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The Secret Of Happiness Revealed By Harvard Study

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Happiness comes from choosing to be happy with whatever you do, strengthening your closest relationships and taking care of yourself physically, financially and emotionally.

Thus revealed a recent survey of Harvard's class of 1980 - with data likely biased to those feeling good enough about their lives to respond to the survey. I compared responses between those "extremely happy" and the rest of the respondents.

These revelations are in line with two earlier studies: The Grant Study and a 2010 Survey of the same class.

Grant Study

The 75 year longitudinal Grant Study led by George Vaillant had two main findings:

1. Happiness is love.
2. If alcoholism is not the root of all evil, it is closely correlated with it.

2010 Survey

An earlier survey of this same group suggested that "happiness is good". Actually, happiness comes from three goods. Everyone is motivated by a blend of 1. Doing good for others, 2. Doing things they are good at, 3. Doing good for me. Given this, Dan Doctoroff and I suggested our classmates (and everyone else) focus on three things:

Good for others:

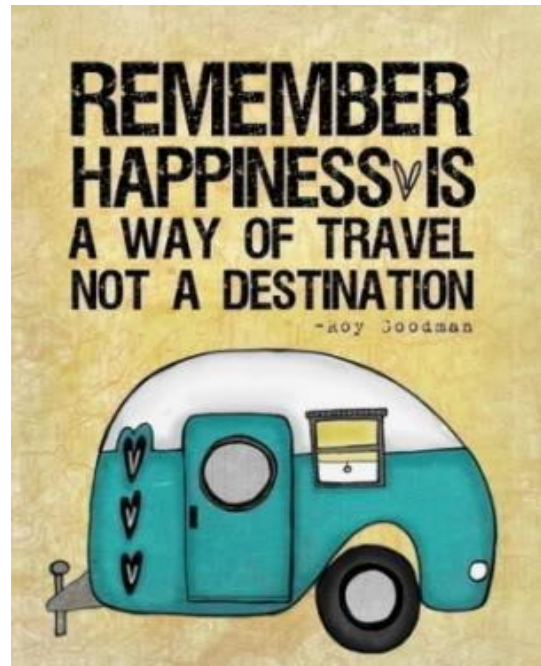
- Cherish your most important relationships.
- Be a contribution.

Good at it:

- Do more of what you're good at and less of what you're not so good at.

Good for me:

- Take care of yourself, your health and well-being, your financial security, and your work/life balance.



2015 Survey

This year's survey suggests you can be happier if you: Choose to be happy with whatever you do, strengthen your closest relationships and take care of yourself physically, financially and emotionally.

Choose to be happy with whatever you do

The correlation between happiness and occupation, income or wealth is far less than the correlation between happiness and how people feel about their occupation, income or wealth.

- 47% of those extremely happy said they thoroughly enjoy what they are currently doing versus
- 14% of everyone else

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- 62% have not and do not expect to hit a mid-life crisis versus
 - 38% of everyone else

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- 49% of those extremely happy said they are already pursuing their dreams versus
 - 18% of everyone else

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- 67% of those extremely happy said the happiest period of their lives is now versus
 - 20% of everyone else

Strengthen your closest relationships

The most important happiness choice is to invest in your closest relationship whether it's a spouse, partner, parent, sibling or friend.

- 75% of those extremely happy give a top box rating to the importance of success in their intimate relationships versus
- 49% of everyone else

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- 77% of those extremely happy said the state of their relationship was either the "greatest" or "very good" versus
 - 48% of everyone else

Take care of yourself physically, financially and emotionally

We all know that exercising and taking care of yourself correlates with good health. The happiest among us actually do exercise and take care of ourselves.

- 78% of those extremely happy said they exercise at least three times per week versus
- 57% of everyone else (and many of them lied)

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- 93% of those extremely happy said they are in excellent or very good health versus
 - 74% of everyone else

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- 68% of those extremely happy think they are "set" or "on track" for retirement versus

- 49% of everyone else
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- 10% of those extremely happy perceive themselves to be under stress versus
 - 42% of everyone else
-

- 44% of those extremely happy said they are at peace with their work-life balance versus
- 13% of everyone else

Implications for you as an individual

1. Choose happiness in whatever you do.
2. Strengthen your closest relationships.
3. Take care of yourself physically, financially and emotionally.

Implications for you as a leader

1. Focus on how your team members feel about what they are doing even more than what they are doing.
2. Invest in relationships with your team members.
3. Invest in your team members' physical, financial and emotional well-being.

Bottom line, happiness is a choice.