

September 1, 2016

## A psychologist's advice on how changing your mindset can help you achieve happiness

It may seem pretty straightforward: either you're happy or you're not, and there's nothing you can do to actually nudge yourself into this lovely state of mind. Well, as it turns out, you CAN learn to be happy! All you need is a bit of perseverance and the willingness to adopt some new positive habits. An article written by Martin Seligman attracted worldwide attention by listing the 21 habits that all genuinely happy people appear to share.

Today, Bright Side shares with you the exciting findings contained in the article!

### Let's be happy already!

In 2004, Martin Seligman, the father of 'positive psychology,' formulated the following three types of happiness-inducing lifestyles:

- Living at your leisure, filling your life with as many pleasant emotions as it can accommodate.
- Leading a life of care and commitment, finding happiness in work, parenting, love and well-deserved relaxation.
- Striving to fill your life with meaning by finding out your strengths and using them to start living for something bigger than yourself.

Seligman conducted research entitled 'What makes people feel most satisfied with life' and came up with highly surprising results. Apparently, the pursuit of pleasure has virtually nothing to do with achieving true happiness. Hedonism is merely the icing on a cake whose main ingredients invariably turn out to be either a sense of commitment or meaning.

This may sound like an attempt to justify what many people call 'living a life not wasted,' but all genuinely happy individuals really do have certain habits that the rest of us would be wise to adopt. Quite possibly, they will change your life for the better!

### 21 habits that most happy people tend to share

#### 1. They surround themselves with other happy people

Joy is contagious. Researchers from the Framingham Heart Study have been scrutinizing the phenomenon of the 'viral' spread of happiness for over 20 years. They have found that being surrounded by happy people makes a person more likely to find happiness in the future. Sounds like reason enough to ditch some of your dreary old friends in favor of more cheerful new ones.

#### 2. They smile a lot

Even if you don't feel particularly cheerful, try to think of something nice and don't forget to smile at that thought. This really should help. It is important, however, that you don't merely pretend to be cheerful — smiling while thinking unhappy thoughts will only make things worse.

#### 3. They develop their ability to recover

Psychologists believe that our ability to recover from bad news is the true antidote against depression. Happy people know how to bounce back from a shock. In a sense, this is a natural weapon against all the inevitable bad stuff we all have to deal with throughout our lives. As the old Japanese saying goes: 'Fall seven times, stand up eight.'

# BRIGHT SIDE

## 4. They actually try to be happy

Yeah, it's as simple as it sounds. Simply trying to be happy greatly improves your emotional well-being.

## 5. They pay attention to little victories

It is very important to celebrate all of your significant and hard-won achievements. However, genuinely happy people never miss the chance to enjoy small victories and good developments as well. Pausing to notice all these smaller positive things gives you additional emotional feedback that helps you stay cheerful throughout the day.

## 6. They appreciate life's simple pleasures

Having an ice cream on a bench in the park, patting a dog behind the ear, feasting your eyes on a rainbow. Happy people know how to value those insignificant pleasant things that come to us uncalled and don't cost anything to anybody. This ability to find reasons for joy in small things, to feel grateful for everything that you have, is directly connected with becoming a happy and fulfilled individual.

## 7. They dedicate part of their time to giving

No matter how busy their daily schedule is, positively minded people make sure to allot some of their time to committing good deeds. And, interestingly enough, those good deeds have a tendency to eventually 'return to sender'! By doing something nice for others, we enrich our own lives as well. Be it voluntary work or simple acts of kindness, such activity has a beneficial effect on one's physical and mental condition. What's more, it acts as a good defense against depression. Psychologists have even coined the term 'giver's high,' likening the joy of helping others to a drug-induced state of bliss. In some ways, this is a good comparison: charitable behavior triggers the secretion of dopamine, which gives us feelings of elation and euphoria.

## 8. They allow themselves to lose track of time

Whenever we are immersed in something very complex, inspiring, and meaningful, we experience a unique state known as the 'Flow.' Happy people are subconsciously looking for activities that allow them to test their skills and motivation in pursuit of some challenging and well-defined goal. They actively pursue the 'Flow,' knowing that it will sweep them along towards success!

## 9. They prefer meaningful conversations to shallow chit-chat

There's nothing wrong with exchanging a few lightweight phrases with your pals, but only a deep, substantial conversation can help you make sense of your life. To put it simply, a proper conversation is far more rewarding than mindless 'blah-blah-blah.' One of the five main regrets expressed by terminally ill people is 'I wish I had been less reserved about discussing my emotions.' A poignant proof of the fact that we spend too much time chatting about the weather while failing to express the really important things that fill our hearts to the brim.

## 10. They spend money on others

Money can buy you happiness. But only if you spend it not only on yourself but on other people. To give is better than to take.

