

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POSITIVE MOOD IN REACHING THE GOALS*****Lidia COJOCARU****Catedra Limbi Germanice*

În acest articol autoarea tratează cu minuțiozitate rolul bunei dispoziții în atingerea scopului propus și în menținerea unui stil de viață sănătos. Sunt descrise și metodele care pot fi urmate pentru a deveni pozitiv și a te simți fericit.

Sunt diverși factorii care determină apariția acestui sentiment. Factorul genetic este cel care nu depinde de propriul individ, ci de părinți, după care se evidențiază: nivelul psihologic, stilul de viață, precum și modul individual caracteristic fiecăruia, de a percepe fenomenele vieții atât cele pozitive, cât și cele negative.

Fericirea reprezintă sensul și scopul vieții, spre care tinde întreaga umanitate. Un caracter cumpătat înzestrat cu nuanțe optimiste, va contribui la perceperea acestui sentiment și la un echilibru interior satisfăcător.

Everyone tends to be happy, but sometimes people are too much concerned about their future and they become anxious and frustrated. Our window for opportunity is open only briefly before we return to routine. We can take this chance to transform our anxieties about the future into strengths. We each have the potential to grow in optimism and confidence – not a blind confidence, but one grounded in reality. For every one of us, there are sound reasons to believe in ourselves and our future.

Why are we afraid of the future? We are cowed and weakened by anxiety because we can hear that we can die of swine flu or it is the end of the world. But when we look at all the times that media have screamed red alert, and nothing has happened. Psychotherapist, Sue Cowan-Jensen, reveals how to learn to face the future without fear. She states: “Nostalgia for the past feeds in to our fear of the future...” [15, p.20]. But if you look for evidence that the past was so much better, it is not always true. We need to allow for possibilities, offered by future. A.Neculau says: “Because we don’t know what is going to happen, many things can happen, but that is a problem too, because we like certainties...” [1, p.48]. So, we tend to project certainties rather than allowing things to be open and the certainties we know are those of the past- we project our past into the future. That can be a problem, because people don’t project past successes- they are more likely to project past anxieties. D.Willem states; “We are afraid of being hopeful and joyful, because we tend to believe that if we are pessimistic, we will not be disappointed. We tell ourselves good things can’t possibly happen to us because we don’t deserve them” [5, p.2]. Usually, we tend to discount what we have achieved, although we must be doing something right. It is important to name the fears and the anxieties. Then it is necessary to identify times when this has not happened. A.Cosmovici gives the following advice: “Look at the list of your fears and think, what would you say to a friend who is in your position now. Encouraging yourself, you will succeed better...” [2, p.84]. One more important thing is to know how to be able to build faith in future. What we know is not always the safest or the best thing. Living cautiously doesn’t always keep us safest. Sue Cowan-Jensen mentions: “The price you are paying for safety is too high – you are usually demoralised and demotivated. The situation you are in can be safe, but is it really what you want.....” [15, p.22]. We have a belief that pessimism keeps us safer than optimism, but that is faulty: optimism gives more resources: “...you risk disappointment, but you feel better, you have more energy, you see more opportunities” [15, p.23].

Anticipatory pleasure is one of the most underrated and under examined emotions, it allows us to abandon the everyday banality and reveal in a perfect future, seeing the most unlikely possibilities in our mind’s eye. Recently, researchers found just anticipating mirthful laughter boosts health-protecting hormones and reduce stress. Another study, led by the National University of Singapore, found prize-winners prefers the anticipation of wondering what they will win, rather than finding out immediately. But is anticipation becoming a lost art? Paul Rosin, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania says: “We are reducing anticipatory pleasure by allowing people gratification very easily. If you are used to snapping your fingers and getting what you want, you will have problems when you face something that takes hard work” [13, p.36]. But if we spend too long putting off pleasure, it can lead to over-anticipation, which inevitably ends in disappointment. According to Fred Bryant and Joseph Veroff, authors of “Savoring”, the way to prevent anticipation spoiling the ultimate experience is to “forget expectations once the event occurs” [9, p.66]. If we make direct comparisons between previous hopes and the present reality, we increase the chance of feeling

worse if the experience doesn't live up to our vision. Finding pleasure in the “before” is not just about optimism, it is a key part of motivation and it also requires a vivid imagination. “People who can anticipate things more easily are those who can conjure very detailed images of the experience,” says David Grad [6, p.12].

