



What Does It Take to be

Really Happy?

Have you ever overheard someone say: "It's funny, I've achieved most of the goals that I thought would make me happy; - my dream home; the car; family; a great income; - and yet I don't actually seem to feel any happier - there's still something is missing, something really important!"

Experienced Life Coaches frequently hear this, particularly from 'high achievers'.

Do you know people who have achieved many of their material life goals, only to say 'Is that all there is'? Maybe you've experienced it yourself?

It's sometimes referred to as 'Successful but Still Not Satisfied' and it's experienced by more people than you might imagine.

So what's going on?

The answer to this paradox lies in the false assumption people often make, that in the pursuit of things they believe will make them 'Happy', they will automatically achieve something they inherently desire most of all - A sense of Meaning & Purpose in their lives.

Research has revealed that it's rarely the case that 'one' leads to 'the other'.

In a recent article in the 'Journal of Positive Psychology,' called: "Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life" world renown Professor, Roy F Baumeister (Florida State University) found there is a big difference between things that make you 'Happy' and the things that bring a sense of 'Meaning and Purpose' to your life.

They also discovered that in choosing to do things that gave people a sense meaning and purpose in their lives, they frequently had to engage in activities that they definitely didn't enjoy.

In fact, happiness played a very small part in their choice to live a meaningful life! (Think Fred Hollows enduring the hardships of Eritrea to bring eyesight to the poor).

In this groundbreaking research, nearly 400 adults ranging from 18-78, answered questions about the extent to which they thought their lives were 'happy' and the extent to which they thought they were 'meaningful'.

And the results were in some areas surprising and very challenging to popular beliefs about our concepts of 'Givers' and 'Receivers', in relation to Happiness and Meaning.

For example, one controversial finding revealed that:

"Happiness is mainly about getting what one wants and needs while helping others can have a negative impact on your general feelings of happiness."

In short, you experience happiness when you receive things you want and you generally don't feel happy when you are giving to others (except to the extent you equate the giving with your life purpose).

"There is a big difference between being happy and experiencing a sense of meaning and purpose in your life".

Baumeister



So what else did the study reveal?

Here are some of the keys findings:

1. Happiness is about getting what you want - Meaning is about giving to others.

We feel happy when we satisfy desires. For example getting things like, material goods; money; satisfying emotional needs; holidays in the tropics; etc, etc. All of which generate a short term 'happiness fix'. However, none of these things (the dream house, car, etc) will increase the level of Meaning & Purpose in your life. Meaning is created by acts that contribute to enhancing the lives of others.

2. Happiness is about the present moment. It's a fleeting 'now' experience.

By contrast Meaning is about the future, or more precisely, about linking life's 'moments' (from the past) to your present, and then to your future.

3. People are happy to the extent they find their lives easy and convenient. Whereas doing things that create meaning and a sense of purpose, often involves activities that can cause stress, worry, pain, and confrontation. These stresses may be part and parcel of a meaningful life, but these sort of stresses are low in the lives of purely 'happy' people.

"People are forever 'seeking' to be happy but they shall never be so, because happiness can only be experienced in the present moment."

George Zalucki

In essence happiness is about receiving, whereas meaning is created through giving of yourself in contribution to others. And the more you feel that your activities express 'who you really are as a person' the more meaning you create.

"We are above all, meaning seeking creatures."

Karen Armstrong

It is important to recognize that in identifying happiness being associated with 'getting things', there are no value

judgments, it's neither right or wrong. In fact, there is are times when getting things is entirely appropriate neither are there judgments about engaging in activities that make you happy.

The research simply highlights something that has been recognized by the wisest teachers through history that the exclusive pursuit of material wealth will ensure that you have enough to live by but nothing to live for, you will have the means but not the meaning.

More important is the recognition that we live in a time when the 'Happiness Industry' abounds with 'How to' guides with titles like: The 'How To' of Happiness; 'Absolute Happiness'; 'The Art of happiness' etc, each with it's own roadmap to this 'ultimate state'.

And yet, when it's all said and done, it may not be 'Happiness' that people are seeking it all.

The funny thing about happiness is that it doesn't make people happy in the way they may have thought it would.

The assumption that the pursuit of happiness will somehow translate into a meaningful and fulfilling life is one of the 'happiness traps' that can lead to bitter disappointment, as people transition through their stages of life and experience a stronger and stronger call to use their gifts, make a difference and leave a legacy.

How can Life Coaching help?

Life Coaches find themselves often working with people in transition, whether this involves a new career, significant relationships, or even 'overall life direction'.

And just as often, experienced coaches will work with people facing the 'Successful But Still Not Satisfied' paradox, which seems to occur during life's second half, and where people recognize that there is so much more to living a fulfilled meaningful life than the acquisition of possessions, power or prestige.

Experienced Coaches come to know that people don't so much want to live a longer life, but that their life means something while they are still here. That the way they contributed of themselves mattered in some way to make a positive difference to the world and to those they love.

"The funny thing about happiness is that it doesn't make people 'happy' in the way they might have thought."

A Life Coach can work with clients through a process to gain clarity and direction toward a life of meaningful contribution, in a way that best expresses their highest intentions, while accommodating the realities of daily life.



Knowing your purpose and the meaningful contribution you make on a daily basis, to create a positive difference in the world, is one of the greatest gifts you can give to yourself and the people you love. Happiness is something you will enjoy in many present moments along the way, but as we've seen it is certainly not the main game.

"The exclusive pursuit of material wealth will ensure that you have enough to live by, but nothing to live for. The means, but not the meaning."

The Four Components of a meaningful Life.

Lastly, the research by Baumeister and his team also revealed that the Meaningful life had certain essential properties. Here is what the Professor said in a recent article for Aeon Magazine.

"The meaningful life ... has four properties. It has purposes that guide actions from present and past, into the future, lending it direction.

It has values that enable us to judge what is good and bad; and, in particular, that allow us to justify our actions and strivings as good. It is marked by efficacy, in which our actions make a positive contribution towards realising our goals and values. And it provides a basis for regarding ourselves in a positive light, as good and worthy people.

A life will be meaningful if it finds responses to the four questions of purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth."

There is no single answer to the Meaning of Life, however, with the help of an experienced coach and a commitment to making your own unique contribution to the world, you will certainly find your own answer to life's greatest question!

David Beard

Employee to Freedom Seminars



Here's to living Life on Purpose!

References:

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