

Don't Worry Be Happy! No really. You Can Be Happy and Here's How...

by Dorothy Tannahill-Moran



Professionally, Dorothy Tannahill-Moran is known as the “Introvert Whisperer,” helping people to find career success by providing unique, actionable career advice. Dorothy also has had spasmodic dysphonia for about 20 years. Dorothy is sharing her professional advice but with a twist of her personal understanding of having spasmodic dysphonia.

I recently had the opportunity to speak at the combined Dysphonia & SD Support group in Portland Oregon. Originally, I had proposed to speak about rebuilding self-esteem since that was what I spoke on last year at the NSDA Symposium. (I also did a webinar on the same subject. Check the NSDA website if you want to listen to it). Much to my surprise and delight, I was asked to speak about Happiness so I combined the two topics. I wanted to give you the benefit of some of that information on happiness.

Happiness can seem like an elusive gift that has been taken away from people with chronic disease and disorders. Once it's gone, it feels like the road ahead will never be a happy one or at least punctuated by brief moments of joy only to return to a greyer place.

I'm happy (no pun intended) to share with you that your gift of happiness is yours to take back.

Before diving into the restoration of your happiness let's make sure we are on the same page about what “Happiness” is. I've combined a few experts' definitions to create this one.

Happiness is a combination of:

How you feel about your life

How you feel on a day-to-day basis

Fairly stable even as life changes and passing moods.

We have to recognize that while life will serve up things that negatively impact us like losing a game or a fender-bender, those things wouldn't change your assessment of your overall view of your happiness.

Your happiness can come from a few different sources. As it turns out each one of us is genetically “predisposed” to a given level of happiness. Some people are genetically oriented to be less happy than others. It's like some people are predisposed to be left or right-handed.

Also, when a person faces a disorder like SD it can reset and reduce your level of happiness. Certainly, other things can also reset your level of happiness like pain or a traumatic event.

But there is great news about happiness. Just like you can change which hand you may write with, you can also change your level of happiness.

We now know through a study of the brain that happiness can change and improve. It's called Neuroplasticity. It is through understanding our ability to change our brain that we can change thought patterns that feed into things like our happiness. And the other piece of good news is it won't require years of therapy and thousands of dollars. In fact, you can change your thoughts for free. The only caveat is it will require your focus and repeated action. Your renewed level of happiness won't fall out of the sky.

Below is a set of actions that will all contribute to upgrading your happiness. Don't attempt them all at once because you may overwhelm yourself, which can lead to stopping any actions you're taking. Also, as you review this list, I'm going to list the most powerful actions first and this will give you a place to start. You may discover that those actions are enough.

First, Insights on happiness

Happiness is a choice. (Great news) You can choose to be happier than you are right now. It's also a choice you make each day under each set of situations you encounter.

Happiness isn't a destination, it's a journey. This means that you don't just arrive at happiness and stop all your efforts to manage your happiness. Happiness is a continual process.

Happiness IS contagious! Studies shows us that our positive emotions affect 34% of those we come in contact with and 18% people are affected if our emotions are negative, regardless of any specific effort on your part. The reverse is also true. A percentage of your happiness comes from others even without direct contact. (This is important to grasp because the actions I list address this.) Our emotional contagion can last up to a year and extend "3-deep" with others.

Top Happiness Actions

Catch, change and learn

This is a seriously simple yet powerful "reprogramming" process. However, simple doesn't mean easy necessarily because you are first challenged to catch a negative thought which requires a level of awareness that we don't often have. That's the beauty of a habit. We can go on autopilot and give very little thought to doing something that is habitual, and negative thoughts are a habit. However, the more you catch yourself in a negative thought, the easier it will be to catch them and the next thing you know is that the frequency of negative thoughts reduces.

The next challenge with this process is to replace or change the thought with a positive thought. It's a challenge for some people to find a positive thought or to frame something without the use of negative words. Negative words are derivatives of "no" such as: won't, should not.

- 1 – Become aware = "catch yourself"
- 2- Replace with a positive statement carefully avoiding the use of negatives
- 3- Continue – over time it will reduce
- Example of negative thought: "No one wants to listen to me because of my voice."
- Replace with: "What I have to share is important to others."
- Example of negative replacement: "I shouldn't stay silent" (the brain removes the word "not" and hears "I should stay silent")

Expose yourself to positive: environments, input, and people

Yes, it's just like your mother told you. Be careful whom you hang out with. Unfortunately, she was right. You will be impacted by and start reflecting not only the values and attitudes of people you spend time with but also what you expose yourself to such as the news or social media. This is the viral effect I was telling you about. Not only have scientist done multiple decade studies on this but social media sites like Facebook and Instagram have also. Surround yourself by positive people, and limit complainers. If you're a newshound you have to recognize that our news these days is primarily negative and sensational content. If you can't bear to go without your news at least counteract the negativity by other things that are uplifting.

Cultivate gratitude

Give thanks at least daily. Not surprisingly, gratefulness has been studied and it turns out it will literally change your brain chemistry. When you search yourself each day for at least one thing to be happy with, it releases happy hormones in your brain. Free and easy.

Other Happiness Supporting Actions

- Learn to forgive – it's a gift you give to you. See Dr. Phil's guidance on forgiveness <https://www.drphil.com/advice/making-peace-with-your-past-choosing-forgiveness/>
- Manage emotions and relationships. Improve your Emotional Intelligence, which is another way of say being effective with others. You can get loads of books on this.
- Friends and social connections – it turns out a factor in longevity is your connection to people. Get them in your life and keep them there.
- Meaningful activities – something to challenge your abilities, not TV or Internet – requires time, requires learning such as a craft, hobby, musical instrument.
- Look for the positive in your experiences. There is something to learn and use with both positive and negative experiences. Always ask yourself what you've learned because there always will be ***"You find what you look for."***

I hope you can see that Happiness is yours to have and to keep.