

Happiness- A Topic for Conversation

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"Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions; it is governed by our mental attitude"

Dale Carnegie.

Happiness noun: According to psychologist happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. A variety of biological, psychological, religious and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources.

Happiness is in the last place we tend to look – inside us. A simple definition in a dictionary, between the pages of a book, can't begin to explain the mental state of each individual when they classify themselves as "Happy". Each person is on an individual quest to find this emotion that is thought of as the "best state of being", some find it on their quest to greater wealth, academic achievements, marriage and family life, their circumstances, financial situations, and so much more. Truth is, however, happiness isn't something we find, it's something we choose. We tend to live our lives waiting for each goal to be accomplished, for that special someone to come along, for that big break, that promotion at work in order to say, "Yes, I'm happy with the life I live". But what happens when the failures come, the ones that hit us so hard we lose faith, motivation, willpower and the urge to never try again? We begin to doubt that this emotion, this feeling of happiness even exists; we get frustrated with our lives, and tend to get jealous of those we see living their lives with pleasure and joy. But one of the most important things we must always remember is that failure is a necessary ingredient in success. If we don't fail we can't find the better way to do it, we wouldn't be as humble, compassionate and kind and, without failure we could miss some of the greatest lessons that life could teach us. As J.K.Rowling once said, "It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you have failed by default". I know not about others, but for me I'd rather fail a hundred times over than to fail once and give up. Each failure is a learning experience, a stepping stone on my path to greatness. So each time I fail, I start again, this time with renewed vision and success in my sights.

Finding Common Ground—Balancing Logic and Emotion

When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion. Dale Carnegie

One of the best ways to get through to the human mind is to focus on emotions; it is one of

our most important feelings. Emotions are what drive us; according to research, emotions drive 80% of the choices we make, while practicality and objectivity only represent about 20% of decision-making. Although an appeal to the emotional side of people can work well it is necessary, however, to maintain a balance between logic and emotions to have a longer-lasting effect and create a more persuasive message. It is also necessary that, when dealing with emotions, we deal cautiously and with an open mind, be judgment-free to avoid offending or criticizing others, and to also allow others to be open to your own thoughts.

To start a conversation across borders instead of talking about politics, current events, business or world hunger, why not appeal to the emotions -- ask about their take on the search for happiness; after all, we all seek it, no matter what gender, race, religion, culture or language we speak; every individual at some point wants to find their “happily ever after”. Ask a person what makes them happy, and you’ll know their hopes and dreams, their goals, their thoughts about the future and about life. It’s a conversation to speak directly to our limbic system- the key area of the brain that deals with showing, recognizing and controlling the body’s reactions to emotions.

As of recent years there has been a significant upsurge in scientific studies on positive psychology and the science of happiness or, to put it simply, discovering what makes happy people happy. Harvard Professor, Tal Ben-Shahar, was the first to spark the interest of many including the media and hundreds of students when he began offering a course commonly called “Happiness 101”, formally Positive Psychology, back in 2004 and then 2006, and since then the much buzzed about course has caught on, and now approximately 200 Universities offer the said course, with some even offering a master’s degree in the field. This goes to show that people are now willing to pay in order to learn how to find the happiness they seek. Of course, as positive psychology has come to show us, happiness isn’t a state that we are to permanently remain in, it’s somewhere we visit, rather than somewhere we live, a journey rather than a destination. As shown, the topic of happiness is already creating conversations across borders, conversations amongst the scholars, the psychologists, the neuroscientists and even the ordinary man, everyone wants to know what makes “us” happy and, truly, the only way to find out is to ask.

When we engage in conversations, we must stimulate the minds of our audience, use our emotional intelligence (a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions) as it will allow for a more successful execution of your message ,while at the same time balancing the logical side of your message with evidence that isn’t only based on facts and research, but that is directed towards the person’s personal experience and beliefs, thereby fully engaging them in the discussion. Basing a conversation purely on emotion gives you nothing concrete to fall back on, but when we incorporate the logic it creates the foundation for the emotion, thus creating that strong appeal , giving it more heart, more passion; all in all giving it merit.

Concluding Thoughts

Let's stop searching for happiness. Let's go out there and create it, find it, make it our own, write a new definition for happiness that is autographed by you. Begin on the inside and work your way out. Happiness is best when you share it; when you make others happy you in turn feel happy. On this journey we take through life we must choose to be happy with the present and not only with the idea of the future accomplishments we hope to achieve, appreciate the things we have, see the good in everything and let nothing steal your happiness and joy. Remove the negativity, the doubts, be happy for others instead of trying to steal their joy, no gain can come from such. Reach to your point of self-actualization and be so happy that the conversation begins itself from the emotions and the feelings that shine so brightly through you that people will approach you and ask what makes you so happy?.

"When I was five years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up I wrote down 'happy'. They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life." – John Lennon.