The wide spread expression “Don't worry. Be happy.” encourages us to enjoy every moment we live, but not everyone can do this because in our instant gratification culture, moments of genuine expectation are few and far between. Laura Bond, an American psychotherapist, trying to help people to be happy, reveals the following tips:

1. “Remember the past”; recalling past pleasures can enhance anticipation and this makes people to be more likely to look forward to the experience and to improve many things.

2. “Talk about it”. Numerous psychological studies show that if we can verbally articulate what we like about something, it increases our appreciation of it. If people can describe in detail what they are looking forward to, they are more likely to enjoy the actual experience.

3. “Be open to rewards». There are potential rewards within the most mundane experiences and some people are much better at spotting those benefits than others. We must realize that we can motivate ourselves and those people who are responsive to rewards in the environment generally experience more anticipatory pleasure.

4. “Don't over-plan.’ There is a difference between planning and savoring” If we are forever focusing on future consequences, it is difficult to build an appetite for a future experience”, says Doise Willem [5, p.46]. It is very good to plan everyday around a positive formula: (“I will approach every situation with a calm mindset” or “I will allow myself small indulgences.”)

We all have the power to view our lives in a more positive way and this means, according to Flavia Mazelin Salvi , “...making the best of our relationships..” [10, p.39]. Approaching life in a consciously positive way isn't the same as cocooning ourselves in an idealistic bubble, but it means deciding not to let ourselves be contaminated by negativism. This, in turn, will immeasurably improve our relationships. Our identity, our sense of who we are, is constructed in the context of our relationships with other people. Dominique Picard says: “The more honest and balanced our relationships, the better we function” [7, p.8]. She recommends the following:

1. “Making sure we give as much we receive” [7, p.8], this can mean time, compliments, attention, gifts, etc. This level of equality protects us from the negative effects of dependence and domination.

2. “Accepting that we are all separate people” [7, p.8]. Many of life's conflicts stem from our need to shape one another according to our own values, so that we feel in control. Accepting differences or separateness allows us to feel positive about what we can not change.

3. “Communicating what we feel, so that we don't send ambivalent or contradictory messages” [7, p.9]. This includes only offering to help when we really want to – without thinking that he owes you, once it is done.

If we compare different experts' opinions, we can notice a relevant distinction between philosophers and psychologists. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre's advice is “...to live without hope. “He considered that gloomy and dark tone represents “an intellectual pose”. Sartre's advice finds some echo in that of the ancient Stoics. They caution us to be ready for whatever setbacks might come. Marcus Aurelius said: “Remember that our efforts are subject to circumstances, but being ready for the worst is actually what equips us to do our best.” So, according to these theories, faith in the future or in ourselves is blind if it does not take into account what might go wrong, but if we are ready to face problems and failures, we are ready to face everything and can stride forward with justified confidence. Although, modern psychologists have another point of view: they think that hope and optimism are very good for us. Claudia Hammond states: “More hopeful people are more popular, healthier, live longer and are more likely to succeed” [4, p.15]. At the same time, they agree that sometimes we should worry about the future. In fact, bad times bring their own beneficial side effects: - psychologists have found that even negative events can increase our level of hope: challenging situations improve our resilience and this resilience helps us through the hardest situations. If stress is manageable, it is possible to come through it as a stronger person: times of uncertainty can also lead us to think about where we really find meaning in life.

At the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign the researchers are gathering evidence of the importance of the Psychological Wealth in addition to Financial Wealth in dealing with stress successfully. They say: “Wealth really means having what you need, and money gives only one part of what we need” [3, p.2].

Psychologists also have found that being highly materialistic affects happiness and those who are most concerned about money and possessions are less happy. Using money to pay for something cultural, social or experiential brings more happiness than buying things. Eating out or buying theatre tickets is better spent than on things, such as new tech toy or clothing and the experiential purchase provides greater happiness.

“Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence” [8, p.68]. Health, beauty, money and power are valued only because we expect that they will make us happy. People are happy when they are making mental or physical efforts that engage them in a challenging activity that requires skill, an activity that isn’t too easy (which would get boring) or too difficult (which would cause anxiety and frustration), an activity for which you have clear goals and receive clear feedback, and one for which your skills can continue to improve, allowing you to grow as a person. According to M. Christopher : “...the best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times , although such experiences can also be enjoyable – the best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” [11, p.25]. During activities such as these, you achieve a state of what M.Christopher calls “flow”, a state in which your attention is totally absorbed by what you’re doing and there is no room in your consciousness for fear or worry. In fact, you become completely unselfconscious for not caring about your appearance or what others think of you. You are so focused on the task at hand that you even lose your sense of time. Struggling to overcome challenges, and then overcoming them, is what people find to be the most enjoyable times in their lives. People typically feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and at the peak of their abilities, they relinquish their sense of self while engaged in flow-producing activities, when their sense of self returns they realize that they’ve been enriched that their skills have grown and so they have sense of achievement.

