

*Happiness Demystified presents a simple formula for achieving happiness. The principles and philosophies in this book possess an innate realness and truth and have proven effective in the lives of those willing to apply them consistently.*

## **HAPPINESS DEMYSTIFIED: HOW TO LIVE A HAPPIER LIFE**

By Kevin Unruh

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# HAPPINESS DEMYSTIFIED

or, if you prefer:

## HOW TO LIVE A HAPPIER LIFE

*(It's Not Nearly As Difficult  
As You May Think)*



KEVIN UNRUH

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*Kevin Unruh*

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## Chapter 2

### *Purpose*

If you struggle with maintaining a consistent, long-term state of happiness or contentment, I have a simple question for you that will help in almost all cases. It's deep, but it's very simple. *Ready?*

~~Do you have lots of cash in your pocket or purse?~~

~~Do you have more than 1,000 friends on Facebook?~~

~~Do you have a super fast red, yellow, green, or orange car?~~

~~Are you taller than the average person, smarter, better looking?~~

~~Do you have a really nice coin collection?~~

~~Do you wear new clothes every season?~~

~~Do you have an underground bunker with lots of doomsday supplies?~~

~~Is your stereo system louder than the teenager's next door?~~

~~Is your 4WD vehicle jacked up higher than everyone else's?~~

~~Did you finally find the perfect shampoo?~~

~~Do your jeans cost more than \$150.00?~~

~~Can your dog do more tricks than your mother-in-law's?~~

*Do you have a dedicated purpose in life and are you fulfilling it?*

The French expression *raison d'être* says it nicely... one's *reason to be* (the Japanese call it *ikigai*, incidentally).

Have you decided what you are all about? Have you committed yourself to a primary purpose? Have you decided where you are going in life and why? If you have not found your reason for being, your purpose, *the thing* that best defines your value to those around you, it's important that you eventually work this out if you want to live a life of sustained happiness.

One's purpose in life is obviously very personal. That is, one's purpose should not be influenced by what others may want of you or for you. It also need not be *grand* to be valid, effective, or worthwhile. All it *needs* to be is sincere and you will be happy. And why is this so important? Because every day when you wake up, you will be doing

what you care most about and you will know what direction in life you are going. In short, you will know your daily mission.

And just so there is no misunderstanding, I am not talking about the purpose or the meaning *of life* – that is an entirely different discussion, an entirely different book, even – I am only talking here about the purpose of *your* life.

Knowing your life's purpose gives you an identity, but it also attaches you to the world around you and keeps you connected. Whether your purpose is to be the best Mom or Dad, the best coach, the best tailor, or the world's fastest pothole digger doesn't really matter. Generally speaking, if your purpose has value to whatever group of people you care about most *and* you are passionate about doing it, it is a worthy purpose. A good Mom or Dad has just as much value as a good physician, a good farmer, or a good beekeeper. One's life purpose should not, cannot *rightfully* be judged by the world's standard of what is often considered important. It need not have marquee-level prominence to be a truly great purpose, and this isn't a numbers game either (who helps the most people). It's about making a sincere contribution in the field, culture, group, place, or endeavor in which you feel you are best able to add value. And if that means dedicating yourself to being a good parent and raising a good human being – as opposed to being the CEO of a big company, for example – please don't ever think your contribution is any less important. *It isn't*. There is no question in my mind that the world needs far more good parents than it needs CEOs (nothing personal against CEOs, of course).

Regardless of your age – 21 to 101 – if you haven't identified, claimed, and dedicated yourself to the purpose of your life, if you haven't found your *raison d'être*, it is never too late to start looking. And the faster you find it, the happier you will be.

Someone I was talking to not long ago about this asked: "How does one go about figuring out their purpose?" and, "Can a person's purpose change over time?" Well, the answer to the first question is easy: Any true purpose starts with a genuine passion. If you haven't found your purpose yet, start the search with what you are truly passionate about. Then, determine which passion it is (if there is more than one) that

brings the most value to those around you. As for your purpose changing, yes, it can change with age or circumstance or epiphany. With aging often comes evolution. As our experiences grow and develop, so, typically, do our philosophies and perspectives and often our priorities. A purpose we thought was our calling at age 25 might not be the same at age 45. It doesn't mean we were wrong at 25. It usually just means we know the world a little better now and, more importantly, a little more about ourselves. The key to knowing when you have it right is the same as when you know you have found the perfect pair of shoes, dress, word, spice, song, mate, etc.: You feel it in your bones. *In your atoms*. The chemistry of *you* coalesces with the chemistry of the *purpose*. You will know when it's right and you will know when it is *no longer* right. And if you have any doubt, then it most likely isn't.

