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How to Get Happiness

By Susan Dunn

How to Get Happiness by Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach

I'm a coach who works with clients on personal and professional development issues. While no client has ever specifically asked me to help them become "happier," I think it's the purpose, yes? Our goals, plans and dreams are all designed to make us happier.

But what happens when we achieve a goal? Well, have you ever talked to someone who finally got a book published, or won a political campaign, found the partner they wanted, had the new baby, or got the big promotion and found them somewhat down in the dumps after a week or so?

It's a law of physics and a law of emotions that what goes up must come down. We need our successes, and certainly to have our goals and to reach them. This makes life interesting, allows us to explore ourselves and our potentials and talents, gives us a livelihood, and enriches our lives. We celebrate our successes with great joy and happiness, but this can only be a temporary state. What then?

Authentic and lasting happiness is a state of being not a state of mind. It must come from inner states, not external events. When you develop your emotional intelligence, you're more likely to achieve this state. It allows you to conduct yourself in happiness, in a positive state, through all the ups and downs of life.

Why develop your emotional intelligence? As W. L. Shirer wrote, "Most true happiness comes from one's inner life, from the disposition of mind and soul. Admittedly, a good inner life is hard to achieve, especially in these trying times. It takes reflection and contemplation and self-discipline."

These are all emotional intelligence competencies which you can develop. It's well worth your time. Instead of focusing on "time management," or "stress management," or "leadership," or "communication," go to the foundational level and develop your emotional intelligence. Instead of taking a part, grab the whole. It will keep you off the "pleasure roller coaster," where you expect momentary highs to last forever, or to sustain you through the inevitable challenges.

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If you expect the highs to continue indefinitely, you're going to be disappointed. You have to be able to appreciate, as well, slow days, calm days, boring days, and the ordinary day because on some days that's the reality, and all we have is the day we have. You can stay present, instead of going into the future or back into the past.

The heights of emotion do not last. In the case of positive emotions, we are sorry. In the case of negative emotions, we are delighted. Think back on some major disappointment in your life, and process back over your emotional reactions. Surely there was anger, grief, sadness, frustration, even depression when it first occurred. (Or shock, which is a shutting down of emotions for protective purposes.) A week later, how did you feel? A month later? Now?

You can retrace the same with positive emotions. Put another way, "after the honeymoon comes the marriage." But don't let this thought dismay you. It isn't "why bother because I'll always go back to a low level." Part of developing your emotional intelligence is being able to tolerate greater levels of emotion. And things overall can become much more positive. After all, for most of us it's the downward spiral after a failure or loss that's the most difficult to manage.

This receding of the initial emotion will be the course unless you've failed to develop resilience, an emotional intelligence competency. Resilience means being able to bounce back from failure, disappointment and loss without losing your enthusiasm and hope for the future. The only permanent damage from any deep emotional event would be if you came out of it bitter, cynical, or hopeless and unable to move on.

Learn to manage your emotions so you can keep a more even keel, enjoying the good, tolerating the bad, and knowing each will pass. This allows you to more greatly appreciate the good things, by the way. Sooner or later we learn to grab the moment when it's good, yes? How many times have you heard someone say, "I didn't appreciate it when I had it?" That would be a real loss in your life, yes?

This is not about losing enthusiasm for achievements and goals. This is about laying the foundation that will allow you to maneuver better in all you do, have better outcomes and not sabotage yourself.

You see, we obstacles we throw in our own way are the ones we need to eliminate. The fear of success and the fear of failure are both about emotions. After all, the result of success is a high state of emotion, and the result of failure is a high state of emotion. Get beyond that. Go for your successes! Learn to manage your failures! Learn emotional intelligence.

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Three Inspirations for Happiness

By David Leonhardt

The following three inspirations were adapted from A Daily Dose of Happiness, and they represent three key ways to increase our happiness.

1. FORGIVING FOR HAPPINESS

We like to think we are better than our friends below us in the food chain, such as the octopus and the snail. After all, we have love. We feel happiness. We have empathy. We have a conscience. We can reason.

We can also hold onto grudges.

Grudges are, in fact, prickly little creatures that worm their way into our hearts. Holding onto them is a self-defeating exercise.

Fortunately, forgiveness is also uniquely human. Forgiveness cleanses the spirit. Forgiveness let's us get on with enjoying our lives instead of being preoccupied with someone else's. Forgiveness opens the door to happiness.

2. SUPPORTING FOR HAPPINESS

When things seem to be very bleak, it does not take much to lift someone's spirits. Sometimes all it takes is to let somebody know they are not alone.

That is why it is so important to smile at people, especially if they look down. And if you know what is weighing the person down, let them know they are not alone. Don't go burdening them with all your miseries, but let them know you have been there.

Guess what? You will feel happiness for having helped them, too.

3. ACCEPTING FOR HAPPINESS

There is no such thing as happiness if you are not at peace with yourself. Too many people just don't know how to make peace with themselves.

Peace begins with acceptance. Whether we agree with everything we do (like the environmentalist who sometimes throws out a recyclable container), it is important to accept what we do.

Do we always make the best choices? No. But they are the choices we make.

Do we always treat people with the most respect? No. But it is how we treat people.

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Can we improve? Yes, and we should. But that is a project for the future. First we must accept who we are now, rather than condemning ourselves. Then we can move to improve the person we will be tomorrow. Both acceptance today and improvements tomorrow will increase our happiness.

This inspiration first appeared in A Daily Dose of Happiness:

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on happiness:

Three Inspirations for Happiness

Where Do We Find True and Lasting Happiness?

The Year Of Happiness

A Happiness Poem

Reap Your Own Happiness



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