

**You Can Have What
You Want**

You Can Have What You Want

Michael Neill



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First published and distributed in the United Kingdom by:

Hay House UK Ltd, Unit B, 292 Kensal Road, London W10 5BE
Phone: (44) 20 8962 1230 • *Fax:* (44) 20 8962 1239 • www.hayhouse.co.uk

Published and distributed in the United States of America by:

Hay House, Inc., P.O. Box 5100, Carlsbad, CA 92018-5100
Phone: (1) 760-431-7695 or (1) 800-654-5126
Fax: (1) 760-431-6948 or (1) 800-650-5115 • www.hayhouse.com

Published and distributed in Australia by:

Hay House Australia Ltd, 18/36 Ralph St., Alexandria NSW 2015
Phone: (61) 2-9669-4299 • *Fax:* (61) 2-9669-4144 • www.hayhouse.com.au

Published and distributed in the Republic of South Africa by:

Hay House SA (Pty) Ltd, P.O. Box 990, Witkoppen 2068
Phone/Fax: (27) 11-467-8904 • www.hayhouse.co.za

Published and distributed in India by:

Hay House Publishers India, Muskaan Complex, Plot No.3, B-2, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi – 110 070. Tel.: (91) 11 41761620; Fax: (91) 11 41761630.
contact@hayhouseindia.co.in

Distributed in Canada by:

Raincoast, 9050 Shaughnessy St., Vancouver, B.C. V6P 6E5
Phone: (1) 604-323-7100 • *Fax:* (1) 604-323-2600

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-84850-109-6

Printed in the UK by CPI William Clowes Ltd, Beccles, NR34 7TL

*To Nina, Oliver, Clara and Maisy –
Without you none of this would have been
worthwhile
or anywhere near as much fun.
I love you more than words (even these words) can
express ...*

*‘I am not a teacher:
only a fellow-traveller
of whom you asked the
way.*

*I pointed ahead – ahead of
myself as well as you.’*

George Bernard Shaw

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FOREWORD

*'Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day;
teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime.'*
Lao Tzu, Chinese philosopher, 6th century BC

There are very few people in the human potential movement these days that impress me. Unfortunately, I have come to realize that many of the biggest names are better marketers than agents of change. Michael Neill is different. He has a truly original message and a wonderfully light-hearted style of delivery. This is partly a product of his high level of skill, but also an indication of who he really is as a person.

I first met Michael back in the late '80s when he was working in a New Age book shop in Camden and I was a DJ at Capital Radio in London. We both went on to become NLP trainers and stayed in touch on and off over the years. Then several years ago, I was in LA and we met up again.

When I asked him what he was doing, he told me he had become a 'success coach'. He explained that this is different from therapy, where the emphasis is on what happened in the past and on 'fixing' what's broken. In coaching, his job is to assist people in enjoying the present and creating the future. Instead of just giving his clients what they say they want, he teaches them how to get it for themselves.

Then he asked me if I'd consider having some coaching with him. I almost said 'no' – things were going well for me and I wondered what he could teach me about change – but I was curious, so I hired him for a month to see what he could do.

What I didn't realize at the time was just how exceptional a coach Michael really is.

According to a brand-new research study reported in the Guardian, happiness, rather than working hard, is the key to success. Cheerful people are more likely to try new things and challenge themselves, which reinforces positive emotions and leads

to greater success at work, stronger relationships and better health. This echoes what Michael has been demonstrating for years, and is one of the primary messages of this wonderful book.

Scientific or not, I can only talk from personal experience. Since using Michael's approach to creating inner and outer success, I have become happier in myself, more successful and to be blunt, I have simply made a lot more money! This book contains many of his techniques that I can personally attest are powerfully life-changing.

In recent years I have recommended to many of my closest friends that they hire Michael as their coach, and I have watched their lives transformed beyond all recognition. They too have become happier, wealthier, and perhaps, best of all, more inspired and alive than ever before. I will tell you the same thing I tell them if they are sceptical or hesitant about getting started: working with Michael will help you to get more of what you truly want out of life.

For the small investment in time and effort it will take you to read this book and do the experiments, you will experience a profound and positive life change. Do it!