*You were put on this earth to achieve your greatest self,  
to live out your purpose, and to do it courageously.*<sup>4</sup>

— Steve Maraboli

Of the five elements in the formula for happiness, this is the simplest to understand, in my opinion, so I won't devote any more space to it, but you must have a purpose in life in order to be truly happy, and only *you* can decide what that is.

Now let's discuss the role of *Courage* in happiness.

## Chapter 10

### *Romantic Relationships*

Relationships, of the romantic sort, are such a central part of the human experience. Thousands of books have been written on the topic because it *is* so central to whom we are as people. But, for purposes of this chapter, I would like to discuss just one aspect of relationships: an aspect that can easily be argued to be the most critical aspect of all – that of *choosing* the person we want to be in a *romantic* relationship with. If you are already in a sound and permanent relationship, this will not be of much benefit to you, personally. However, it might be of use to you in your role as a Mom/Dad, Aunt/Uncle, Brother/Sister, or Friend.

The two constructs I always focus on when discussing this topic with family, friends, and co-workers are *compatibility* and *chemistry*. These two concepts are not new to anyone, and I seriously doubt I am turning over any new ground on the subject. However, I am confident in saying that these two concepts are all one needs to think about when choosing a potential partner. Anything outside of these two is simply not integral to the decision, in my estimation. But, before I go further in this discussion, it is important, as always, to define terms.

Chemistry, to me, is innate physical attraction, *plus*. It is physical attraction that goes, almost literally, to the molecular level. Chemistry is attraction that causes a person to be “in love” with just about everything the other person transmits to the five senses. Just having an intense physical attraction for someone is not real chemistry, at least not as I choose to define it. Chemistry is, well... *chemistry*. It’s how the taste of apple pie melds so well with the taste of ice cream, or how a certain perfume smells pretty good on one woman but *perfect* on another. It’s how beige and brown complement each other and how red and yellow really don’t. Chemistry in humans is almost visible. In fact, I would argue that it *is* visible in that many of us would claim to be able to “see” when two people are truly meant for each other.

On the other side of things is compatibility. As with chemistry, I apply a very stringent definition, a higher standard to the definition of compatibility than is perhaps employed by others. I see compatibility as how well-matched two people are in relation to how they address the world, how they navigate *in* the world, *not*, for instance, in whether both people like the same sports team or the same types of food. I measure compatibility by the important things: ethics, morals, standards of behavior, philosophical beliefs – you know, the *big* stuff. Many times, however, we are told by friends and loved ones that liking the same music, the same teams, the same places to vacation, the same TV shows, and the like, are important and that the big stuff can be worked out later. I could not disagree more.

TV shows are not who we are – *beliefs* are. The beach or the mountains do not define us. But our ethics do. It's always nice to enjoy watching the same show together, but if the other person doesn't want to watch re-runs of *Gunsmoke* with me, I understand that and do not then perceive this lack of desire as an aspect of incompatibility (although it does make me wonder why someone wouldn't want to watch *Gunsmoke*). What I *do* find incompatible, though, is trying to form a relationship with someone that, for example, doesn't feel compelled to give to the less fortunate or who isn't polite to the waiter/waitress, if the other person *does* feel compelled to do these things. These things are far more defining of a person in that they define *attributes* (in this example, *charity* and *kindness*). Sure, both liking to go to a sports bar may make for a fun date, but the majority of lasting relationships do not sustain themselves on this type of compatibility. Think of it this way: Are you going to be able to have love, affection, and respect for someone that is dismissive of or disinterested in animals, if you are a person who feels led to take care of animals? Are you going to be okay with someone who lives check-to-check when you are someone who believes in always having a savings account *and* a solid cushion in your checking account? Do you really think that the person you want to commit to, with whom you have many hobbies and interests in common, isn't going to lose their charm once you realize that they believe that "life sort of just happens the way it happens," while you are a staunch believer in personal responsibility? These *big*

*things* are the types of compatibility that matter. The other stuff just doesn't – not ultimately. Like-mindedness is not about low-level preferences. It is about direction and meaning in living life, not ice cream toppings, and favorite colors.

