

The Happiness Solution Newsletter

October 2007



Quote of the Month

“When we talk about settling the world’s problems, we’re barking up the wrong tree.

The world is perfect. It’s a mess.
It has always been a mess.
We are not going to change it.

Our job is to straighten out
our own lives.”
-Joseph Campbell

A Bit of Humor?

Recently, a middle-aged woman came to see me for a consultation. She said, “Doc, you’ve got to help me. My husband thinks he’s a piano.” I replied, “Bring him in to see me.” She quickly responded, “I would if I could, but have you ever tried to move a piano?”

Your Signature Strengths

If you have about 45 minutes to spare, go to Dr. Martin Seligman’s website, www.authentic happiness.org.

After you create a username and password, you can take the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire (no charge) and immediately get feedback as to your top five character strengths. Once you know what they are, you can run with them, so to speak, to create more happiness in your relationships and in your life.

Story of the Month

"In and Out of the Trap"

Patients frequently tell me that they feel trapped. Can you relate to that? Trapped in a relationship, or maybe in a job? Like there's no way out. Like Sartre's "No Exit." Listen carefully. The trap is an illusion. Maybe you think that I don't understand, that you really are trapped. Well, as compassionate as I am to your plight, I still respectfully beg to differ. I will not say that you are trapped. What I will say is that you have very difficult choices. With so many possible mitigating or extenuating circumstances attached to your situation, it may indeed feel as if you have no options. But, you do. That is important for you to know and believe. If you don't, you'll feel powerless and hopeless.

Some choices are excruciatingly hard to make. It may be easier to feel trapped and do nothing than to choose to get out of the trap and deal with the consequences as well as with the unknown. Known misery may be preferable. In making difficult choices, you will probably have to confront intense ambivalence, grapple with guilt, and risk the disapproval of important people in your life. As horrible as it feels to be trapped, you might be choosing that rather than having to face the burden and consequences of exercising your freedom.

We can have this argument for a long time. You'll insist that you're trapped and will offer me a myriad of proofs to that effect. I'll insist that you have choices that will get you out of the trap, albeit with the caveats of facing the anxiety-provoking unknown as well as the loss of the known. I'll remind you how resilient you are and that you're capable of doing extremely difficult things. But the bottom line is that

it's your choice. I just want you to understand and believe that you have a choice. What you ultimately decide to choose is up to you, and you only. If you choose to stay in the trap, is it really a trap?

The image that often comes to mind is from cowboy movies of the 1940's, where a sheriff puts a rowdy person in a jail cell and shuts the door but doesn't lock it. The joke is that the prisoner shouts and rattles the bars of the cell while the audience knows he needs only to turn the handle in order to get out.
-Sylvia Boorstein

My Two Cents

We all have busy lives. I understand that. Much of the time it may seem like we can't get everything in. There are a lot of things to juggle. Although I'm sympathetic to your hectic life and the time constraints inherent thereof, I'm going to ask you to do something. Give me one hour a day. Rather, give yourself one hour a day. I know you're balking at the idea of having to find time for new things. Where will you find the time? Keep in mind that it's a 24 hour day for everyone. Einstein, Beethoven, Jonas Salk, the great inventors, poets, scientists, and so on, all had the same timeframe in which to operate.

If you spend one hour each day doing what I'm about to suggest, I can almost guarantee that eventually you will feel a lot better than you do now. Do me a favor. Stop resisting the idea and open up to it. Believe that you can do this. Make it a priority. You'll be amazed by the dividends it yields. As I'm writing this, I feel like a salesman, although I'm not trying to sell you anything. It's just that I trust this formula to be effective and hope you give it a chance to find out for yourself. Here's the formula:

- 10 minutes of prayer or positive contemplation. Don't forget to express your gratitude for those you love, and for what you have.
- 10 minutes of walking (aside from any exercise that you do)
- 10 minutes of writing in a journal. Don't censor. Don't worry about grammar.
- 10 minutes of deep breathing or meditation. Keep your focus on your breathing and gently let go of all thoughts.
- 10 minutes of classical music. It is not necessary to be a fan of classical music. Try Haydn's "Symphony #26," Bach's "Brandenburg Concertos," or whatever piece does it for you. Okay, if you can't stand classical, substitute music of your choice.
- 10 minutes of having a face-to-face talk with someone you love (if there's someone available to you). A hug at the end of that talk is a nice finishing touch. If you happen to be alone, give yourself a heartfelt hug and say something loving to yourself.

Try it. You can find the time. Just one hour a day. Is it worth spending one hour a day to help you feel happier all of the other hours of each day?

Holiday Promotion

I've come up with an idea that may make your life a little easier around the holidays. Tell me who you would like me to send my books to as holiday gifts. I'll sign them to whomever you'd like me to, wrap them in tasteful holiday gift wrap, and mail them directly to the addresses you tell me to. I'll include a gift card stating that the gift was from you. And there is no extra charge for any of this. It's just the regular price of the books. And, as usual, all of the money will be donated to charity. Just e-mail me your special instructions at drgettis@aol.com. Happy Holidays!

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