



Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 44: Pay Attention: Noticing Beauty

2,071 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **8.2** 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.

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I. PAY ATTENTION!

Happiness Principle #9 reads, **Pay Attention**: *When we are on auto-pilot, life just happens around us. Look. Listen. Notice. The sunset in your own backyard can be just as wondrous as the one at the beach.*

Beauty In The Muck

We vacation in coastal North Carolina – on one side of the island is beach and ocean; on the other side, the intercoastal waterway and saltwater marshes.

We like to go crabbing. Crabbing is like fishing, except instead of using a rod and reel, you tie a fresh chicken neck to a piece of string and toss it into the water so it sits on the bottom. When a crab comes over to munch, you pull it in slowly, get a net under it, and into the pot it goes.

A few hours later you are sitting around a table inhaling the scent of Old Bay seasoning and shucking steamed crabs. They don't come any fresher!

But my story is not about the crabs. It's about something NEW we discovered this year, after spending our vacation in this spot for the past 30 years.

Crabbing occurs on the marsh side of the island, from a dock that sits about a hundred yards offshore. When the tide is in, the marshes are a lovely place of quiet – water lapping softly on the dock, the soft shushing of marsh grasses moving in the current, soft splashes and the contented hum of life. When the tide goes out the marshlands are left raw and exposed. The ground is slimy and stinks of rotting vegetation and dead things. Usually we retreat to the house or to the ocean side of the island at low tide. On this day, however, we stuck around because we did not yet have enough crabs for dinner.

We began our crabbing surrounded by water and marsh grass. While we teased just a few more hungry crabs onto our lines, the water drained away from the acres of land around the dock, and suddenly we found ourselves in an entirely different world -- the marshlands came to life!

Mucky little islands emerged, covered with black slime and thousands of little black bumps. Following the receding tide, flocks of brown and black-feathered birds with long beaks emerged from the cover of the brown grasses to pick at the pebbles, which are apparently some sort of mollusk.

Several snowy white egrets with an enormous wingspan and regal presence appeared to wander thru the marsh grasses and pick at the now exposed ground. Tall herons with brilliant scarlet crowns landed at the edges of the water to forage. Little white birds with long, stilt-like legs landed in the shallows and walked around with their heads cocked comically sideways so as to track the schools of tiny fish now trapped in the tidal pools. Even seagulls joined the chase, circling overhead and swooping down occasionally to grab at something on the surface.

We sat and watched, fascinated. What we thought was a dank, smelly, dead zone turns out to have more life and beauty than we ever imagined. Who knew? Until we paid attention!

Beauty Is Where You Look For It

Beautiful is defined as: *having qualities that give great pleasure or satisfaction to see, hear, think about, etc.; delighting the senses or mind; excellent of its kind.*

Where is Beauty? It's everywhere, really. Yet we miss it much of the time because we are socialized to call something 'beautiful' only when it meets certain narrow standards, e.g. thin, young, new & trendy, fast, or sexy.

Beauty is also in the wrinkles and the imperfections. We see it in the clear blue sky, yet it's also present in a cloudy sky or thunderstorm. There are different varieties of beauty in calm water, moving water, and raging water. An oak tree in spring, summer, autumn, and even winter presents us with different forms of beauty.

And then there's beauty in people. Not just the designated "beautiful people" of magazine covers. Notice the beauty in the wrinkled skin on the back of an old woman's hands. There's beauty in the laughter of children... and in the deep sadness of a grieving family at a funeral.

One member of my YMCA is an old man who suffered a stroke several years ago. He was already crippled with arthritis before the stroke, and now one side of his body barely supports him. His highest speed on the treadmill is one-half mile per hour, and it takes him ten minutes just to sit down and get his legs onto the pedals of the recumbent bike. Yet three days a week he shows up to work whatever muscles are willing to cooperate that day.

I see such beauty in his perseverance.

My friend [Marc Golub](#) (who took the pictures on my website) did a project two years ago that captured the beauty of people who are touched by cancer. [You can access the slide show here.](#)



We Notice What We Choose To Notice

If I'm looking for the negative, my faults & flaws, I will always find something. Likewise, if I'm looking to affirm my decisions and find evidence of my success, I will always find proof.