"But don't opposites attract?" I am routinely asked. Well, yes, sometimes. "Opposites" tends to imply, for example, introverted vs. extroverted, easy-going vs. frenetic, or vigilant vs. care-free. Sometimes, they are a disastrous combination and sometimes they are an excellent one. Now, guess what tends to make the difference in which of these occurs? That is correct: *Chemistry*. Which leads perfectly to my next point and the answer to the question you may not have known you had: "*So, which is more important, chemistry or compatibility?*"

Never, ever should a person feel compelled for any reason to choose one of these over the other. *Both* are extremely important. Both are *crucial*. But, answering this question for the sake of pure curiosity actually helps me make my point about the importance of *chemistry*, which, to answer the question, is the *slightly* more important of the two.

Chemistry, which manifests itself most particularly in physical attraction, has the mysterious ability to enhance understanding, heighten cooperation, preempt and mitigate disagreements, to incite forgiveness, and to kindle synergy. If you absolutely have to put one slightly higher than the other, *go with chemistry*.

In the many years I have been discussing the topic of relationships with people, I have found that beyond the mistake of not looking for people with whom they have chemistry *and* compatibility, they also tend to make this other major mistake when beginning a relationship: *They compromise their standards*.

In talking to a co-worker, a close friend, or even just an acquaintance about this very common topic of conversation, I will advise them, in the context of a new relationship, to make a list of attributes they are looking for in a significant other. I ask them to include in this list only those *must-haves* and *will-not-accepts*. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the final list is perfectly reasonable and even well-considered. But, in *revisiting* the list with them after a few weeks

or months of dating their potential candidate, I very frequently find that the list-maker has scratched off one or more items in each of the two categories in order to accommodate those things the *latest* significant-other candidate is lacking. I would estimate this happens at least eight out of ten times I conduct this exercise. When I ask why the person decided to scrap a *must-have* or *will-not-accept*, the person almost always says they think they were being too critical (even though in the initial formation of the list, the person was confident in their itemized requirements). When I say to the person that I do not think any of the items were too critical (or I would have stated so initially), I also tell them that I think they have altered their standards based on one or more factors, and then I present to them a list of factors I think might have influenced their changes. Forthcoming people will eventually tell me that they did, in fact, revise their standards for one or more of the items below as reasons for their compromise:

- Financial concerns
- Boredom/loneliness
- Companionship/sex
- Social expiration (worry about aging out of the “market”)
- Fear of being lonely later in life

There are several others, but these are the most common.

Recently, I was speaking to a female friend of mine about this very subject. She commented that the guy she had just gone out with was very kind, smart, etc., and that he “checked some boxes, but didn’t really ring any bells.” I asked her why then she was considering another date with him, and she said because she wasn’t sure that she really had “any other options,” (implying that whatever guy has asked her out at the time is her only option). I told her that while I understood how she felt and sincerely sympathized, I was concerned about her perspective given that I don’t believe that anyone should “settle” (compromise one’s standards and settle for less than is hoped for).

Let me say here that I understand that women reading this might say to themselves, “*Well, that’s easy for you to say – you’re a man,*”

and I do understand that reaction. But, because I cared about this person, my duty as a caring friend was to provide the best wisdom possible, and wisdom tells me that no matter how many “reasons” there may be for wanting to settle, settling is never a wise choice. I have met and know many people that have settled. *Many*. And, while some of these people are *relatively* content, the great majority are not. I often say to people that the only thing worse than being unhappy and alone is being unhappy and living in the same house with someone you do not love. Loneliness is bad, but loneliness when you are not actually alone is even worse.

Settling will sometimes solve the initial problem (financial concerns, loneliness, whatever the case may be), but as with so many other examples of short-term solutions, the *long-term* effects of settling are many and dire. Those that settle tend to be resentful, aggravated, angry, a poor significant other, dreadful, sad, depressed, and just generally unhappy. And don’t forget that when a person settles, they also effectively take themselves off the market, taking away the best option for finding love, *which is finding a better match*.

“*But what of love itself,*” you ask?

