

How To Develop the Habit of Happiness

(adapted from *Finding Joy In Your Job*, © 2007 by Pat Healey)

Did you know that happiness has become an area for serious scientific research? What's been discovered so far, is that while to some extent we are either pre-wired genetically to be happy or we're not, there is also a lot of room for us to consciously *choose* to be happy. I'm not alone in believing that **in order to create the life of your dreams, both at home and at work, you need to nurture the habit of being happy.**

Recent studies reveal that our adult brains continue to change with experience. You can actually increase your capacity for happiness with the right exercises. Why is this important to know and understand? Simply put—to avoid joining the growing number of people succumbing to depression and other psychological problems. It's predicted that within 20 years, depression will be the number one illness afflicting the women of the world.

How can you make happiness more of a habit in your life? **Here are some basic tips:**

- Be grateful for the good in your life. Some people enjoy keeping a separate gratitude journal that they can read when they hit a rough patch.
- Be deeply involved in all facets of your life—don't just phone it in.
- Engage all your senses on a regular basis, get out in nature, listen and look more acutely at the world around you.

- Nurture relationships, be a giver as well as a receiver. Visit friends in the hospital, practice random acts of kindness, don't take your loved ones for granted.
- Be involved in your community—volunteer for civic projects, at your kids' schools, check up on elderly neighbors, take pride in your home and neighborhood.
- Live with a clear heart. Purge yourself of regret, anger and other negativity. Forgive anyone who needs it and move on!
- Learn lots of ways to handle stress, before it handles you. (Having a job you love is a great way to reduce stress.)
- Cherish your body—despite the trend toward spare parts, it's still the only one you're going to get.
- Monitor your thoughts and what you allow into your brain. If you catch yourself indulging in negative thinking, have a new thought! Does incessant war coverage give you nightmares? Don't watch! What's negative in the world is always available on cable news. Choose instead to put joyful thoughts, inspiring stories and good news into your mind.

Finally, scientists have found that optimists suffer half the incidence of heart disease as their pessimistic counterparts, and having a sunny disposition reduces your risk of early death by 50 percent. What are you waiting for? Go pet a puppy or smell a gardenia!