

THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS IS PAVED WITH JOY, HOPE AND, YES, PAIN.
THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT LIES IN WHETHER YOU LET THE NEGATIVE
OR ACCEPTING PART OF YOUR PERSONALITY TAKE THE WHEEL.

By Alex Van Tol

THE ART OF *happiness*

Are you the type of person who can see a fresh start behind the dark cloud when, say, your relationship breaks down, you lose your job or you are forced to deal with any of the other life crises that can come our way? If you can take the grey stones that life hands you and turn them over until you discover the spot where they shine just a little, you're in a good place. You might just be happy.

Believe it. Truly happy people know that life is more work than play. It's not about the things that happen, but about the way you view those things. "A while back, I did a talk about bliss," says Carolyne Taylor, community connector, event planner, founder of YoUnlimited and host of the annual Victoria Yoga Conference, who is herself known to be a fairly happy sort. "At the same time I was talking about bliss, my son and his wife and two granddaughters were getting on a ferry to move to Alberta. In that moment, I wasn't unhappy. My heart was breaking and I was sad, but I wasn't unhappy."

ARTFUL ADDITIONS

Incorporating sculpture can enhance and enliven your garden, with your choice of art augmenting the mood and atmosphere.

The diverse array of Paul Harder's bronze creatures range from West Coast-

inspired fauna, such as timber wolves, grizzlies and Great Blue Herons, to more exotic offerings, such as Komodo dragons and Galapagos tortoises. paulharder.com



Local sculptor Birgit Piskor draws her inspiration from the natural world, creating sensual, curved pieces in concrete that work in perfect harmony with an outdoor setting. birgitpiskor.com



SUZANNE SAGMEISTER

to the pergola, and beyond, as one view after another is exposed. Even though, as head gardener and unofficial historian Barrie Agar explains, the garden is not strictly traditional, it is still a wonderfully calm place to be, and can most certainly be viewed as an artscape.

Another element of successful artistic design is seen in landscapes that "have a particular twist on them" that make you "pay attention," says Bev Windjack. She describes the landscape that her firm, Ladr, designed at Ship Point Plaza in downtown Victoria: "We have the five oceans represented and the brass from the ships, and the more you look and the more knowledge you have about ships, the more you'll get out of it."

Perhaps the most poignant of Ship Point's elements are the red honour bricks, which are inscribed with names of members of the Canadian Navy. This site is successful as an artscape because of the subtle way it represents and honours its site and its subject.

In a home garden, similar elements can be incorporated into the site by researching the history of your neighbourhood and taking cues from what you find there. Alternatively, your garden may also reflect elements of your own

personal journey, giving the landscape a deeper meaning.

Not only do artistic gardens express personality through their unique sites, they can also express energy and mood through movement, light and colour. Artful garden design will always take advantage of plantings that bend and sway with the wind, for example, such as the mass of sedge grasses in the expansive rain gardens at Murdoch de Greeff's renovation at Fisherman's Wharf Park in James Bay. When the wind blows through this large swath of grasses, the blades move and seem to dance together, visually expressing the patterns of the wind, and adding another element to the richness of the landscape.

Designing a successful artscape is a complex and mysterious process, but the results can be worth all of the thought and effort involved. After all, the kind of richness, beauty, meaning, and inspired creativity that went into those oh-my-goodness landscapes that I saw in Berlin so long ago has stuck with me, and I can see those spaces still, all of these years and gardens later. This is where we experience the true power of the artful landscape — it enters our imaginations and stays there, changing us for the better. ::



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"Learning to separate 'happiness' from 'spending money' is the quickest and most reliable way to a better life."

A CLOSER LOOK AT HAPPINESS

In defining happiness, it helps to look at what it is *not*. By now most of us know — if not at a practicing level, then at least at an awareness level — that we can't get there by chasing the next promotion, a bigger house, a more far-flung vacation, fuller lips or a faster yacht. Acquiring these only leads us to want more. That path is actually a never-ending treadmill.