Many of you might have noticed, and are scratching your head even now, perhaps, that I did not discuss “love,” *per se*, very much at all in this chapter, even though it is a chapter on romance and loving relationships (in fact, I have used the word “love” only five times prior to this sentence). These are my reasons: Love is intuitive to most everyone. I couldn’t imagine that any of you would find value in listening to me wax on about what *I* think it is or how *I* think it relates to happiness. In my mind, a discussion of love is implied in a discussion of “romantic relationships,” so I tried to spare you the parts that felt obvious. Secondly, love is different things to different people and I did not want to presume to say that what it is to me is what it is or should be to others. Third, a discussion of love could take up thousands of pages, and *has* taken up tens of thousands of pages already elsewhere. I did not think I could do justice to the topic, and it was just not part of my objective to include it. Fourth, though many would argue that love



is required for a person to be happy, there will be many that disagree. Yes, the numbers in these two camps will be quite different – perhaps 10:1 or even 100 or 1000:1 – but in any case, there will be many who say that happiness does not require love, so I did not include it in the formulaic elements I believe to be essential. Is it, as Tennyson proclaimed, “...*better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all*”? <sup>21</sup> Most might agree, but some would not...

Lastly on the topic of love itself, all I know for sure is this: *Love is powerful*. As powerful as anything I have written about in this book. In fact, if there is anything *more* powerful in the cosmos of humanity, I am not familiar with it.

I know many people believe in this next cliché, but I am not aware of any credible information or belief system that compels *me* to believe that there is *one “right person” for everyone*. I have always believed that a person could fall in love with any number of people, if everything fell into place just right. In fact, I believe that there could easily be 10 or even 20 people that one *could* encounter in a lifetime that may meet all of one’s requirements for chemistry and compatibility. If I am right, settling doesn’t seem like a very prudent (or necessary) thing to do. I have no examples of someone I know that settled *and* was happy, but I have *many* examples of friends and acquaintances who settled who are *not*.

*Choose your life’s mate carefully. From this one decision  
will come 90% of all your happiness or misery.*<sup>22</sup>

– H. Jackson Brown

For those of you about to enter into a new relationship, make your list (*must-haves/will-not-accepts*). Be fair and reasonable and list all those things that you require in a significant other in order to feel both chemistry and compatibility and all those things that are deal-breakers. Then, all you have to do is stay true to your list. Miss or Mister Right sometimes falls into our laps, but it doesn’t happen very often, so you have to work a little. Make yourself available, let your friends know you are available, make *them* aware of your list, and tell them not to

send anyone your way that isn't fully up to specs. Think about it: How many story-book endings have you heard that start with "*Well, you see, it all started when I settled...* "?

## Chapter 21

### *Boundaries*

One of the things I talk to people about fairly regularly are relationship boundaries. Whether the boundary issues are between family members, significant others, co-workers, or friends, the problem is almost always the same: One person in the relationship is being pushed in a particular area and to a degree that is beyond what they are comfortable with. We all have *some* boundaries, but boundary *problems* arise because we have either not made our boundaries clear, or we have made them known but have failed to enforce them. Boundary issues are a source of constant anxiety for a lot of people across many age groups and populations. If you want to feel better about yourself and attain a greater sense of peace, addressing boundary issues is imperative if you are going to have harmony in your relationships. In my estimation, boundaries are one of the most beneficial yet least discussed aspects of most relationships, so I felt that a chapter devoted to the topic was important.

I think of relationship boundaries as interpersonal rules of conduct. Sometimes these rules come about very naturally. When they do, they do so in an easy, “organic” manner due to the fact that both parties see the world, social ethics, and equality in relationships, for example, from the same general perspective. In these instances, no boundaries really need to be discussed at all because both parties already play by the same rules. Unfortunately, however, not everyone does play by the same set of rules, so boundary discussions are often very important, especially in the beginning stages of a relationship, regardless of the type of relationship it may be.

Boundaries are very often, if not *most* often, about self-respect and self-esteem. If you don’t respect yourself, you will not likely have good boundaries and you will allow others to push past your lines of comfort. So, if you value the other person more than yourself, and that person is exploitive (bullyish, manipulative, egotistical, etc.), you are going to have boundary problems. And the harsh reality is that many people will

push you as far as you will let them. The “moral” here is that self-respect and self-worth will most often determine whether you set good boundaries or any at all.

