



# ACHIEVING HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

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After completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Describe a general concept of happiness.
- Discuss factors that contribute to happiness and recognize the role of needs satisfaction and the influence of culture.
- Explain how expectations can be obstacles to happiness and ensure your expectations are realistic.
- Tell why dependency on external sources of happiness is inadvisable.
- Be positive, use alternative thinking, and act on desired changes.
- Concentrate on the present and enjoy life's pleasures fully.
- Identify what is worthwhile in your life.

*Happiness is having a sense of self, not a feeling of being perfect, but of being good enough and knowing that you are in the process of growth, of being, of achieving levels of joy. It's a wonderful contentment and acceptance of who and what you are and a knowledge that the world and life are full of wondrous adventures and possibilities.*

—Leo Buscaglia

What do human beings desire and seek? You may think the answers are health, wealth, relationships, success, and love. Each is a probable avenue to what is sought by nearly everyone and crucial to psychological well-being and happiness. Numerous studies show that happy individuals are successful across multiple life domains, including marriage, friendship, income, work performance, and health (Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener, 2005). In developing healthy, nourishing relationships, a happy person has definite advantages.

As valuable as happiness is, not much is done to help people learn how to be happy. Don, a troubled 19-year-old student, wrote in a paper:

I have spent a large part of my life in mental health facilities. The personnel there taught us that we have problems but do not direct us the right way. They prevent suicides, but do not give reasons to live. I think I am finally finding it here.

Sadly, his therapy sessions and the class discussions on happiness were not enough. Don's body was found in his apartment a few weeks after the term ended. What appeared to be a suicide is another tragic reminder that we are not doing enough to help people live happy, satisfying lives.

What is happiness? How does one become and stay happy? These important questions are easy to ask; the more significant answers are difficult to find. This entire book provides insight. Specifically, this chapter provides a basic overview of the concepts of happiness and satisfaction and suggests ways to achieve them.

## What Is Happiness?

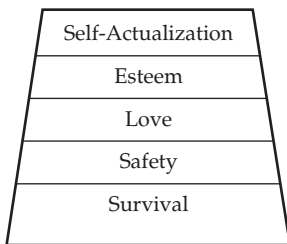
A starting point in any search is to know what you are looking for; however, defining happiness is difficult. Happiness, like trust and love, is intangible. It cannot be seen, heard, or touched. Abstract words are not easy to define. Another challenge comes from our own uniqueness; what is happiness for one person may not be so for another. Mary found satisfaction in creating beautiful paintings in art class. Beth was unhappy trying to achieve even average work in the same class. Each has a slightly different path to follow. For the purpose of clarity, think of **happiness** as a general sense of well-being that can range from contentment to ecstasy. Happiness is a state of mind that is not determined by one's circumstances. Adult happiness stems more from honor and integrity of the self than from simply an experience of pleasure (Pittman, 1998). Even when you are not excited about anything special, happiness means that you will like yourself and appreciate life.

## Satisfying Your Needs

Related to happiness is satisfaction. Satisfaction can precede or follow happiness and almost always accompanies it. One way of looking at both is to equate them with the fulfillment of needs.

### Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's (1968) **hierarchy of needs** has become a standard in outlining human motivation. He identified five levels of needs. The first four are *survival*, *safety*, *love* and *belonging*, and *self-esteem*. Before you can begin to satisfy higher needs, you must first satisfy your basic or survival needs. For example, "If you spent a long time without water in the desert, you would feel that you were the happiest person in the world if you found an oasis. Even the word *ecstasy* might not adequately describe your feelings as you took your first sip of water" (Williams and Long, 1983, p. 339). After your thirst has been quenched, extreme happiness will probably not persist; then a higher need will take precedence, and you will be motivated to strive for something more (Fig. 4-1).



