

Exercise #1 - Appreciating Blessings in Disguise

When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.

– Helen Keller

Unwanted events occur. Mistakes happen. However, this does not mean that we have to experience them as strictly useless, “negative” events. Occurrences that cause us displeasure can also lead to growth, learning, and greater appreciation for our lives.

Frequently, they do lead to the latter, but we often fail to appreciate their positive influence.

Though we may not always have a say on whether an event happens, we always have a say on what the event means to us.

For the next several days, make it your intention to appreciate some of the unpleasant occurrences in your life as blessings in disguise.

Before the end of each day, take a few minutes to silently bring to mind at least three things that did not go well, or events that you wish had not occurred. These can be small or large. Then for each, ask yourself how it could be perceived as a blessing in disguise. *What can be learned from this experience? How might this lead to growth? How could it directly, or indirectly, lead you to a better place?*

Even in the mud and scum of things, something always, always sings.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Exercise #2 - Delayed Gratification

A great obstacle to happiness is to expect too much happiness.

– Bernard de Fontenelle

Is there something in your life that you experience every day that gives you pleasure (a morning cup of coffee, a midday muffin, watching television, reading the newspaper)?

For the next several days, intend to develop a healthier relationship with sensory pleasures by practicing delayed gratification.

Choose one of your daily pleasures. Instead of experiencing this as frequently as you usually do, attempt to delay your experience. If your routine is to experience this early in the day, you may want to postpone it until later in the day. You can also experience the pleasure less frequently. Rather than having one premium coffee a day, try having it every other day, or maybe even just once a week.

You may soon notice that through this practice you decrease the effects of sensory adaptation, resulting in even greater experiences of pleasure from the experience.

And when this realization occurs, take solace that the greater experience of pleasure was the result of your own conscious choice to delay your gratification.

The pleasure which we most rarely experience gives us greatest delight.

– Epictetus

Exercise #3 – Experiencing Flow

(Option #1) By Being Playful

*We don't stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing.*

– **George Bernard Shaw**

Have you ever participated in an activity that was too easy? Instead of flow, you probably found yourself in boredom.

There is a simple, but often overlooked, approach to enlivening these sorts of activities.

This week, start to develop the habit of finding flow by turning your easy activities into challenging games.

Practice the art of being *playful*.

Choose an activity that you do regularly, and that you find too easy, and come up with a way to make it a bit more challenging. You can begin by asking yourself how a child might turn this into a game: add rules, add obstacles, or alter the task in any other way that requires more skill.

Maybe decide to handicap yourself while doing the task. Add a level of complexity, increase quantities, set boundaries, strive for speed, beauty, humor, or make it interesting by setting fun objectives.

The number of ways to make an activity more difficult is endless. And it can certainly be fun if you approach it as play.

*The true object of all human life is play.
Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground.*

– **Gilbert K. Chesterton**

Exercise #3 – Experiencing Flow

(Option #2) By Decreasing Your Difficulties

The two enemies of human happiness are pain and boredom.

– Arthur Schopenhauer

While a task that is too easy leads to boredom, a task that is too difficult also strays us away from the flow experience.

Rather than satisfaction and gratification, activities that are too difficult lead to frustration and anxiety.

This week, start to develop the habit of finding flow by decreasing the difficulty of challenging activities.

Choose an activity that you do regularly and that you find challenging.

Can you think of a way to make your activity easier by simplifying it, breaking it up into smaller parts, approaching it with a new strategy, or reducing your goals or expectations?

Is there a way to gather external resources to make the activity more manageable?

Or, can you spend more time learning or developing skills to better meet the challenges you face?

If you said yes to any of the above, make a daily effort to approach the activity in a way that makes it easier...

...but not too easy.

Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person's capacity to act.

– Mihaly Csikszentmihaly