Boundary difficulties are also often about guilt (legitimate or false), the avoidance of conflict, and the “need” to be loved or accepted. Feeling guilty about pushing back, about challenging someone you like and respect, or feeling guilty because you feel you owe the person a certain amount of deference (e.g., because it’s a family member, someone who has helped you in the past, or because you have never pushed back before) is not a rational reason to feel guilty. Because boundaries are about your own personal set of parameters in various areas of emotional and social conduct, someone’s position or their past support, for example, should not be relevant to whether or not you allow them to exceed your boundaries.

People also routinely allow others to cross their boundaries because they simply do not want to deal with conflict. Confrontation is relatively uncomfortable for 85% - 90% of people, I would estimate, so a lot of boundary problems result from a person choosing to remain silent while the other person is pushing beyond the line. Avoidance of confrontation often becomes a way of life, one that, by definition, causes you to consistently misrepresent how you feel and which leads to an ongoing undercurrent of aggravation due to your unwillingness to articulate the things you don’t like about the other person’s behavior. And, those that feel they need the other person’s approval are reluctant to express any form of criticism for fear of losing the affirmation that comes from that person’s affection or support.

Think of it this way, perhaps: Would you rather go through a short period of unpleasantness in discussing your boundaries, or would you rather continue to feel subjugated by your own need for the other person’s approval? What most people do not consider is that it is very possible to have both – to set new boundaries *and* keep the other person’s approval. It doesn’t always work out this way, of course, but I cannot think of any instance in which at least *trying* for both conditions isn’t well worth the effort.

Lack of boundaries or *unenforced* boundaries cause us to resent the other person and ourselves, but the likelihood of the other person's poor boundaries suddenly and spontaneously becoming healthy boundaries, are about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1%, so it is incumbent on *us* to make the change. Setting boundaries is simple but not necessarily easy (a common refrain of mine). It is *simple* in that all it entails is telling the other person how you feel about their behavior and making clear to them your own preferences. For example, if your parents like to feed your kids junk food when the kids are at their house but you have asked them to feed them just like you do at home, the choices you offer your parents should be very straightforward: "*Please feed the kids as we have requested or they will not be allowed to come back.*" This is a battle that parents (you) will win 98 times out of 100, because we all know that most grandparents will do almost anything to see their grandkids. *The key is not to cave.* The instant you compromise your standards, you have lost the battle. Set your boundaries and do not flinch. If someone disrespects them, there must be some form of repercussion or enforcement, or the boundaries might as well not exist.

One of the most vital aspects of setting good boundaries is to do so very early on in any relationship. I hope it is obvious that you have the right to set boundaries at any point you choose, even if it's very late in the development of your relationship; however, the longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get things back to conditions you are happy with. If you wait twenty years into a marriage, for example, before you tell your husband that you don't like that he always chooses what you watch together on TV, it is going to be much more difficult to persuade him that your TV preferences are just as valid as his, given that you have changed the rules, as it were, very late in the process. This in no way diminishes the validity of your complaint, of course. It will simply make it more difficult to make new rules, in most cases.

Another thing that greatly helps in the establishment of boundaries is the use of language that is firm and unequivocal. Whether you are speaking or writing, it is very important to choose words that are definitive when you are asking someone for something that you want or need. The following statements are examples of *equivocal* language,

all of which invite challenges to your intended boundaries by anyone who is prone to such:

- “I would prefer that you didn’t get to work much after 8:30 a.m.”
- “Would you mind not parking so close to my vehicle? It is very difficult for me to get out.”
- “I would rather not have to pick you up so early. Is that okay?”
- “It might be better if we were to wait another week before we leave so that I can get a few more things done.”

The following are better alternatives:

- “Please come in from now on no later than 8:15 a.m. Thank you.”
- “When you park behind me, please do not park so close to my car so that I can get out easier. Thank you.”
- “I cannot pick you up until 7:00 p.m.”
- “I won’t be able to leave for another week. I have several things I want to accomplish first.”

Boundaries are about speaking up, requiring courtesy and respect, and about enforcing fair play. Poor boundaries cause dread, anxiety, and animosity. Good boundaries require self-respect and a little courage, and while setting boundaries is best at the beginning of a relationship, it is *never* too late to set them. Ask for what you want and deserve from others. If they are worth having as friends and loved ones, they will comply (assuming, of course, that your requests are reasonable). If they do not, does it not seem logical to ask yourself if they are really worthy of being part of the circle that you call “friends and loved ones.” To my mind, the answer is very straightforward: Those who claim to care about you should also respect you and want for you what you want for yourself.

