

Gratitude is the Foundation to Personal Happiness

Every good parent that I have ever met has expressed his or her aspiration for their children to be happy. However, how they envision their children achieving happiness varies among parents.

Some parents emphasize the importance of education. Others encourage athletic success. Many hope to guide their children into a respectable profession, such as law, medicine, or business. A few want their children to value hard work. Marrying the right spouse, and having good health are always integral to happiness. And, of course, parents love to see their children make a lot of money.

Yet, one ingredient of happiness I almost never hear from a parent is the most fundamental: gratitude. Imagine how much easier it would be for their child to attain happiness by simply changing their perspective on life.

Consider our own lives.

Unhappy with a job? I recall once at work, when the boss gathered the office together to yell at the entire staff. He declared that we were all replaceable and that other people would love to have our jobs. While my boss's words and actions were unprofessional and inappropriate, his observations were correct. People who were unemployed or underpaid in another profession would love the opportunity to have one of our jobs.

Having good health is certainly a key component to happiness. Yet, few of us recognize that until our health turns poor. When we were healthy, we merely took the good health for granted. Even for those with health problems, there is always someone else far worse. I have worked with people who are blind, in wheelchairs, have cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and even a person with polio. Many of these people are more outgoing and have a better outlook on life than those with no disabilities. They accept their physical challenge, appreciate other aspects of their lives, and persevere.

Is your spouse driving you crazy? Sure, you can leave them, separate, or divorce, but isn't it surprising how many other people are interested in the dreadful person you just left? True, there are circumstances where you should leave a spouse – if they become violent, for example. Yet, someone else will probably pursue them. Too often, we dwell on the deficiencies of a loved one, and take for granted their finer points.

Money can certainly purchase us good times, but can it buy us true happiness? People I have known with money are always concerned about someone taking it from them, acquiring even more money, or paying large bills for their excessive lifestyle. Even people with little money are envied by others with even less money. Money can buy us a lot, but no matter how much we have it never seems to be enough to make us happy.

How many of us complain about our family and friends? Unreliable, opinionated, judgmental, and overbearing are just a few terms that come to mind when it comes to some relatives. However, I know people who have no family, no close friends, and spend holidays alone watching television.

We certainly should want our children to be happy. However, I believe we expect too much has to happen for them to attain that elusive goal. What if we just taught them to acknowledge and appreciate what they already have? It will cost them nothing and require little additional effort.

None of this means we should not strive to improve our lives. But life is a challenge no matter what path we take. And, if we appreciate that path a little more, perhaps we might be happier on our journey.

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