**Figure 4-1** Self-actualization chart.

Even though the order of the levels is not exactly the same for everyone and for all conditions, individuals achieve satisfaction by fulfilling needs at each stage. The highest and most difficult level to attain is self-actualization. Individuals do not even begin to work at this level until the previous four stages are completed. To Maslow, self-actualization meant achieving one's full potential, fulfilling a mission, possessing fuller knowledge of and accepting one's self, and feeling unified or integrated. Self-actualizers want to become all they are capable of becoming. Maslow described self-actualization as full humanness. After satisfying their needs in the previous four levels, people who are unhappy and dissatisfied with life would each benefit from asking, "What can I do to become a self-actualizer?" Self-actualizing individuals are striving to achieve the following characteristics.

- Fully experiencing life in the present
- Searching for self-knowledge on an ongoing basis
- Assertively expressing feelings and thoughts
- Making growth choices instead of fear choices
- Being honest and genuine in interpersonal relationships
- Setting and achieving goals of excellence
- Becoming involved in meaningful life activities
- Remaining open and flexible about ideas and beliefs

If you believe that you are working toward self-actualization, which of the characteristics do you possess? Which still need to be more fully developed? Because happiness and satisfaction are closely related, a recommendation is to use Maslow's hierarchy and focus on achieving at the level of your needs.

Associated with Maslow is transpersonal psychology, which focuses on health and human potential. As did Maslow in his hierarchy, this approach looks to models of full human development and the growth-oriented nature of humankind. In addition to the four developmental areas of self, transpersonal psychology addresses the spiritual realm as well. A balanced development of the all parts of the self is conducive to happiness.

### Basic Human Needs

Glasser (1965) also discussed needs when he introduced **reality therapy**. Glasser contended that individuals who need psychiatric treatment suffer from one basic inadequacy: an inability to fulfill their needs. Being involved with other people is essential in satisfying two basic needs: the need to love and be loved, plus the need to feel that we are worthwhile to ourselves and to others. As a psychiatrist, Glasser felt that people had to learn how to fulfill their own needs without depriving others of the ability to fulfill their needs—what he called *responsibility*. He identified the following additional needs.

- Surviving and reproducing
- Belonging, loving, sharing, and cooperating

- Having power, which includes having recognition and influence
- Being free
- Having fun

Fun, Glasser believed, is an integral part of life and needs to be incorporated into our learning experiences and work. People can be happy if they spend their time and energy working on fulfilling their needs instead of choosing to be miserable. Think of your own needs. Working toward fulfilling your needs could lead to satisfaction and the quest for one often leads to the other.

## Removing Obstacles to Happiness

Several obstacles can hinder you in the pursuit of happiness. Before you can create happiness and become satisfied, eliminating these barriers is essential.

### Unrealistic Expectations

Expectations often set up a roadblock. Far too many people expect happiness to just happen. “They do not see it as something they have to do. People will go to a lot of trouble to learn French or physics or how to operate a car, but they will not be bothered learning how to operate themselves” (Newman and Berkowitz, 1974, p. 21). Those who view happiness as a given are seldom happy because rarely does the emotion just happen.

Others have opposite expectations and believe that they cannot ever be happy or do not deserve to be. To them, happiness is not possible. Dan had suffered many disappointments and he believed that he never had any luck. Good things just did not happen to him and happiness was for others. What would you predict for him? Dan succeeded in fulfilling his own prophecy, as discussed in Chapter 1. Happiness is neither automatic and easy nor impossible and too difficult to achieve. Expectations at either extreme are an obstacle.

Another unrealistic expectation is that we will be, or even need to be, happy all the time. Life is just not like that. All around are possibilities for happiness and satisfaction, yet life is not just a “bowl of cherries.” It seems sensible to accept what is called the **10-80-10 spectrum of happiness** (Bloomfield, 1996a). For 10 percent of the time, life is spontaneously wonderful and deliriously happy, and another 10 percent is extremely difficult, tragic, and miserable. The remaining 80 percent of life is what you make it. Regardless of the weather, you have a wonderful time, or even when somebody else is in a bad mood, you enjoy a pleasant experience. Check your own “happiness pulse” in the activity “Happiness, It Is Up to Me!” in Reflections and Applications.

