way that you might remove?

4. *Sometimes, less is more.*

Fifty years of benign neglect in the yard meant that anything that started to grow...grew. We cut down five decades of overgrowth, and pruned back 80% of the trees and shrubs. The simplified landscape has drawn dozens of positive comments from the neighbors, most of whom had never even seen the front of the house.

Maybe you've allowed some of your habits to grow unchecked over several decades until they hide parts of who you are. What would emerge if you took pruning shears to one or two of those things you've been doing/thinking the same way since high school? You might discover a part of you that surprises!



5. *A fresh coat of paint can work miracles.*

50% of the house front was covered in dark brown siding. After two coats of light green paint, the house literally leaped from the shadows to claim a proud new position in the neighborhood.

Consider the power of a SMILE. We catch our emotions from others - and when one person shows up with a smile on their face, the emotional contagion can ripple across a room in minutes. Putting on a different "face" can be just as transformative as a paint job, for a heck of a lot less work!

6. Take Before and after shots to really appreciate your progress.

Despite a month of hard work, the interior of the house still looks far from livable. In the moments of discouragement we turn to the shots I took the day after we got the keys. Quickly, we appreciate our progress and return to the project with a greater sense of optimism.

When you strive to change a habit, there will be lots of days when you feel like you're in the same place as always. To help you along, take time before you start to create a "picture" of the old You. Maybe that's an actual photo; or perhaps it's an assessment, a checklist, or a letter to yourself that details your starting point. Then use that to boost your spirits and remind yourself of the progress you've made since you started your journey.

7. Ask for help - it's there.

As we began this huge project - on our own - we assumed we'd be making it up as we went. Turned out that many of our friends and neighbors are excited by our project and incredibly eager to help us out. Some have lent us equipment, some their expertise, others merely moral support, and it all helps.

When you seek to shift a behavior, habit, or attitude, do you think, "I have to do this myself"? Sharing a goal with others can often generate more ideas and create an unexpected network of support. Friends like to help friends.

8. Don't be afraid to be bold.

During our planning discussions, many ideas were tossed about, from combining rooms to designer kitchens to painting a 12' high wall dark purple. Because we entertained the ideas, the final plan - while mostly conventional - includes several splashes of excitement!

When it comes to living a happier life, consider this: If you continue to do what you've always done (the "safe" route), you'll end up exactly where you are. What shift in thinking or habit would, for you, be the equivalent of painting one of your "walls" a bright purple?

9. The plan is ALWAYS evolving.

The only thing certain about the future is that it will turn out differently than expected. We've had to redraw the kitchen plans several times - wiring won't work that way, the wall won't support the extra weight, cabinets don't come in that size, and so on. Yet each time we redesign for something we *can't* have, we find new tweaks that often improve the outcome.

Above all, a personal plan for change requires flexibility. Don't get married to the details; rather, fall in love with the concept, and remember that there are multiple, multiple paths to more happiness in your life!

OK, so I started off this series by challenging you to take responsibility for own happiness, especially at work. I've tossed out some ideas from <http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/> as if you're remodeling your internal home. Check out his website for 13 Principles of Happiness and 75 Ways To Be Happier. Hopefully, it's given you some things to think about and some things TO DO.

Here are ten ideas of my own that have helped me chase the elusive happiness dream.

1. Mondays really aren't all that bad, unless you make them so. In fact, if you choose to make them as good as Fridays they will be...ok maybe that's a stretch, but as good as Thursdays is realistic.
2. You gotta take the bitter with the sweet - though we want to be happy all the time, it's not possible. And anyway, without bitterness we wouldn't appreciate sweetness.
3. Take special notice of the sweet moments - we like to complain about bad weather, co-workers, workloads, but do we say, "Wow that was a great meeting, report, client, patient, etc?"
4. Create a gratitude list from those moments. Write them down or remind yourself of them regularly

5. Wait - be patient, at least wait till the next day. Even after my worst days when nothing seems to go right, the next day is often smooth as silk.
6. Don't watch the news before going to bed...watch Seinfeld.
7. Complaining is ok...in limited doses. We usually do this with friends at work, the problem is it can easily get out of control and you end up feeling worse, more depressed and less hopeful than ever. Spend at least as much time coming up with helpful, supportive solutions.
8. Music soothes the savage beast - for me it never fails to change my mood and uplift me. If you can't listen to your favorite tunes at work, then do so at home and on your commute.
9. Don't compare yourself to others, especially at work - there will always be someone who appears better off, but you just don't really know, do you?
10. Talk it over - don't use EAP. That surprised you I bet! Seriously, I can't tell you how many times I've talked to a friend/colleague/boss and it's taken the edge off. And I didn't even need solutions all the time, just someone to listen, to think out loud and to help me think it through. Sometimes that's all you need for enough of a shift in your head to make it more manageable.
- 10a. OK, I can't resist, use EAP if you would like to speak to a neutral, professional resource skilled at active listening and coming up with solutions.



I bet you all have lots of pearls of wisdom, especially about being happy or content at work. SEND THEM ON TO ME. Pay it forward and I'll send them back out to y'all.

In the meantime, be well and have some fun!

"If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change the way you think about it."

~ Mary Engelbreit

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