

Happy Summary

Guy who lives in the a slum in India – house made out of cloth, carries people around all day in a rickshaw, some of whom treat him with disrespect. Not much money or even food, but loves spending time with his family/kids, as well as his neighbors. He is as happy as the average American.

- What do we learn from this story?
 - o Money, living accommodations, even your job, not as important in determining happiness.
 - o Spending time with family and friends, and appreciating this time, is very important for happiness.

Happiness Pie

- 50% is genetic – “set point”
- 10% - factors only partially or completely out of your control.
 - o Circumstances you were born into...
 - o Income
 - o Social Status
 - o Age
 - o Health
 - o Looks
- 40% - “Intentional activity” – specific things you can do to increase happiness

The importance of Novelty / variety

- Louisiana Guy – “never know what I am going to see out here; it’s different every day.”
- Even as simple as taking a different route to work.

Dopamine – neurotransmitter that allows us to experience pleasure and satisfaction

- Aerobic Exercise releases dopamine
- Use it or lose it – if dopamine not consistently released the receptors die – you cannot put off the experience of enjoyment for another time in your life. By the time you get there, your brain will not be able to produce enjoyment.

Csikszentmihalyi – experience of Flow

- Activity is an end in itself – you do it simply because you enjoy it.
- Not passive, but active and fully engaged – pushing yourself

Good and Bad events do not determine happiness – they do temporarily, but we tend to return back to our set point.

- lottery winners
- people who experience a permanently debilitating injury

Story of the woman who was beautiful and got run over by a truck, permanently disfiguring her face.

- Then husband divorced her

- Then remembered being abused by her father
- She ends up being more happy after all of these things than before... Why?
 - o Acceptance of all experience, emotions, and aspects of self over denial
 - o New husband – honest with her / jokes about her face

Problem of the hedonic treadmill – buying new things only makes us happy for a short time, then we adjust and are not any happier than we were before.

#1 thing that makes people happier is quality of relationships and time spent with family and friends.

- Louisiana Guy – whole big extended family lives close by – they eat together all the time

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

- Extrinsic = Money, status, image
- Intrinsic = personal growth (doing things you like), close relationships, and helping others / making the world a better place.
- People who focus on extrinsic are more likely to be depressed, anxious, and lack vitality in comparison to people motivated by intrinsic motivation.

Japan – least happy industrialized nation

- Karoushi – literally working yourself to death
- The guy who spends so much time at work his daughter does not even recognize him – and too tired to play when at home
 - o Dies when something bad happens at work.

Bhutan – focus on Gross National Happiness rather than Gross National Product

Denmark – happiest country in the world

- Co-Housing Communities

Religion increases happiness

Okinawa – higher percentage of people who live to 100 than anywhere else (contrast with Karoushi).

- strong relationships, work off the land, traditions that ensure consistent contact with all people of all generations - parade / music
- People are cremated and their ashes are mixed with the ashes of others who have died from the same village.

We are hard-wired to cooperate – releases dopamine – we will choose cooperation over competition – inhibit self-interest

The big sweaty guy who talks to the middle school kids

- Story of the girl in the special Olympics who is way ahead in the race and chooses to wait and cross the finish line with the other runners.

- Kids tell stories of being picked on
- “The most important thing we can teach these kids is love.”

What made us happy before our culture started inundating us with commercials and images that greatly affected our perception of what we think will make us happy?

- Bushman
- Again, very close community – hunt together – small communal festivities around a fire

The Dalai Lama

- Compassion right from the start is in our blood, from the first connection between mother and child

Compassion and loving kindness meditation – increases happiness

- cultivates qualities of compassion
- Monk – Ricard – look at his brain while he is meditating
 - o Activation of left prefrontal cortex -
- Every day people – teach them for 2 weeks to meditate – their brain changes
- Meditation can change in its structure as well as function

Count your blessings on a consistent basis – 5 things every Sunday

Commit acts of kindness – put change in a parking meter, helping a friend with homework – VERY CONCRETE THINGS – this is most effective in increasing happiness.

Andy Wimmer

- bank and computer manager, made a lot of money, very ambitious, liked to spend money
- Volunteer for 17 years at Home for dying and destitute
- Show them they are not forgotten – someone cares
- Life has a meaning
- My life is a loan given from god – I will give it back with interest

Focusing on things beyond yourself brings happiness – “spiritual emotions”

Think of happiness as a SKILL – no different from learning to play the violin or to play golf