

# Secret of Finding Happiness Explained

## Money Can't Buy Happiness, but Health and Family Can

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Aug. 25, 2003 -- The key to finding happiness may be learning to shift personal priorities from the boardroom to the bedroom.

New research provides evidence to support the old adage, "You can't buy happiness." It suggests that people will find happiness by focusing more on family life and health issues and less on career and financial pursuits.

Researchers say people spend too much time worrying about achieving professional and monetary goals that may never bring them true happiness. But by devoting more time to personal health and family life, people will find lasting happiness.

### **Happiness Explained**

Researcher Richard Easterlin, an economist at the University of California, argues that a new approach to finding happiness is needed that combines the two prevailing theories of happiness in psychology and economics.

According to the psychological view of happiness, each individual is born with their own setpoint for happiness that's determined by personality and genetics. Life events, such as marriage, loss of a job, and serious injury or disease, can temporarily raise or lower a person's level of happiness above or below this predetermined level, but they will eventually return to the original level.

In contrast, the economic "more is better" view of happiness argues that life circumstances and the growth of income have lasting effects on happiness.

But Easterlin argues that life events like marriage, divorce, and serious disability, have a lasting rather than temporary effect on happiness. And an increase in income doesn't necessarily bring lasting happiness because a person's expectations are also raised by through adaptation and social comparison as they achieve greater wealth.

A better theory of happiness, Easterlin says, should take into account the fact that happiness found through family life and personal health is affected much less by heightened expectations and social comparison than happiness sought through financial gains.

### **Make More Time for Health and Family**

Easterlin says people make decisions assuming that more income, comfort, and positional goods will make them happier, but they fail to recognize that adaptation and social comparison will come into play and raise their aspirations to about the same extent as their actual gains, which leaves them feeling no happier than before.

"As a result, most individuals spend a disproportionate amount of their lives working to make money, and sacrifice family life and health, domains in which aspirations remain fairly constant as actual circumstances change, and where the attainment of one's goals has a more lasting impact on happiness," writes Easterlin.

"Hence, a reallocation of time in favor of family life and health would, on average, increase individual happiness," Easterlin concludes.

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