Paul McKenna PhD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Were I to make a full list of the people to whom I and this book are indebted, it would be longer than the book itself. Therefore with a huge ‘Thank you’ to everyone who has contributed to the accumulation and sharing of experience represented by this book, here are a few of the people I would particularly like to acknowledge:

- Stuart Wilde for pushing me out in front of a group of people before I had any idea I was ready: I came, you pushed, I flew!
- Richard Bandler for his support and for developing the field that saved my life and launched my career.
- Paul McKenna for dragging me out of premature retirement kicking and screaming (and for being a great friend along the way).
- Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks for convincing me that sticking my head above the parapet would be much more fun than living in an eternal crouch.
- Sacha Gervasi for encouraging me to write this book ‘before I was ready’.
- Sue Crowley – my angel of serendipity – without whom this book would have languished on the bookshelves of my mind.
- Robert Kirby, Dotti Irving and Jane Acton for helping me deal with the numerous people who asked ‘Who the hell are you and why should we care?’
- Michelle Pilley, Joanna Lincoln, Jo Lal, Megan Slyfield, Reid Tracy and the whole Hay House team for giving me the chance to share what I do with a wider world.
- The ‘Magnificent Seven’, who let me bounce my early drafts off them and bounced them back to me better than before.
- Mike Meakin for helping me to dot my ‘i’s, cross my ‘t’s, and mind my ‘p’s and ‘q’s.

- Bill Cumming and Peter Fenner for playing midwife to the emergence of my spiritual self.
- Mandy Evans and Michele Lisenbury Christensen for continually encouraging me and assisting me in living what I teach.
- All my teachers, coaches and clients past and present: your contributions to my life and to this book have been immense!

I would also like to especially acknowledge the children's 'Uncle Father David' for being my best friend, confidant, teacher and fellow- explorer. I'm grateful to have met you so young that I never had to find out what a rare gem our friendship is ...

INTRODUCTION

'There are no rules here – we're trying to accomplish something.'

Thomas Edison

Let's begin our time together with a little experiment ...

I'd like you to put the book down and swap shoes with the person nearest you. Now, if you're in the bath, or reading this all alone in the middle of nowhere, I understand that might be a little bit difficult. But, otherwise, go for it. Take off your shoes, go up to the person nearest you and ask them to swap.

Done?

OK, let's talk about it.

Nobody questions the fact that your feet are different from other people's feet. Different size, different shape, different appearance. There may be people you know with similar feet, but no one with identical ones to yours. And the reason you almost certainly didn't do what I just asked you to do (and if you did, for goodness sake swap back!) is because you understood immediately that it was ridiculous.

The chances of someone else's shoes fitting your style and taste (or, more importantly, your feet) were as slim as a pair of single E loafers. Yet to them, their shoes might be the most wonderful ones in the world – comfortable, practical, attractive, and with great memories attached as well.

What's less obvious to most of us is that the same principle holds true of our beliefs and practices in the world. Setting goals, meditating for thirty minutes twice a day, doing the latest diet or practising yoga might be as painful, uncomfortable and inappropriate for you as trying to squeeze into your favourite movie star's underwear – but you might still try to do it because it looks so good on them!

What if you don't need to do things someone else's way in order to live a happy, successful life? What if everything you've ever learned about success was just wrong?

This book is about what happens when you use your head, listen to your heart and follow your bliss. It's about what happens

when you stop doing all the things you think you should be doing and start doing what you really want to be doing – when you stop listening to everybody else and instead turn up the volume on the still, small voice within.

By the time you've finished reading, you'll know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can have whatever you want in life: more money; better relationships; a new job; or anything else that makes your heart sing and your soul come alive. The only question you will be left with is whether or not you really want it!

Let's face it – most people spend their lives chasing someone else's dreams, then wind up being disappointed that they never achieved them or even more disappointed that they did.

As you explore the ideas in this book and put them to the test in your one and only life, you will get back in touch with your own dreams. You will discover what actually works for you, regardless of whether or not it works for anyone else. And best of all, you will finally be able to truly enjoy the journey every bit as much as the stopping points along the way.

Debunking the myth of the experts

'The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth – persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.'

John F. Kennedy

Having grown up in a family of scientists, I was thoroughly immersed in the myth of the experts, which can be summed up in the phrase, 'Follow the advice of the experts – they know best.'

The idea is that there are these people out there called 'experts', and what they do is study everything there is to study about a field, and they find the best ways of doing things. Then they tell you what they've learned, and even if it feels wrong to you, you should do what the experts tell you – because they're experts.

Makes sense, right?

Well, it made so much sense to me that I grew up and became an expert in my area of psychology called Neuro-Linguistic Programming or NLP. I've studied hundreds of books and worked with thousands of people over the past fifteen years, including a foreign prince, numerous millionaires, and famous (sometimes

infamous!) members of the Hollywood elite. I'm an unquestioned expert in the field of human behaviour.

Yet I'm not going to give you a single bit of advice about what you should do with your life.

Why?

Because even if what I say is true in my experience, it may not be in yours.

In theory I may know better than you, but in practice you know best (or at least you have the potential to know best) what will work for you.

In fact, I'll go so far as to say this:

You are the expert on you.

But here's the catch ...

Most of us have never claimed our expertise – we've never made a study of ourselves. And if you're going to step up and be your own best expert, one of the most useful things you can do is to begin tapping into your own inner senses and inner genius on a regular basis.

