

MENTAL NOTES

A mind expanding e-newsletter from Mark Zust, *The Perceptionist*



Happiness Is A State Of Mind

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“Most people are just about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”
– Will Rogers, American Humorist

Is all this economic bad news making you cranky? When your favorite sports team falls short, do you curse and shake your fist, proclaiming “Wait until next year!?” Read any opinion poll and it's clear that Americans love dwelling on the past and projecting into the future. As a result, we often miss the greatest gift of all: **the present.** Our minds are hard wired to process information and make connections that serve us. The mind doesn't care whether



the information you feed it is positive or negative - either way, it processes the input and provides options. Is it any wonder that we spend so much precious time dwelling on “what might have been” or “what might be?” Ruminating like this guarantees only one thing: dissatisfaction. The key to happiness is all in your head, and it starts with your language. When you tell yourself that life will be better *after* the economy improves, your home team wins the championship, or any other major or minor external event

comes to pass (which are out of your control, anyway), you rob yourself of the present. What's worse, over time you develop a kind of “mind paralysis” that encourages your brain to constantly rehash the past, consider multiple future scenarios (most of which are unlikely) and to wait for the *after*, rather than take action. Does this sound a little nuts to you? In fact, psychologists point to habitual forms of fixating on the past or future as “insanity” and a root cause of many neuroses. In his remarkable book

The Power of Now, author Eckhart Tolle states that accepting the present as it is poses a direct threat to the ego, that part of our emotional state that thrives on conflict, drama, and the insatiable need for *more*. To be more relaxed in the present moment and happier in general, we can rely on our mind's rationale ability to accept the moment as it is rather than as we *wish* it to be. Tolle believes that acceptance is the key to a life filled with joy. So accept the present for what it is - a gift to cherish every day.

Keys To Happily Living In The Present:

- 1. Accept That Life Is Life.** Life is neither positive or negative. It is what it is. We project our own values onto the present and in so doing often miss the magic of the moment. Happiness guru Alfred Souza said, “For a long, long time it seemed to me that I was about to begin my real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles *were* my life.”
- 2. Stop Waiting.** If there is a dream you're deferring out of fear, obligation or plain old inertia, take five minutes right now and write down that dream. Tomorrow, take five more minutes and write down the first simple step you can take toward that dream, no matter how small. With modest, consistent steps and a steady focus, your mind will begin to find the resources you need. As the Tibetan monks remind us, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
- 3. Choose Happiness.** After all, happiness is not a new car, taking a vacation or losing ten pounds, it's how you feel in every waking moment. That doesn't mean you shouldn't treat yourself or set goals. It simply means to focus on every moment and live it fully. That means feeling the pain along with the joy. To be fully alive, to embrace all that life offers, is to be present and grateful. If you find yourself dwelling on past disappointments or projecting doom and gloom for the future, take five minutes to reflect on everything you are grateful for. You'll feel the anxiety of the moment melt away and a smile begin to spread over your face. If you're really set on feeling cranky, stop by a local nursing home or assisted living center and chat with a resident for fifteen minutes. I do this weekly, and I'm constantly amazed at their peace, joy and passion for life. You have a healthy body and mind. What more do you need to enjoy the wonders of the moment?

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