

When You're Smiling, When You're Smiling, the Whole World Smiles with You...

How are you doing? This insane, exceptionally challenging year is finally on its way out, but it does not look as though we will be totally free of lockdowns any time soon! I must admit, I had days in November when I started to lose it. But then Gloria and my daily meditation practices managed to pull me out of the hole into which I was sinking. Plus, I read an interesting book this month (yes I know – another book!) that really gave me pause for thought. The book is called *Rip It Up* by Richard Wiseman. Its basic premise is: *If you want a quality, act as if you already have it.* Wiseman calls this the *As If* theory and he gives the example that if you smile, you will feel happy. In several research studies, subjects reported feeling happier when they forced their face into a smile and significantly angrier when they were told to hold a frown for several seconds

It is really easy to try this theory out for yourself. Sit in front of a mirror. Relax your face into a neutral expression. Then, make a wide smile, including wrinkling the corners of your eyes. Hold this expression for around 20 seconds. Then drop the smile and check how you feel. Most people report feeling happier. Another research project found that people who laughed out loud for some time started to feel not just happier, but elated.

A weird aspect of this research into how acting in a particular way can strongly influence our emotions was a study that tricked strangers into feeling more attractive to one another. The researchers did this by getting couples who did not previously know each other to play footsie with one another under a desk whilst thinking that they were practising using a way to cheat at cards. The couples who played footsie with each other rated one another as more desirable than the couples who just played cards without making physical contact.

Now I know that this idea that our actions can create certain emotions within us sounds rather odd. We have all probably heard about the power of positive thinking, but we have heard far less about the power of our actions in determining our mood. But just think of the wonderful implications of this discovery. Instead of a depressed person needing to spend a fortune on some kind of long-term psychotherapy to lift their mood, or taking anti-depressants for the rest of their life, what if they were simply mentored to act as if they were happy or confident?

During this lockdown, so many of us have spent a lot of time complaining about the state of the world and all the restrictions on our lives. But what if we began to act as if our everyday life was just fantastic? What if we got up every morning and said *out loud* to ourselves. 'Wow, I can feel that this is going to be a wonderful day!' What if we then got out of bed and did a little jig of happiness and then laughed out loud for a minute or so? Wouldn't this get our day off to a much better start than opening our eyes and groaning out loud at the thought of dragging ourselves through another challenging or depressing day?

I love the basic premise of *Rip It Up* because it takes everything one step further than the *Creating a Complaint Free World* book. Not voicing our complaints so much about

everything that is wrong with our lives can definitely prevent us from sinking into apathy, or even dark despair, about life. But surely life should be better than just OK? I know life is not at all easy for any of us at the moment, but what if we all started to smile more, laugh more, relax our mind and body more and thus act as though life was really good moment to moment? In reality, our lives are still extraordinarily blessed. We have plenty of delicious, comforting food to eat. We still have friends and loved ones, even if we are physically separated from them at the moment. We have mobiles, we have Zoom etc. etc. Gloria and I now have a knitting factory in our living room that strangely brings us a lot of fulfilment - even if we are only capable of knitting really basic stuff. I also know that many of you reading this message have become extra inventive and creative this year in all sorts of wonderful ways.

Are we perhaps so wedded to being miserable, that none of all our many blessings seems enough to make us really, really happy and grateful? This is tragic. So why do we not decide that from now on we will wake up every morning singing or humming that wonderful song from the 1940s musical Oklahoma?

Oh What a Beautiful morning

Oh what a beautiful day

I have a beautiful feeling

Everything's going my way.

I dare you: Every day throughout the month of December, belt this chorus out soon after you awake. If you are not a big musicals fan, sing another song instead, as long as it has a really happy tune and words. If singing really is not your thing, what about laughing yoga? Simply start your day by laughing out loud and keep laughing until you feel great. Sing, hum, dance, laugh, or at the very least smile broadly each morning to start each day as you mean to go on. Then, just keep acting all day as though you have fallen madly in love with life and guess what? Life will love you back 100 fold.

Is that a deal? I am afraid I am not offering a prize for being the most enthusiastic and committed morning warbler/dancer/laughing yoga practitioner. But if the premise of *Rip It Up* is true, your greatly increased happiness will be its own reward.

So, no complaining out-loud all month - or at least very little complaining - plus acting as if we were all blissfully happy and in love from 1/12/20 until 25/12/20 and we should all have what I so sincerely wish for us from the depths of my heart as this challenging year comes to a close:

A Very Happy Christmas,

Peggy Foster