While no one can teach you exactly how to do that, it is something that can be learned – and I've designed every sentence in this book to act as a catalyst in the process of bringing your genius to life.

The idea of 'genius' being a measure of intellect is actually fairly recent. In its original form, the word had two primary meanings. The first refers to that natural inclination that we all seem to have which draws us towards some things more than others. This is different from cultural conditioning, which would have us all want the same things and agree that only certain things are 'good' and 'right' while everything else is bad and wrong.

The second root definition of 'genius' is *djinn* or 'genie'. And like the genie in the magic lamp, when you learn to unleash your inner genius, you will find your 'wishes' to the universe are granted more easily and effortlessly than you may have ever thought possible.

How it all works

In Part I – Creating a Life That Makes You Go 'Wow!' – I will share

with you the same stories and techniques I use with my clients to help them unleash their own inner genius and put it to work in creating their lives. You will learn the keys to knowing yourself, trusting yourself, inspiring yourself and even loving yourself – what I call the four pillars of an extraordinary life, because each one provides a core structural element in supporting you on your journey, and together they form an unbreakable foundation for living the life of your dreams.

You'll also learn some of the foundational secrets of effortless success – that kind of success where it seems as though you got what you wanted without even trying. We often think about these experiences as anomalies – happy accidents while we are getting on with the 'real' business of working to create what we want in our lives. In fact, your experiences of effortless success are the keys to finding and walking along what I like to call 'the path of inspiration' – that unique blueprint for success, happiness and fulfilment that is being drawn on your heart and in your life each and every day.

In Part II – An Obstacle Course to Success – I'll walk you step by step over, around and through the nine key life obstacles that people use to stop themselves from having everything they want in life. This section is packed with simple tips, techniques and proven action strategies for getting unstuck and moving forward with your dreams.

Throughout the book, you'll also find a number of boxed sections called '*From theory to practice ...*' These are based on a simple but important idea:

The difference between theory and practice is that in theory, there is no difference between theory and practice – but in practice there inevitably is.

Each of these sections will contain an experiment or two that you can do for yourself to find out if what I'm saying works for you – if it enhances the quality of your life and moves you closer to having more of what you want.

You do not need to do all of the experiments in this book in order to succeed!

Instead, I'd like you to think about each one of them as an invitation to learn more and have fun doing it. As with any

invitation, you don't have to accept it – but if you don't, you might just miss the party.

How to NOT change your life

One of the core skills of NLP is learning to use language 'hypnotically'. I have put these skills to use and have written this book in a way that your life will change for the better just by reading it.

Despite this, there are still a few ways you could avoid making your life better if you really want to ...

1. Dismiss it all as Americanized New Age happy-clappy bubble-gum pop psychology

If you're already thinking about hiding this book inside a porn magazine so you don't have to be embarrassed about people seeing you read it, there are a couple of things in here you may find difficult ...

First, there are times when I use words like 'love', 'happiness' and even 'God' (gasp!).

Second, I tell the occasional 'little bunny FuFu' story. You remember little bunny FuFu, don't you? The one who went hopping through the forest, scooping up the field mice and bopping them on the head?

You don't have to work out exactly what these stories are supposed to mean consciously. They're written for another part of your mind – the part that keeps your heart beating and your body breathing, even as you're reading this book right now.

2. Turn the ideas in this book into a new set of 'rules' for how you're supposed to be in the world and what you 'should' and 'shouldn't' be, do, have or want

In the famous story of the blind men and the elephant, each of the men in turn mistook the small part of the elephant they were able to grasp in the moment for the true nature of an elephant. Therefore the man holding the tail thought the elephant was like a snake, the man who grabbed an ear described the elephant as being like a bat, and the man who got hold of one of the legs thought the elephant to be very like a tree.

In the same way, it is the easiest thing in the world to turn any one perspective on life into ‘the whole truth’ and then expound on it as if it really were the ‘right’ way to be.

But if you read this book as a manual for how you *should* be and what you *should* do if you want to be happy and successful, you will find ways of turning every positive possibility into a limiting straightjacket.

Know this – no matter how well things are going for you or how badly you may be suffering right now, you’re almost certainly doing the best you can to take care of yourself, moving towards happiness and away from sorrow in the best way you know how. And as Oprah Winfrey is fond of saying, ‘When you know better, you’ll do better.’

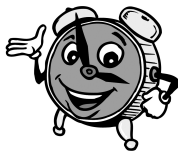
3. Override your inner wisdom by listening to me instead of yourself

The reason why I focus so heavily on experimentation is that until you actually try things out for yourself, you won’t know where, when and how they will make the biggest positive difference for you.

Here’s an experiment we’ll be playing with throughout the book ...

