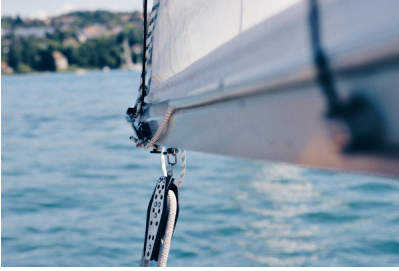


Start by Prioritizing Your Happiness

Written by Susan Leigh



Some people treat happiness as their main goal. When you ask them what they want in life they say, 'to be happy'. But happiness can be elusive. It creeps up on us when we least expect it, when we find ourselves smiling at a beautiful sunset, a table laid for a family meal, succeeding in a challenge, watching our friends laugh at a terrible joke.

Happiness is rarely about expensive gifts or acquisitions. So when planning for a positive, fulfilling life it's important to start by prioritising your happiness. Let's look at what this entails.



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- **Practise daily gratitude.** This doesn't mean settling for second best or sitting back on your laurels, but is about being grateful for what you have and finding a balanced, grounded approach to life. Appreciation of others, valuing the lessons learned from challenges and setbacks, the relationships in your life, the food, air, roof over your head, running water, all can all be taken for granted but are things many others don't have. Those people would be happy to be in your shoes.

- **Happiness comes from being inspired,** so ensure you have things that motivate you to improve, to be better, reach a higher level. This may be learning new skills, expanding your area of expertise, focusing on a new direction, something that elevates your vision, stretches you and brings a sense of achievement.

- **Leaving our familiar comfort zone** can be scary and exhilarating, yet often results in us feeling happy and proud of ourselves afterwards. Even trying new food, another route to work, having a go at something we're apprehensive about can prompt a positive shift in our thinking and a happier sense of self.

- **Being challenged** is important to happiness too. Being receptive to new ideas and initiatives, being prepared to say, 'yes' even when unsure of yourself. Why not say 'yes' first and work out how to do it afterwards! Self-improvement and development bring their own happiness and fulfillment.

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- **Do things you do well.** Being challenged is often a good experience but if life is already stressful making time to do something you know you're good at can be an important reminder of how competent and capable you are. And we all need a little window of success in a stressful life. Enjoy it, even if it's icing a cake, putting up shelving or supporting an elderly neighbour.

- **Rewards can bring happiness.** Yes, we deserve to be rewarded for our efforts financially. We need to live and pay our bills. But also reward yourself by ensuring you have a space, a place where you go and feel secure, able to relax. It may be your bedroom, with lovely prints, cushions, flowers and music. When you're there you close the door on the world, distress and chill.

- **Being involved with others** can bring happiness; teaching, mentoring, coaching, volunteering are often fulfilling experiences. And the people we're involved with may bring new ideas, inspiration, suggestions of their own that add value to our lives.

- **Don't follow the crowd.** Others have their own stories, motivations and limitations. They may begrudge you your energy and drive, preferring that you don't remind them of their apparent lack of ambition, but we're all different and each of us have needs and wants that evolve over time. Reflect on those relationships and consider if it's time to reduce their influence in your life.

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- **Mix with people who like, support and encourage you;** they're your fans and ambassadors. People who like you treat you with respect, may challenge you on occasion, but they're in your court and you're in theirs. Nurturing 'your' people allows you to be vulnerable, wrong sometimes and able to discuss any problem areas in an accepting, non-judgmental arena.

- **Indulge your senses.** Happiness comes from incorporating smell, taste, touch as well as music and beautiful art and colours. Make time to enjoy nature, your pets. Visit the beach, the forest and stimulate your senses; feel the sand underneath your feet.

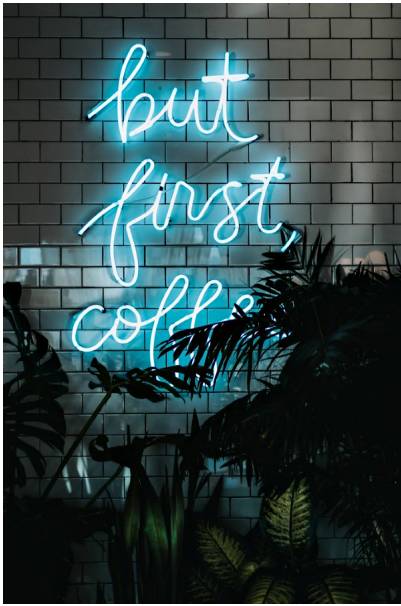
- **Give yourself regular free time.** Happiness is about ensuring there's balance in your life. Prioritising time for fun, sport, exercise, reading is important. Sometimes work may require extra attention, but aim to regularly give yourself time out, perhaps just to sit with a coffee at the mall.

- **Insist on being treated with respect** by those you come into contact with. Good boundaries matter. Unhappiness can occur if we feel disrespected, treated dismissively or are taken for granted. Intercept bad treatment at the outset and be firm about good manners and consideration. But equally remember to invest time and attention in your good relationships.

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- **Deal with your demons.** Happiness is about being at peace with ourselves, forgiving any failures, past mistakes or errors of judgement. If you're struggling therapy could be a good way to heal and recover from negative patterns and ways of thinking. Be gentle with yourself and move on from unhelpful self-talk. It can make all the difference to your happiness levels.



Look after yourself. Eat well, exercise, commit to regular sleep. Practise these tips, prioritise your health and happiness will follow.

Susan Leigh, counsellor, hypnotherapist, relationship counsellor, writer & media contributor offers help with relationship issues, stress management, assertiveness and confidence. She works with individual clients, couples and provides corporate workshops and support.

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She's author of 3 books, 'Dealing with Stress, Managing its Impact', '101 Days of Inspiration #tipoftheday' and 'Dealing with Death, Coping with the Pain', all on Amazon & with easy to read sections, tips and ideas to help you feel more positive about your life.

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