

THE SPHERES OF LIFE AND HAPPINESS

A practical way of understanding happiness is that it is a by-product of having the various components of life working in harmony and synchrony. To understand this approach, visualize about six gears with teeth, spinning in unison. As long as all gears are moving properly (and no teeth are broken), a state of equilibrium and fluid motion is achieved. Similarly, imagine that life has six major components. The exact components will differ among people. For most people, the components would be approximately as follows:

1. Work and career
2. Interpersonal life, including loved ones and romantic life
3. Physical and mental health
4. Financial health
5. Interests and pastimes, including reading, surfing the Internet, and sports
6. A spiritual life or belief system, including religion, science, or astrology

When a person has ample satisfaction in all six spheres, he or she achieves happiness. However, when a deficiency occurs in any of these six factors, the person's spheres are no longer in harmony, and dissatisfaction or unhappiness occurs. Yet sometimes if a person is having problems in one sphere, satisfaction in the other spheres can compensate temporarily for a deficiency in one. For the long range, a state of happiness is dependent on all six spheres working in harmony. In short, the theme of this book surfaces again: Work and personal life are mutually supportive. Figure 16-1 presents the spheres-of-life model of happiness.

People vary as to how much importance they attach to each sphere of life. A person with intense career ambitions, for example, might place less weight on the interests sphere than would a more leisure-oriented person. However, if any of these spheres are grossly deficient, total happiness will not be forthcoming. Another source of variation is that the importance people attach to each sphere may vary according to the stage of life. A full-time student, for example, might need just enough money to avoid worrying about finances. However, after about 10 years of full-time career experience, a person's expenses might peak. The person would then attach more importance to the financial sphere.

THE KEYS TO HAPPINESS

Much research has been conducted about the ingredients of happiness. If you are aware of these contributors to happiness, you might be able to enhance your happiness. The spheres-of-life model of happiness also furnishes

self-image leads to the self-esteem required for loving relationships. A feeling of self-worth is important because it helps prevent being overwhelmed by criticism. An important part of developing self-esteem is to not want financial success more than other things. Insecure people seek society's approval in the form of purchasing consumer goods and accumulating investments.

4. *Work hard at what you enjoy and achieve the flow experience.* Love may be the most important contributor to happiness, with staying involved in work you enjoy coming in second. To achieve happiness, it is necessary to find a career that fits your most intense interests. In addition, it helps to achieve regularly the flow experience mentioned in Chapters 2 and 12. Happiness stemming from flow is powerful because it is not dependent on favorable external circumstances, such as recognition or love. The individual creates the happiness that follows from flow. Hard work contributes to happiness in another important way. A fundamental secret of happiness is accomplishing things and savoring what you have accomplished. Lyken, the happiness researcher mentioned above, argues that happiness is available to anyone who develops skills, interests, and goals that he or she finds meaningful and enjoyable.⁵ A log cabin dweller who lived off the land and whose goal was to be close to nature would therefore be happier than a wealthy person in a luxurious house who was not leading the life style he or she wanted.

5. *Appreciate the joys of day-to-day living.* Another key to happiness is the ability to live in the present without undue worrying about the future or dwelling on past mistakes. Be on guard against becoming so preoccupied with planning your life that you neglect to enjoy the happiness of the moment. The essence of being a happy person is to savor what you have right now.

6. *Be fair, kind, helpful, and trusting of others.* The Golden Rule is a true contributor to happiness. It is also important to practice charity and forgiveness. Helping others brings personal happiness. Knowing that you are able to make a contribution to the welfare of others gives you a continuing sense of satisfaction and happiness. Related to fairness and kindness is trust of others. Happy people have open, warm, and friendly attitudes.

7. *Have recreational fun in your life.* A happy life is characterized by fun, zest, joy, and delight. When you create time for fun (in addition to the fun in many kinds of work), you add an important element to your personal happiness. However, if you devote too much time to play, you will lose on the fun of work accomplishments. In choosing fun activities, avoid overplanning. Because novelty contributes to happiness, be ready to pursue an unexpected opportunity or to try something different.

8. *Learn to cope with grief, disappointment, setbacks, and stress.* To be happy, you must learn how to face problems that occur in life without being overwhelmed or running away. It is also important to persevere in attempting to overcome problems rather than to whine or engage in self-pity. Once you have had to cope with problems, you will be more able to appreciate the day-to-day joys of life.

9. *Live with what you cannot change.* Happiness researcher Martin Seligman says that attempting to change conditions unlikely to change

The concept of love is part of the need for intimacy as well as a key part of understanding personal relationships. Every reader has an idea of what love means to him or her. Harry Stack Sullivan, the famous psychiatrist, developed a particularly useful description of love, as follows:

When the satisfaction or the security of another person becomes as significant to one as is one's own satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists. So far as I know, under no other circumstance is a state of love present, regardless of the popular usage of the word.

A BIOCHEMICAL EXPLANATION OF ATTRACTIVENESS

Another explanation of why certain people are attracted to one another is based on chemicals and specifically hormones. According to this theory, our hormones direct us to sense or screen potential mates. After the initial biochemical attraction, our conscious, psychological preferences, (e.g., Does he enjoy action movies and golfing?) come into play. The interests and lifestyle preferences of the potential mate carry more weight after the initial attraction. While the biochemical factors are at work, the brain is processing the external clues people use to measure sex appeal. Among these personality factors are appearance, grooming, makeup, scent, body language, and voice.¹⁹

A more specific explanation of attraction between people is based on the presence of pheromones. These are chemical substances released by a person (or animal) to influence the behavior of another member of the same species. A person who emits high doses of pheromones will therefore attract more partners. Conversely, we are physically attracted to people with high doses of pheromones.

