



Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 40: Stop Trying So Hard

1,574 words of content -- approximate reading time required: 6.29 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. Please forward to a friend who needs more happiness.

IN THIS ISSUE

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- I. Stop Trying So Hard: Evolve Into Happiness
- II. In The Workplace: Shift Your Patterns
- III. The Ultimate Environment Shift: Join the Peace Corps
- IV. Instructions and Contact Info

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I. STOP TRYING SO HARD: EVOLVE INTO HAPPINESS

Happiness Principle #8 says,

Stimulate Your Environment: *Surround yourself with environments and people that continually challenge you, energize you, and literally pull you forward. Have adventures.*

Human beings are creatures of habit. We draw great comfort from all the little rituals that we build around us – how we brush our teeth, the routes we drive to the places we frequent, the way we prepare the foods we like to eat, the people we hang with, the phrases we use in conversation, and the way we walk, talk, and even breathe.

This tendency to turn everything into a routine is a biologically programmed survival strategy – if early humans had to think about everything, all the time, they would have been so distracted that they would have been easy prey for saber-toothed tigers, and the species would have died out. So our habits protect us and serve us in many ways. Stability is good for us.

At the same time, that wonderful stabilizing trait gets in the way when we want to change something about ourselves, like, “I want to exercise more. I want to stop procrastinating. I want to be more adventurous. I want to feel more confident, less anxious, more outgoing, more decisive, less aggressive, and on and on. Oh, and happier. I want to feel happier.”

Have you ever said any of those things?

Trouble is, saying it does not make it so. And living it is a challenge, since your wonderful habits do such a great job of returning you to what you’ve been doing all along, even if you no longer want to be there, do that, think that, or say that.

<Sigh> Why does personal change have to feel so much like hard work?

Hey, stop TRYING so hard. Rather than fighting against your human nature, you might try leveraging something else you are really good at: evolving.





You are constantly evolving. You are not the same person you were in junior high or at high school graduation or before you had kids or got that promotion or changed jobs. Human beings possess some of the same characteristics as water – we can adapt to the shape of the container in which we are placed.

Once we've adapted, new habits emerge and re-stabilize us. But between the point where our environment shifts and the bureaucracy of habits reestablishes control, we have a window of opportunity. We have the opportunity to *consciously* examine what we do and think and allow ourselves to be pulled into new behaviors and new attitudes.

Do This For Yourself!

Select one of the following ideas – or your own version of one -- and experiment with it for a couple of weeks to fully experience how your ability to evolve can change your outlook:

Shift something small in your current environment. Drive a different route to work. Visit a different place of worship to experience a different minister or community (or even just sit in a different pew at your own place!). Go to lunch with different people. Sit at a different table in the cafeteria and notice what new ideas and conversations you are exposed to. Go to the library and pick up a book from a genre you've never explored. Listen to music from a genre you profess to dislike – or in another language! Paint one wall in your living room a vibrant color.

Any one of these environmental tweaks holds the potential to challenge and stimulate you. At minimum they might improve your appreciation of what you already have; at best they can expand your worldview.

Shift the people you spend time with. Do not underestimate the power of community. If you want to change something about who you are, you can struggle to make a shift thru sheer force of personal will (how exhausting!); OR...you can try hanging out with people who already have what you want, rather than people who resemble who you are now.

Want to be happier? Hang out with happy people – they carry a highly infectious 'virus' that you are more likely to pick up if you stay close to them. Aspire to greater creativity? Hang out with the creatives. Think more strategically? Find ways to hang around with and have discussions with other strategic thinkers.

When you surround yourself with people who have more of something you want, you'll find it is incredibly easy to change your own thinking or behavior... or happiness!

Sidebar: Rearranging the Furniture

I am famous in our family for rearranging the furniture, a habit that increased in frequency when I learned that there is an actual home design process called "shopping in the house." I'm constantly moving things to different rooms, to different corners or shelves, etc. At various times during the past year, for example, I reorganized the pictures on our bookshelf, shuffled where pictures hang on the walls, swapped a rocking chair for a large plant, and moved lamps around to shift how light falls in the room. It's all part of Principle #8, Stimulate the Environment. These are small things that keep me used to small changes and that always make a room feel fresh and new – without having to paint or buy anything.

And that helps me feel happy in my home.



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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.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>

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## II. IN THE WORKPLACE: SHIFT YOUR PATTERNS

For many people, the workplace environment is one where they feel they have little or no control. OK, maybe you are subject to the rules of others and find yourself surrounded by limitations, e.g. you can't change your job duties or the corporate culture. Even so, I encourage you to focus on what you CAN control.

Examine all the patterns and habits you've adopted over time. Do you take break at the same time, eat lunch with the same people, drive the same route to work, at the same time every day? Do you keep saying the same thing(s) about the company, walk the same route between departments, and attend the same meetings?

Stop it! Select just one of your routines – one of those things you do without much thought – and for a short time, perform it in a different way. Then notice how when you break your subconscious pattern, new options have the chance to emerge.

Remember: Leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader who generates ideas to create a more positive workplace and helps others feel more of a sense of control in their world!

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## III. THE ULTIMATE ENVIRONMENT SHIFT: THE PEACE CORPS

The concept of environment shift has really been on my mind as my oldest son, who graduated from college last May, prepares to leave for his two-year assignment with the Peace Corps. He's been assigned to Ukraine.

While his degree is in Anthropology and Gender Studies, Justin has spent much of his free time studying and practicing the art of Improv (improvisational acting) over the past five years. He is the ultimate go-with-the-flow kind of guy, who seems to settle easily into any new situation. Still, the move from middle-class suburbia (and all the technology and retail access that includes) to a rural mountain village in a former Soviet-bloc country with a depressed economy will certainly be a huge shift.

I found this passage from the Peace Corps' Volunteer Handbook revealing:

“Some claim the essence of cultural adjustment is losing and reestablishing routines. [...] What is a routine, and why is it so traumatic to lose one? Simply stated, a routine is something you do while your mind is on something else. It is an action you have done so many times that you no longer need to think about it to perform it. [...] Many routines involve basic coping and survival behaviors. When you move to a new country, routines get disrupted mightily. Suddenly nothing, not even going to the bathroom, is a routine. The loss of routines means the energy that was available for higher order thinking and more sophisticated tasks now goes to basic coping and survival...”

A veteran volunteer from Ukraine writes of how her Country Manager told her, “Ukraine is going to happen.” It took her many months to realize the wisdom of that statement. One day she woke