Now, let’s discuss boundaries from a different perspective. Those that we apply to ourselves...

I know a lot of “people-pleasers,” and I’m sure you do, too. You may very well *be* one yourself, and I can tell you that I used to be one, and I will expound on this a bit more, shortly.

Having boundaries that regulate (for lack of a better word) ourselves is just as important as establishing boundaries that regulate others. And it is not uncommon for those that do not set boundaries well with regard to others to also have difficulty in setting boundaries for themselves. This is because people-pleasers find it so hard to say no, in general.

There are several different reasons that people-pleasers struggle with regulating themselves and saying no, and these are the most common:

- They want to be agreeable
- They want to avoid anxiety, confrontation, a sense of intimidation
- They want to avoid disappointing others
- They claim or actually *convince* themselves that whatever the request, it is “no big deal” and that “they are fine with it”
- They think or fear that saying no isn’t “nice”
- They have become accustomed to putting themselves second in most circumstances

The primary reason behind *these* reasons is, once again, almost always one of self-esteem/self-respect.

There is, obviously, nothing wrong with being generous, helpful, compassionate, and kind. These are *always* good things. But, often, these are really nothing more than self-made excuses for lacking the level of self-esteem that is required for a person to set healthy boundaries.

Self-esteem and self-respect are *crucial* for knowing how we want to be and *should* be treated by others. And just because we are willing to make sacrifices for others at the expense of ourselves does not mean that these sacrifices are healthy or wise.

*Givers need to set limits because takers rarely do.*<sup>33</sup>

– Rachel Wolchin

The perils of people-pleasing are several and great. Once you have established yourself with friends and family as someone who rarely, if ever, says no, you naturally create the expectation in them that whatever request they may make of you will be granted. Which, in turn, almost *predestines* you (because of your inability to put yourself first) to say yes to them. Self-esteem and self-respect are what allow you to have appropriate boundaries, the boundaries that empower you to say no by putting yourself first – by believing that your time and energies are just as valuable as theirs, and that declining their request is not unkind, selfish, or rude.

I am confident we would all agree that we can't do everything for everyone all the time, yet many of the people-pleasers I know do not live this belief at all. In fact, most of these people *do* try to do everything for everyone all the time, which, means that their lives are really not their own, *because they have chosen to be at the disposal of everyone but themselves*. This is Peril #1.

What I have also routinely observed is that when a people-pleaser finally *does* say no, they do not do so because of courage or a flash of self-esteem, but rather because they are willing to tell a lie with regard to why they claim they must decline. This is Peril #2: *Dishonesty due to the lack of self-esteem and courage that is required to give an honest declination*.

Non-people-pleasers will simply say, “No I can't babysit your kids,” or “No, I do not want to travel to your destination wedding,” or “No, I do not want to loan my car to you.” And they can say these things because they respect themselves enough to know that whether or not the other person gets upset, they have every right to decline and that saying no does not make them a “bad person.” People-pleasers, on the other hand, will often say no by asserting a *false* reason that most anyone would agree *outweighs* their request: “I can't babysit your kids tonight because we think one of ours has the flu”; “We won't be able to make it to the wedding in Mexico because my Mother recently had surgery, hasn't been doing very well, and I don't want to be too far away”; “Our other car has been acting up lately, and I can't be stranded without a car, if the other one won't start.” None of these are true, but the people-pleaser chooses a lie over the truth because it



relieves them of their own responsibility in saying no. In essence, the subconscious “logic” goes like this: *I don’t want to say no to you, but I simply have no choice...*

And Peril #3 is that *not setting boundaries on your own commitments to others causes a people-pleaser to be in a perpetual state of dread*, even if only subconsciously. People-pleasers are more anxious than those who are not because the decisions they make are typically reactive rather than proactive. When the phone rings for someone who isn’t a people-pleaser, it’s just someone on the phone. For a people-pleaser, though, the fear is that the person calling is going to ask them to do something they don’t want to do, and the anxiety and dread comes from not wanting to do whatever it is but knowing that they’re going to do it anyway – or from having to come up with a fib as to why they can’t do it.

