

Who is HAPPY?

The Declaration of Independence, our country's foundational document, states that "all men are created equal," with certain unalienable rights, including "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

We get to pursue happiness. Happiness isn't, itself, an unalienable right.

Global leaders have expanded their viewpoint from measuring policy success according to purely economic benchmarks like Gross National Product (GNP) to measures of happiness like The Satisfaction with Life Index and the Better Life Index. Gretchen Rubin's happiness project went from an experiment to a book, *The Happiness Project*, which in turn, has started a movement.

Does wealth bring happiness? Plenty of research suggests that once income reaches a certain level, it does not significantly raise happiness levels. A 2010 study conducted by Princeton University economist Angus Deaton and psychologist Daniel Kahneman found that after study respondents reached an annual income of \$75,000, a further increase in pay does not really matter to their overall life satisfaction. Other factors, such as health, leisure, relationships, and

feeling of autonomy play a greater role in raising a person's day-to-day sense of well-being. Research published in the journal *Health Economics, Policy and Law* concluded that psychotherapy, even in a short duration, is 32 times more cost-effective at improving happiness than receiving money.

Positive psychology has plenty of tools to increase happiness. My favorite is the "gratitude journal." Get yourself a notebook or a pretty journal. At the end of the day, simply write down three things that you are grateful for. It puts your attention on the blessings right in front of you. Of course, we all have challenges – people who annoy us, bills to pay, and even significant obstacles to overcome –but we also have good things right in front of us that we may take for granted. I believe those things onto which we put our attention are the things that grow. When I shift my attention toward the people, places, thoughts and activities that bring me joy, it improves my overall sense of well-being.

As Sheryl Crow sings, "It's not having what you want; it's wanting what you've got." So, go on, soak up the sun, and be happy!



Theresa Beran Kulat, founder and lead attorney at Trinity Family Law, P.C. in Downers Grove, focuses on Collaborative Practice and Mediation and limits her practice to settling cases. She provides coaching services to individuals and organizations through Trinity Collaboration, Inc. www.TrinityFamilyLaw.com

