Happiness Within Reach

Stanford Wellness Summit 2013
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The Co-Vitality Path
Happiness and Wellness
Defining Happiness
Superstar practices of happiness
Is Happiness a “missing link” to wellness?

When people's happiness levels improve, so do their health behaviors.

- Stronger immune system functions
- Live longer
- Higher level self-care (healthier lifestyle factors; wear sunscreen, get regular checkups, use seatbelts, etc.)
- Less frequently distressed; less intense symptoms; shorter in duration.
- Look for strength and meaning in adversity
  - (Dr. Ed. Deiner, U. of Illinois)
Defining Happiness

What makes you happy?

artist: Leah Rosenberg
Bliss?
Happiness
Seligman; ”Authentic Happiness”

Hedonic
Pleasurable experiences and moments

Eudaimonic
Meaning, purpose, flow, accomplishment
What do happy people do differently?
Dr. Ed Deiner, 2004

• Savor the good; experience gratefulness
• Are compassionate, not harshly critical
• Social connections
• Set goals that cultivate satisfaction, meaning and purpose
Social science and Neuroscience study happiest people

Social Science:
• Studies human attitudes, beliefs, behaviors

Neuroscience:
• Studies the mind and its potential to re-shape neural pathways
• Conducts imaging studies on brains of happiest people
Neuroplasticity – “the neurons that fire together, wire together.”

(Donald Hebb; 1949, referred to as “Hebb’s Law”)
Happiness (hedonic) set point: capacity for emotional well being

- **50% Biology:** The gene pool
- **10%:** Lucky Charms or Bummers: Life circumstances

- **40% Intentional choice**
  - Goals
  - Thoughts/beliefs
  - Social connections
  - Dealing with Adversity

Dr. Sonya Lyubormirsky, USC “How of Happiness”
Gratitude and Wellness

Dr. Robert Emmons, Uc davis; author; “Thanks”
What is gratitude?

Gratitude can be as easy as a beautiful sunset, an exquisite bite of chocolate, a child, or the brilliance of autumn leaves. No matter what shape or form gratitude takes, it fills us with a warmth and a reminder that life is good; this moment is special. And challenges provide lessons to learn and make us stronger.
Gratitude Findings

- **Psychological** (Positive emotions: alert, energetic, enthused, attentive) 25% increase in well being measures.
- **Physical** (more exercise, better sleep, healthy BMI, stronger immune system)
- **Interpersonal** (more helpful and connected, less lonely and isolated, highly pro-social)

Compassion
What is Compassion?

Concern for the alleviation of suffering and distress of self and others.
Wired for Compassion

- The urge to help others is innate
  (Tomasello, 2009)

- We are quicker to cooperate than to compete both as children and adults
  (Rand, Greene & Nowak, 2012)

- Compassion ensured our survival (and even influences dating preferences!)
  (Sapolsky, 2004; Buss, 1986)

- Compassion makes us happy
Compassion in Business and Technology

- Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (C-CARE)
- Greater Good Institute UC Berkeley
Self Compassion

When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it's bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast, and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space.

Pema Chödrön; Zen Master. “When Things Fall Apart,”
Self-Criticism

Failings, inadequacies and experiences of distress/pain
Self-Compassion

"You will encounter frustrations. Losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us."

—Dr. Kristin Neff
Self-Compassion

A type of open-heartedness that replaces harsh inner critical self-talk

• Kindness: must notice that suffering is occurring
• Recognize that suffering is part of the shared human experience
• Respond with feelings of care and concern for self.
Self-compassion and self-criticism

Self-compassion is more strongly associated with
  - intrinsic motivation, learning and growth goals, curiosity and exploration, and less fear of failure
  - less anxiety; depression; self-criticism
  - Provides the safety needed to see oneself clearly, detect maladaptive patterns, establish healthy goals and make changes
  - Strongly supports change and resilience
  - engage in fewer self-handicapping behaviors such as procrastination
  - Self-determined vs. helplessness

(Kristin Neff, PhD; University of Texas at Austin; Author, “Self Compassion”
GOALS: Joy on the Journey

Contrary to our belief, lasting happiness does not come from the attainment of a goal. Happiness comes from pleasure and/or engagement on the way to a meaningful goal.

Dr. Kennon Sheldon (U. of Missouri)
"I spent four years working on my last climb, and the moment of success took me only about 10 minutes to achieve. The time we spend on the top is short; you have to enjoy the journey."

- Chris Sharma, Rock Climber

(ESPN The Magazine, 7/22/13)
The Benefits of Meditation

Source: *20 Scientific Reasons to Start Meditating Today* by Dr. Emma Seppala, Associate Director, CCARE
We all have difficult times
RELATIONSHIPS

Our presence is the medicine
“Relationships are themselves a crucial part of psychological wealth without which you cannot be truly rich. Simply put, we need others to flourish. Indeed, the results of research on social relationships and happiness are clear on this point: healthy social contact is essential for happiness. Happy people report mutually supportive relationships (families, friends, mentors, colleagues) and better health than do people with low life satisfaction”.

Dr. Ed Deiner; “Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth”
Happiness IS Within Reach

What can we do?

Create a strengths-based culture of co-vitality

• Celebrate each small step towards accomplishment of goals.

• Foster meaningful and authentic relationships.

• Replace harsh self-criticism with self-compassion

• Integrate benefit-finding and gratitude in daily experiences.

• Mentor others towards resiliency so that we find strength in good times and hard times.
Your assignment:
One of the best ways to help others to be happy is to be happy *yourself*.

-His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Courses and Seminars

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu: Based UC Berkeley, Greater Good reports on groundbreaking research into the roots of compassion, happiness, and altruism. One day seminars; trainings. A treasure trove of information for adults and children. Also offers web learning.

Stanford Continuing Studies; Stanford Health Improvement Program: Practices of Happiness; Positive Psychology

http://ccare.stanford.edu: Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Offers seminar series; trainings in compassion.
Courses and Seminars (cont.)

**www.wisebrain.org**: Free subscriptions to this treasure chest. Receive weekly “Just One Thing” tips; latest in science and research about positive states, meditation and emotion, and a wealth of interesting and noteworthy articles. Also offers web learning.

**http://www.awakeningjoy.org**: Live and online courses available. This course sustains joy and interest. Also offers on line option.

**http://www.projecthappiness.org/programs/for-adults-happiness-coach-certification-program/**: Learn 7 doors of Happiness for yourself; teach others to access their inner happiness too. On-line course

**https://shiftnetwork.infusionsoft.com/go/epc2/pme/**: On line course to shift from ego to essence
For Parenting & Kids

Christine Carter’s online parenting course

Project Happiness: Palo Alto organization dedicated to increasing well-being among youth.

Race to Nowhere: a film about the struggles of high achieving Bay Area high school students.

http://www.challengesuccess.org: A project of the Stanford School of Education, whose mission is to inform, inspire, and equip youth, parents, and schools to adopt practices that expand options for youth success.