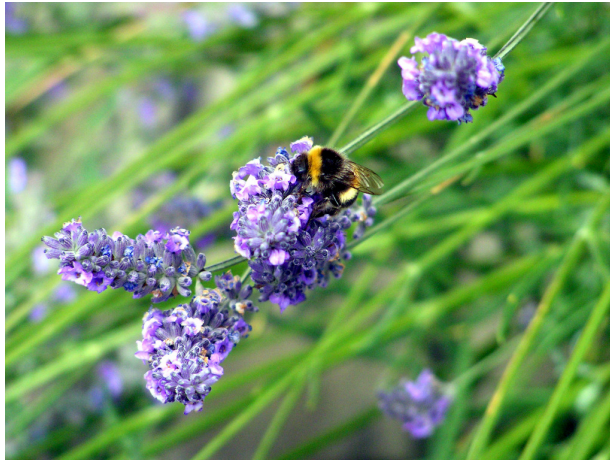


Leading a satisfying life – *how to be happier and have a strong sense of well-being*



Bumble Bee on Lavender. *Photo: Liz Holland*

At last the researchers are verifying what many people have found for themselves, and that Life Coaches have proven with clients. We can do something to improve our lives and feel “happier” and have a more positive outlook on life. The science of happiness is researching what makes people happy, and how we can feel happier – and the research has some common themes. One of the major themes is focussing on small everyday activities that have some meaning for us so we can obtain a sense of well-being. Another theme is having meaning or a sense of purpose in life, and this will be a topic for another newsletter.

Being happier has many benefits. We experience the “feel good” factor; and researcher, Sonya Lyubomirsky has shown that our quality of work and productivity can improve; our relationships with others are enhanced as well as bolstering our immune systems and lowering our stress levels.

So what can we do to receive these wonderful benefits? Below are eight practical suggestions (adapted from Sonya Lyubomirsky) for taking responsibility for your personal level of happiness – have a play with these ideas and develop your own prescription for developing a healthier, happier life. At the same time you will develop good habits that can act as a buffer when some of life’s challenges are thrown at you.

1. ***Count your blessings.*** Look for the things that are going well already in your life and acknowledge them. Some ideas include:
 - Record the things you are grateful for in a specific section in your journal. They may be very simple things such as being able to enjoy a cup of coffee with a friend every week to more significant events of recovering well after surgery. As you add to this list over the years, you are creating a resource that may be useful to read during tougher times in life.
 - Just before going to sleep, identify three good things which have happened that day. If you are going through a particularly rough patch in your life, you may be grateful for the fact that you have survived another day; been able to eat some food and have a bed to sleep in. If life is going much better for you, you may be

grateful for a meaningful conversation you had with your partner; the progress you made in a project and the appreciation someone expressed to you today. (Note the difference in how you feel going to sleep remembering the good things that happened that day instead of going over all the things that didn't go the way you wanted them.)

2. Pay attention to the small joys in life. Appreciating the small things in life can really lift your mood and sense of well being. Often our attention can be on the bigger things or worries in our life, and so we miss the little things that can bring us pleasure. Practice noticing what is going on around you from time to time – so you can be “in the moment” and really pay attention to what you are doing or seeing.

Some ideas include:

- Enjoying the drawing your child gives you
- Feeling of the sun on your back as you walk to your car
- Appreciating the genuine smile or ‘thank you’ you received
- Looking at the view out the window of your home
- Reading an article that inspired you
- Drinking your favourite brand of tea
- Watching a bumble bee at work
- Appreciating the email or text from a friend
- Savouring a glass of wine
- Observing the change of seasons
- Watching your cat or dog stretch after they wake up

3. Practice acts of kindness. Acts of kindness are encouraged. This means doing something for someone else, without expecting anything in return. These may be short “one-offs” or something you do on a regular basis.

Some ideas include:

- Really listening to an older person’s story of something that happened in their life
- Having an elderly relative over for a meal each week
- Feeding the neighbour’s cat when they go away
- Writing a letter of condolence when someone you know has had someone significant in their life die
- Giving a word of encouragement to a colleague at work
- Looking after a friend’s children for a few hours to give them a break
- Doing some voluntary work
- Sending a card to a friend to celebrate an event in their life

4. Thank someone who has been your mentor or done something significant in your life. Don’t wait until that person dies before you talk about the positive impact they have had in your life. Ring, visit, email or write a letter to that person now, and tell them how their support has been significant to you and just what a difference they have made.

5. Take care of your body. Eating well, exercising regularly, and getting plenty of sleep all assist in maintaining a sense of well being. 3 key areas to consider are:

- i. **Physical activity:** 20 minutes of aerobic activity 3 times a week is a common minimum recommendation
- ii. **Nutrition:** Eat well and be guided by a up-to-date guidelines

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- iii. **Relaxation:** Develop a relaxation technique that works for you and take time for your hobbies
6. **Develop strong relationships with friends and family.** With modern communication you can still develop and maintain relationships with family and friends even though you do not live near each other. Learn how to text so you can ‘talk’ with the younger members of your family; email or telephone those friends and family you can not see regularly. Learn how to talk with, and listen to your life partner.
7. **Develop strategies for the tougher times in life.** Pay less attention to your thoughts and more attention on your actions and behaviours. I have found it useful to read what I have recorded in my journal for the ‘count your blessings’ exercise during a tough period. It can remind us of some of the simple things that bring joy, and they can inspire us to look for small blessings to support ourselves during the challenging phase we are experiencing.
8. **Learn to forgive.** Forgiving someone who has hurt you allows you to move on. Dwelling on others wrong doings towards you keeps you in the victim role – liberate yourself!

Know Yourself Fieldwork

- a) Look at the above 8 areas, and identify what you are already doing that could fit into these categories.
- b) What else could you do to increase your sense of well being?
- c) What steps are you prepared to take this week to increase your awareness of “happiness” and a sense of feeling good about your life?

I’d love to know what you thought of this article. Please email your comments to lizholland@xtra.co.nz

Further Reading

Susan Henwood & Jim Lister (Liz Holland Contributor) (2007) *NLP & Coaching for Healthcare Professionals: Developing Expert Practice*. Chichester, Wiley

Robert Biswas-Dienwer & Ben Dean (2007) *Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the Science of Happiness to Work for Your Clients*. New Jersey, Wiley

Tal Ben-Shahar (2007) *Happier*. New York, McGraw-Hill

Useful websites

Positive Psychology Centre <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

Reflective Happiness <http://www.reflectivehappiness.com/>

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