## 11. They know how to listen

When you listen, you open yourself up to new knowledge. When you speak, you close your mind shut. By demonstrating your ability to listen, you display both your self-confidence and your respect for the speaker. This inevitably makes people appreciate you, which, in turn, makes you feel happier. The ability to listen is a skill that strengthens relationships.

## 12. They keep in touch

When it comes to communication, sending a text, making a phone call, or posting something online are the

# BRIGHT SIDE

quickest and simplest options. However, none of them can beat crossing half the country by plane to pay a long-awaited visit to your best friend! All of us need to feel connected to other people. We've got to communicate with our nearest and dearest, and this doesn't mean using social networks. You cannot hug someone via Facebook. It has long been proven that, for humans, touching and being touched is high on the list of things that increase our sense of happiness and comfort.

## 13. They see the good in everything

Optimism is beneficial for your health: less stress means fewer heart problems and a higher tolerance to pain. By choosing to deliberately see the good in everything that happens, you undoubtedly choose health and happiness!

In one of his books, Seligman gives what is considered to be one of the best characterizations of optimists and pessimists: 'The defining characteristic of pessimists is their belief that the bad times will last long, that they will bring about the destruction of everything that has been achieved, and that all of this is their own (pessimists') fault. Now, optimists have to confront exactly the same kinds of life's difficulties, yet they tend to think of them in the opposite way. They believe that all misfortunes are temporary, that none of it is their fault (instead preferring to blame circumstances, bad luck, or other people). Such people aren't worried by defeat. Surrounded by problems, they perceive them as challenges and simply try harder.'

## 14. They appreciate good music

There is power in music, and it is so strong that it can compete with the power of massage. Choosing the right music is an important factor — cheerful or moody songs can affect our perception of the world. In one study, participants were asked to determine from photographs whether the people depicted in them were feeling happy or sad. In most cases, their responses appeared to have a correlation with the mood of the music that test subjects were listening to at the moment of being photographed. This goes to prove that you should try to listen to more happy tunes!

## 15. They know when to log off

Amazing technologies, constant news updates, the sheer abundance of information — none of this will be lost to you forever just because you choose to temporarily abandon your computer, tablet, or smartphone! Digital detox gives your brain the opportunity to recharge and relax.

## 16. They engage in spiritual practices

The expression of gratitude, sympathy, and compassion forms an important part of almost any religion. Thinking about 'big questions' gives our lives context and meaning. In 2009, a study was conducted which showed that children who believe that their life has a purpose and a higher predestination are happier than those among their peers who live for the moment. And it's not just religion, of course — the same is true for all spiritual practices. All kinds of 'sacred rituals' are important — be it meditating, praying, or simply pausing to reflect on one's place in the world. It doesn't really matter whether you do it on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. What truly counts is to have some kind of spiritual anchor that'll give your life balance and meaning and help you to recuperate from the daily rat race.

## 17. They exercise regularly

Physical exertion causes our body to produce endorphin — a chemical that makes us feel happy. By setting off special chemical reactions in our brain, exercises help to alleviate the symptoms of many psychological conditions, including depression, anxiety, and melancholy. What's more, they give us the opportunity to appreciate our bodies, which is an important part of a positive mindset. Interestingly enough, even in cases when exercise fails to help us lose weight or gain impressive musculature, we still end up with more reasons to feel good about ourselves!

## 18. They go for walks

Nature is fuel for the soul. Even a 20-minute stroll in the fresh air can do a lot of good for your health. Whenever we feel sluggish, we pour ourselves a cup of coffee. However, we can do much better by simply going out

# BRIGHT SIDE

for a walk and letting Mother Nature recharge our batteries!

## **19. They lounge in bed**

Getting up on the wrong side of the bed is not just an expression. Awakening during the right sleep period is crucial for ensuring your well-being throughout the day. Medics advise against jumping out of bed/rushing off to begin your morning chores. It's better to get up gradually, allowing yourself time to curl up and stretch out between the cozy bedsheets. And, naturally, make sure that you get enough sleep during the night!

## **20. They laugh a lot**

You've heard it a hundred times: laughter is the best medicine. Laughing triggers the production of the hormones in the brain that make us feel happier and reduce sensitivity to pain and stress. And, by the way, it is advisable to laugh on a regular basis! It is believed that the brain responds to frequent laughter in the same way as the rest of the body does to regular exercise.

## **21. They walk with great strides**

This is not a metaphor. Happy people walk in a free, nonchalant manner, making wider steps. By adopting such a type of walking, we trigger a certain chain reaction in our brains. This might sound paradoxical, but the freer your walk is, the happier you are. Still don't believe us? Then try walking a few meters in small, shuffling steps, keeping your eyes on the ground. Now, did walking in this manner make you feel good? We bet it didn't!