



WHY ARE YOU UN-HAPPY?

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"Most people are about as happy as they make their mind up to be."
--Abraham Lincoln

I have a client who was involved in a difficult breakup with a woman he had seriously considered getting married to. During our session one day, he said to me "The thing is, I just don't love her anymore."

This struck me as a bit odd, because everything I'd ever seen or heard him express about her was deeply loving.

"Yes you do," I said.

"No, I don't," he replied, seemingly trying to decide whether to be annoyed or confused by my response.

"Yes, you do still love her," I continued. "You just don't want to be with her anymore."

He went quiet for a minute or two as he considered it for himself. Finally, he spoke.

"Can both of those things be true at the same time?" he asked, somewhat tentatively.

Several days later, I was speaking with a friend who was complaining about how much she hated her work situation and how she wished she was able to make enough money doing what she really loved to do to quit her job immediately.

After listening to her go on for a while, I was struck by something neither of us had ever really considered before:

"What if you could absolutely love the work you're doing at the moment and STILL leave to do what you really want as soon as it makes sense to you to do so?"

This time it was only a few moments before she replied.

"Am I allowed to do that?" she asked, her voice filled with wonder.

The insight behind both of these interventions comes from the work of a man named Bruce Di Marsicio (see the 'Want to Learn More?' section at the end of this tip to learn more), who posited a simple but powerful theory about why people experience un-happiness in any form, be it fear, anger, sadness, depression, or misery:

The only reason why you are ever un-happy is because you think you should be.

In other words, when you feel bad, it is because you think you should feel bad – that there is some positive benefit to it.

That benefit generally falls into one of two categories:

1. We feel bad because we think it will motivate us (or we are afraid that we wouldn't act in our own best interests if we weren't)
2. We feel bad because we think it means something good about us (or are afraid that it would mean something bad about us if we didn't)

I will always remember the man who challenged me during a Happiness workshop I was giving in London with a somewhat provocative question over whether I was advocating that he should feel happy about the recent death of his wife.

After quickly pointing out that that was NOT what I was saying, I went on to explain that for me, the question was not whether or not he 'should' be happy but simply if he was willing to be – that is, would it be OK with him if he felt at peace with what had happened?

He shook his head 'no', so I went on to ask him this question:

"What are you afraid it would mean about you if you were not un-happy about your wife's death?"

He looked at me aghast. "What kind of a monster would I be if I was not un-happy about that?"

"So are you saying," I asked, "that your feeling un-happy now is your way of expressing your love for your wife?"

He softened immediately and nodded.

"Is that how you want to express your love for her?" I asked.

"No," he acknowledged. "But won't other people think there's something wrong with me if I'm not miserable?"

Rather than venture forth with my own opinion, I asked him how he would answer his own question.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that if they did, that would be OK with me. Because if there's one thing I know for certain, it's how grateful I am for our time together and how much I will always love her."

Is it really true that we are only un-happy because we think we should be?

Honestly, I don't know.

But whether we have learned to use sadness to express our love, anger to signify our caring, or fear to motivate ourselves to go for what we want, the point is this:

Whatever you can do with un-happiness, you can do better when you're happy – and you're liable to be about as happy as you make your mind up to be!

Today's Experiment:

1. Think about something in your life that you are un-happy (angry, sad, fearful, etc.) about.

Example:

My kids don't listen to me, we don't have enough money, I hate my job, etc.

2. If I could wave a magic wand and you would be instantly happy in that situation without anything else changing, would you want me to wave it?

In other words, is it OK with you to be happy in that situation, exactly the way that it is?

(Remember, this is not saying you shouldn't be un-happy about whatever you are un-happy about – it is just a sincere and curious question from you to you.)

3. If your answer was 'no', ask yourself either or both of the following questions:

*What am I afraid would happen if I wasn't unhappy about _____?

*What do I think it would mean about me if I wasn't unhappy about that?

Example:

If I wasn't angry with my kids for not listening to me, then I might never do anything about it. If I wasn't scared about not having enough money, I might not look for ways to earn more or spend less. If I didn't hate my job, I might never leave.

4. Whatever you came up with, pick out the positive intention behind it – i.e. the 'very good reason(s)' you have for getting and staying un-happy.

Example:

With my kids, I get angry to give myself the courage to confront them about their behavior. When it comes to money, I scare myself so that I'll take action and do something about my situation.

5. Finally, imagine yourself feeling comfortable and peaceful in yourself and handling the situation elegantly and well. Come up with at least 3 ways that you could fulfill that positive intention without the 'negative' emotion.

Example:

With my kids, I could sit down and talk with them calmly – they might actually listen to me if I wasn't shouting at them all the time.

I could write down what was really important to me for them to get and ask them to sign it when they really understood and agreed to it.

I could make a real point about speaking with them publicly when I wanted to praise them and privately when I had something critical to say.

Have fun, learn heaps, and ask yourself this:

How happy have you made your mind up to be today?

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WANT TO LEARN MORE?
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Here are some of my favorite resources for exploring your reasons for un-happiness and making your mind up to be happy now...

Books and Audio Programs

Each of the four programs listed below are based on the work of Bruce Di Marsicio, generally known as 'the Option Method' – Frank Mosca, Mandy Evans, and Barry Neil Kaufman were students of Bruce when he first began teaching in the early 1970's...

*Emotional Options by Mandy Evans
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0976090139/geniuscatalys-20>

*Happiness is a Choice by Barry Neil Kaufman
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0449907996/geniuscatalys-20>

*Is Happiness a Choice? by Bruce Di Marsicio (audio)
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0970479549/geniuscatalys-20>

*Joywords by Frank Mosca
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0595157807/geniuscatalys-20>

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