



Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter
Edition 77: Don't Let the Crabs Drag You Down!

1,785 words of content including **Six Tips for Dealing with Crabs**. Approximate reading time required: **7.14** 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. DON'T LET THE CRABS PULL YOU DOWN

A most fascinating thing occurred during a keynote talk last week, which inspired this month's newsletter topic.

My subject was Happiness (of course!) and during my talk I was marginally aware of the fact that a woman at the table just to my right – and in the front row – kept muttering and making a gagging noise during the talk. She was being “just” loud enough to carry across the table to her coworkers, but not so loud that the company president – who sat on the other side of the room – could hear. Since I'm used to speaking while people are eating or dishes are being cleared, her behavior did not affect me; I was simply aware it was going on.

Near the end of the talk I had everyone in the room stand up for a quick mind-body exercise. I've done this hundreds of times, and it's a lot of fun. The “gagger” – as I'd now named her in my head – created a tiny “scene” at her table when she refused to stand or participate. Again, I've had that happen before. But what happened next was what fascinated me.

As I continued my talk, I stood up on a chair, so the drama at the front table unfolded right in front of me. First, the gagger, who was nearly purple in her face (Anger? Embarrassment?) nearly crawled up the arm of the woman next to her until she convinced her to sit back down. Then she did the same with the woman on her left. So now, as the activity commenced, there were three sitting and five standing at the table.

I focused on the larger audience, so I don't know exactly what happened during the exercise. But as I finished and looked to my right, two more people had been convinced to sit down, one remained standing but looking intensely uncomfortable... and the other two who were standing had moved several paces away from the table and were focused on me.

After the talk, many people came up to apologize for what happened. I just chuckled and reminded them of a two key points from the talk: **one, you can't change other people, only yourself; and two, happiness is a decision.** And clearly, that is a decision the gagger is not ready to make!

Like Crabs in a Bucket

Every summer when we go to the beach, we go crabbing at least once on the marsh side of the island, armed with string and some bait. As we net our catch, we toss them into a bucket. Once we catch a dozen or more crabs, they create enough mass in the bottom that any one of them could easily climb out on the backs of their fellow crabs.



But we've never had a crab escape. Why? Because every time a crab reaches to grab the rim of the bucket and achieve freedom, all the other crabs swarm that one and haul it back down. It's as if they're saying, "Hey, if I'm stuck here, I'm gonna make sure you're stuck, too!"

After awhile, even the most ambitious crabs stop trying and lay down with the others. They all die together.

How Do You Recognize a Crab in Your World?

Crabs usually reveal themselves through their language. Sometimes their actions are physical (like the crabs in the bucket) but most often they are more subtle, pulling you or others down with the weight of words:

You'll never get into that school.
Forget it; you don't have that much talent.
You could never do that.
No one will want to hire you!
They won't listen to you. They won't give you a chance.
Why even bother? The system is fixed anyway.
That's so stupid/they're idiots.
There's no way you can afford that.
Who do you think you are anyway? So, you think you're better than us?
You're not smart enough.
You're not pretty enough.
You're not skinny enough.
You're not good enough.

None of these statements have truth – they are just assessments someone else is using on you. **Crabs, remember, cannot tolerate having others move up in the world... so they do what they can to keep you down in the muck where they live.**

The real sadness is when you hear something so often that you start to believe it is true. It is not true, but it will become true if you let the crabs pull you down!