And it's also remarkably ungratifying. A Princeton study a few years back showed the fiscal contentment "ceiling" to be around \$75,000, at which point, extra money doesn't really add happiness.

"Learning to separate 'happiness' from 'spending money' is the quickest and most reliable way to a better life," writes budgeting rock star Mr.

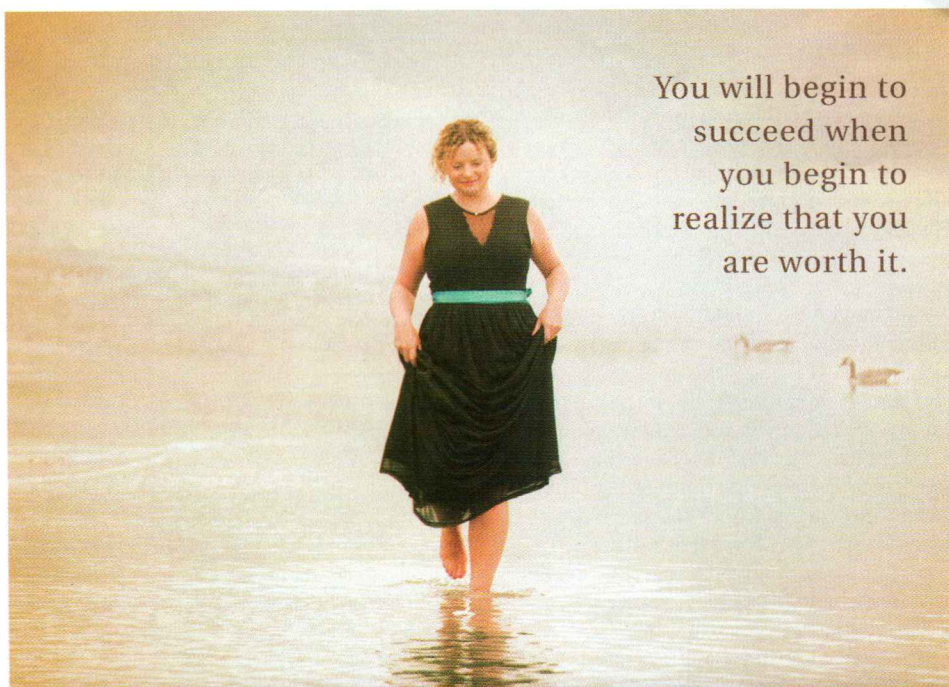
Money Mustache. His eponymous blog has flipped hundreds of thousands of lives around for the better by redirecting people's focus away from spending toward what really matters. We can all think of someone who's got money oozing from every pore yet who never seems satisfied or content.

We're all likely familiar, too, with the end-of-life stories where people on their deathbeds look back and reflect on what they wish they could have done differently. With a fair degree of consistency, people say they wish they hadn't worked so hard, that they had made more time for friends, and that they had let themselves be happier.

CAN NATURE BRING HAPPINESS AND HEALING?

Everything in nature has a unique relationship within the natural system and we often forget we are part of this. "Consciously cultivating that relationship — our ecological identity — is critical," says Dr. Hilary Leighton, eco-psychologist and director of Continuing Studies at Royal Roads University. The patterns we see in nature mirror the patterns in our own worlds, Leighton says, and this knowledge should calm us. Part of wellness is to realize that while we may be experiencing depressing events in our lives, like everything that is of nature, the cycle will eventually spin us back up into a place of light. Spending more time outdoors, in nature, is a powerful way to reacquire ourselves with this knowledge.

You will begin to succeed when you begin to realize that you are worth it.