It is very easy when reading to get ‘lost in thought’, particularly if something I say doesn’t seem to fit in with what you have learned about happiness, success or life. But if the ideas most people had in their heads about what it takes to live their dreams were accurate, there would be no point in my having written this book and even less point in your reading it now.

Therefore, whenever you see this symbol:



check to see if you have disappeared off into your own head. If so, pat yourself on the back for noticing and bring your attention back into your body by closing your eyes and taking a slow, gentle breath in as you focus on your physical heart. You can use these checkpoints as an easy way to reconnect with yourself and your

inner wisdom. We'll talk more about why this makes such a difference in Chapters Five and Six.

So ... what do you want?

I'm hoping you picked up this book because there are all sorts of things in your life that you want and you'd like some help in getting them. Maybe you want to make more money, improve (or even change) your career or start up a company of your own. Perhaps you are looking for a new or improved relationship, better (or even any!) sex, different friends or a more enjoyable social life.

What you want may be even more personal – more intimate. You might be wanting to save your marriage or get on better with your resident teenager. You might have a health condition you are hoping to overcome. You may even be saying to yourself, 'I just want to be happy' or 'peaceful' or 'loved'.

The good news is, you can have what you want, even if right now it seems too remote a possibility to even wish for. That's not to say that just because you want to go out with your favourite movie star, you automatically will (although one of my clients did – her story is in Chapter Two), but rather that you will come to realize over the following pages that the universe runs on a fundamental and oh-so-wonderful principle:

When you get really clear and honest about what you want, everything in the universe conspires to help you get it.

I call this the principle of effortless success, and it's at the heart of everything you'll be learning in this book.

Along the way, I'll share dozens of stories of how people just like you and me have overcome traumas, achieved 'impossible' goals and made improvements in areas of their life where they had abandoned all hope. In fact, I'll be sharing with you the best of what I've learned from over 15 years of coaching and teaching thousands of people to have what they want, catalyse their genius and live a life that makes them (and often everybody around them) go 'Wow!'

But there is a catch ...

You're going to have to allow this to be easier than you think, faster than you expect and more fun than you can imagine.

Are you ready to begin?

PART I

**Creating a Life That
Makes You Go ‘Wow!’**

CHAPTER ONE

MASTERING THE HAPPINESS/ SUCCESS CONNECTION

The happiness priority

*'Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life,
the whole aim and end of human existence.'*

Aristotle

Most people's goals in life are made up of the things they believe will 'make' them happy. But as one of my business partners once said to me, 'If the bottom line is so important, why is it at the bottom?'

In other words, if what we really want is happiness, why don't we start there?

Having now asked this question of thousands of people, the answers generally come down to what I consider to be the greatest myth in Western civilization ...

I'll be happy when I get what I want.

This idea has been with us for thousands of years and is endemic throughout all mythology, ancient and modern – that when you battle with a dragon and win, you get the princess and you live happily ever after. Or if you are the princess, you just need to be patient long enough and someday your prince will come and *then* you'll live happily ever after.

In fact, people are often willing to endure great hardship on the way to success because they just know there's a pot of gold at the end of their rainbow – and they plan on using that pot of gold to buy the feelings of happiness and fulfilment that they really want.

To give yourself a sense of how this myth might be active in your own life, think about three or four ways you could finish this sentence:

I'll be happy when ...

- I'll be happy when I've got enough money.
- I'll be happy when I'm in a loving relationship.
- I'll be happy when I get a better job.
- I'll be happy when my boss/co-worker/friend stops being such a jerk.

Whatever you're putting between you and being happy in this very moment is a by-product of the myth of happiness: the idea that when you finally sort out your outer life, your inner life will take care of itself.

But the truth beyond the myth is simple yet profound:

**If you're doing things in order to be happy,
you're doing them in the wrong order!**

When you make happiness your number one priority and allow yourself to follow your 'happy wanting', success is not only more likely, attaining it is much more fun. As Albert Schweitzer said:

*'Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success.
If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.'*

Which brings up an important question: what exactly is 'success'?

The origins of ‘success’

Suc’cess (noun)

First appeared (in print in English) in 1537:

1. An outcome or result.
2. The attainment of wealth, favour or eminence.
3. One that succeeds.

Isn’t it amazing that the first recorded success didn’t happen until 1537? What did they call people who attained wealth, favour or eminence before then?

I mean, sure, Ben Hur ‘did well’ in the chariot race. Richard the Lionheart ‘rocked’ the crusades and Genghis Khan ‘achieved some very impressive things’ in the plains of Outer Mongolia, but the first recorded use of the word ‘success’ wasn’t until 1537.

(Personally, I like to think the first person written up as a ‘success’ was a Renaissance barber named Bob who increased his business by two score and ten when he introduced blood-letting as one of his services.)

Here’s my problem with the dictionary definition of the word ‘success’ – linguistically speaking, it describes something which doesn’t actually exist.

