



Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 80: 14 Life Lessons from Italy

1,349 words of content including 14 life lessons and a powerful reminder for leaders.
Approximate reading time required: **5.4 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. 14 LIFE LESSONS FROM A TRIP TO ITALY

In May I spent 10 days in Italy with my wife, daughter, son-in-law, and eight-month-old grandson. While we did some touristy things (e.g. you simply cannot visit Florence and NOT see the David!), we also immersed ourselves in the culture.

We never set foot in a hotel or gift shop. Instead, we slept in residential neighborhoods in old convent rooms now run as B&Bs by the nuns, or in an apartment within a medieval-era walled city with a commanding view of olive orchards and vineyards.

Immersion in a foreign culture refreshes the way I view the world. First, the "different-ness" of life in another country or region opens up new awareness; then, my newly expanded lens causes me to review habits and beliefs that were previously "invisible" to me.

Through the lens of learning, I share with you my most powerful life lessons from Italy:

1. **Just because you don't know where you are does not mean you are lost.** We circled parts of Umbria and Florence for hours, unable to make sense of the serpentine, one-way roads...and we had a blast!
Just like in real life, the pleasure's as much in the journey as the destination.
2. **You can be way off track and still maintain balance.** I'm a vegetarian who manages my diet to minimize starches and fat. Not in Italy! There I consumed huge amounts of *pasta*, *gelato* and *vino* every day, and LOVED it!
There's nothing wrong with letting the pendulum swing far in one direction, as long as you ride the swing back in the other direction to keep yourself centered. To balance our doubling of food, we walked EVERYWHERE!
3. **Don't underestimate the common and familiar.** At first, we resisted the *vino della casa* (the house wine), thinking it was the "cheap stuff." We learned that in Italy the house wine (typically ~€3/liter, about \$4.50US) was inexpensive because it was made just a few



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kilometers down the road – and it was always *fantastico!*

Take a fresh look at what is right under your nose and you may be pleasantly surprised. I'm now paying more attention to the Locavore movement, which is all about reconnecting with the great quality of foods and opportunities nearby.

4. **Happiness is all around, but there's not always a Sign.** One of my two vices is great coffee, and I was told that "espresso bars are everywhere" in Italy. I was frustrated until I learned that the bars are typically tiny and, since the locals already know where they are, poorly marked. Once I had clues, I could find a shot of espresso within minutes.
Happiness is like that – if you don't know what you seek, it's impossible to find. Seek clarity, and you'll soon realize it's right in front of you.
5. **Do your inner work, first.** Americans are often concerned about the view OF their house, e.g. how others see their house/lawn/gardens from the street. In Italy, gardens are maintained in hidden courtyards, so the focus is on the view FROM the house.
When you work on how YOU see the world, you will create more positive change than when you spend all your time worrying about your "image" with others.
6. **We build on other's successes.** While we think we are special and so advanced, we are not the first generation to achieve huge innovation and create great works – ancient Rome proves that point. If not for the accomplishments and creativity of those who went long before us, what we have today would not and could not be.
We have a responsibility to understand history and use it in two ways: as a jumping off point to build a better future AND for lessons on what NOT to repeat!
7. **When you move all day, many small steps add up.** Our busiest walking day (nearly 20km/12mi!) covered ancient Rome's central city: the Forum, Palatine Hill, and the Coliseum. Yet because we stopped for a picnic lunch in the emperor's throne room and a nap in the palace gardens, we survived the day.
As the saying goes, "how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time;" any big undertaking becomes easier when tackled just one step at a time.
8. **Happiness is in the small things and the quiet moments.** One of my fondest memories will be of the supreme calm I'd experience each time I stepped off the crowded, frantic streets of Florence and into the dark, cool quiet of the convent lobby.
Take a moment to breathe.
9. **There are friendly people everywhere.** We got lost. We feared pickpockets. We sat down in restaurants where nothing was in English. We learned that no matter the situation, *per favore* and *grazie* (please and thank you) brought out the best in others.
In life, we often assume that we're on our own because we buy the "story" that the world is an uncaring and dangerous place. That's an image created by the media to sell newspapers, cable news, and reality shows. In the Real World, 98% of the people you ask will return a smile with a smile, and help you on your way.
10. **Once you let go of control, it's easier to enjoy the ride.** Italians pay scant attention to breakfast, start dinner "too late, and drive like lunatics on impossibly narrow roads, right? Well, it took a few days for us to understand, but once we let go of our American "filters" and embraced a different set of rules, we had a better time, and created great stories to tell.
Let go of your "shoulds" and instead be curious about what is.