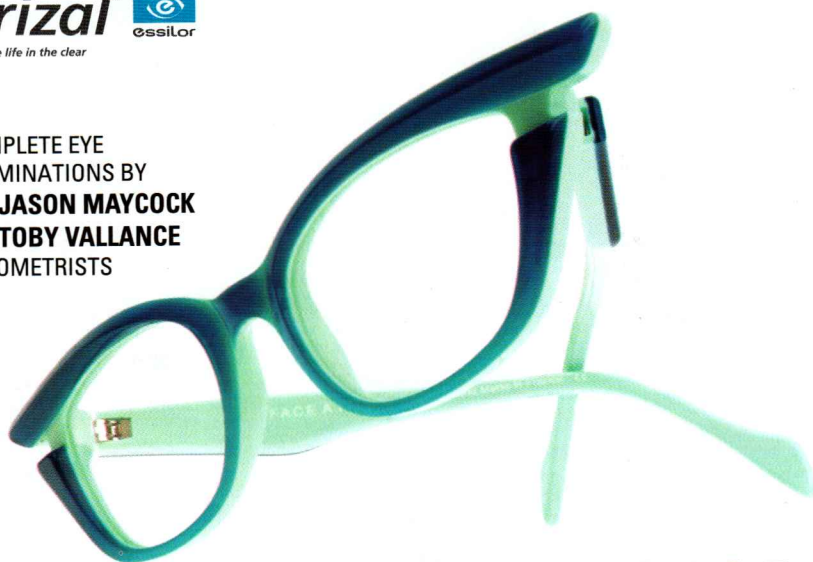


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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"Happiness isn't an end state, but rather a potential," says Human Nature Counselling co-founder Dave Segal. "Yes, we can have a life with less suffering, more ease and more joy, but still with its ups and downs." A happy state is one in which we develop the resilience to accept and weather those ups and downs.

And maybe we shouldn't even be calling it happiness, anyway, because most experts come at it from the angle of wellness or contentment, rather than happiness. "Happy is such an interesting word," muses Taylor. She echoes Segal's words when she points out that happiness means allowing space for the sad. "To be happy, you have to have that full range of everything, and really feel it all." So really, happiness includes sadness, anger and fear because, well, it must.

Whether you call it happiness, contentment, wellness or just plain balance, what we should be seeking is the knowledge that, no matter what arises, we can deal with it. On the road to happiness, gratitude is the key that starts the engine, meditation provides the horsepower, and mindfulness keeps you out of the ditch.

how to be happy

Ditch busyness. Figure out how little you can get away with doing and still do a good job, says sociologist and happiness expert Christine Carter in her new book *The Sweet Spot: How to Find Your Groove at Home and Work*. Let's drop "I'm so busy" as a point of pride in our culture.

Take it outside. Go hiking. Paddle. Surf. Sit on a beach. Leighton recommends her patients cultivate a site-sitting practice, where they return to the same place in nature every day, to reacquire themselves with the cycles of day/night, the seasons, birth/death/rebirth, and to reflect on how everything in our human experience is cyclical. And remember, turn your phone OFF!

Take it off. Go barefoot as much as you can; recent research into the practice of "earthing" indicates that the

electrical energy exchange between our feet and the earth reduces inflammation and cortisol levels, and promotes healing.

Practice gratitude. It's not just an Oprah-ism. The more you can be thankful for, the happier you'll be. Instead of blowing a gasket over the driver who cut you off, be glad you're fast on the brake. Give happy things more space to overpower the negativity bias.

Build your tribe. As much as you go "inside" to meditate, devote just as much energy to connecting with others. "Few of us are really connected to a tribe, if you will," says Segal. "A sense of community and connection and gratitude is a brake on the anxious mind."

Eat. Sleep. Repeat. If you fill your car's gas tank with Diet Coke, you won't make it to

Tofino, right? So why fill our bodies with food that doesn't optimize our performance? Figure out how to recalibrate what you take in, because we are systems, and everything that enters the system is processed. And since we're in the detox chamber, let's talk about sleep, the grand dame of system renewal. You need it to consolidate learning, metabolize food, manage anxiety and renew your cells — and that's just scratching the surface.

Meditate. As little as five minutes twice a day has been shown to create positive changes, says Tamara Lechner, a happiness expert and Chopra-certified meditation instructor who starts each day with 30 minutes of meditation and tucks on another 20 minutes later as space allows. Don't think you can find time? Return to the beginning of this list and start over.

season your skin to perfection

It has often been advised to avoid using anything on your skin that you are not willing to eat. The Parkside Spa likes to follow this 'rule of thumb' which is why their primary product line is Éminence Organic Skincare of Hungary.

