

## **Happiness is Liquid**

When most people think of happiness they think of an emotional pleasantry. Happiness, to most people, is a feel-good outcome. It is a commonsense notion that happiness is the emotional finish line in the race of life. You get the right job, live in the right city, marry the right spouse, find the right parking spot and you will end up happy. That is, first something happens in life, and then there is the rosy emotional aftermath. Interestingly, recent research from positive psychology shows that the reverse is also true: you get natural bursts of happiness throughout the day, and these moments of energy you can spend on the job, the spouse, and other areas you care about. That's right! Happiness is liquid, in the same way that monetary instruments such as stocks are liquid. Humans are built with emotional systems that include happiness, and that happiness is intended to be spent. It is a type of emotional currency that can be spent, like money, on the outcomes in life you truly value such as your health, your relationships, and success at work.

Researcher Barb Fredrickson has developed the "Broaden and Build" theory of positive emotions. It is easy to see the function of negative emotions. Fear helps to keep us safe. Anger helps to protect those we care about. Guilt motivates us to behave in ways that promote healthy social relations. But what good are positive emotions? According to Fredrickson, positive emotions such as joy and affection serve to broaden and build our psychological and social resources. When we feel good we are more likely to be curious and try new things, seek out new relationships or tend to those we already have and to be more creative and even healthier. There is a large and growing body of research evidence supporting the many benefits of positive emotions. When people are put into good moods in the research laboratory (usually by watching a short humorous video clip) they show better cardiovascular recovery from stress, are more sociable, persevere at difficult tasks longer and are more creative problem solvers. No wonder researchers find that happy people have high quality social relationships, make more money, receive better job evaluations and live longer!

Happiness may be the best resource you are currently overlooking in your life. In a time where there is mounting concern about economic woes, armed conflict and a loss of trust in social institutions it is reassuring to think that happiness actually buys us better relationships and more productivity. That the natural uplift we get from everyday occurrences like receiving a compliment or finding money on the ground can actually give us just the boost we need to succeed in the most worthwhile areas of life. So step back and—instead of trying to create a life that will make you happy—try spending some of the happiness you already have on the people and outcomes you really care about.

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