The realization that all people go through unhappy times can help us accept trials and tribulations and appreciate the many positives in life. In fact, unhappiness can be a forerunner to happiness. Buscaglia (1982) was a firm believer in the value of unhappiness: “Joy is a great teacher, but so is despair” (p. 74). A widow in a workshop on coping with crisis shared her personal experience with the participants. “My husband died 18 months ago. I loved him, and I miss him. It

was painful. However, a few months ago I realized that I felt reborn. While married, I did not take classes or use talents outside the home. I have been doing so lately; from my loss has come happiness." Accepting pain and allowing the reality of unhappiness to contribute to learning and growth translate into long-term happiness.

### Searching Outside of Self

Where is happiness found? How can satisfaction be achieved? Too often people engage in a frantic, fruitless search for these elusive feelings. Looking outside of ourselves is common. What are some external sources? A partial list includes material possessions, money, a certain person, a job, marriage, a baby, drugs, the weather, activities, and even a day of the week (maybe Friday?). How often do you think that a particular person or a specific thing can make you happy? This belief carries grave risks such as dependency. Relying on an external source for happiness puts control of your life outside yourself. If externals make you happy, they can also make you unhappy. Expecting happiness from things or others often means that we do little about our own happiness except depend on others for it.

We further risk losing happiness by putting all our "eggs in one basket." Relying on only one source is dangerous, and being dependent on another person is a mistake. Julie believed that her fiancé made her happy. She was devastated when he broke their engagement, and she believed she could never be happy again. She became severely depressed because she did not recognize other potential sources of happiness. Her situation illustrates the importance of being responsible for your own happiness. People may equate a certain achievement with happiness. Although satisfaction and temporary happiness accompany a successful experience, the achievement is not the answer.

We constantly tell ourselves such things as, "If I could just go back to school and acquire more knowledge—perhaps get a master's degree—then I will be happy." But are people with master's degrees or Ph.D.'s any happier than the rest of us? It is beautiful to acquire knowledge, but it is misleading to expect it to bring us peace, love, and happiness (Keyes, 1975, p. 5). Another misleading thought is that money will bring happiness. "People grossly exaggerate the impact that higher incomes would have on their subjective well-being," said Alan Krueger, a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University. (*Lincoln Journal Star*, 2006d). A wealth of data in recent decades has shown that once personal wealth exceeds about \$12,000 a year, more money produces virtually no increase in life satisfaction. From 1958 to 1987, for example, income in Japan grew fivefold, but researchers could find no corresponding increase in happiness.

Another problem is that this "mad search" is unending. Happiness is always at the next turn or over the hill ahead. For example, once one plateau is reached, those who seek money to make them happy will simply want more and continue the endless quest. We all are so busy chasing after external objects of one kind or another that we have no time left for enjoying our lives (Dyer, 1990). Even though finding satisfaction outside ourselves is impossible, unhappy people persist in trying to do so.

Because advertisers realize that people desire happiness and have a tendency to look for it externally, they use it to sell products. Look through any magazine or watch television commercials; an ad may show the merits of a product, but what entices us is the subtle message that the product will bring happiness. Alcoholic beverages are sold almost exclusively with this theme. Picture the scene: A group of young people are playing volleyball on the beach with a cooler of ice-cold beer near at hand. The play is often interrupted for one guzzle after another. Each beer seems to increase their skill level. They seem ecstatic. What is the message? Drink beer and be happy. The tragic side of alcohol abuse will never be shown in the product's advertisement, and usually the taste is not the point. The sales pitch is concentrated on consumer happiness.

The same could be said for clothes, cars, and other material goods. Research shows that the relationship between consumption of products and personal happiness is weak. Happiness is also not correlated with age, being female or male, or money. Once people can afford the necessities of life, increasing levels of wealth matter little, and having money is no guarantee of happiness (Myers and Diener, 1995). Think about your ancestors. You may have or will have more spending power, yet are you happier just because of it?

