



LIVING AND WORKING ON PURPOSE

Bringing more meaning and purpose into your life

1. Looking at your life as a whole, do you feel that what you do, personally and professionally, is valuable and worthwhile?
2. In a typical week, what % of your time is spent on activities that you find meaningful?
3. What about during the course of a day?
4. What did you do last week at work where you felt you made a positive contribution?
5. Do you understand your organisation's purpose?
6. Can you relate it to what you personally do, so that you feel you're contributing towards something worthwhile?
7. What would be the most meaningful thing you've done in the last month?
8. Was this activity something personal or work-related?
9. What could you do that would enable you to spend more of your time engaged in activities and tasks you find meaningful?

Should happiness be your goal?

It was Aristotle who began the whole debate. Writing and teaching around 335 BC, he stated that happiness should be the ultimate goal of human existence. But after the Greek and Roman period, the dominance of religious traditions in the West saw a shift in emphasis. People were urged to focus on happiness after death, not while alive. 'Happiness-now' was viewed as an inappropriate life goal. However, much more recently, simply feeling happy has returned to prominence as a legitimate human aim. In fact, the internet is awash with advice on how to be happy. There are quite literally millions of courses, programs and books claiming to unravel the 'secrets' of happiness for you. And there are thousands of happiness gurus waiting to teach you their favourite 3 insights, 7 steps, 10 methods or 15 habits! Take your pick!

But does it work? What's the evidence?

New studies reveal something that even the researchers themselves called "surprising". It seems the quest for happiness might actually be a recipe for misery! A team at the University of California found that the more value people placed on happiness, the less happy they became. It seems a focus on happiness backfires. People who identify happiness as their goal tend to seek strong positive emotions such as joy, elation and excitement every day. They quickly start to compare and judge their regular experiences. Even the people in their world get rated. All this encourages a focus on the self and 'now'. But the researchers found this produced a sense of emptiness, especially when people confronted the regular stresses, and ups and downs of life. Wanting to be happy seems to produce loneliness. The direct pursuit of happiness isn't what seems to make people truly happy. Researchers began to look beyond defining happiness as just those fleeting and transitory moments of joy or elation we can all experience on occasion. It seems that, to reap the true benefits of happiness and to experience it more consistently, people need to want it less and focus on some other things instead.

A sense of purpose matters more

In fact, the key to sustained well-being comes from a sense of purpose, contribution and connection. In this context, the work of Martin Seligman and his team at the University of Pennsylvania is persuasive. In his earlier research, Seligman focused on happiness – like many of those writing about what has come to be called 'positive psychology'. But more recently, he has publicly acknowledged a shift in his thinking. Happiness can be so fleeting, so hard to sustain, so challenging to design. And it doesn't explain all the things you've most likely done over the last month that didn't necessarily make you feel

great in the moment. But those things often form part of what gives your life a larger sense of meaning. Maybe you helped a colleague, a family member or a friend? Maybe you got up earlier than you wanted in order to take a child to Saturday morning sport? What have you done because it was meaningful to you, even if you didn't specially want to from the perspective of immediate pleasure? For these reasons, Seligman has shifted his research from happiness to meaning, purpose and well-being.

UGM Goal Setting Programs reflect the research

It turns out that a focus on meaning and purpose is what will get you through tough times and challenges. It's this focus that delivers an overall sense of satisfaction, persisting beyond those fleeting moments of happiness. In our goal setting programs, through a series of thought-provoking exercises, participants get a chance to consider what gives them a sense of purpose, both personally and professionally.

For some people, it can be the first time they've had the chance to think about their lives and their careers in this more strategic way. At first, people can imagine that identifying purpose and meaning must be about some lofty goal: discovering a cure for cancer, solving world peace or giving up everything to serve a great cause, for instance. But purpose, for each person, has to be linked to context. What's your situation? What are the current circumstances of your life? Thinking about your life as a whole, do you feel that what you do and how you live is worthwhile?

It's the small regular things that matter

Finding what's meaningful in your context will give you motivation, drive and lasting satisfaction. For example, a team at Harvard examined 12,000 diary entries from 238 workers in 7 companies. Their conclusion was, "Of all the events that engage people at work, the single most important by far is simply being able to make progress in meaningful work." It turns out that creating a sense of meaning and purpose in your life is more about the accumulation of the small, regular things you do, as opposed to the occasional big exciting thing that may come your way by chance. Small, regular positives that mean something in your context are what matter for health, well-being and life satisfaction.

A recent Stanford study asked 400 people about happiness and meaning in their lives. Unsurprisingly, those who felt their lives were meaningful also recorded the strongest scores for happiness.

Look objectively at your life this year and assess your context. Tailor your sense of purpose to your context. Don't postpone leading a meaningful life to 'one day' when this or that has happened. Success is living 'on purpose' here and now.