The word ‘success’ belongs to a category of words called ‘nominalizations’. And nominalizations are words that describe an activity as if it was an actual thing. Think about words like ‘love’, ‘happiness’, ‘relationships’ and ‘joy’. You can’t stick them in a wheelbarrow, yet we talk about them as if they are things which exist outside ourselves.

Why is that significant? Because if we are spending all our time trying to become successful and there’s no such thing as success, we’re all doomed to failure!

What this means is that if our pursuit of success is going to be a meaningful one, we need to start by defining success for ourselves. To begin exploring how that definition might look, let’s take a look at the two categories of things which people talk about as ‘success’ ...

1. *Outer success*

'I always wanted the trappings of great wealth, but instead I've got the trappings of poverty. I've got hold of the wrong trappings – and a rotten load of trappings they are too.'

Peter Cook

The trappings of outer success are the things we're used to seeing on TV and reading about in magazines – the money, the cars, the homes, the husbands/wives/mistresses/toy-boys, the servants, etc. Status symbols may change from generation to generation, but in the world of outer success, he (or she) who dies with the most toys nearly always wins the game.

2. *Inner success*

'Finding inner success is the best, easiest and, in fact, the only way to achieve and enjoy everything else in life.'

Spencer Johnson

Inner success is the ongoing experience of love, happiness, fulfilment and wellbeing – the experience of joy in your everyday life. And most people would say that given the choice, inner success is by far the more important.

Yet why do we have to choose?

What if you didn't have to give up the taste of a really great steak for a taste of enlightenment?

What if you didn't have to give up the scent of eternity for the smell of a rose?

Happy success, and what I'm convinced most of us are really after, is the combination of the inner with the outer – a truly fulfilling life which is a combination of authentic happiness and really cool stuff.

For example:

- A wonderful experience of working at a wonderful job.
- A fantastic sense of wellbeing within the context of a fantastically loving relationship.
- Peace of mind and a nice piece of real estate overlooking the ocean.

From theory to practice ...

What Happy Success Means to You

1. Imagine you're out near the end of your life. In your mind, notice a future you, looking happy and content. What is it about that person that lets you know they are happy and content?
2. Go say hello! Ask them what it is they have done with their life to make them feel so good. What were the key actions, attitudes, choices and accomplishments that led to it being a wonderful life?
3. Before you go, be sure to ask for at least one piece of advice they could offer you with the benefit of hindsight. Don't forget to thank them for their time!
4. Based on what you've learned, what does 'happy success' mean to you?

Happy success for me is ...

The secret of happy success

If the greatest myth we are up against in our pursuit of happy success is the idea that 'getting what we want will make us happy', the secret of happy success is simply this:

**Your happiness does not depend on
getting what you want.**

Now, at first glance that may seem innocuous enough. After all, you've probably heard similar things before, ranging from 'Happiness is a choice' to 'Happiness is an inside job' to 'Would you rather be right or happy?' (a question to which my answer has always been a resounding 'Both!').

But what if it were *really* true? In other words, what would you want if you didn't have to be unhappy about not getting it?

When I ask this question in my seminars I often have to repeat it several times before people can even hear it, so here it is again:

What would you want if you didn't have to be unhappy about not getting it?

We are so used to connecting up our pleasurable feelings with getting what we want and our unpleasant feelings with 'failure' that many of us have never questioned the idea that happiness and success are intrinsically linked.

This apparent link is the source of nearly all our fears about failure and success. Think about it – are you afraid of failing, or are you afraid of failing and feeling bad about it? Are you afraid of losing all your money, or are you afraid of losing all your money and feeling bad about it? Are you afraid of ending a relationship, or are you afraid of ending a relationship, feeling fine about it, but feeling bad that you don't feel bad about it? (Complex, aren't we?)

For example, I have a client who was involved in a difficult break-up with a woman he had seriously considered marrying. During our session one day, he said to me 'The thing is, I just don't love her any more.'

This struck me as a bit odd because everything I'd ever seen or heard him express about her was deeply loving.

'Yes you do,' I said.

'No, I don't,' he replied, seemingly trying to decide whether to be annoyed or confused by my response.

'Yes, you do still love her,' I continued. 'You just don't want to be with her any more.'

He went quiet for a minute or two as he considered it for himself.

Finally, he said, somewhat tentatively, 'Can both of those things be true at the same time?'

Several days later, I was speaking with a friend who was complaining about how much she hated her work and how she wished she was able to make enough money doing what she really loved to quit her job immediately.

After listening to her go on for a while I was struck by something neither of us had ever really considered before.

‘What if you could absolutely love the work you’re doing at the moment and STILL leave to do what you really want as soon as it makes sense to you to do so?’

This time it was only a few moments before she replied.

‘Am I allowed to do that?’ she asked, her voice filled with wonder.

