

Happiness Through CANI

What makes us happy? The answer to that question is truly one that can be debated. Everyone has their own ideas of what they feel it would take to make them happy. There are some constants however. For example, I'm sure most people feel that having more money would bring them happiness. Money does create more financial freedom which can alleviate some sources of stress. Ultimately though happiness is not about how much money you have. There are countless examples of people all over the world who seem to have it all, including money, and yet they are still miserable.

Anti-depressant use has increased by about 400% over the past two decades. Clearly unhappiness is an issue. So where does happiness come from then. While it may be difficult to narrow it down to one specific source, a major source of happiness is something referred to as CANI. This is an acronym for **Constant and Never-Ending Improvement**.

Once we hit our 40's and sometimes our 30's most of us live our lives on autopilot, rarely straying from the habits or routines that make up our everyday lives. This is because we are in what is referred to as the comfort zone.

What is Your Comfort Zone?

When you are in your comfort zone, you are in a mental state which is anxiety-neutral and your behaviors are normally free of any risk. You behave in a predictable way that will give you a level of performance that is standard for you. Because there is no risk in your behavior, you have no anxiety and therefore you feel comfortable doing what it is you're doing. When you are acting within your comfort zone, your learning and development opportunities are limited as you are likely to be doing something that you are already comfortable in doing.

Yet this is really a misnomer because constantly staying in the comfort zone actually makes us uncomfortable due to the fact we are never growing, and growth is a major source of happiness. As legendary Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz said; "In this world you're either growing or you're dying". Dying certainly isn't associated with happiness.

Life Today

Today we are living in an all or nothing society. By that I mean most of the time we are not growing, and when we do try to grow or improve we go to extremes. We try to lose weight by going on crazy fad diets. We start exercising and try to go from couch potato to Olympian overnight. We have a business idea and expect to be millionaires overnight. One of life's realities is that major improvements take time. They don't happen overnight. But because so many of today's products and services promise overnight perfection, we've come to expect instant gratification—and we become discouraged when it doesn't happen. This creates a negative association with attempts at improvement. To create a positive association and thereby evoke feelings of happiness we need to focus on practicing CANI.

Examples of ways to practice CANI:

Make an effort to have incremental daily improvements: If there are things about yourself you are unhappy with, focus on making minor improvements daily. No one is perfect, and trying to be that way can cause frustration. But each one of us has things about ourselves we would like to improve upon. We can take steps toward this every day. For example, if you want to become more patient, focus on slowing down and not being as reactionary at least one time during the day during a situation that would ordinarily set you off.

Continually goal set to challenge yourself: Setting a goal and achieving it is a wonderful thing and something to be proud of. But once you achieve a goal, if you don't have something else to strive towards your fire can dwindle, your enthusiasm can wane. Always give yourself a goal that is on the challenging side so you feel more happiness about accomplishing it. Then when you do accomplish it, set your next goal and work towards it, and so on...

Learn: Today there are so many sources for learning, including audio books, free educational podcasts* on-line you can download, and let's not forget good old fashioned books. You might be saying; "I don't have time for that". Well think about all the time you spend traveling or commuting. This is a great opportunity to learn. Instead of listening to the same old noise put on an audio book. Even if it's only a 10 min drive there is still enough time to learn, plus multiple 5 and 10 commutes add up to a significant amount of time and as a result, a significant amount of learning.

Find a purpose and work towards it: I recently was listening to a podcast called The Joe Rogan Show, he mentioned a friend of his who had been suffering from depression and was into drugs and alcohol. This friend learned about issues in Africa in which there was insufficient clean drinking water and poor overall living conditions. This sparked something inside of him and he decided he needed to help. He has since been making regular trips to Africa and works to help create better living conditions. He is no longer depressed or into drugs and alcohol. Why? He found a purpose!

This is a bit of an extreme example but it makes the point. Your purpose doesn't have to involve working in third world countries, it could mean any number of things large or small. Whatever your purpose is, when you are working toward it you will know it because it will bring feelings of fulfillment and happiness.

We weren't born with an owner's manual. We don't know all we need to know when we are born. We learn through life and experiences. Every book you read, every class you take, every experience you have is another building block in your career and your life. Life is our school and by living life, not just existing, we learn and improve.

Make a commitment to keep getting better and better every day in every way. If you do, you'll enjoy the feelings of increased self-esteem and self-confidence that come with self-improvement, as well as the ultimate success and happiness that will inevitably follow.

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