

STEP ONE: HAPPINESS IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF FEAR

Since unhappiness comes from a set of beliefs that we learn and perpetuate, isn't it logical to you that we can become happier by challenging and changing those beliefs? You are right, we can. We can make some basic decisions and implement them on a daily basis. At some point, we can even replace the old thinking with new thinking so that choosing the option for happiness becomes automatic. There will always be new challenges to our thinking, but we can meet those challenges successfully.

Happiness is not magic, and it's not magical thinking. It doesn't belong to a lucky few. Moving from a state where you experience a lot of negative emotions like anxiety and depression to happiness requires commitment and courage.

If you want to be happy, you have to entertain the possibility that you can be. Many people come to believe very early in life that life is a game they can't win. They spend the rest of their lives collecting evidence to prove that they are incompetent, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here are two facts that might surprise you

- There are only two emotions: fear and love.
- All fear is the fear of loss.

From the time we leave the safety and comfort of the womb, we are bombarded with various messages to tell us

we will lose. In the womb we had comfort and security and nurturance without having to do anything. Inevitably, we experience a series of losses during the ordinary events of growing up which cause us to become preoccupied with avoiding loss instead of with celebrating life.

Norman Cousins once said, "The tragedy of life is not death, rather it is what we allow to die within us while we live." He's right, you know. In the areas of your life that aren't working, how much denial and avoidance of loss are you practicing? How many of these self-protective games have you played?

- **Quit before you start.** If you don't enter the game (that's any aspect of life you're avoiding), you can't lose.
- **Quit in mid-stream.** If you quit before the game is over, you might be a quitter, but you've saved yourself from being a "loser."
- **"That's OK, I didn't care anyway."** You never committed to it anyway, so it doesn't matter that you lost.
- **Dumb game.** If you decide that the game's stupid, it doesn't matter that you lost.
- **Endless game.** If you keep halfheartedly playing the game without ever coming to a place where you win or lose, then at least you haven't lost.

Did you find yourself in one of these? Just about everyone does. If you saw yourself, GOOD! You just took the first step to turn yourself around. That takes courage, but you can't change what you can't see.

The next step is to make a commitment; you need to commit yourself to changing both your attitude and your behavior. Spend some time looking at the areas of your life that you're unhappy with – what are these areas and what negative thinking and avoidance behavior are you practicing in these areas? Now, let's begin to discover how to confront this thinking.

In his excellent book, *What Happy People Know*, Dr. Dan Baker talks about fear and love:

“We need to be willing to charge headlong into the inferno of our most horrific fears – eyes open, intellect and spirit at the ready.... That takes courage, and that's when courage is one of the prerequisites for happiness. But where does that ability come from? What power grants the strength to overcome the sick, shaky feeling of fear? Only one power is that strong: love. In the ultimate analysis, human beings have only two essential, primal feelings: fear and love. Fear compels us to survive, and love enables us to thrive. ... For you to be happy, love must lead this dance.”

Dr. Baker goes on to talk about appreciation as the highest, purest form of love. It's higher than romantic love, the love parents have for children, or the love children have for parents. It's the strongest love there is, and it's the only thing strong enough to be the antidote to fear. Dr. Baker describes his feelings during the loss of his infant son. It was at this time in his life that he discovered the feeling of what he calls “Appreciation.” He felt that his son, even with his brief life, was a gift full of joy and love whose presence would never leave him. On Dr. Baker's part, he was feeling an unselfish love, the purest form of love, the love he calls appreciation.

An attitude of appreciation can help you survive all the difficulties in this world without being destroyed by them. It's the type of love that allows you to enjoy an experience while being able to let go. This attitude can help you when you lose loved ones, when unfortunate things happen, and even with confronting your own death. You face the fact that these negative things happen and you've chosen to experience and enjoy the good things, including your own

life, while you have them. Dr. Baker concludes that the constant fear of loss is what creates our unhappiness and that once we face and accept this, we will be able to be happy.

Dr. Brené Brown states some similar ideas in her book, *Daring Greatly*. She says that our unhappiness is caused by anticipation of things going wrong. Using herself as an example, she talks about how we all suit up in our suits of armor in an attempt to keep ourselves safe from all the negative things in the world. The problem is, of course, this doesn't keep the bad things from happening, but it does shut out a lot of the good things, including all of our positive emotions. She believes that we lose so much more than we win because of negative projections. Her solution is to know who you are, to believe in your inherent worth, and to face things as they come.

I recommend both of these books to you. They are excellent in their courage and simplicity. Telling the truth to yourself and standing in your courage are not easy things to do, but they will bring you the happiness you are looking for.

Replacing fear with truth and courage is the road to happiness. The steps to follow will help you confront your negative thinking and behavior and replace it with truthful, courageous thinking and behavior. These are skills you can learn if you have a true desire to do so.