The theme running through both these dialogues was the idea that it was necessary to be unhappy in order to change.

Bruce DiMarsico – the creator of the Option Method – posited a simple but powerful theory about why people experience unhappiness in any form, be it fear, anger, sadness, depression or misery:

**The only reason why you are ever unhappy
is because you think you should be.**

In other words, when you feel bad, it is because in that moment you think ‘bad’ is the best way to feel – that there are some important and positive benefits to it.

These benefits generally fall into one of two categories:

1. We feel bad because we think it will motivate us (or are afraid that we wouldn’t act in our own best interests if we weren’t)
2. We feel bad because we think it means something good about us (or are afraid that it would mean something bad about us if we didn’t).

I will always remember the man who challenged me during an NLP and Happiness workshop I was giving in London with a somewhat provocative question over whether I was advocating that he should feel happy about the recent death of his wife.

After quickly pointing out that that was NOT what I was saying, I went on to explain that for me, the question was not whether or not he ‘should’ be happy, but simply if he was willing to be. That is, would it be OK with him if he felt at peace with what had happened?

He shook his head ‘no’, so I went on to ask him:

‘What are you afraid it would mean about you if you were not unhappy about your wife’s death?’

He looked at me aghast. ‘What kind of a monster would I be if I was not unhappy about that?’

‘So are you saying,’ I asked, ‘that your feeling unhappy now is your way of expressing your love for your wife?’

He softened immediately and nodded.

‘Is that how you want to express your love for her?’ I asked.

‘No,’ he acknowledged, ‘but won’t other people think there’s something wrong with me if I’m not miserable?’

Rather than venture forth with my own opinion, I asked him how he would answer his own question.

‘I suppose,’ he said slowly, ‘that if they did, that would be OK with me. Because if there’s one thing I know for certain, it’s how grateful I am for our time together and how much I will always love her.’

Is it really true that we are only unhappy because we think we should be?

Honestly, I don’t know. But whether we have learned to use sadness to express our love, anger to signify our caring or fear to motivate ourselves to go for what we want, the point is this:

**Whatever you can do with unhappiness,
you can do better when you’re happy.**

From theory to practice ...

Happy Success in Action

1. Think about something in your life that you are unhappy (angry, sad, fearful, etc.) about.
2. If I could wave a magic wand and you would be instantly happy in that situation without anything else changing, would you want me to wave it?

In other words, would it be OK with you to be happy in that situation, exactly the way that it is?

(Remember, this is not saying you shouldn’t be unhappy about whatever you are unhappy about – it is just a sincere and curious question from you to you.)

3. If your answer was no, ask yourself either or both of the following questions:

- *What am I afraid would happen if I wasn't unhappy about _____?*
- *What do I think it would mean about me if I wasn't unhappy about that?*

4. Whatever you came up with, pick out the positive intention behind it, i.e. the 'very good reason(s)' you have for getting and staying unhappy.
5. Finally, imagine yourself feeling comfortable and peaceful in yourself and handling the situation elegantly and well. Come up with at least three ways that you could fulfil that positive intention without the 'unhappy' emotion.



The three types of happiness

A few years ago, I participated in a vanguard programme training coaches in using the distinctions from the relatively nascent field of Positive Psychology. As a part of the training, Dr Martin Seligman, a well-known author and researcher, shared his notion of the three types of happiness and how to experience more of them in your life. As you review the following introduction to the three 'happineses', have a think about which of them are most and least developed in your own life.

1. *Pleasure*

'All the money in the world is spent on feeling good.'

Ry Cooder

The thought that 'whole-body aliveness' or 'background bliss' could be a place to live from, not just a mountain top to occasionally visit during a particularly deep meditation or wonderful sexual experience, may be a real stretch for you. And yet, what if it were possible?

What would it be like to live in a space of vibrant energy in which feelings could arise and dissipate against the gentle background hum of your whole-body aliveness?

For that matter, how good do you feel in your body right now on a scale from 1 to 10? Not how happy or sad or angry or fearful but how wonderfully, pleurably alive?

I remember the first time I felt really, really alive in my body was when I was fifteen and watching a re-run of *I Dream of Jeannie*. As it happened, I was sitting cross-legged with my spine straight, a position it turns out facilitates an easy flow of energy through the body. I felt such an overwhelming sense of peace and wellbeing (what I now recognize with my scientific mind as an endorphin release) that I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

So significant was this experience for me that I spent much of the next five years trying to recreate it by sitting in the same posture, studying meditation, experimenting with drugs and watching re-runs of classic 1960s television. (See, mum, I told you it was research!)

As I moved into my twenties, I temporarily gave up my quest for inner delight to focus on my career and family. After all, I reasoned with myself – who has time for bliss and a mortgage? But the memory of the possibility never really went away, and since reawakening my search a few years back I've learned some wonderful ways to access ease and wellbeing in your body on a regular basis.