The pheromone theory is particularly geared toward explaining why one person is strongly attracted to another person on first sight. After the initial physical attraction, however, other, more rational factors (e.g., Is this person employed?) enter into the picture. Several companies sell cologne for men and perfume for women that allegedly contains pheromones, thus making it easier to attract Prince or Princess Charming and also to be noted by others. Because these “attractant” substances are considered cosmetics and not drugs, they are free from government regulation. Buyer beware.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOOSING A PARTNER CAREFULLY

Having a plan for meeting a partner and understanding why people are attracted to each other should be regarded as helpful information for making the right choice. A principal problem in many poor relationships is that the couple used faulty judgment in choosing each other. Of course, it is difficult to be objective when choosing a partner. Your needs at the time may cloud your judgment. Many people have made drastic mistakes in choosing a spouse because they were lonely and depressed when they met the person they married. Being on the rebound from a relationship that went bad makes you particularly vulnerable.

your relationship vibrant and fun. Make up a list of your own, but here are a few ideas to jog your thinking:

Ask your mate out for dinner on a *Monday* evening.

Write your partner a poem instead of sending a commercial greeting card.

Take up a new activity together in which you are both beginners (such as swing dancing or scuba diving) and learn with each other.

TAKE AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Earlier we described the importance of being positive when working out differences in a relationship. Viewing your partner positively will often help the relationship stay romantic and endure. A 10-year study was conducted to identify what saves marriages, with the initial interviews accomplished within six months of marriage. Ninety-five Seattle-area couples were traced for seven to nine years. Couples who will endure see each other through rose-colored glasses and show positive behavior toward each other. Those who will divorce within six months see each other through fogged lenses, seeming cynical and unable to say good things about each other.

The researchers noted that more important than what was actually said was “if they expressed fondness and admiration for their partner, if they talked about themselves as a unit, if they finished each other’s sentences, if they teased each other when they told a story, and whether what came to mind was pleasant.”²⁹

Additional support for the link between positive behavior and a lasting relationship stems from research by John Gottman. He has videotaped thousand of couples with the aim of coding positive and negative facial expressions, body language, and comments. For instance, eye rolling in reaction to a spouse’s comment is a strong predictor of divorce. The data of Gottman and his colleagues reveal that strong marriages have at least a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative interactions. As the ratio begins to drop, the marriage is at high risk for divorce. Four negative qualities are the most characteristics of couples that split: contempt, criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Negative facial expressions also dampen a relationship.³⁰

MAINTAIN A NONPOSSESSIVE RELATIONSHIP

A **nonpossessive relationship** is one in which both partners maintain separate identities and strive for personal fulfillment yet are still committed to each other. Such a relationship is based on interdependent love—love involving commitment with self-expression and personal growth.³¹ A nonpossessive relationship does not mean that the partners have sexual relationships with other people.

Contributors or keys to happiness include the following: (1) giving priority to happiness; (2) love and friendship; (3) self-esteem; (4) working hard at things enjoyed; (5) appreciation of the joys of day-to-day living; (6) fairness, kindness, helpfulness, and trust; (7) recreational fun; (8) coping with grief, disappointment, setbacks, and stress; (9) living with what you cannot change; (10) energizing yourself through physical fitness; and (11) developing a philosophy or system of belief.

According to Richard Carlson, the best way to achieve inner serenity (or happiness) is to follow the five principles of psychological functioning. First is *thinking*, which brings about feelings. Second is *moods*, including the idea that you can ignore bad moods. Third is *separate psychological realities*, meaning that each person thinks in a unique way. Fourth is *feelings*, which can be turned from negative to positive. Fifth is the *present moment*, which is where people find happiness and inner peace.

A good social life begins with finding people you want to date. Such an important activity in life should not be left to chance or fate alone. Instead, use a planned approach that includes exploring many sensible alternatives. Be realistic about the type of person you are likely to attract. However, when you experience quest fatigue, back off and enjoy activities without a partner.

Understanding why people are attracted to one another helps in choosing a compatible partner. The balance theory of attraction contends that people prefer relationships that are consistent or balanced, and therefore they are comfortable with people similar to themselves. According to social exchange theory, people seek relationships in which there is an even match of personal assets. A third explanation is that people are attracted to each other because the need for intimacy prompts them to fall in love. A fourth explanation of attraction is based on biochemistry, suggesting that our hormones direct us to sense or screen potential mates. After the initial biochemical attraction, our conscious, psychological preferences come into play.

Whatever the basis for attraction, a partner must be chosen carefully to help prevent a split based on a poor fit. One suggestion would be to ask your family and close friends what they thought of your potential for happiness with your prospective mate.

To keep an intimate relationship healthy, you should resolve issues as they arise. Suggestions for accomplishing this include (1) listening carefully and giving feedback, (2) being more positive than negative during arguments, (3) defining the real problem, (4) avoiding opening old wounds, (5) not hitting below the belt, (6) being prepared to compromise, (7) minimizing an accusatory tone, (8) communicating by e-mail when emotions are high, and (9) being alert to gender differences in communication.

Two-income couples are subject to unique pressures. To sustain a good relationship, a two-income (or dual-career) couple should consider these approaches: (1) establishing priorities and managing time carefully, (2) dealing with feelings of competitiveness, (3) sharing big decisions equally, (4) dividing the household tasks equitably, (5) taking turns being inconvenienced, (6) developing adequate systems for child care, and (7) deciding who pays for what.

Keeping a relationship vibrant is a major challenge. Among the approaches proposed to meet this goal are (1) keeping romantic love in perspective; (2) holding communication sessions, including while traveling;