

An ARC of contentment...

Happiness has been in the news a lot in recent years, from research in Positive Psychology and BBC programmes like 'making Slough Happy,' to people generally becoming a bit disillusioned with all the 'stuff' our society weighs itself (and them) down with.

Many people say they want to 'be happy' as an aim for their lives. But over time, they end up chasing after it and getting nowhere – more money, more stuff, pressure. The more we focus on chasing 'happy' the more it will elude us.



But if instead of running after it, OR taking happiness for granted, you change your focus to look *beyond* yourself, you may find joy creeps up on you when you're not looking. I find these three principles can help with changing one's focus and finding more contentment. The initials A – R – C remind me of the arc of a rainbow.

Attitude

The more we practice being thankful for the things in our life which are positive, the more our measurable happiness level will increase. When we get our focus off of what we don't have, and on to what we do have, it helps change our perspective. It is a well-proven habit which will help to gradually increase and sustain the sense of being pleased with our lives.

A technique for this, popularised on FaceBook last year, required one to think of three different things each day that one was thankful for. One of my friends kept it up for a whole month (never repeating any) during a particularly stressful period in her life, and found it helped her keep her head above the turbulence.

It of course is NOT necessary to post what you write on social media! But if you're thankful each day, you will reap benefits for as long as you continue the practice.

Relationships

Connecting with people is central in finding a life you love. It isn't necessarily about 'friends' in our usual sense of the word. But we can still practice acts of kindness, show generosity and warmth, and forgive people. If we have a grudge and keep ourselves apart we get more discontent.

Note that Extraverts may need more relationships at a shallower level, Introverts may prefer fewer, deeper relationships. But we all need to develop a network of people to connect with, to give to and to think of before ourselves.

Challenge

Do you know the feeling of getting so involved in something that you lose track of time? This often happens when you do something which is skilled and difficult enough to challenge you, but you still have hope of succeeding. Hobbies are often like this, but work and volunteering also.

Find a task that matters to you and which gives to others. Learn to do it well and you'll find that you lose track of time. Particularly fulfilling are tasks that come from our humanity – creativity (eg craft, cooking, writing, engineering), or caring (for people, plants, animals or things).

This is not an overnight transformation; it is gradual like the growth of life. Be gentle and patient with yourself, and watch the miracle unfold.

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