Advertisements also persuade parents to buy products to make their children happy. This is potentially damaging. Because children learn from their parents, the message that happiness comes from their things is perpetuated. "We are raising the next generation of frustrated consumers on a steady diet of television ads. Most children have fantasies of desire long before they have fantasies of achievement" (Spezzano, 1992, p. 170). By relying on a happiness-producing product to entertain, parents may deprive their children of valuable personal attention and meaningful parent-child interaction.

It is always a by-product, never a primary goal. Happiness is a butterfly—the more you chase it, the more it flies away from you and hides. (Kushner, 1986, p. 23)

Although the media and general public have many ways of creating the illusion that happiness is out there "somewhere" and can be sought and bought, the belief is a fallacy. If you do not become happy by pursuing happiness, what does make a difference? Factors include culture, specific aspects of the self, and individual actions. Agreeing that national and cultural factors are involved, Myers and Diener (1995) named four traits common to most happy people: self-esteem, a sense of personal control, optimism, and extraversion. In terms of the latter, one can speculate that extraversion helps people make social contacts that increase happiness or that being happy encourages outgoing behaviors. Happy people also are able to filter out ideas that others are better; they pay more attention to their own internal standards of performance and do not use how well others do as a measure of success (*Health*, 1998). Without a doubt, what people do is critical. Individuals of all ages who continue to use their brains to think and their bodies to move are happier. Older people who keep mentally active are most likely to maintain their intellectual abilities and to be generally happier and better adjusted than those who do not. Importantly, the source is not outside waiting to be discovered. *Potential happiness is inside waiting to be created* (Reflect and Apply).

**REFLECT AND APPLY****Reflect**

- ◆ *What do you need? Relate this to your degree of happiness in the past and present.*
- ◆ *Where would you place yourself on Maslow's hierarchy of needs?*
- ◆ *Think of examples of unrealistic expectations or searching outside of yourself for happiness.*

**Apply**

- ◆ *Ask other people what they consider to be their greatest needs. Note how similar these are to your needs.*
- ◆ *Check with friends and family members. What factors do they relate to their personal happiness?*
- ◆ *Identify some advertisements that try to sell happiness.*

**Creating Happiness and Well-Being**

Developing an inner reservoir or base of happiness is something only you can do: from that, you can derive even more happiness from externals. Without this solid foundation, positive feelings are fleeting. Think of this reservoir as an “inner joy,” which is a power source, not something that happens to you but something you create (Bloomfield, 1980).

A fine-line difference exists between someone or something making you happy and using externals to increase a personal store of internal happiness. For example, with self-satisfaction and a general sense of well-being, becoming happier because of another person, material possessions, and the like is possible. However, *they do not make you happy*. Happy people become happier from outside sources; unhappy people continue to seek in vain. How can a person create this reservoir and add to it? No magic formula exists, and no one way is right for everyone. Consider the suggestions in this chapter and the rest of the book as building blocks and action steps that can empower you to create your own happiness.

**Cultivate Self-Knowledge, Self-Esteem, and an Optimistic Attitude**

A basic recommendation is to know yourself well. This will enable you to determine what happiness and unhappiness mean to you. Nothing is more destructive to the human spirit and to personal happiness than never quite knowing who you really are, what you really want, and what you were put here on earth to accomplish (Bloomfield, 1980). Developing self-esteem is essential. People with low self-esteem put themselves into situations that perpetuate unhappiness. “If we care little for ourselves, we are likely to end up as someone’s doormat” (Buscaglia, 1992, p. 285). Years ago, “women who love too much” were described as not believing that they deserved to be happy, tending to depend on others for their sense of self-worth, and believing that they must earn the right to enjoy life. At the crux of their unhappiness was critical low self-esteem (Norwood, 1985).



Mary Hollins, an insightful young woman whose self-esteem had been low, shared some of her writing.

You cannot live for or be another person. The joy and the happiness is to know, accept, and grow, becoming uniquely you.

Mary made a conscious effort to build her self-esteem, as can each of us. Closely related to self-esteem is an optimistic attitude and both are characteristic of happy individuals (Myers and Diener, 1995). Unhappy feelings follow a pessimistic way of thinking. Optimism lends itself to endless choices and opportunities to make the most of and enjoy all of life.