Here is one of my favourite techniques you can use to experience more life in your body and more aliveness in your life.

From theory to practice ...

A Warm, Fuzzy Practice

1. Take a few deep breaths and become aware of your whole body, from head to toe.
2. Now, find a part of your body which feels especially good – especially nice. This might be a warm tingle in your hands or a soft 'fuzzy' feeling in your heart.

3. As you tune into that good feeling, keep part of your attention with that part of your body. Imagine the feeling as a colour and let it spread up to the top of your head and down to the bottom of your feet.
4. Next, look around the room you are in, keeping part of your attention on that good feeling inside you. If you notice that the good feeling starts to fade or you suddenly become aware that you've stopped focusing on it as you're looking outside yourself, then just return to the good feeling. You can close your eyes so long as it's safe and appropriate to do so. When you've got that good feeling back, start to look around again.
5. As soon as you get comfortable looking around and holding that good feeling inside you, go ahead and stand up and walk around the room you are in. Again, if you notice the good feeling start to fade, go back to your body until you're reconnected.
6. When you can look around and walk around and still hang on to the good feeling in your body, find some other people to interact with, either in person or on the phone. Remember, part of your attention is staying with that good feeling in your body, part of it is focused on the person you are with.
Any time you notice the good feeling start to fade, just pull back enough to get back to it. Reconnect with the warm fuzzy, wherever it is in your body. When you're ready, you can once again engage with other people and the world.

2. Satisfaction

*'If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work.
But when they seldom come, they wish'd-for come.'*
Prince Henry in Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*, First Part, I, ii

Perhaps the simplest way to grasp the distinction between pleasure and satisfaction is to think about it as the difference between those things that feel good in the moment and those things that we feel good about afterwards.

Here are some common pleasures my wife and I have been known to enjoy on the odd occasion:

- eating chocolate cake
- receiving a full-body massage
- shopping for clothes (one of us)
- drinking beer while watching football on a large-screen TV (the other one of us).

Here are their equivalent satisfactions:

- making a chocolate cake
- giving a full-body massage
- making or designing clothes
- playing football (probably without the beer!).

Pleasures give our bodies, well, pleasure; satisfaction nourishes our souls.

Does this mean satisfaction is better than pleasure?

Not at all. But the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake will rarely lead us to the type of lasting happiness which so many of us seem to crave. Like the root of the word itself, the path to satisfaction is invariably paved with action, and the more challenging the action, the more satisfying the journey.

Here are some questions which will help you to bring more satisfaction in to your daily life:

- What are some things which bring you pleasure? What are their equivalent satisfactions?
- What new challenge could you give yourself today?
- What would you need to do today to be able to look back and feel great about what you've done?

3. Meaning

'It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words.'

Mahatma Gandhi

There is a story about a journalist who pursued Mahatma Gandhi through a train station, hoping to get an interview for his newspaper.

Despite his persistence, Gandhi politely but repeatedly declined to respond to the man's questions.

Finally, as the train was pulling out of the station, the reporter called out 'Please, give me your message for the people!'

Without hesitation, Gandhi shouted back 'My life is my message!'

When I first heard that story I was struck by a persistent question of my own:

If my life was my message, what would the message be?

I tried on a bunch of noble-sounding ideas, ranging from 'Help yourself by helping others' to 'Joy is the pathway to success', but nothing seemed to quite fit. Finally, I decided to get real and look not at what I would have liked the message to be, but what it really was. After some uncomfortable soul-searching, the answer became clear. The message my life at the time was giving out was this:

'Set big goals and then half-ass your way towards achieving them and blame everybody but yourself so you don't have to feel bad when you fail'.

I realized then that it's not enough to follow the Quaker admonition to 'Let your life speak' – you also need to put some real thought into what it is you'd like your life to say.

From theory to practice ...

Letting Your Life Speak

1. If you haven't already done so, ask yourself the Gandhi question:

'If my life was my message, what would the message be?'

Remember, this is not 'What would you like the message to be?' – that comes later. Begin first by taking a long look in the mirror.

Even if you don't like what you see (and it's fine if you do), there's no better place to start than right where you are sitting now.

Examples:

- *'Do unto others as much as you can get away with.'*
- *'It's never too late to blame someone else for your life.'*
- *'Make resolutions and never follow through on them, then hate yourself for it.'*

If you can, resist the impulse to reject the 'real' message in favour of a more positive one. The more you are willing to take ownership of the message, the easier it will be to make changes in your life.

2. Now, what would you like the message of your life to be? What message would you like people to take away from experiencing your presence and being a part of your time here on earth?