6 Tips for Dealing with Crabs In Your Life

1. **Don't listen to the crabs.** You might hear them out, but don't let what they say become your Truth.
2. **Look for another point of view.** When a crab speaks of your situation or the world in only negative, hopeless terms, remember that there are ALWAYS multiple, equally valid perspectives, and you get to choose one for yourself. Example: when a crab grouses about every grey day, you can remind yourself that clouds carry water, and water is life!
3. **Deny their self-appointed Superpowers.** When a crab makes a statement that implies they know what "everyone thinks," or what others feel, say to yourself: "No, actually -- you don't know!"
4. **Turn it around.** For every Yin there is a Yang, and one way to manage a crab is to turn around their statement and make it about them (well, at least in your head – you don't need to create an argument, you only need to resist letting what they say pull you down).
5. **Yes, And... what they say.** You let the crab "be right" in what they say, then build on it in a different direction. If they say, "you'll never get that job" then say, "maybe so, and I know the right job is still waiting for me."
6. **Practice confidence and stability.** It's a lot easier for a crab to impact someone who's already fearful and worried. That's why it's super important to practice being in a confident, positive emotional space. Stand tall with your shoulders back, ground your feet, and breathe deeply. When you practice that daily, you'll feel more solid and you'll be less susceptible to the influence of crabs.

When you regularly practice any/all of the above you may find that, after awhile, the crabs stop bothering you because they no longer get a reaction!

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**The 13 Principles of Happiness, when practiced regularly, can inoculate you against the power of crabs.** Visit <http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>, to download a colorful 1-page PDF Poster. Post it on your workplace wall or your fridge at home, and try to live principle each day!

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## II. IN THE WORKPLACE: DON'T BE A CRAB

**Who are the workplace crabs? Here are some ways to spot them in the wild:**

- **They often call themselves "realists\*\*"** but then spend all their time whining about... well, much of everything.
- They are often **unwilling or unable to do the work required** to get to the next level, but will blame others at every turn for denying them the opportunity.
- **They don't like to see others succeed**, and will often create or support gossip that implies success was unearned.
- **They often mock those who take risks**, creating discomfort for those who stretch and take on extra assignments or apply for promotional opportunities.



- **They studiously avoid change**, even when that change will benefit them. And please know that I acknowledge change can be very uncomfortable. However, it's one thing to avoid it yourself – that's your own issue. Crabs are those who try to guilt others into joining them in non-compliance or resistance.

\*\* Note: I make a distinction between **Optimists** (those who look for the good and \*usually\* expect things to go well), and **Pessimists** (those who look for the worst and \*usually\* expect things to go wrong). **Realists**, as far as I'm concerned, will hold a balanced point of view, for in reality some things go well and some things don't. **When someone says they're a Realist but then acts like a Pessimist, then I say: "If it quacks like a duck...."**

**An effective leader does not behave like a crab, at any time and in any venue.** Moreover, most good leaders have little tolerance for crabs, as they have a toxic effect on the workplace team. Still, crabs exist, for they often do their work under the sand, where they are not visible but they still undermine morale in the workplace.

**ACTION ITEM: Pay attention to your language:** How do you speak in the workplace? Do you blame others for your troubles? Do you refuse to try anything new? Do you mock people who are willing to step up and try something new, or take on a new challenge? Be careful... you may be a crab!

**Remember, Leadership is not about a title:** Anyone can be a leader who seeks to lift others up, not drag them down!

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### III. PERSONAL: THE FOREIGN BECOMES EASIER

**So, as my big trip to Italy gets closer, I've continued my self-study of *la bella lingua* that is Italian.** When I started my 30-minutes-per-day lessons, I felt completely lost, and often had to repeat a recording twice before I could "get it" and move on. I'm up to advanced levels of Italian II, now, and while I am still challenged by new words and grammar each day, it's no longer a struggle.

**The other day I accidentally started listening to my current lesson number... but in Level 1.** Wow! I was astounded by how much s-l-o-w-e-r the lessons were just 30 days earlier. When I returned to the correct level, I experienced a jolt of excitement as I realized that >50% of my instructions are now also in Italian. The shift has been so gradual, I'd stopped noticing.

Basically, I've learned quite a bit of Italian along the way... but **it happened so slowly that I'd not noticed how much less foreign this foreign language is feeling.**

I mention this story for two reasons.

**One, I'm powerfully reminded that a small practice, repeated daily, can create a BIG shift in awareness and behavior.** This will become another example I can use with my clients who are sometimes skeptical that little shifts will make a big difference when maintained over time.

**And Two, to remind all of us that change done in small yet regular pieces can be – almost – painless!**

