

"Take responsibility for your own happiness. Never put it in other people's hands."

- Roy T. Bennett

This seemed like an appropriate quote this month given my topic. It's been a rough year and people are hurting. Are you one of those people? Be honest. Admitting weakness takes strength. I wrote this month's newsletter not only for you, but also for me. I needed to be reminded that happiness is in YOUR OWN control. Have you lost your smile? Have you felt lost and disconnected? You're not alone. But you must stop wallowing in your sadness and CHOOSE to be happy. If you are lost, my goal this month is to help you navigate the path back to happiness. But I'll let you in on a little secret. The choice to be happy rests solely with you. I can't choose it for you, but perhaps my 10 steps will arm you with ways to make that choice and find that seemingly elusive path.

Yours in health,

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10 Steps to Happiness



It's been a rough year for a lot of people and we've lost connection to not only co-workers, but friends and loved ones. Depression is skyrocketing. Suicides are increasing. Rioting and looting is out of control and there seems to be very little civility left right now. While I try to be an optimist and hope that better days are just around the corner, I'm also realistic enough to know that positive change will take some time. But in the meantime, as we move from the dark to the light, I have to trust that in the end, God wins. So in the meantime, as the battle between good and evil wages on, I thought it would be helpful to put together some ideas on how we can find happiness amidst all the sadness and fear. Here are some of my suggestions:

1. Believe in yourself. You need to really take a good long look at yourself in order to begin to find happiness. The idea here is to figure out any negative beliefs about your own worth and make some adjustments. When you're comfortable with who you are and are open, friendships can start to develop and thrive. Friends can often make all the difference when you're feeling lonely.
2. Hang out with positive people. When you have someone in your circle who is happy and upbeat, it increases your chances of happiness by about 15%. Why? Happiness is infectious and can spread like a ripple in a stream. I've worked hard the last couple of years to get negative people out of my life and it's made a difference. Surround yourself with people who make you smile.
3. Make time to have fun. Swap working long hours and lengthy to-do lists for some play time. It will pay off in a big way for your health, your mood and even your relationships. I know lately, I've been way too caught up in work that I've not taken the time to just have fun and enjoy life. Take a mini-vacation from your responsibilities and just laugh and have some fun.
4. Eliminate negativity. I really need to work on this one. How many of you forget to do something and then refer to yourself as "Stupid"? It's a horrible habit and you have to learn to break it. I've tried to be more cognizant and catch myself when I do it. Then, I simply remind myself that I'm not stupid and am actually pretty darn smart. When a negative thought enters your head, picture a red light and just stop. Tell yourself something positive instead like "I can do it", "I am smart" or "I am beautiful."

5. Connect with other people. This has been really hard to do these last six months. People have been holed up in their house, afraid to go out or invite their friends over and just enjoy life. While we certainly have to be careful, human connection is critical. If you can't see a friend, pick up the phone and call him or her. Better yet, grab a hug whenever you can. Touch stimulates oxytocin, which is the "feel good" hormone. Remember, connecting with others can help you cope with stress and feel so much better about everything. Nothing, I mean nothing, beats a great hug!
6. Keep a gratitude list. I wrote about this in my May 2020 newsletter, how practicing gratitude can change your life. Every day, make a list of things about which you're thankful. Some days will be easier than others and that's normal. Even if you only write down one thing, it's a step in the right direction. Soon you'll learn to notice the blessings all around you.
7. Help someone else. When you're feeling down, it's so easy to get caught up in the "Woe is me" mentality. The best way to dismiss it is to give back. It can be anything from giving blood (which is my top choice) to running an errand for a friend. Doing something for someone else takes the focus off of you and whatever is getting you down and puts it elsewhere.
8. Enjoy Mother Nature. This is my number one choice to help center me and find my inner happiness. For me, the healing properties of being outside comes from a combination of the smell of the clean air, the warmth of the sunshine and the beauty of the green trees against a blue sky that get me back to my happy place when I'm feeling down. Even if it's only for a few minutes each day, get yourself outside.
9. Listen to your favorite songs. It doesn't matter what kind of music you like. Throw on a pair of headphones (or not) and press "play". Music can give you a much-needed mood boost in difficult moment or day.
10. Take time to meditate or pray. When you're feeling blue, find a quiet place to meditate (or pray) and think about life. Either of these choices can help slow your breathing and calm your soul. This in turn, has the ability to reduce your heart rate and/or your blood pressure. It will hopefully fill you with peace and probably, ultimately some joy. A good friend once told me to "Let go and let God." It was great advice.

Remember, being happy often means facing the fact that sometimes, life really does stink and there will certainly be times when you feel unhappy. That's life. No one can be happy all the time and that's ok. When we do get into a somewhat dark place, it gives us the chance to work through whatever issue is bringing us down. Never forget, there is ALWAYS light at the end of the tunnel. It may take some time to reach it, but it's there. When you spend some time focusing on what makes you happy, you may begin to see that you have the ability to make choices to move in new directions that may change your life. Sometimes, it just takes a leap of faith to understand that the power to be happy is within you. It's like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. She always had the power to get herself home. She just didn't know it. Happiness truly is a choice. Never forget that you, and you alone, have the power to be happy. No one else can get you there. As my dad would say, "It's an inside job!"

Have a wonderful month.