



**Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter  
Edition 33: Lessons From A House**

1,987 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **7.95** 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.

**Remember: I'm MOVING this newsletter to a new provider, AWeber.com, after this edition. You'll receive an invitation from Aweber shortly -- I hope you'll "renew" your subscription to Happiness!**

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**I. NINE LESSONS FROM A HOUSE**

On July 13, my wife and I became real estate investors. Following a series of conversations over several years, we purchased the house next door from the original owners, who had it built in to spec in 1955.

They loved that house when they moved into it 52 years ago – so much so that they kept it exactly the way it was. The walls were still the original color, the original stove still cooked their food, and... well, you get the idea. The house has good bones, but it is several *decades* overdue for some serious updating. And painting – LOTS of painting.

So now we are immersed in a complete overhaul of the property. Once completed, it will become a rental property, and the first tenant to call it home will be our daughter and her fiancé (following their December wedding).

It is a huge project. Walls are moving, the kitchen is torn down to the studs, we're rewiring the entire house, and replacing every appliance, window, door, light, sink, faucet, and floor covering. What's left, we're staining or painting.

It will still be the same house, yet it will never be the same as it was (and the better for it). That latter sentiment got me to thinking about how this house makeover holds many lessons for people who seek to do the same for their lives.

**Nine Lessons on Happiness, Learned from a House**

**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!

#### **Do This For Yourself!**

Pick one of the above lessons and consider how you can apply it to your life or work. For one week, focus on removing, adding, or putting a new face on some part of you, and then pay attention to how your "neighbors" respond to your "remodeling." Above all, have fun!

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