RETHINKING HAPPINESS

Jennifer Aaker
General Atlantic Professor
Stanford GSB
jaaker@stanford.edu
https://people.stanford.edu/jaaker/
The Road Map

Happiness, a story

Rethinking our approach to happiness

What is the new destination?

What to pack for the journey?

What to do Monday?
Happiness

Business case for happiness

- Job burnout
- Turnover intentions
- Illness
- Organizational Citizenship Behavior
- Job Performance
- Customer service
- Likability as a work partner
- Group cooperativeness
- Creative episodes
- Exploration strivings

But here’s the hitch...
It's a shitshow out there...
...MAKING IT EXTREMELY HARD TO BE HAPPY.
But there is good news*....

* Loose usage of the term
Happiness is miserable, and here's why.
Misperceptions (and traps) of happiness
1

We think we know what makes us happy.

(But we don’t, really).
Happiness Drivers

Factors that matter less than you think:
- Youth
- Beauty
- Intelligence
- Money (over $75K/yr)
- Education
- Religion

Factors that matter more than you think:
- Self-esteem
- Free time
- Social skills
- Volunteering
- Humor
- Dancing

Psychology Today 2005
Happiness Drivers

Glamorous
- Money (over $75K/yr)
- Beauty
- Intelligence

Matters less than you think
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Matters more than you think
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Simple
- Dancing
- Intelligence
- Education

Psychology Today 2005; Work by Gilbert, Kahneman, Wilson
When we do arrive at happiness, it fades. 

*We adjust surprisingly quickly.*
Promotion
Paraplegic

When we value happiness, there can be paradoxical boomerang effects.

*Boomerangs sound fun, but they also hurt.*
When Happiness Backfires...

Expectations

Performance

Gap

Happiness
We think happiness is fixed and stable, an endpoint to achieve.

But it’s not.
We start **simple**, but soon fill up with **angst** and feelings of **confinement**, until we leave those behind to go **conquer the world**, before gradually trading ambition for **balance**, developing an appreciation for our **bodies** and our **children**, and evolving a sense of **connectedness**, for which we feel **grateful**, then **happy**, **calm**, and finally **blessed**.
discovery

THE PROMISE

Excitement
THE PROMISE

balance

Family + work + health
THE PROMISE
Significance
impact
savoring

THE PROMISE

Contentment
We often pursue happiness.

Yet once we attain it, its meaning changes.

And we start the pursuit again.

How might we rethink our approach to happiness?
How might we create products, build organizations, and live lives that CULTIVATE happiness — if we can’t aim for it?
Now, here's where you are going to hate me briefly....
Destination

Journey
Yes, new research confirms what old (wise) people have been esoterically telling us our entire lives.
Life is journey, not a destination.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
All you need is the plan, the roadmap, and the courage to press on to your destination.

Earl Nightingale
Sometimes it’s the journey that teaches you a lot about your destination.

Drake
First, let’s talk about destination.
Your north star.
“Destination” feels daunting and/or elusive. But it doesn’t have to be.
Anchor on purpose, something that is deeply meaningful to you.
P.S. HAPPINESS AND MEANINGFULNESS ARE DIFFERENT THINGS.
Happiness vs. Meaning
(n = 397 study 1; n = 114 study 2)

Happiness feels good.
Meaningfulness doesn’t always.

Happiness is self-focused.
Meaningfulness feels bigger than your self, anchored on others.

Happiness is fleeting.
Meaningfulness is more lasting, bridging the past, present and future.

Creating Mindsets

Happiness Mindset
Do one thing a day to **feel happy**.

Meaning Mindset
Do one thing a day to **create meaning**.

Results 3 months later
Those with a meaning mindset reported **less negative mood** and **more positive feelings** about their social interactions.

Meaning and Health

Higher sense of meaning and purpose correlated with:

- Higher levels of good cholesterol
- Healthier weight
- Better sleep
- Lower levels of cortisol
- Lower risk of cardiovascular disease
- Lower risk of cognitive decay / Alzheimer’s

Tracked women **ages 61-90**

Carol Ryff, Singer and Love, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1693417/
Meaning and Purpose @ Work

Employees who say they derive meaning at work are:

3X as likely to stay with their companies

1.4X more engaged at work

1.7X higher job satisfaction

Techniques people use to create a sense of urgency

- Nagging
- Countdows
- Rewarding fast work
- “Motivational” deadlines
- Explaining something is important over and over
- Hiring only people who have gone fast before
- Sending an email about why something a couple of items down on the backlog is OMG super important now

Techniques people use to foster a sense of purpose

- Delivering results of their own creation
- Working on things they care about
- Focusing on the right things
- Under-standing “why”
- Connecting to customers / clients / users
- Remembering the greater cause
- Working with awesome, like-motivated people

(Not much here)
So how do you find purpose, something that is deeply meaningful to you?
Some feel born with a sense of purpose. Others don't (nor necessarily want to). But the reality is that it is more of a skill than we think.
First, consider whether you have a moonshot.
Moonshots

Our purpose is to invent and launch moonshot technologies that make the world a radically better place.

www.solveforx.com
Astro Teller’s 2016 TED Talk on Medium [link]
Your Moonshot

A north star . . .

