

Buy Your Way To Happiness? Not Likely

Not only can't you buy your way to happiness, believing you can will make you unhappy. Here's the evidence. You don't have to be poor to be happy, just know what you're doing.

Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude.

- Denis Waitley, American inspirational speaker and author (b. 1924)

What the hell does that mean?

If that was your reaction to the quote, you might be a bit light on the happiness scale, and may not know it.

Think about things that can be owned, earned, worn or consumed. They all require spending money. Thanks to the rich and powerful West and its persistent propaganda telling us that we can't be happy unless we spend money, an unbelievably large number of people in the world equate happiness and spending.

That requires people to have money to be happy, going along that way of thinking. Everyone who is poor must be unhappy, as a corollary. Or at least lack the ability to be truly happy.

People with lots of money spend, spend, spend. And they are happy. Or they believe they are. They must be, they conclude, because they are living the lifestyle that says they must be happy. They believe they are happy because they have been taught to believe that.

Yet look at the divorce rate among these people. Look at the percentage of their kids who take drugs and alcohol and simply can't manage in school. Look at the number who grow up with a video game as a surrogate mother instead of a real one. By the time they are in their teens, they don't want their natural mother anyway, many of them, because their mothers don't know what to do with them. And they have no idea what to do with their mothers.

So they all spend as much as they can to be happier.

But they don't get happier. What they do get is embroiled in addictions and obsessions, causes to which they devote much of their lives--such as their religion of choice or a political party--in a vain effort to teach the rest of the world how to be happy.

Some cults in other parts of the world understand. They have no source of the money needed to spend the way the addicts do in the West. So, jealous of the West and their own inability to get money to spend on the luxuries they believe they need to be happy, they become suicide bombers or terrorists of other stripes. Some kill their own people out of spite.

Most people in poorer countries don't behave that way, of course. But they have gotten the message. They believe that only fate has prevented them from being happy by not giving them the ability to earn money they can spend to make them happy. "Poor me, fate has dealt me such a cruel blow."

However, others in poorer countries do not succumb to the consumerism propaganda. They believe that happiness is what you make for yourself. And what you make for others around you in the process. They become musicians and dancers, for example, and find happiness in their music. They cherish the "spiritual experience of living every minute" with their music. Others get involved with other forms of artistic endeavour.

They lose themselves in whatever they do. Musicians become one with their music. Painters one with their paintings. Actors one with their particular craft, and so on.

Are the arts, then, the secret to happiness? No, it's the giving of themselves to something beneficial or to someone else that is enjoyed and appreciated by others that brings the happiness.

I can't say whether they live each moment with "love, grace and gratitude." Those are Denis Waitley's words. What

words would I use? I stumble over them myself now that I have found happiness I could never have understood until recently.

While I was growing up, I was taught repeatedly, at home, at school, at church, playing sports and doing just about every activity involving others my own age that I must come first in my life. I must be in charge. I must be in control. I must succeed at everything. "Pay yourself first" and buy what you can with it. Borrow to buy what you can't afford so that you can show it off to others so they can see your success. Only when I outgrew that infantile, selfish and consumerish way of thinking and began to share my life freely with others did I find happiness.

With happiness, the more you give to others, the more you get back in return. Business doesn't work that way, which is why business wants us to be selfish. And consumers. Business lives for money. A life built around a business model is pretty shallow.

Business, however, cannot be happy. It's emotionless, even sociopathic if you believe some studies. Shaping our lives on a business model not only doesn't bring much happiness in return, it tends to lose for us many of the opportunities for happiness that we could have enjoyed.

Make someone happy today. You'll be glad you did. Really.

Bill Allin

Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems, a guidebook for parents and teachers who want to teach their children how to be more than consumers, who want them to live lives full of happiness.

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