



ADVOCACY LIFESTYLE

Happiness First

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It won't come as a surprise to you to hear that happiness and success are related. But, if you have ever found yourself looking for happiness around the corner - after you have made partner, won your next trial or made it through a busy month of cross-examinations and discoveries -

you might be mistaken about *how* the two are related.

According to Happiness Expert Paul Krismer, success does not necessarily lead to happiness. However, when we are happy, success tracks us down. Paul delivered the keynote presentation at this summer's Advocates' Society education program entitled "Stress-Free Litigation: A Myth?", co-chaired by Ann Morgan and Alan Mark. His simple message - that happiness leads to greater successes in life (or "Happiness First") - was one that resonated with me and I thought it was worth sharing.

So what is "Happiness First"? It involves doing away with thinking that winning your next trial or making partner or buying a new home or getting a dog will lead to happiness. While doing or achieving these things might lead to feelings of contentment in the short term, the science tells us that these successes do not necessarily lead to long-term happiness. When happiness comes first, however, success follows: people with positive emotions are more likely than their peers to

advance their careers, be healthier, have stronger relationships, have fulfilling marriages, be more involved in their communities and even live longer lives.

Here are a few snapshots of the fascinating research Paul shared (I don't do it justice here, but for more details, read Paul's blog <http://www.happinessexperts.ca> or his book *Whole Person Happiness: How to be Well in Body, Mind and Spirit* or follow him on Twitter @HappinessXpert): (i) happy people outperform sad people; studies repeatedly show that happiness positively impacts performance on cognitive tests; (ii) we literally see more when we are primed to feel happy; if our emotions are negative, we see a narrower perspective; and, (iii) we can train our brains to allow us to experience more positive emotions. This does not mean that happy people never feel sad or that they are always successful. It is healthy to experience negative emotions arising from painful or difficult life experiences; as we all know, we learn and grow from things that make us feel bad. The trick is to train ourselves to focus on the positive in our day to day lives to help offset negative emotions. In doing so, we can actually lay down new neuropathways in our brains which will allow us to experience more positive emotions.

Paul challenged the advocates in the room to teach our brains to be happy by training them to focus on what is going well in our lives and the things we have to be grateful for. He suggested that one of the most effective techniques for increasing your personal happiness is to commit to a daily practice of writing down three things that have gone well each day. The research Paul shared shows that, six months after starting this practice, even though the majority of people studied had since stopped the daily practice, they were still happier than their baseline. I'm going to give it a try. 📌

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