

The Discipline of Happiness

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Happiness is under-rated. People think that happiness is a luxury that busy working people cannot afford. Worse yet, they think that happiness is trivial and not worth discussing. You are either happy or you're not, right? Wrong.

Happiness is a health issue. Years of medical research have shown that happy people are healthier and suffer less from depression or stress related ailments than their unhappy counterparts. Happiness actually regulates the heart's rhythm and puts the body into a synchronized state which optimizes the functions of the entire body.

Happiness is also a performance issue. Companies across industries are demanding outstanding performance from their employees. And, people who are concerned about keeping their jobs know that the better you perform, the better chance you have to stay employed. Happiness and working to your strengths are the two biggest contributors to high personal performance. There are many ways to attain short term high performance but sustained high performance levels are driven by happiness. Happiness breeds success, not the other way around.

There is a myth that happiness is a function of luck. Some people seem to lead charmed lives. Wrong again. Happiness is a discipline. It is like good health. Without it, you will be alive but you won't be your best at home or at work. You control your own happiness much like you control your physical fitness. Happy people cultivate certain habits and practices that help them lead happy lives at work and at home—and often despite the trials and tribulations of their lives.

Happiness is important because it underlies and colors everything we do from the way we do our job to the way we raise our children. To be happy, you don't need to be rich or live on a desert island. You need to understand the components of a happy life and then cultivate them every day.

Happiness, as a health and performance factor, is important for everyone. For working mothers, it is doubly important. If you want to raise happy children into happy adults, you need to show them what a happy adult looks like.

The debate between stay at home vs. working mothers has raged for decades. For years, mothers who worked outside the home were told that they were damaging their children by going to work. In response, many highly skilled women stayed at home with their children, turning their back on graduate degrees or years of experience to give their children the best. Other mothers, who went to work, were racked by guilt and exhausted themselves trying to be supermom at the same time they were holding down a job. Recent studies have shown that there is no negative impact on children just because mom works outside the home. Children thrive when their mothers are happy—whether that means going to work or staying at home. When a woman is happy, she is more patient, more creative and more affectionate. She brings her best to her children when she has aligned her life to what she believes is important.

The happiness of mothers and their children, on an aggregate level, becomes a societal imperative. Happy children raised by happy, loving mothers (and fathers) are more likely to stay in school and reach their potential as fully contributing adults. The debate should not be whether it is better for children to have their mothers home full time or not. The debate should be how we help mothers cultivate their own happiness and share that with their family.

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