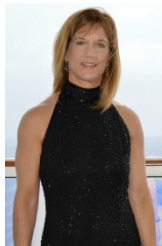


“When you stand at the bottom of a mountain and look up, all you see are the things that block your path. Yet when you reach the top and look down, you will know: 100 paths would have brought you to that place.”

- ***“From the book The Happiness Hack”***

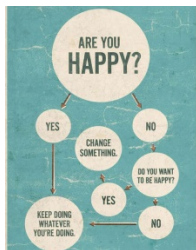
I love finding perfect quotes and here is yet another one. It's especially fitting for me, because I love to climb mountains. My goal is always the summit. Goals are important, not only having them but achieving them. As you're reading this, know that I just achieved one of my goals. As well-traveled as I am, I'd never been to Niagara Falls. Now here I am, enjoying their breathtaking beauty, on the Canadian side. Listening to the falls, which are calming like the ocean to me, it reminded me about how important it is to find your happy place. But then I thought, "Why does it have to be a place? Why can't it be wherever you are?" My dad believed that happiness was a CHOICE. He was right. So this month, I'm going to help you learn how to choose happiness. This is only the tip of the iceberg, so if you want more information, be sure to contact me.

Yours in health,



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In Pursuit of Happiness



We all feel blue or get depressed from time to time. But there are people who seem to snap out of it as quickly as they get into it. My friend Debbie is one of those people. I often call her "Pollyanna" because she always seems to see the light at the end of the tunnel, no matter how dark it is inside. I've always admired her for that. She definitely CHOOSES to see the bright side of just about every situation. Her attitude is a great reminder for me that happiness really is a CHOICE.

But how do we make that CHOICE when it feels so difficult? It really should be one of the easiest choices we'll ever make, because it's in our own power. Physically speaking, it's much easier to smile than to frown. Smiling takes 2 muscles. Frowning takes 11. But sometimes, we get so caught up in our own head that we forget how to make that CHOICE. I've done a lot of thinking about this topic over the last several months and I've come up with some suggestions I think will help. It takes work to reprogram our brains to make a different CHOICE than the one we've probably been making for most of our lives. You just have to decide that it's worth the effort and then CHOOSE to do it. Here are some suggestions to help you.

Get negative people out of your life. A few years ago, I made the CHOICE to eliminate negative and toxic people from my own life. It wasn't easy ending friendships I'd had for years, but when I realized that those people were bringing me down, I stopped spending time with them and chose to spend time with positive people who made me smile and laugh. I'm now fortunate to have people in my life to help me do that.

Stop negative thoughts. When they enter your mind, replace them with positive ones. If you make a mistake at work, instead of calling yourself an idiot, think about what you can do better the next time and learn from it.

Believe in Yourself. In order to really find happiness, you need to take a good long look at yourself. Identify things you want to change and remind yourself that YOU and YOU alone have the power to change them. Then start taking one step at a time to facilitate those changes, whatever they are. Along the way, be your own best cheerleader and then reward yourself when you get there.

Make time to Play. Put away your to-do list and do something spontaneous you enjoy. It can be anything from taking a motorcycle ride on a beautiful day to meeting a friend you haven't seen for a while to reminisce and laugh about old times. Stop thinking about work and CHOOSE to do something that makes you smile and feel good.

Connect with Others. When you're feeling blue, the worst thing you can do is what I like to call "hermitize yourself" This is when you hide from the world and wallow in your own self-pity rather than picking up the phone and calling a trusted friend to talk or to go do something with you. Connection is so important when you're not feeling your best. Often, physical touch is what's really needed. Hugs stimulate oxytocin, which is a feel-good hormone that can help improve your mood. When I'm feeling down, almost nothing is better than a hug from someone who cares about me.

Make a gratitude list. Every night before you go to bed, make a list of at least 3 things that made you smile today. Perhaps someone you care about sent you a text that they were thinking about you. Or perhaps you got the last seat on the Metro so you didn't have to stand the whole way to work. Keeping a list like this will make you more conscious of the positive things happening around you that you probably never noticed before. Read the list occasionally to remind yourself that there really is a lot of good in your daily life.

Try to make someone else smile. Everyone has a bad moment or a bad day and perhaps you can make it better. Sometimes, I'll tell a complete stranger that the royal blue sweater she's wearing is a great color on her. An unexpected complement will generally bring a smile to someone's face. Try to do this at least once a day and I bet you'll end up feeling better too.

Get Outside. Spending time with Mother Nature may just be the ultimate cure for what ails you. When I need to get centered, I go on a long strenuous hike in the middle of nowhere or for a long walk on the beach to listen to the waves crash onto the shore. Almost nothing lifts the blues more than the beauty of nature. Being at Niagara Falls has been a good reminder of the importance of being outside.

Learn to say no. Just because someone asks you to do something doesn't mean you have to say yes, even at work. Sometimes you even have to say no to yourself. Do you really need to do that load of laundry tonight when you'd much rather kick back and start watching the new season of *"Orange is the New Black"*? If you can't replace "should" (I should really clean the kitchen) with "want" (I really want to clean the kitchen right now), give yourself a break and do it another time.

Set achievable goals for yourself. Find something that's important to you and try to attain it. Choose something you'd want to do even if you're on vacation, like I am right now. If you don't enjoy the process, you won't enjoy yourself when you reach your goal or destination.

Nurture relationships. Understand how important it is to seek out ways to invest in and spend time with your friends, family and loved ones. Solid relationships can truly enhance happiness. I think the happier someone is, the more likely he or she is to have a solid circle of friends and people who love them in their lives. These individuals can provide support, comfort and friendship whenever it's needed. Don't take these people for granted. Let them know how much they mean to you. Relationships really are good for the soul.

Keep in mind one very important thing: people who are generally happy don't feel like they have to wait for something amazing to happen to them to feel joy. They tend to live in and enjoy the moment, which makes the world a happy place for them.

Ultimately, being happy means facing the fact that sometimes life can really stink and there will be times when you feel unhappy and that the deck is stacked against you. But you have to remember that YOU ultimately have the power over your own feelings and your own mind. Here's a simple example: If you don't like the song that's playing, change the station. CHOOSE to smile. CHOOSE to tell yourself that today will be better than yesterday. CHOOSE to spend time with people who care about you. It's so much better and healthier than being alone, all wrapped up in your own misery. Most importantly, remember that you have the ability to CHOOSE to be happy.

Have a wonderful month.