

Happiness is Highly Overrated

By Nick Arnette

Do you want to be happy? Duh. Of course you do. Everyone wants to be happy. Being happy makes us feel good. That's what it's supposed to do.

Wanna hear something? I think happiness is highly overrated. "What? Are you kidding me?" you say.

Well, sort of. Yes, I love being happy. But the problem with happiness is that it doesn't last. By definition, the word "happy" is based on the word "happenstance." In other words, happiness is based on circumstances. Some of us get caught in the trap of thinking something is really wrong with us because we don't *feel* happy.

So some people do some pretty destructive things to make themselves "happy." They drink or do drugs or gamble excessively because it makes them happy—for a little while. Then that feeling goes away, and they want to feel happy again. If left unchecked, they wind up with an addiction because it takes more and more to make them feel happy.

I live in Los Angeles, a town where lots of rich and famous people live. I'm sure you've heard countless stories of people who had it all but were absolutely miserable. Consequently, their lives ended tragically. I'd venture to guess that if someone could ask them what they wanted out of life they'd say something like, "I just wanted to be happy."

If one of your goals in life is to live happily every after, you will probably wind up making yourself, and others around you, very *unhappy*.

Okay, now that I've bummed you out, don't despair. It's all good, I assure you. Instead of frustrating yourself by pursuing endless happiness, try hanging your hat on things that last. It's what's known as *joy*; it's an internal sense of well-being, regardless of the circumstances. How do you get more joy? Focus on things that will last. That way when you are facing one of life's many challenges, you'll have something deep inside you to get you through. □ Here are a few ways to boost your joy factor:

*** Take care of your body.**

Eat right, get enough rest, and exercise. I bought a Nintendo Wii and use the Wii Fit exercise program. One day, my Wii Fit age was *20 years old!* (It made me more happy than joyful, because on most days, I'm much older.) Still, knowing that you are in good physical shape does a lot to keep your mind in the active mode.

*** Look after your spiritual needs.**

Go to your place of worship. Join a small-group study at your church. Pray. It's always good to have someone to lean on who's bigger and stronger than you are.

*** Volunteer.**

One of the best ways to be fulfilled is to reach out to your fellow man. It gets the focus off you and onto others who need a helping hand. Teach someone to read. Clean a senior citizen's yard. Coach a little league sport. Go on a mission trip. Bring meals to the homebound. When you help others, you'll have a much brighter outlook on life. (Here's a prescription for a miserable day: Spend the entire day thinking of nothing but yourself and your problems.) Get outside yourself, and boost your joy factor and someone else's in the process.

*** Be a family person.**

If you have a family of your own, savor the time you have with them. Emphasize quality time together. Encourage and support one another. If you don't get along with your family, do your best to try to make things right. You'll get a lot of joy out of that.

If you don't have a family, "adopt" one. If you're fortunate enough to come from a good family, be proactive and include someone who isn't as fortunate. Some of my favorite holiday memories are from times our family invited people who had no family to join us.

One thing is for sure: In times of need, one of the first places we turn to is our family. Do your best to maintain healthy relationships.

*** Learn something.** Learning something new is always a good confidence booster. Learn to speak a new language, or take a class at your local community college. Knowledge is something anybody can get, and nobody can take it away from you.

*** Take on a hobby.**

Join a club with people who have similar interests. If you like to hike, join the Sierra Club. If you like to fly-fish, join Trout Unlimited. Having outside interests is a good stress-reducer as well as an effective joy-builder.

*** Expand your skills.**

In this economy, it's always good to make yourself as indispensable as you can. A good friend of mine is a financial troubleshooter for a large company. He was told he'd done so well that he had basically worked himself out of a job. He responded by learning how to use the complicated new accounting system the company had installed. Only a few knew how to use it, and now he's one of them! There is no more talk of laying him off. Other ways of improving your skills might be attending conferences, joining associations in your industry, networking, or becoming an expert in your field. Be the first one to learn how to use the new equipment. Be good at finding quick answers to questions. Become the "go-to" guy or gal at your job. There's always a place for leaders and self-starters. It might as well be you!

If you're out of a job, become more skilled while you're looking. Use your time wisely. The time you spend worrying about not having a job can be spent learning skills to

improve your chances of finding a new one.

