

How Happy Are You?

Engage in positive, possibility thinking.



by Cathy L. Greenberg

HOW HAPPY ARE YOU NOW? Do you know? You may know what makes others

happy, but not what lights up your life. If you're seeking happiness, start with the relationship you have with yourself. Is it healthy, loving, and nurturing? Or do you defer to your inner-critic?

Are you living a life defined by negatives—by what you believe you can't do and what you don't have? Do you keep looking for happiness, while believing it will never be yours? You may ask, Why even dream? My response, Why not? Why not dream about a joyous life? Why not overcome the self-constructed barrier between what your life is and what you want it to be?

Happy men and women cultivate certain habits and practices that enable them to have happy lives in spite of—and sometimes because of—life's tribulations. They integrate their experiences into the narrative of their lives in such a way that they feel successful. Some people seem to always be happy—they know how to take a good life and make it even better. You can learn and apply the principles of happiness to create personal and professional fulfillment.

Gender Differences

Much of happiness may be gender-specific. The female brain makes more connections in areas that govern communication and emotion. The neurons of the male brain are more concentrated in areas that govern sex and aggression; women have 11 percent more neurons for language and hearing; women use 20,000 words a day compared to men's 7,000; the brain space dedicated to emotion and memory is larger in women.

Women experience more of all emotions, except anger, and while women suffer four times as much depression as men, they also report more positive emotions than men, more frequently and intensely. Men tend to be stronger, more aggressive, and think more strategically; their success determines their status and power. Women bear and raise children—an undertaking that requires support, nurturance, communication, cooperation, and strong relationships. What men and women value

—and what they are valued for—sets the stage for what they find fulfilling and meaningful, which ultimately leads to happiness. Clearly, women and men are on different paths to happiness.

Because what constitutes happiness for men and women differs to such a degree, what men and women think will make them happy differs as well. Men spend much more time and energy in the pursuit of power, status, and things; women focus more on relationships, cooperation, and communication. While men are more caught up in *having* enough, women are more engaged in *being* enough—and they often struggle when they fear they are not.

Avoid Happiness Traps

A happiness trap is something that promises happiness but doesn't deliver. It becomes a trap when you respond by re-doubling your efforts: If one piece of cake doesn't do the trick, another will!

Six of the most common traps that lead to unhappiness are: 1) perfectionism; 2) wanton wanting; 3) holding a grudge; 4) thinking "I would be happy if . . ." 5) thinking, "I'm nothing without X," and 6) circling the career track.

These six traps could be called the "if only's." If only I was, if only I had more, if only I could, life would be perfect. No it wouldn't because these things won't deliver the joy you seek. If you believe they are, happiness will remain outside your reach. Most happiness traps are based on misplaced fear. Fear comes in many guises. For women, fear is the product of not being or having enough. Most women feel they are inadequate. If they're beautiful, they find a feature to hate. If they're accomplished, they believe they're impostors.

Who is ever satisfied? Who ever feels secure? Our "survival brain" is hard-wired to fear hard times. Hence, we still lean toward the emotion of FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real).

Practice Self-Coaching

As part of your self-coaching, use some questions to avoid falling into a

trap or to pull yourself out.

For example, perfectionism is based on a fear of not being good enough. Women who fall into this trap believe that happiness correlates with a specific goal: being more successful, smarter, better, more educated, or wealthier—in short, perfect. But perfection is an unattainable illusion. You can't ever get there from here! Women seek perfection because they are wired to do so for perceived or real access to resources. The perfection trap is lethal because it mani-



fest itself in many ways, including Wanton Wanting (I need, I want, I have to have it), or "without X, I'm nothing." Caught in the perfection trap, you compare yourself to somebody with an attribute that's higher or better. The precept of perfectionism is *no one or no thing will ever be good enough*—not you, your partner, your job,

your home. People are not perfect; people make mistakes.

You can overcome perfectionism by looking at what is working. What is your strength, what are you good at, what can you do, what you can be proud of. By turning the "what is working" on in your mind, you can see what is good and begin adding to your strengths and minimizing your need for perfectionism. By asking yourself what is working, you force your mind to see the possibilities.

You can take this possibility thinking to a higher level by asking: When you are at your best, what strength do you use? When you are at your best, what are you working on? Are you working with others or by yourself? What time of the day are you most energized? What behaviors trigger success for you? How do you like to reward yourself for a good deed or a job well done?

The more you practice using happiness tools, the less you have to think about using them—you just will.

Who is happy and why? Most happy people are proactive. They don't wait for life to come to them—they engage in life. They participate in the creation of their destinies with great resilience.

You can find happiness in your life without having to win the lottery, marry Mr. Right, or drop down to a size 2. You only need to become the CEO of you! Happiness is near—waiting for you to discover it.

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ACTION: Avoid the happiness traps.