But first, I have to make the effort. I have to look. I have to pay attention.

If I am convinced that beauty exists only in exotic places, I will rarely notice it when it lies across my path.

If I write my job off as boring or unchallenging, I will never notice when an exciting opportunity presents itself.

Pay attention! Pay attention! Pay attention! Where goes your attention, so goes your life.

Do This For Yourself

Here are some practices that might help you pay attention and notice the beauty around you:

- Meditate for a few minutes – witness your breath, your body, your mood, your thoughts (not evaluate, just observe)
- Be a tourist in your own life for one day – strap on a camera and document the day in pictures, noticing (as if for the first time) all the interesting stuff you do and the people and places you've grown numb to.
- Visit your workplace as a reporter/journalist (with an objective perspective) for one day.
- Notice when your mood is up or down and ask: What was behind this? Is this how I want to feel?
(NOTE: you are never responsible for the mood or emotion you are in. You are only responsible for moving out of it or *choosing* to stay with it because it serves you.)

If you are on autopilot, you're no longer paying attention. Everything just happens. It is only when we pause and look – really look – that we can experience awe and wonder and beauty in our lives... and create the opportunity to shift our perspective. .

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Happiness Principle 9 is just one of the 13 Principles of Happiness. If you'd like to download a 1-page summary of all 13 as a reference, you can do so here:

<http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>

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**II. IN THE WORKPLACE: PAY ATTENTION TO THE NOW**

Tenure in a workplace provides many advantages: you get to know “how things really work;” you can establish solid, lasting relationships with your coworkers; you better understand the context and history of decisions and processes within the organization; and you can learn what your team members are really good at – and what they don't do well.

Your knowledge of people and process can get in the way, however, if you rely too much on history and stop paying attention to the present. People change – they learn from past mistakes,



they mature in their understanding of the business, and they often have life experiences outside the workplace (e.g. volunteer roles, college coursework) that expand their skill set.

Their perspectives on life and career may also have shifted. That team member who three years ago turned down a promotion that required a lot of travel may have a totally new ambition now that their youngest child is in middle school. Or the impatient “trouble-maker” might love to revisit a new challenge that you didn’t think they were ready for last year.

It’s important you allow people the space to grow and change. Look at who they are today, versus who they were three years ago when you worked with them on “that awful project.”

Notice when you are allowing old assumptions to affect your current decisions. Pay attention to the now.

**Remember: Leadership is not about a title.** Anyone can be a leader who pays attention to their own filters and behaviors and then chooses those that create a more positive respectful presence and impact.

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### III. READING LISTS AND MAILBAG

A couple of notes from last month’s edition:

**Summer Reading:** A record number of people downloaded my Ninth Annual Summer Reading List (SRL). It’s not too late for you to pick up a fun vacation read or select something that will pull you out of your comfort zone and expand your mind and your world!

You can review and download (pdf) the list at [www.TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com](http://www.TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com), where you’ll find the SRL under the Resources & Archives tab. Have fun, and happy reading!

**Detox and Emotional Cleanse:** I got a lot of conversation going about diet, that’s for sure. Several dozen people wrote to me of getting off caffeine, eliminating glutes, or reducing/eliminating sugar in their diets. Those stories reinforced the message I was living in at the time – when we change what and how we eat, we can change how we feel!

I also received a lot of ideas for implementing an emotional cleanse. My friend and colleague Mary Vales sent me this:

*“I just had to respond to your note about emotional cleanse! I learned my lesson 8 years ago, and want to share my story.*

*“I was expecting my first baby in June. I had great plans for my maternity leave. I was planning to catch up on projects at home, hang out by my pool, visit friends, shop, and return to work after 12 weeks of leave recharged, relaxed, and tanned.*

*“Ha! Seven weeks into my leave, at 11:00 a.m. on a weekday morning, I was preparing myself a snack when the baby started to cry. She had only been asleep for a few minutes.*