Any activity that requires energy, can be focused upon, and is challenging can create flow. The list of such activities is endless and includes reading, writing, performing, playing sports, learning, playing chess, engaging in stimulating conversation, dancing, and so on. Let’s use tennis as a specific example. It is challenging, but not impossible, offers clear goals, immediate feedback and the chance to improve. While playing you can feel good about your mastery of the game, and you’re so absorbed you have no time to worry about different things. Surgeons are in flow during surgery and shop sellers are in flow when they are artfully closing a sale. In many ways, flow is the opposite of boredom and anxiety.

The researchers, from the University of Virginia, the University of Illinois and Michigan State University, looked at data from the World Values Survey, a large-scale analysis of economic, social, political and religious influences around the world. They analyzed the behaviours and the attitudes of 193 undergraduate students at Illinois. Their findings, which appear in the December 2007 “Perspectives on Psychological Science”, challenge the common assumption that all measures of well-being go up as happiness increases. While many indicators of success and well-being correspond to higher levels of happiness, the researchers report, those at the uppermost end of the happiness scale people, who report that they are 10s on a 10-point life satisfaction score, are in some measures worse off than their slightly less elated counterparts.

Dr. Robert Holden finds out 10 ways to achieve happiness:

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|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Define Happiness | 6. Love Someone        |
| 2. Accept Happiness | 7. Forgive Now         |
| 3. Follow Your Joy  | 8. Vocal Gratitude     |
| 4. Choose Happiness | 9. Beware of Martyrdom |
| 5. Free Happiness   | 10. Be Present         |

There are much more anxious and frustrated people than those who are happy. Genetics could help to explain why many people are predisposed to anxiety and why worrying is more natural than we think. It’s in the Genes. The nature versus nurture debate is nothing new, but since the mapping of the human genome, scientists are increasingly finding that some personality traits are encoded in our DNA. Studies in the past ten years have identified genetic profiles associated with common anxiety disorders, like Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), Panic Disorder (PD), and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). There is not one specific gene that causes anxiety, but combinations of genes seem to be at play. This does not mean Mother Nature has won the great debate. Scientists agree that genes are not the only things at work when it comes to worry. Environmental factors and trauma can also greatly affect a person’s

ability to process anxiety and fear. Some of these include low levels of maternal care, childhood trauma, fear conditioning, brain injury, and even strep infections. Genes and the environment are working together. A new study by Swedish and German researchers in Psychological Science shows that “... participants with specific versions of two genes were more likely to develop fear of external stimuli and less able to overcome that fear, potentially leading to increased anxiety” [12, p.55].

So, researchers established that half of human happiness is genetically determined. Also, around 10 percent of our happiness comes from life circumstances - for example, where you live and work. This explains why people who move to sunny southern California from upstate New York may be happier in Los Angeles for a while, but they soon adapt to the sunny weather and lament the rainy days even here in Los Angeles.

The theory of happiness shows that it is composed of two main components: 1) a cognitive component, which is how you think about your life, how satisfied you are with your life, and whether or not you feel like you're progressing toward your life goals, and 2) an affective experience, which is how often you experience positive and negative emotions.

But can too much happiness be a bad thing? According to University of Virginia psychology professor Shigehiro Oishi and his colleagues, the answer is positive. They studied levels of happiness among European-Americans, Asian-Americans, Koreans, and Japanese, and found that while European-Americans tend to be the happiest, they also experience higher levels of unhappiness—they appear to encounter the most emotional peaks and valleys during their lives. They also found that, on average, European-Americans claim to be happy in general – happier than Asian-Americans or Koreans or Japanese – but are more easily made less happy by negative events, and recover at a slower rate from negative events, than their counterparts in Asia or with an Asian ancestry. On the other hand, Koreans, Japanese, are less happy in general, but recover their emotional equilibrium more readily after a setback than European-Americans. So, people who are used to be happy most of the time become more sensitive to unpleasant situations that may appear.

Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim of humanity. A golden rule that should be subscribed in your mind is: “Life is in your hands, act this way, to enjoy it” [14, p.81].

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