### Have Realistic Expectations

People who create happiness have a realistic self-appraisal and accept their true potential. They do not live their lives at one extreme, where they require perfection, or at the other extreme, where they allow themselves to “just get by.” A student, for example, would be unrealistic to expect all top grades if she or he were not capable of them. Yet thinking “just so I pass” is self-defeating if you can do better. In the first case, failure and unhappiness could result; in the latter, not giving yourself the opportunity to feel pride and satisfaction will not produce happiness. “It is well to challenge ourselves with dreams of what we would like to be, but it is wiser to stay within the realistic realm of who we are” (Buscaglia, 1992, p. 285) (Fig. 4-2).

The deadly “perfectionist trap” is not conducive to happiness. Wanting to do well is one thing; thinking that one must be perfect is another. A perfectionist is someone who thinks that anything short of perfection in performance is unacceptable (Hendlin, 1992). Often the obsession with perfection stops people from trying and robs them of potentially rewarding activities. Hannah believed that she had to be a perfect golfer. She took lessons and became quite skilled. Then one day she “whiffed.” Having missed the ball completely, she knew she was not going to play a flawless game. She left the course and decided that she was through with golf! She gave up hours of potential pleasure because she could not be perfect. Her case is an exaggerated one, yet many persons who participate in sports do not truly enjoy themselves unless they are performing almost perfectly. The happiness comes not from playing but only from superb performance. Perfectionist people frequently avoid challenges and do not comprehend the value of failure.

#### **Baseball and Perfection**

A perfect batting average is 1.000, which means that a hitter always gets on base. Nobody expects this out of baseball players. In fact, an average of .400 (4 hits out of 10 times at bat) is outstanding and rare. As in baseball, it is neither possible nor wise to expect perfection in life.

Figure 4-2



Perfectionists do not welcome mistakes as sources of learning, and this deprives them of helpful information. “The dream of perfection turns mistakes from warnings into sins” (McKay and Fanning, 2000, p. 135).

More common is hearing the message, “Whatever you choose to do, do your very best.” Does that sound familiar? Most of us have heard it from parents, school personnel, coaches, and friends who had well-meaning intentions. Allow yourself to challenge this belief. Think of at least five of your statuses, such as student, employee, parent, son or daughter, and friend. In order to do your very best, what is required of you in any one status? Time, energy, effort, commitment, and determination certainly are necessary. Is it possible to do the very best you can in all statuses at the same time? Buying into the belief of having to be the best in all you do and then kicking yourself when you do not succeed leads to unhappiness. Fully enjoying what you are achieving is impossible if you are carrying around the guilt from not always performing the best in everything. Nobody has or can have unlimited power.

Ann was a full-time student, mother, wife, friend, member of her original family, and church member. She did not seem to be satisfied with anything in her life as she kept thinking, “I must be the best student I can be, the best mother, wife, friend, family member, and church member.” One day she came to an important realization. “It is not realistic for me to expect to be the best in each of these. Right now being a student is primary, and I think I can still do a better than average job as mother and wife. I will just put the others on the ‘back burner’ and learn to feel okay about that.” She freed herself to be happy. This liberation is difficult for those of us who have been led to believe that we must excel in all endeavors.

As long as this “be-the-best” belief persists, happiness is not possible. Instead, happiness can be created, as Ann did, by prioritizing your statuses and deciding that you will do the best you can in each one—under your present circumstances. Creating happiness means looking for challenges that are reasonable.

At the extreme opposite of those with overly high self-expectations are those who are apathetic about life and their accomplishments. They seem to lack self-pride and any hint of motivation. For whatever reason, they have little direction and seldom try to achieve. They pretend that they are happy just getting by, and perhaps they feel as happy as they want to be. They may be depriving themselves of the potential for much greater life satisfaction.

