

YOUR HAPPINESS QUOTIENT

by Deb Elkin, LPC

For many of us, happiness is so elusive. We may experience moments of it, hours, days, or more. It feels wonderful. It's a great high. Most of us wish we could have more. But creating and maintaining it sure does present us with one big challenge! Why is that?

Since childhood we have been taught to hold ourselves back from experiencing life fully, from feeling pleasure and joy and exuberance. Our parents and schools and churches tended to reign us in and tried to contain us. They wanted us to be more practical, to behave, to be quiet, to not make waves. How many of you got permission as children to be fully yourselves in your energy, your creativity, your boisterousness, your emotions?

Most of us are a lot more experienced, and comfortable, being negative than being positive. We spend much more time complaining, worrying, criticizing, and pointing out what's wrong (with ourselves and others). We spend much less time appreciating, thanking, supporting, and openly and outwardly loving ourselves and others. If you listen to your internal negative voices, you'll probably recognize some of your family member's in there. They taught us well. They still live inside of us.

Many of us have been taught the ethic of "work before pleasure." Pleasure is a reward, not something that comes to us as a natural part of life and living. I can think of several of my clients who cannot enjoy themselves until...the job is done, the house is clean, the paper is completed, the kids grow up!

When we deny ourselves pleasure, we tend to have a low happiness quotient. It takes a toll on our state of mind, on our energy, on our relationships, and on how we are in the world. It is a very hard habit to break. And yet, as I said in the beginning, most of us crave to be happier and more contented in life. So what can we do about this?

Dr. Stella Resnick, in The Pleasure Zone: Why we resist good feelings & how to let go and be happy says this: "...people's happiness level stays the same over a lifetime because most people take for granted the narrow range of pleasures they tend to rely on to bring fulfillment. Not many of us have ever considered the notion that we could raise our sense of well being directly by learning to expand on, and intensify, our basic ability to enjoy everyday pleasures."

So here are a few suggestions to help you increase your happiness quotient.

- ◆ Look at how you currently derive pleasure in your everyday world.
Make a list of what you do or how you use your time when you are doing things that make you happy.

- ◆ What do you notice? Do you tend to do the same few things over and over again?

- ◆ How can you expand your world? What else brings you happiness that maybe you've forgotten about or denied? Is there something that's been calling you that you've been ignoring? What did you love to do as a kid? What form could that take for you as an adult?
- ◆ Take a survey of people you know and find out what makes them happy, what brings them pleasure. Remember, as Dr. Resnick explains, we are all working from a narrow range of experience. Why not use others' input and experiences to help us expand.

Know that what makes us happy does not have to be about "activities" and you don't necessarily have to expend a lot of time and energy on it. It may be a leisurely walk by yourself or with a neighbor or friend. Perhaps it's playing with your cat or dog, reading a good novel, watching birds at your bird feeder, drawing, painting, talking on the phone to a friend, taking a class that you've always wanted to take. The possibilities are truly limitless. What's most important, of course, is that you take the time and make the commitment to yourself to do it, to give yourself permission to put yourself first and allow yourself to have and feel joy and happiness in your life. This is how you raise your happiness quotient.

Are you willing?

copyright © 2007 Deb Elkin