

## **Happiness Factors: Simple addition and subtraction for happiness at work.**

by Bob Schout

Happiness is not an elusive possibility. It is real and it is imminently possible for everyone, at work and in life.

### **A mentoring moment made a difference.**

Many years ago, when I was in high school, I was unhappy when thinking about the prospects for my life. My father had a job as a machinist at Electro Motives on the south side of Chicago. My biological family's culture seemed to settle into the mindset of getting a good job and working hard on the south side of Chicago. My spirit yearned, even at that early age, for something different: not better, not more...just different. I could not picture myself being happy remaining where I was.

Then one day my aunt Dolores, who was the pivotal mentor in my early life, took me to Jansen's Drive-In on 99th & Western Avenue in Chicago (it's still there today). In high school, I worked after school at a store in a mall but really worked my butt off on weekends painting apartments and doing landscaping at my aunt's apartment buildings. For lunch, she would take me to Jansen's Drive-In. It was there that I first learned about happiness factors. On a particular day, she noticed that I was sad and pushed me to talk to her about my feelings.

I told her that I didn't want to stay on the south side. I wanted to do something more, go more places, do different things. She inquired, *"like what, Bobby?"* I said, *"I don't know for sure. I just want to go to college and maybe do something more than what everyone else in the family is doing."* Again, she asked, *"like what?"* I became frustrated and responded, *"I don't know."* It was then that a mentoring moment occurred that would change my life and guarantee me – if I followed her advice – happiness at work forevermore.

My aunt said, *"Bobby, you can't go if you don't know. You can never get anywhere in life if you're not sure about where you want to go or what you want to do. You don't have to be definite at your age but you need to have an idea about what you want to do and what will make you happy if you ever want to achieve your goals and be happy."* I whined and told her that, *"Dad says that I can't go to college and we can't afford it."* She replied, *"don't worry about your father; I'll take care of him. You just need to think about what you want to learn in college, why you want to go, what you'd like to be, and are you really ready to work hard for it." If you can decide all of that then you'll be ready and you can do it, and I'll help you."*

I didn't know where to begin, but at that moment my aunt grabbed a napkin and took out a pen. She commanded me to complete two simple mathematics problems: one addition and one subtraction problem.

A diagram consisting of two vertical columns of horizontal lines. The left column has two lines, each preceded by a yellow plus sign (+). The right column has two lines, each preceded by a yellow minus sign (-).

**Total = Happiness**

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She asked, "Bobby, if you had to do 3 things every single day at work, and you knew that you'd have to do these kinds of things every day for the rest of your life, what would they be?" That was a HUGE question for a 16-year old kid. I thought about it and I said, "I'd like to teach or tutor people and maybe be a counselor because I like the ones in school ...they help people. I also think I'd like to be a minister of some kind. Ohhh, and I'd like to travel a lot for work and see the world." She said, "alright. Now, what are 3 things that, if you had to do them every single day, you'd be miserable because you need to subtract those from even being possibilities in your future." I thought about it and said, "I know Dad works in a factory, and it's good work, but I don't want to work in a factory. I want to do things that help people learn and be happy. Aunt, I also don't want to have to paint apartments or houses after college. I'm good at it but I don't want to paint apartments anymore. And I don't want to do anything that could hurt someone else, even accidentally, like being in the military. I want to help people grow not hurt people even though my dad says that it's necessary at times."

She replied, "okay Robert. So now you know where you want to go. You need to begin researching what kind of college education you need to be a teacher or counselor or minister, and you need to begin volunteering to see if those things will really make you happy. And every time your father or friends in the neighborhood say, "you should just work for my old man at the mill" or "I can get you in to the police force" you need to say to them directly, "Hey, those are good jobs, really good jobs, they're just not for me."

My aunt said, "Robert, there are a million jobs out there. Decide on what will make you happy then work your bottom off for it. Don't knock down another person's job but don't take the job if you're going to be miserable. You have a long life ahead of you. Be happy!"

**The form may change but the essence remains the same.**

My friends, I acted on my early mentor's wisdom and never looked back. She was right. I pursued education and employment in fields that offered me the opportunity to teach,

counsel and minister in many ways. Over the course of my career, I have been a social worker, a manager at a human service agency, an adjunct lecturer at the University of Chicago, a private psychotherapist, a pastoral counselor and now a business owner, whose training and development business provides seminars, coaching, and support to others. My titles have changed over the years. The platforms for service have changed (e.g., classroom teaching, writing of self-help/professional development articles and booklets, counseling in one-on-one environments, etc.). The locations have changed (e.g., traveling around the world to serve others), but the essence, of what I determined would make me happy so many years ago (e.g., teaching, counseling, ministering and travel), has never changed. Even as a 16-year old, my spirit knew what would make me happy at work, for life.

### **Deep inside we know what makes us happy.**

Each person knows, deep inside, what type of work will stir contentment and give rise to happiness within oneself. It is never just one thing and it is not always the thing(s) that a person is good at. Each of us knows our own truth. We know it at a very early age. The issue is that most of us don't take time to discern what our truth is (e.g., the truth of happiness). We settle for what others say happiness should be or what form it should take (e.g., marriage, money, never working again, etc.). Some of these things may indeed trigger happiness in some people, but they are not universal provocateurs of happiness for all. I know myself. I am good at many things but doing some of the things that I'm good at does not make me happy. In fact, some of the things that I'm best at, make me feel miserable. Happiness within occurs when that which we are doing is in alignment with that which brings us immense joy in a moment and brings meaning to life and to living.

### **KEY QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- Regardless of your age or your current life-realities, what are those types of work that will make you happy?
- How can you volunteer or learn about these lines of work so that you can test the waters of happiness and prepare yourself to delve into them over time?
- Are you more committed to being miserable and complaining than to committing to change and committing to achieving your own happiness?
- What simple but firm choices can you make to experience happiness at work a little bit more each day? What do you need to add and what do you need to subtract each day?
- What type of discipline do you need to demonstrate and commit to permanently move towards happiness at work?

- What kind of support would be nice to have (though not a prerequisite for your own happiness) and what type of boundaries do you need to put in place so that you can pursue what makes you happy?
- How will you maintain your character so that your quest for happiness at work is not achieved at the expense of others or at a cost of becoming self-centered?

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