*Do not be timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments that you make the better. What if you are a little coarse, and get your coat soiled or torn? What if you do fall, and get fairly rolled in the dirt once or twice? Up again. Never be afraid of a tumble.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Initiate Activity and Pleasure**

Satisfaction eludes many people because they do not take the initiative in bringing about pleasure. They play a waiting game. It is as if they believe that there is a “happiness godmother” who will invite them to participate in life. Conversely, those who create happiness realize that there is much they can do for their own well-being. Happy people are active in life. They know what can add

pleasure to their lives, and they go for it. They are willing to take risks. Carolyn, who was just starting college, wrote, "I have been taught to take a 'better safe than sorry' approach to life. I am now throwing that safety role out the window and taking chances. It is really invigorating!" The fully alive person asks, "How can I enjoy this person, place, situation, or challenge?" This requires a positive, creative mental attitude.

How alive do you feel? How often do you seize the moment and create delight? "Mentally healthy people keep a vital forward thrust through life until death" (Adams, 1987, p. 198). In contrast, noninitiators are inactive and wait for a "bolt of happiness" to strike them. They put someone else in charge.

Most of us do not "sculpt" our lives. We accept what comes our way, and then we gripe about it. Many of us spend our lives waiting for the perfect mate, waiting for the perfect job, waiting for perfect friends to come along. (Jeffers, 1987, p. 63)

Julie, who was divorced, talked about her desire for a social life. On Monday mornings she would usually say, "I had a boring weekend. I wanted to go out, but nobody called. After you are divorced, couples do not want you around, you know, so I sat home. I could not call them." Laura, a widow, said, "I get so tired of sitting home, and I wish my family would visit more often and take me places." Julie and Laura are not incapacitated; they just do not initiate. You may want to look at how much pleasure there is in your life and ask what you are doing to bring it about.

*For those of you wondering what to do while waiting for your prince to come, I say,  
"Enjoy the frog!"*

—Ric Masten

### Take Responsibility

Excuse making, a common way of not taking responsibility for one's happiness, can create dissatisfaction and misery. In order to avoid the harmful excuse-making habit, it helps to recognize the difference between an excuse and a reason. A reason is a statement of fact usually offered with acceptance of responsibility and control. An excuse can consist of facts; however, responsibility for behavior is lacking. Instead, an excuse usually includes a "that-should-get-me-off-the-hook" presumption. Contrasting excuses with reasons is helpful in distinguishing between the two. For example:

I could not go visit him.	versus	I did not go visit him.
I did not have time to study.	versus	I did not take the time to study.

Lack of time is a common excuse. When I remind students that they really did have time to complete a paper or study for an exam, I can get indignant protests. There was not *any* time, I hear. How much time do we literally have? The answer is that each of us has 24 hours a day, 8,760 hours each year. In reality, we do have time; we just may not have time left over. "We always have time, if we but use it aright (sic)," said the German poet and dramatist Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who died in 1832. This is still true today.

When we persist in thinking that we do not have time, it really does seem to be nonexistent. Potentially satisfying experiences can be delayed or never accomplished. Melissa insisted that she wanted to “work out” regularly, but she just did not have time. So she did not exercise. One day she decided to awaken earlier and exercise. She found time that had actually always been there!

Another common excuse and a definite obstacle to happiness is age. “I am too old” is a phrase that, if recognized as an excuse, can be eliminated. When exercising, I sometimes feel winded. It is tempting to think, “It is my age.” My preferred thought is, “I am just not in shape yet!” Do you see the beauty of thinking the latter? In doing so, I can change my physical condition and stamina; my age is unchangeable. Certain obstacles exist if you have some type of disability. Having an artificial eye has been challenging for me, and using it as an excuse is occasionally tempting. I recall trying to do so once when discussing a tennis match with my daughter Lisa. She showed up with a patch over her eye and proceeded to win the set and remind me of the senselessness of excuse making! A more dramatic example is an amazing man who calls himself Mitchell. He describes himself as someone who could be called the unluckiest man alive because of two devastating accidents that left him badly scarred and disabled from severe burns and paralyzed from the waist down.

