

Breakthrough Life Coaching Newsletter, February 2009

“The two foes of human happiness are pain and boredom.”

Arthur Schopenhauer

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Hello everyone,

I've been thinking lately about how our thoughts impact the way we feel and limit how we see opportunities to make changes. I've gone back to this theme in many of the articles I've written and in these newsletters. It probably goes without saying that I strongly believe altering the way we think dramatically changes our lives.

Let's take this concept a little further and venture off into a philosophy developed by David Cooperrider from Case Western Reserve called “appreciative inquiry.”

Appreciative Inquiry

One of my favorite principles of this philosophy is the Constructionist Principle: “Change your Stories to Change your Life.” It is the idea that we create the stories about what goes on in our lives. We have a subjective and unique way of looking at everything that happens to us. Our view is a product of our culture, how we were raised and spoken to by our parents and our experiences.

Our happiness comes from the way we think about things. Think about a time you felt angry or frustrated at someone. Were you feeling that way because this person did not act the way you wanted them to? Sometimes we expect people to be the way we want them to be rather than just let them be who they are. Many of us have a natural tendency to want to change people to be and think the way we do. This could even account for why there are so many disagreements and wars being fought all over the world.

Learning to accept people the way they are can free us from trying to change them and will increase our happiness. Consider that in the end you are only responsible for your own happiness.

SCENARIO A:

For example, someone tells you this story: “I witnessed a horrible accident on the subway today. A man fell off the subway platform and banged his head. Blood was pouring down his face and he suffered severe injuries to his legs. People came running over and it took five men to pull him off the tracks. I was terrified. The whole event was so scary.”

SCENARIO B:

Someone else describes the story: “The most amazing thing happened today. A man fell off of the subway platform and onto the tracks, badly injuring himself. I hope he recovers. Five men who didn’t even know each other came running over and together they pulled the man off to safety. It made me feel so good to see these people run to his rescue.”

Each individual had a separate interpretation of the event and told a very different story. We all have a perspective on what happens to us and around us. We choose what we focus on in every situation. Remember, we have the ability to open ourselves up to view life in a completely new way. Sometimes it is the view you have of yourself, your abilities and talents that can hold you back. The past is gone and you can create a new story about yourself.

You can choose to get up every morning and look for the good things that are happening in your life. You can ask yourself every morning how you can bring a little more joy into your life – and the lives of those around you. This takes discipline since we are so programmed to focus on the negative all of the time. Actually, this can be a profoundly enjoyable exercise. The next time you find yourself in a situation, stop before you analyze what is happening and think before you tell your story: Do I want to interpret this like Scenario A or Scenario B?” Then tell your story. The results may astonish you.

WE ARE CONDITIONED TO FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE

We are bombarded with negativity. Turn on your T.V. and look at all of the crime shows. Open the newspaper and listen to your local news. You will hear more news about bad things that have happened to people rather than good things. We are conditioned to complain to one another in the elevator. Our culture has gotten us into always looking for what goes wrong in a day rather than what goes right! It is perhaps ironic that a news channel would not be able to find sponsors if all they were interested in covering were the positive achievements of the day. An all positive news show might look and sound like a skit from Saturday Night Live. Our news is generally not good news – it is news we can’t use. Only once in a while do they give us something positive and these are considered human interest stories designed to balance things out.

YOU APPLY THE MEANING TO EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS

You are in control of the meaning you apply to every situation. You apply the meaning to how people look at you, what they say to you or don’t say, what they do or don’t do for you, what you think they think or don’t think about you. Quite simply put “it’s all in your head.”

Tomorrow morning when you get up ask yourself, “What is one way I can bring a little more joy into my life today?”

Food for thought: We create our happiness through our thinking.

Reference: The Joy of Appreciative Living by Jacqueline Kelm

Free Tele-seminar

I've been toying around with the idea of adding a free monthly 1-hour tele-seminar on the subject I write about in my newsletters. Even if only one person came I would share my thoughts and ideas on the subject. Any feedback or suggestions on this idea are welcome.

Article in The New York Post

My recent interview by The New York Post is expected to be published soon. I will keep you posted!

All the best,
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