Purpose provides an important sense of direction and meaning and pulls you through the challenges of seeing through

You are intrinsically motivated

You can help others, one or many

Purpose provides an important sense of direction and meaning and pulls you through the challenges of seeing through

Highest and best use, now
A PERSONAL STORY...
What the World Needs

My Passions

Carry on the legacy of Sameer Bhatia

Make a dent in cancer

My Unique Strengths

Behavioral psychologist who studies meaning

Dragonfly Effect
What the World Needs

Make a dent in cancer

Carry on the legacy of Sameer Bhatia

My Passions

My Unique Strengths

Behavioral psychologist who studies meaning

Metrics of success:
Our kids connecting to charities
#100K in bone marrow registry
Note, your “meaning” or “purpose” doesn't have to be something that will launch you to the moon.

It can be something as simple as making a difference in one person's life.
It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.

Confucius
Glimmers of Purpose

Write down three glimmers of purpose - possible moonshots or important goals you might have in the next 5-10 years.

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.................................................................

.................................................................

.................................................................
Second, think back about the most defining stories of your life.

Write them down; they will inspire you and provide clarity on your values and north star.
Baby shoes, for sale, never worn.

Hemingway
Six Word Stories

What is your six word story?

Apply cool science, improve life experiences

A human seeing all humans same

Love life like I love cookies

Family man builds companies, lives simply

Protecting those who cannot protect themselves

Married the wrong girl, fixed it.
Six word stories

Family man builds companies, lives simply. Tonight he packs, tomorrow I pine. Married the wrong girl, fixed it. Getting old; ringtones piss me off.
Some stories are perceived as more ‘definitional’ than others - more meaningful, important and memorable. Write down the stories that capture who you are, what you value or the most important parts of your life (6 words or less).

What are Your Signature Stories?

..................................................................................................
Next, let's talk about the journey...
This “journey” concept is often unclear and esoteric.

What do you actually need to pack for the journey?
Things to Pack for the Journey

Secret weapons

A tribe

A way to diffuse tension
How do we cultivate these things?
Happiness Drivers

Glamorous
- Money (over $75K/yr)
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- Education
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Matters less than you think
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- Free time
- Social skills

Matters more than you think
- Simple
- Humor

Psychology Today 2005; Work by Gilbert, Kahneman, Wilson
Balance gravity with levity.
Most think humor is fun and frivolous.

In reality, it matters a lot.

It has an outsized impact on our ability to both make progress toward our destination and to embrace the journey.

Because humor is a Multiplier.
Humor is a (secret) weapon.
First full day as Twitter COO tomorrow. Task #1: Undermine CEO, consolidate power.

Dick Costolo*

*a year later became CEO
Humor and Status Studies

Overview

Across 8 experiments, researchers at Harvard and Wharton studied the influence of humor on status in new and existing relationships.

Results

Successful humor → Perceptions of confidence → Perceptions of competence → Status

Bitterly, Brooks, and Schweitzer (2016)
Humor plays a fundamental role in shaping relationships.
Humor builds your tribe.
Humor and Openness Study

**Cover Story**
Write down 5 pieces of personal information...

**Condition 1:**
After watching a neutral film

**Condition 2:**
After watching a humorous film clip

**Results**
Self-disclosure increased 30% in humor condition
Moments of laughter spark trust and quicken self-disclosure. They solidify your tribe’s closeness over time — and positively impact culture.
Humor defuses tension.
Humor in Negotiations

Conditions

Condition 1: “My final offer is $.”

Condition 2: “My final offer is $, and I’ll throw in my pet frog.”

Results

18% more concessions.

Increased enjoyment of the task and reduced tension.

O’Quinn and Aronoff, SPQ (1981)
Humor is important in politics. I laugh at least once every day, otherwise I cannot do this job... I would never allow people to take away my holiday from me.

