

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It's Time to Decide: A Final Call to Action

“This life is yours. Take the power to choose what you want to do and do it well. Take the power to love what you want in life and love it honestly...Take the power to control your own life. No one else can do it for you. Take the power to make your life happy.”

—Susan Polis Schutz

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me so much of your time reading my story. At the beginning of this book, I suggested that if I—a financially blessed, professionally successful man with a beautiful family and genuine relationships (i.e., assets that supposedly bring happiness)—could experience such a brutal breakdown, perhaps our society’s idea of what constitutes “happiness” should be redefined.

Well, here’s *my* definition of happiness today: **Happiness is the daily act of choosing to accept and love yourself as you are and for who you are.** (Assuming, of course, that you are honestly striving to live your best and most fulfilling life and that you are helping others in the process!)

Happiness is not created through money. You won’t find it solely through achievement, accolades, honors, or pats on the back. Not even the unconditional love of others can bring about its presence in your life. That’s because

happiness isn't wholly dependent on outside factors. It has to exist within you apart from external circumstances.

I know as well as anyone that you can't always ward off depression or prevent anxiety. There's no such thing as a worry-free, mistake-free, or trouble-free life. Not even close.

However, I *have* learned that there is such a thing as choice:

Choice concerning what you focus your attention on.

Choice concerning how you react to various situations.

Choice concerning what you prioritize.

Choice concerning the type of people you surround yourself with.

Choice concerning how you treat your body, spirit, and mind.

Choice concerning how you view yourself and your circumstances.

All of these choices (and many more) have a crucial bearing on how happy, or unhappy, you will be.

The Wisdom of a Fisherman

Here's a story I love about a fisherman who truly was wise beyond his years. I think it really captures what we all need to remember throughout our own lives as we strive to make conscious choices based on what we really *do* desire—not what others tell us we *should* want.

A very wealthy, successful older man and his wife were vacationing on a beautiful tropical island. As this man sat in his beach cabana, he noticed a young islander rowing his small boat out into the waves each morning, and then returning with many fish within just an hour or two. This went on consistently day after day. Being curious, after about a week the older man approached the younger fisherman and asked him how he managed to return from the ocean with such an impressive catch day after day.

"Well, it's just a knack I've always had," the young man replied. "I can tell where the fish are going to be."

"Do you realize that with talent like that, you could make a fortune working for a large fishing company?" the older man observed. But to his surprise, the fisherman wasn't really interested.

"Why would I want to do that?" the fisherman asked. "I'm already happy with myself, my wife, my child, and my fishing boat. Every day, I go out on this beautiful ocean. Then I come back, sell as many fish as I need to, and go home. I cook the rest of the fish I have left on the grill. I relax, I play with my son, I visit my friends, and I make love to my beautiful wife. What more could I want?"

"Well, for starters you could make quite a bit of money," came the reply. "Actually, I'll even start you out. I'll set you up with several boats and workers to man them. I'll get you your own office here on the island, and we can travel together to grow the company. It'll be great!"

But still, the young man wasn't convinced. "What would be great about that? I would be working hard, probably much longer hours than I do now. I would be away from my wife. I wouldn't get to see my son grow up, and I wouldn't be able to swap stories with my friends. Doesn't sound like much of a 'great' life to me."

"Well, that's only temporary," the older man responded. "When you're older and as rich as I am, you'll be able to *buy* your own island where you can do all of these things that you love so much."

"No thanks," the young fisherman said, putting an end to the discussion. "I'm *already* on my favorite island doing all of the things that I love the most!"

The fisherman in this story could have made many different life choices. Also, he could have looked down on himself because he wasn't wealthy and because he lived a simple life. He could have chosen to beat himself up because he wasn't "going places." He could have chosen to believe that sacrificing many of his blessings and joys would be worth it for riches. He could have chosen to think that he "needed" material success to make him a worthwhile human being.

In other words, he could have chosen to put stock in many of our current world's damaging priorities. But he didn't. And because he made the choices that were best for him, he was truly a happy person.

Ultimately, we must all realize—and this is very, very important—that at any moment, even the richest and most successful person in the world can look at himself and feel just awful about his life. And conversely, the poorest person among us can choose to do just the opposite and feel tremendous about himself. It truly is up to each of us whether we feel good or bad about ourselves. And this decision will certainly have a huge bearing on our own abilities to be happy.

In this book, I've tried to give you the tools you need to begin making this vital shift in your self-perception. I hope that reading my story has inspired you to celebrate how great you really are! And I also hope that it has shown you that once you've learned a lesson from a mistake, you must just push that error aside and move on.

So—now it's time for you to make the critical choice. You must decide right now just how important it is for you, and thus your future lineage, to live happier lives. Remember, there's no substitute for learning how to love yourself.

It's time to look in the mirror and see the wonderful, gifted, one-of-a-kind individual who's really looking right back at you.

It's time to start giving yourself both more slack and more credit, as well as the mental empowerment you deserve.

It's time to stop basing your opinion of yourself and your own happiness on a disproportionately negative memory of who you were when you were younger, or on other people's opinion of you, or on performance reviews, or on the size of your paycheck.

Yes, it's time to put on a "new pair of glasses" with a new prescription—a much more "sunny" prescription, that is!

And here's a piece of truly encouraging news: If you choose to put on those new glasses and work toward a happier life for yourself, you don't have to go it alone. In Part Two of this book, I'd like to share with you my Twelve Weeks to Living a Happier Life, which I've developed from my own experiences. It is my hope that these weeks will give you the tools to take the first steps on your own journey to greater fulfillment, positivity, growth, and yes...happiness.

You've read my story...now it's time to begin a new chapter in your own! As you embark on this path, my ultimate hope is that you will come to understand that happiness is definitely a state of mind that occurs when you begin to take care of yourself—body, mind, and spirit—and, most importantly, when you learn to love yourself. And when you learn to love yourself, you will naturally be more loving to others. When you succeed in changing your own life, please do pass on the lessons you've learned and pay all the help you've received

forward! Share what you know about the real nature of happiness and tell as many people as possible how they, too, can find it. Now that's a way to *truly* change the world for the better!