All three of these perils can directly be tied to happiness (rather to *unhappiness*). Being at everyone’s disposal takes away your freedom, and freedom, as I have already asserted, is central to happiness; being dishonest in making excuses might free you from the obligation but, in turn, burdens you with the guilt of a lie; and, living in a state of dread is about as *unhappy* as a person can get.

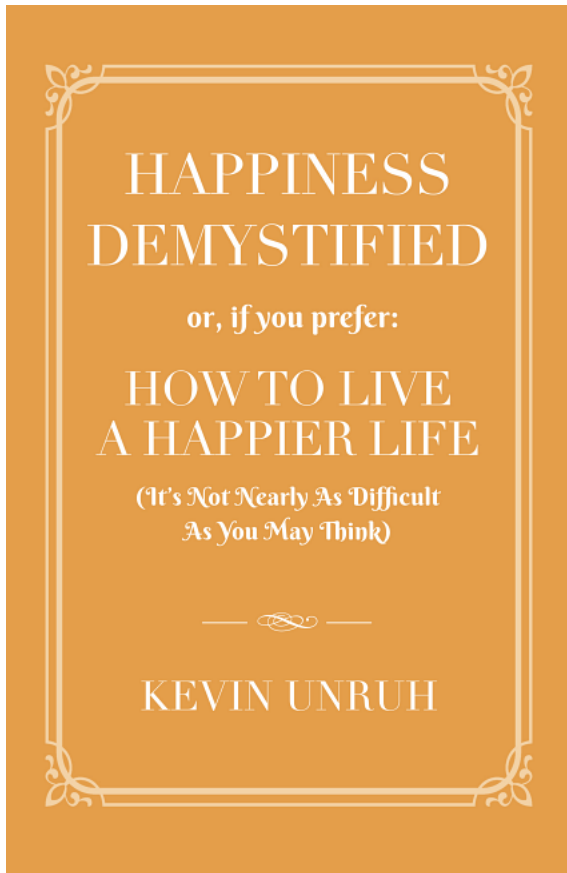
A few paragraphs above I mentioned that I used to be a people-pleaser, and I was – and it was all because of poor self-esteem. Now, though I often say yes to people when they need something from me, I do it because I can and I want to and not because of any fear that they might think less of me if I were to say no. The truth is that I do not like to say no to people. It pains me to one degree or another every time I feel the need to say no, but whatever the nature of the emotion I am feeling – whether it is a form of guilt or just simple disappointment in not being able to say yes – it is, *now*, mitigated, or perhaps *countermanded* by my preference for expressing my true desires, by doing only those things that I feel I am in a good position to do, and by whether or not I should really *be* doing it at all. I will explain:

In my mind, the best reasons to do things for people are because 1) I sincerely desire doing it, 2) I am practically and responsibly available to, and 3) because what they have asked of me is reasonable and/or necessary to be done. Again, I say yes a *lot* – at a ratio of around 50:1,

I would guess – but when I do, it’s because all three of these conditions have been met.

I was talking with someone just the other night on this topic, and I mentioned that one of the principles that I apply when making decisions about what I can or cannot do for others is based, in part, on my other obligations. The person I was speaking to, like so many others, is in the habit of saying yes to almost everything, so what I told them is that there are no boundary concerns, generally speaking, as long as the things you say yes to do not infringe on the “rights” or the boundaries of others. For example, if you live alone, it is perfectly fine for you to come in to work after hours when the boss asks you to, if you can and sincerely do not mind (assuming the request is truly optional). However, if you have a family and the boss asks you to come back in to work just as you were sitting down to dinner or were engaging in family time, you should decline (again, if the boss’s request is for a genuinely voluntary commitment), given that saying yes would *unnecessarily and unfairly* cheat your family out of their time with you. Now, if the circumstances were such that you worked for a boss that fired people because they did not work extra when called upon, I would say that you probably need to interrupt dinner and go back to work as requested. But I would add very quickly to this recommendation that you should also be looking for another job.

Setting boundaries is about courage and courage comes from self-esteem and self-respect, which is just another way of saying *knowing what you believe in, applying what you believe in, and knowing your worth*. Having these beliefs and self-assurances will give you the ability to set boundaries for others *and* for yourself. *Without* these, your boundaries will undeniably be set by others – because that is what you have allowed them to do.



*Happiness Demystified presents a simple formula for achieving happiness. The principles and philosophies in this book possess an innate realness and truth and have proven effective in the lives of those willing to apply them consistently.*

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