Examples:

- *'Always do your best and your best will always get better.'*
- *'The fastest way to future rewards is by following present joy.'*
- *'The question is irrelevant; love is the answer.'*

3. Next, brainstorm any changes you would need to make to bring your life in alignment with this new message.

Examples:

- *Life message:*
 - *'Always do your best and your best will always get better.'*

- *Changes to make:*
 - *Seek to do my best, even when part of me wants to just ‘get away with it.’*
 - *Focus on continual improvement, particularly in my relationships.*
 - *Choose to participate fully in everything I do.*
4. Finally, ground your new life message by choosing one concrete action you can take in the next 24 hours.
- Examples:*
- *Life message:*
 - *‘The question is irrelevant; love is the answer.’*
 - *Changes to make:*
 - *Focus on my heart more than my head.*
 - *Don’t spend so much time trying to ‘figure everything out’.*
 - *When in doubt, love it!*
 - *Grounding action:*
 - *While I’m on the way home from work today, I will silently send loving energy to every person I see.*

To Seligman’s three categories, I would like to propose a fourth, which for me lives out above and beyond pleasure, satisfaction and meaning because it exists as a pure choice available to us in any moment ...

The art of contentment

‘You can resent your bald spot or be glad you have a head.’

Timothy Miller

One of the myths of modern living that keeps so many people running full-speed on a treadmill of their own creation is the idea that if they allow themselves to feel happy and content before their lives are perfect, they won’t have any reason to get out of bed in the morning.

In my own experience, something very different happens the instant I choose to be content – to declare that I have enough (for now) of whatever it is that I want. Rather than leading to apathy or indifference, I find myself energized and enthusiastic. I feel more instead of just trying to feel better. I begin to enjoy what is instead of trying to make it into what isn't.

In Buddhism and Hinduism, contentment is revered as a worthy goal in its own right, based on an understanding that 'All there is is all there is, and all there is is enough.'

In the traditional Passover ritual, Jews the world over sing the thousand-year-old song *Dayenu*, a word which translates roughly as 'That would have been enough'. The song is a reminder that although we can content ourselves with any one of God's blessings, the blessings will keep on coming.

In Christianity, Jesus describes the abundance of contentment in his Sermon on the Mount, when he says, 'For whoever has, to him more shall be given and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.'

In other words, all the world's major religions recognize that when we cultivate contentment (by taking the time to really be present with what we already have), we get to have more and more and more.

So ... what do you still need to change before you would be willing to feel content?

Do you have to earn a million dollars? End world hunger? Marry the man or woman of your dreams? Create world peace?

How much enough will be enough for you?

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines contentment as 'Rest or quietness of the mind in one's present condition'. This gives us a clue as to how to be content.

First, we focus on our present condition: on experiencing things exactly as they are. Second, we focus on resting or quieting our minds in the present moment.

While there are many practices which can enhance your experience of contentment, here are three of my absolute favourites...

1. Be where you are and do what you are doing

I once had a teacher who defined meditation as the practice of keeping your mind in the same time and place as your body. If our minds really wanted to go somewhere else, we were encouraged to take our bodies with them.

By consciously choosing to be present to where you are and what you are doing, you demonstrate your contentment – your recognition that at least in this moment, there is nowhere else you need to be and nothing else you need to be doing.

2. Breathe deeply

If you were under attack, your breathing would become rapid and remain shallow in the chest, enabling maximum oxygenation to the heart to help pump the adrenaline you needed to mount a mighty battle or hasten a speedy getaway. By purposely breathing slowly and deeply into your belly, you trigger your body's natural endorphin response, allowing your felt sense of contentment to deepen along with it.

3. Saunter

According to Jungian psychologist Robert A. Johnson, the word 'saunter' comes from the Middle Ages, where everything was considered sainted including the earth (St Terre). Therefore, to saunter is 'to walk on the earth with reverence for its holiness'. By taking the time to live life in the slow lane, we quickly experience a deeper, more profound experience of contentment.

In other words:

To be fully present with what is is to be content, and to be content is to be blessed by everything that happens in life.

A final thought on the happiness/success connection

*'Now and then, it's good to pause in our pursuit
of happiness and just be happy.'*

Guillaume Apollinaire

As we have already discovered, many of the things people go for in their pursuit of success are really being chased in pursuit of happiness – a kind of happiness which is already within your reach once you know how to grab hold of it.

And as you explore the happiness/success connection more closely, you can find subtler and subtler ways in which you have been limiting yourself and in so doing free yourself up to feel happy with your life as it is even as you go for and have what you want.

Try this premise on in your own life and see how it fits:

**When you're unhappy, you want to be happy.
When you're happy, you want what you want.**

The more you live *from* happiness instead of *for* happiness, the sooner you realize that changing the world is the worst possible way to change how you feel.

So let me ask you one final question:

***If you already had all the happiness and love in the world
right now, what would you still want?***

We'll be exploring your answers to this question in the very next chapter ...