11. **Don't sleep with the windows open unless you pull down the screens.** Don't get mad at the mosquitoes – it's not their fault you forgot!
12. **Although it is hard work to climb up hill, the spectacular views from the top make it all worthwhile.**
13. **Anything that seems strange at first can feel perfectly normal after a week.** Exhibit A: pumpkin, sardines, and octopus on a pizza (it was pretty tasty!)
14. **There's no place like home.** No matter how delightful the trip, there's nothing quite as lovely as a good night's sleep in your own bed!

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**The 13 Principles of Happiness** offer even more life lessons. Visit <http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>, to download a 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: TRUE VISION ENDURES

**To understand Italy and the culture, you must visit the Basilicas.** Churches were the heart of town life – centers of worship, the primary meeting hall, the seat of justice, etc.

**Churches were also symbols of power and prestige, so kingdoms competed with each other for the grandest and largest basilicas.** As a result of Middle Age politics, beautiful architecture abounds.

**Two of the most spectacular churches we saw were built over a 50+ year period, and the final details, such as murals and marble mosaics, took 150-200 more years to complete.** I find it incomprehensible that architects of that time could hold a vision so powerful as to inspire their great grandchildren. Yet, they did!

**When they planned, they often assumed they would not survive to see the completed project.** So they would spend much time enrolling others in their vision, striving to create an entire community that shared their passion.

**In contrast, it makes the job of today's leaders seem so easy.** All they need do is engage people for a few years!

**When you speak of vision, what's your timeline?** Sure, things change faster today than in the Middle Ages or even the Renaissance, but is it not just as important for leaders to create a compelling vision that will carry your organization into the future?

**Remember, Leadership is not about a title:** Anyone can be a leader who holds a passion for what is possible, and seeks to enroll others in a positive future vision – whether it's about an organization, a community, or a family.



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### III. SUMMER READING UPDATE

If you've yet to take your summer vacation, check out my Twelfth Annual Summer Reading List for some great ideas.

[Visit my website](#), and click on Free Stuff, Reading Lists.

Oh, and I added two more to the list since June. First, I got turned on to George R.R. Martin's first book, **A Game of Thrones**, and am now hooked on the series. It is almost Tolkien-esque in the way Martin has created an entire world, with its own mythologies and histories.

Finally, if you like Michael Crichton's fast-moving, just-on-the-edge-of-reality writing style, you will love **Robopocalypse**, by Daniel Wilson. It was a fabulous fun and frightening quick read on the beach!

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### IV. COMMERCE DIVISION: GET FREE STUFF!



**So, have you checked out [my new website](#) yet?** This is my first complete overhaul in ten years, and I'm pretty excited about it – there's new content AND new technology (e.g. you can browse on your tablet or smart phone)

**The site is loaded with tons of new [information on our services](#), and ample supplies of [Free Stuff](#), including Articles you can use in your company newsletters, Assessments for your personal development, Reading Lists, Happiness resources, and Archives.**

**After you explore, [let me know what you think](#).**

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### V. ABOUT THE COACH

Hi, I'm Jim Smith, PCC, The Executive Happiness Coach®. I work with smart, successful people like you, who secretly struggle with overwhelm and fear that you won't have what it takes to succeed at the next level. I help you expand awareness of your strengths and limits, explore new paths to effectiveness, then support you **as you build powerful new behaviors that transform how you "show up" in your life and work.** You will achieve more clarity, build broader leadership skills, and expand your capacity to LEAD your life on a MUCH bigger stage!



## Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

I have helped thousands of leaders and business owners just like you to increase effectiveness at work AND live a happier, more balanced life. I invite you to contact me for a free Leadership Strategy Session to learn how you can create **a less-stress leadership presence**.

Reach me directly: [Jim@TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com](mailto:Jim@TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com) or +1-440-885-3247

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

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