

HOW HAPPINESS WORKS

What You Need to Know About Happiness

“The statistics on sanity are that one out of every four Americans is suffering from some form of mental illness. Think of your three best friends. If they’re okay, then it’s you.” -Rita Mae Brown

I used to think that “*happiness*” was some far off elusive destination that could be reached only when the sun, the moon, and Martha Stewart’s sleeping patterns were all in sync. It’s not though and I’m about to tell you why...

But first, let me ask you some questions...

Did you know that in the United States, depression rates are 10 times higher today than they were in the 1960s?

Did you know that the average age for becoming depressed is now 14 years old? Fifty years ago, it was age 29.

And did you know that 45 percent of college students claim to be so depressed that they have trouble functioning?

What the hell is going on here?!

*(Check out Tal-Ben Shahar’s book **Happier** for more on this and ways to be happier!)*

As you now know, my take on the topic is that our value system is morbidly diseased. We talked about the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and if you watch just two minutes of prime time TV commercials, you’ll notice that we’re told to value extrinsic rewards.

Essentially, what is it that we all want?

- Money?
- Fame?
- Power?
- Respect?

No. The ultimate currency is none of the above. What we all want is HAPPINESS! That's what we're working so hard to have.

Call it what you will — excitement, love, joy, bliss, euphoria — but recognize that we're striving for a state, not a substance.

Something amazing has been happening in the last 10 years to help us with this. It's called the Positive Psychology Movement. The world's leading psychologists are saying that instead of using psychology to simply treat mental illness, we can use it to make normal life more fulfilling.

From 1900-2000, for every 100 articles published on the negative side of psychology (about illnesses like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, etc.) there was approximately ONE article published on the positive side (about things like gratitude, exercise, optimism, etc.).

If you're like me, you think it's pretty amazing that modern technology is now able to **scientifically** tell what makes people happy. Finding out the things that are proven to make us happy, and then doing them and feeling the results for myself, is one of the most valuable things I've ever discovered.

Let's take a look at where happiness comes from...

Research done involving identical twins separated at birth shows that about 50% of our happiness is determined by our genetics. We're pretty much born with a "happiness set-point" and regardless of what external circumstances are going on, in the long run, if unchecked, we'll return to that level of happiness automatically.

Now this is where most people (*including myself at one point*) take a wrong turn:

They spend most of their time chasing the **things** that they've been brainwashed to believe will bring them happiness. However, science shows that the **things** you have in life only bring about 10% of your happiness. Stuff like what kinda car you drive, how much money you have in the bank, and what your job title is all fit into this category. For the most part, you can think of this 10% as "external incentives."

The warm fuzzy feeling that those things initially bring will diminish... kinda like the experience of eating cookie-dough ice-cream. The first taste is a euphoric explosion of enzymes tangoing with your taste buds. But by the time you're on spoon six – it's nothing new.

So that leaves us with 40% of happiness left to address. These are our behavioral tendencies which we have direct control over. And this, my friend, this is how we have the power to be happier... RIGHT NOW!