Angela Merkel
Humor is a superpower, but there’s a problem.
Our self perceptions of our funny-ness plummet as we age.
Global Humor Cliff

(Gallop data 2013, n = 1.4 million)

% of people who reported smiling / laughing a lot yesterday

Participant Age
So, how do we move the needle on humor?
First, know your own funny.
Humor Audit

Think about the last time you really laughed (bonus points if you were at work or were the one creating the humor). What was happening, and how might you cultivate more moments like this?
I’ve been up for an hour and I’ve already stopped the baby from choking to death on dog food twice

Not today, Natural Selection. Not today.

12:35 PM - 16 Jul 2016

retweeted 1,037 times, liked 6,411 times
Find your (humor) tribe.
Teaching Team Tribe

Junaid Belo-Osagie  
Danica Bunnett  
Truman Hanks  
Carly Hayden  
Grace Isford  
Nick Krauss  
Jolena Ma  
Pat O'Grady  
Sophia Pink  
Stelio Ropokis  
Sophia Sterling-Angus
Your (Humor) Tribe

Who are you funny with? Who appreciates your lame puns, epic fail stories, or favorite memes (or whatever kind of humor is authentically you). Write down 2-3 names.
Realize that humor is a choice – a filter through which to view the world.

Our stories define us, and we get to choose the genre.
Stories Study

Prompt
Asked people to list the stories that defined their life so far (as many as they like). Then they rated each story on whether they were dramas, comedies, tragedies.

Results
If stories tended to be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tragedies</th>
<th>Dramas</th>
<th>Comedies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>participants reported to feel more anxious, stressed, sad, disappointed, alone</td>
<td>participants reported feeling more anxious, stressed, sad, disappointed, and alone</td>
<td>participants felt happier, more satisfied, energetic, fulfilled, inspired, and challenged. They also reported to have more meaning in their life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Story Activity

Look back at all the story(ies) you wrote down before. Now, rewrite them as comedies.
Comedy abounds if you just look around you.

Mel Brooks
You will all have a (new) superpower.
In sum...
Know that happiness is miserable (at least chasing it is).
Real “success” comes down to anchoring on the right destination and embracing the journey.
You need a compass to navigate to the destination, and you need to know what to pack for the journey.
Capture the journey in stories.

But know you get to pick the genre.
George Saunders, on getting into the MFA program at Syracuse and hanging out with his new mentor, Tobias Wolff:

At a party, I go up to Toby and assure him that I am no longer writing the silly humorous crap I applied to the program with (i.e., the stuff that had gotten me into the program in the first place). Now I am writing more seriously, more realistically, nothing made up, nothing silly, everything directly from life, no exaggeration or humor—you know: “real writing.”

Toby looks worried. But quickly recovers. “Well, good!” he says. “Just don’t lose the magic.” I have no idea what he’s talking about.

Why would I do that? That would be dumb...
I go forward and lose all of the magic.

Somehow, under the pressure of suddenly being surrounded by good writers, I go timid and all the energy disappears from my work. I somehow become a plodding, timid, bad realist.

You see this pattern over and over with many creative people: they have this little bit of magic, a spark of something that comes naturally to them, and it’s often messy and weird and a little bit off, and that’s why they catch our attention in the first place. The odd magic is what we love about them.

Then, something happens. They decide *it’s time, now, to be serious*. The wild painter whose Instagram you love goes to grad school and all of the sudden her posts get boring. A brilliant illustrator decides to write a book, a *real* book, one without any pictures in it, and it bores you to tears.
It happened to me: before I went to college, I loved poetry, drawing, and art with a sense of humor. Then, after I got to college, I decided:

*It’s time, now, to be serious.*

I started to believe in the following misguided equations:
fiction > poetry
words > pictures
tragedy > comedy

Eventually, I got so miserable that I threw those equations out the window, bought a sketchbook, and started reading comics again. When I graduated college, I started making my weird, occasionally funny, blackout poems.

Slowly, a little bit of the magic came back.
But whenever that impulse returns, that impulse to come on now be serious, I lose the magic again.

It happened most recently getting ready for my upcoming art show. That stupid voice started saying: This is a gallery show. This is Art. I need to be serious.

Cue the choke.

A few years ago, Bill Murray gave a speech to a bunch of baseball players and he ended it with this perfect bit of Zen...
If you can stay light, and stay loose, and stay relaxed, you can play at the very highest level—as a baseball player or a human being.

Bill Murray
“A few years ago, Bill Murray gave a speech to a bunch of baseball players and he ended it with this perfect bit of Zen...

Stay at it, but stay light.

Don’t be afraid to do what comes naturally.

Fight the urge to be serious.

Don’t let it destroy the very thing that makes you.”

- George Saunders
You’re only given a little spark of madness. You mustn’t lose it.

Robin Williams
Our hope is to keep the pilot light on.
The End

WITH LOVE,
JENNIFER