



**Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter
Edition 26: The Practice of Happiness**

1,759 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **7.0** minutes. And isn't your happiness worth it?

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Welcome to my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the Principles of Happiness and Positive Emotion in your life and work.

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I. HAPPINESS TAKES PRACTICE

I work out on a regular basis. At least three days each week I lift weights or engage in aerobic activity to get the heart pumping (walking, biking, swimming laps). Recently I found myself thinking, "Why do I do this?" How silly, it seems, to lift a 20-pound weight up and down ten times or walk around the neighborhood. I have no goal (like running a race). I have no destination. Yet each day I walk and lift and stretch.

I think I do it for three reasons: One, I feel better when I work out – my energy level is higher and my mood is brighter. Two, I believe that by training my body to operate at a certain level of strength and energy, it will serve me better as I age. And three, when I find myself in a physically demanding situation I will have the stamina to make it through what might otherwise be a draining experience. In other words, I "work out" so that I can count on my body to be at its best when I need it to be.

I'm realizing that same concept applies to many of my Happiness habits. Let's examine this:

BASIC METABOLIC RATE

Our bodies are complex organic systems that excel at maintaining stability in the system. For example, our bodies keep our temperature within a narrow range no matter the environment, and our bodies hold our weight stable.

The body is smart about how it uses energy. We may overeat in the short term (e.g. a holiday) then find that our weight returns to its "base level" within a week or two. The body says, "Hey, I'm supposed to weigh X, but now I'm tipping the scales at X+5." So it burns calories at a higher rate until it returns to base. On the flip side, when we experience a short-term weight loss, the body seeks to return to its base by using calories more efficiently.

If someone consistently takes in more calories than they burn for a long period, the body will assign a new, higher value for X, and the body will work hard to STAY at that new base.



This is why we can only lose weight effectively when we change our diet and exercise (input and output) routines permanently. We have to stay at it long enough that the body readjusts to a new metabolic base – a new “X” -- where it will seek to return when thrown off balance.

EMOTIONAL BASE

The same is true for our emotions. We live in a base mood – call it “E.” Events in our life will shift that mood. For instance, a bad day at the office or a fight with family might knock us down to E minus 10. On the other hand, receiving a compliment might boost it to E plus 5, while a vacation might lift our mood to E plus 15.

Just as your physical body will seek to return to its base weight, your wonderfully resilient emotional self will sense an imbalance and work hard to pull you back to your base mood.

For example, I read an article recently about a couple at the end of their marital and financial ropes. Then they won the lottery and were very happy -- for a while. Three years later they were divorced, and unhappy again. Why? Perhaps one explanation is that they did not know how to live in a state of happiness. They returned to their base state of discontent (richer, yet no wiser).

Or take Christopher Reeves – the actor of Superman fame. He broke his neck in a fall from a horse. Later, his smiling face became his brand image. When he died we all remembered him as a person with a great attitude. Before the accident he was generally optimistic, so his emotional self was able to return to its base state once the initial trauma wore off.

So our emotional self is as much of a powerful, complex, self-calibrating system as is our body. How do we adjust the body? Through practice, and more practice, consistently and over time. How can we shift our emotional self? Yep – with practice, consistently and over time.

PRACTICE NEW EMOTIONS

So, back to weights and walking: as much as it might be silly to just keep moving 20 pounds up and down or walking around with no place to go, we do it. Why? Because those actions make our muscles stronger and build capacity for when we will need it.

One can “practice” an emotion in the same way – through repetition, and through activity that, in the moment, may feel purposeless yet is building future capacity.

Here are some simple emotional practices that can help recalibrate base mood:

- ~~Smile more often (it improves “muscle memory” on your face)
- ~~Keep a Joy List or write down daily blessings (it tones your “awareness muscle”)
- ~~Take two deep breaths and relax your shoulders, ten times a day (trains your body to find a calm place under pressure)
- ~~List what’s RIGHT in a situation before listing the problems (balances your perspective)
- ~~Count to ten before reacting to any situation (trains your emotions to wait – until your brain catches up)
- ~~Hold your arms at your sides – *uncrossed* -- in all conversations (helps your body experience the feeling of openness/acceptance to other ideas and people)
- ~~Hang out with people who already live in the place you want to live (seriously, this works! As mammals, we learn our emotional cues from others)



Do This For Yourself!