*** Listen to positive things.**

Be careful what you listen to. I love music. I have over 20,000 songs on my iPod. I installed a program that found the words to most of my songs. Much to my surprise, some of my top-rated songs turned out to be very negative. Think of all that negativity stored in my subconscious! Some genres tend to be more negative than others. Instead, try listening to upbeat music and motivational or inspirational programs on the radio.

*** Watch what you watch.**

A lot of TV shows are essentially just guilty pleasures. Be careful. Don't let the skewed values displayed on many TV shows (especially reality TV) influence the way you think. Remember, garbage in, garbage out! At the very least, try to balance your TV watching with inspirational and educational programming.

*** Don't read into it.**

What we read can influence our thinking just as much as—if not even more than—what we watch on TV. If all we read is doom and gloom or gossip magazines, we can end up with a pretty pessimistic outlook on life. Everything we see and read gets stored in our sub-conscious mind. All of it. Take that into consideration when you're thinking about what you read (or watch). Try to balance your reading with something that is motivational or inspirational, especially at the beginning or the end of the day.

*** Take it outside.**

Being outside can be invigorating. Take a walk, do some gardening, smell some flowers, get a little sun. We get vitamin D from sunlight, and there are some valuable health benefits from it, such as an immune system boost, decreased risk of a battery of cancers (not skin cancer though, so don't get too much), protection from heart disease, and a decrease in joint and muscle pain. It also combats osteoporosis and weakening muscles.⁷

*** Journal.**

Get a notebook and write down all the good things in your life. You'll find that as time goes on your list will get longer and longer. You'll start focusing on the positive things in your life, and you'll be thankful for them. If you're having a hard time starting your list, go to www.youtube.com and search for "The Miniature Earth with Song." This short video breaks down what the world population would look like if there were only 100 people, using current statistics. After watching it,

I assure you, you'll be able to list some good things in your journal.

*** Be positive.**

If you take on a positive, upbeat attitude, you'll find you start feeling that way too. It's

the old “fake it ’til you make it.” Also, when you’re a positive person, you’ll find you draw more like-minded people to you. Wanna hear a song about it? Listen to “Change Your Mind” □ by Sister Hazel. It’s a good theme song for active mode thinking. You can’t lose by having a positive attitude!

*** Git ’er done.**

If you have something hanging over your head that you’re dreading—a project, something you need to tell someone, etc.—just bite the bullet and do it. You’ll probably find it wasn’t as bad as you thought it would be. Even if it is, you’ll be working toward solving a problem that’s robbing you of your joy. You’ll have a tremendous amount of self-satisfaction knowing that you’ve accomplished something challenging.

*** Be good to yourself.**

If someone you deeply care for had a bad day, wouldn’t you want to do something nice to show how much you value him or her? Sure you would. So remember to do the same thing for yourself. Reward yourself for a hard day’s work or after completing a difficult task. It doesn’t have to be anything big or even cost any money. Just do something that you enjoy doing.

Even taking a nap can do a lot to keep you feeling good. More than 50 percent of Americans are sleep deprived.⁸ A 20-minute afternoon nap (right after lunch is ideal) can increase your productivity and help you regain some of the sleep you lost the night before.⁹

*** Look forward.**

Be sure you have things to look forward to, both long- and short-term. Short-term ideas include meeting weekly with a group of friends, a golf game, a bowling league, a dance lesson, or going to church.

It’s important to have some long-term things to look forward to as well, such as something you’d like to accomplish before a specified time, a special place you want to visit, the kids’ graduation, grandchildren—the sky is the limit. Just be sure to have some!

We’ve all heard stories of people who survived dire circumstances mostly because they had something they were looking forward to. Having something to look forward to actually saved their lives.

Everybody needs something to do. Everyone needs someone to love. Everybody needs something to hope for. And every- one needs something to believe in.

Lou Holtz

The preceding article is an excerpt from *Me, We and Glee: How to have a great attitude, work as a team and keep your sense of humor*, by Nick Arnette. Known as *The Feel Good Funny Guy*, Arnette is a popular keynote speaker at business meetings throughout the United States and Canada. You can contact Nick Arnette at www.NickArnette.com, email: nick@nickarnette.com

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