The Parkside Spa suggests trying Éminence's Citrus & Kale Potent C+E Serum and Masque products. Both products are blended together with citrus, kale and avocado and then individually combined with additional rejuvenating ingredients.

For total body nourishment, pair these skincare products with Éminence's "Almighty Antioxidant Smoothie" recipe - a great boost to any morning!

Combine:

- 2 small satsumas or 1 large orange, peeled
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- ½ small avocado
- ½ cup apple, chopped
- 1 cup coconut water or water, chilled
- ½ cup ice
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- Pinch of parsley
- Dash of Hungarian Paprika (optional)

Blend all ingredients until smooth, and begin to feel rejuvenated.

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HAPPINESS BOOTCAMP FOR YOUR BRAIN

You can absolutely train your mind to become happier, says happiness expert and Chopra-certified meditation instructor Tamara Lechner. She would know: she's done it herself. "On all the measures for happiness, I am at the ridiculously high end," she says. "But that's not my natural set point. I used to be very different. This is learned."

Turns out you can change your happiness set point. Here's how Lechner explains it: We all arrive in this world with a preordained set point for happiness, which forms about 40 per cent of our total happiness pie. Another 10 per cent comes from where you land in life: where you live, how much money you're born into, how much you've got now. The final 50 per cent is entirely under our control.

"We get to effect that much change in our thought patterns," she says. And changing thought patterns is as simple — and as disciplined — as strengthening the neural pathways that lead us to focus on what's good, instead of what's not.

"We have a negativity bias," adds Lechner. "Anything we see that's negative, we notice in a stronger way. So, for example, if I'm teaching a class of 20 people and 19 are totally engaged and hanging on every word I say and one person is looking down, I will remember that one person despite the majority of those people being happy."

Our natural negativity bias leads us to notice the bad, she notes. Emotions like fear, anger and anxiety pack a bigger chemical and physical charge than do the happier emotions like joy, serenity and hope. So you have to experience the happier emotions more times to have the same kick.

Feeling the happier emotions more, she says, requires noticing the great things more often (that's the gratitude piece), but it also demands a learned perspective shift.

"Examine your process of how you greet stimulus every day so that whatever comes into your world — positive or negative — you learn to see it as, 'Wow, this is exciting. I wonder what I'm going to learn from this,' as opposed to getting stuck in those negative patterns of thinking."

True happiness requires you to remain open to life, to look on what enters your life with curiosity, and to discipline your brain to run the "feel-good" neural pathways far more often than the "this-sucks" pathways.

And it is a true discipline. As any truly content person will tell you, it takes time and practice to learn to rewire your thinking habits. But you can do it.

And you'll be a lot happier for it. ::

You might find yourself sleeping a little better...

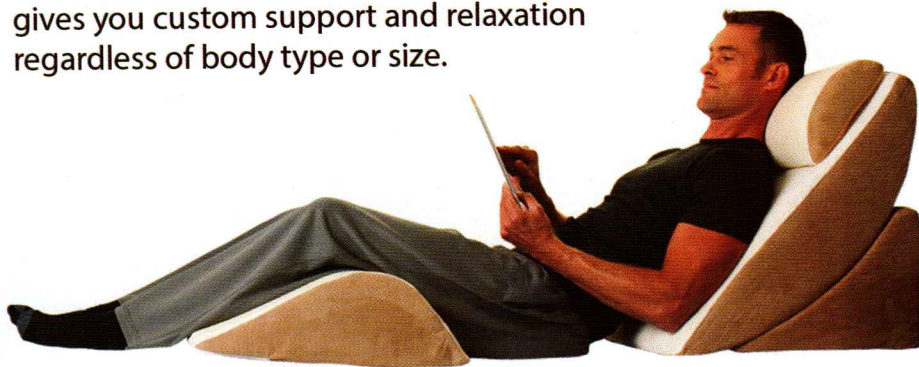


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