Consider a physical or emotional aspect of yourself that you want to recalibrate. What is a practice that you might use to help you get used to a new way of being? Start with just one thing – one food, one habit, one choice, one relationship, even just one word you use. Shift it, then practice it regularly from this day forward. Just one...

~*~*~QUOTES~*~*~

Circumstances are beyond human control, but our conduct is in our own power. ~Benjamin Disraeli.

The Way I See It #17 (seen on the side of a Starbuck cup):

The world bursts at the seams with people ready to tell you you're not good enough. On occasion, some may be correct. But do not do their work for them. Seek any job; ask anyone out; pursue any goal. Don't take it personally when they say "no" -- they may not be smart enough to say "yes." ~Keith Olbermann, Broadcast journalist

If you'd like to download a 1-page summary of the 13 Principles of Happiness as a reference, you can do so right now: <http://www.1leadercoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>

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II. IN THE WORKPLACE: PRACTICING A NEW BEHAVIOR

New habits can be tough to change or develop in the workplace. People like predictability. When you show up differently – even if the change is for the better – it is still different, and you may often feel pressure from others to go back to how you were “before.”

Still, change starts with you. Choose a specific situation, conversation, or relationship that sometimes creates difficulty or unhappiness for you. Notice how you behave or choose in that situation. Now, notice the internal conversation you have with yourself each time it occurs. Finally, try shifting that conversation to something more positive.

A story: An executive client was having difficulty working with his CEO because he felt the boss was too hard to pin down. His perception was that the CEO changed her mind too often and was unable to make a decision. He found himself so focused on taking notes and analyzing ideas that he was constantly exhausted after their meetings.

We looked at the situation from different angles, and my client considered the fact that the CEO, a high-energy extravert, was perhaps just “thinking out loud” and did not need him to create action plans. So he shifted his internal conversation from, “Oh no, here we go again” to “Let’s have some fun with this!” He stopped taking notes and began to practice active listening when the boss went off on a tangent.

And guess what? A few weeks later she brought him into her office and thanked him for being such a great listener. She told him, “I really appreciate being able to talk things over with you. Sometimes I just need to sort out the issues before I talk with the rest of the team.”

Final word: Practice does not make perfect. Practice does, however, build capacity and can



serve to recalibrate us at whatever level we aim.

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III. RANDOM STUFF: THELEADERSHIPSERIES NOW ON AUDIO

I often have people approach me after a program and ask, “Have you written a book? Do you have any of this on CD that I could buy to listen to later?” No, I say. Not yet.

Well, YET has arrived. And I am so excited!

A more techno-literate colleague of mine, Skip Weisman of www.TheAchievementGym.com, and I have spent many hours over the past year talking about leadership and the kinds of issues we see come up time and again with our clients – poor communication, unmotivated teams, lack of feedback, unresolved conflict, and unhappy people. We both wish there was a way we could help more people.

Skip decided to record some of our conversations, during which we talked about best practices in Leadership, Communication, Conflict, Coaching, Motivation, Emotional mastery, and (of course) Happiness in the workplace. He turned that into seven audio files and put it all out on the Internet, downloadable for immediate purchase.

It’s about six hours of lessons on leadership for your iPod or MP3 player, along with printed supplemental materials and a couple assessments, including my Leadership Audit, to supplement the learning.

I’ve got my 20 years in the leadership trenches plus my eight years as an executive coach to draw on. Skip spent his career in leadership roles in major league baseball (he was at one time the youngest general manager in the entire MLB minor-league system!). While our products and services differed, we’ve found that the same best practices worked in both environments. We are both so excited to be able to share our wisdom with our clients and colleagues!

We are launching [TheLeadershipSeries](#) in February, but we are each offering a special deal to our subscribers this month: you’ll receive a \$20 discount for trying it out early and giving us some feedback. ([Follow this link](#) – the \$77 discounted price will show up in your shopping cart when you check out).

Let me know what you think!

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IV. INSTRUCTIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Jim Smith is The Executive Happiness Coach™. He is a recovering corporate executive whose passion is to help people discover and increase the amount of Happiness in their lives and work.

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Drop me a line anytime with your feedback and queries! Jim <mailto:Jim@1LeaderCoach.com>

**Happiness is a decision, not an event.
How will YOU decide today?**

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