With my scarred face, my fingerless paws, my wheelchair and real, genuine happiness in my heart—I want to be your mental image of the power of the human mind to transcend circumstances. (Mitchell, 1997)

Having read his book and heard him speak, it is obvious that because he refused to make excuses, Mitchell has overcome immense obstacles and has taken responsibility for his own life.

Sources for excuses are bountiful. Passage of time, people, the weather, a car, and even the dog can be at fault. Another convenient scapegoat is an emotion. Have you ever thought or said something like, “I was so angry that I just had to honk my horn,” “I was so frustrated that I couldn’t help screaming”? Ask yourself what part of that statement is true. You were angry (even *so* angry) and frustrated; the rest is inaccurate. You did not *have* to honk the horn or scream. A young woman said, “I was so depressed, I could not go to work.” Have you ever gone to work or to classes when you were depressed? She could have gone to work, but she did not. Taking control of her life would mean thinking, “I was depressed, and I chose (or decided) not to go to work.” Then she is free in the future to be depressed and go to work if she chooses. Emotions are important influences in our lives; however, they do not have to control or justify behavior. “I could not help it” usually means “I did not help it.”

Excuses limit choices. Blaming outside forces takes away freedom and power. “This class is boring,” someone might say, and then the class or the instructor is at fault. This blaming could prevent a person from ever enjoying the class because the responsibility is elsewhere. Don complained that he was unable to study for a test because his roommate was talking on the phone. He blamed his roommate for his poor test score. Who was actually responsible for his score? As long as Don continues to blame others, he will be at their mercy and will be unable to change his life. Responsibility gives us the power to make changes and to create the kind of life we want.

Excuses are like antacids; they can bring temporary relief but do not contribute to long-term happiness. Excuses decrease self-control and dim feelings of success. For example, how can you feel proud about a high grade if you do not take responsibility for the low ones? Even though it may be temporarily upsetting to realize that you have created pain for yourself, this realization is your biggest blessing. When you take responsibility for your own misery, you discover you have the power to find pleasure and create happiness.

People who take responsibility have or develop an **internal locus of control**, the belief that they are in control of their own lives. A perception that outside-self factors control one's life is **external locus of control**. Over the years there has been increasing interest in whether individuals believe that outcomes of their behaviors are due to their own actions or personal characteristics or due to chance, luck, fate, or under others' control (Rotter, 1972, 1990). People recognized as being psychologically hardy (Kobasa, 1979) have an internal locus of control, and one of the traits of happy people is a sense of personal control (Myers and Diener, 1995). Think about your own locus of control and strive to empower yourself by taking responsibility. Happy individuals welcome control over their lives. Excuses prevent present happiness and block potential well-being.

### Change Can't and Couldn't Thinking

Excuses frequently include the words *can't* or *couldn't*. People think and verbalize in these terms. Have you ever said or heard this common expression: "I *could not* get up this morning"? Really? Picture what would be necessary for this to be true. Perhaps you were lying there in a full-body cast? Usually the person means "I had a hard time getting up," or "I did not want to get up." A person does not mean *cannot* or *could not* in actuality, yet without realizing it, potential happiness can be jeopardized. Analyze *cannot* and *could not* messages and then challenge them. Read the following thoughts and then reflect on what a person will likely miss by thinking and then behaving accordingly.

I just *cannot* ski.

I *cannot* talk to people.

I *could not* ask her to go to the party with me.

Do you see how limiting such thinking is? Think of as many literal uses of the words as you can, and you will discover that the words are correctly used in only a few instances such as, "I *cannot* live forever." Even if you cannot do something now, in most cases, you could eventually! A wise decision would be to stop using the negative words unless they are entirely accurate. "Adulthood is the time for doing what you can and not talking about what you can not" (Spezzano, 1992, p. 20). Life has circumstances or external forces that cannot be changed. You cannot control the weather, many tragedies, and other people's behavior. You do control your reactions and future actions regarding these uncontrollable events. Learn to recognize your own internal power and avoid thinking *cannot* when you actually have control.

*Cannot* may be a cover-up for fear. Other times use of such words is just wishful thinking. A student wrote on an evaluation form, "I liked this class. I wish

I could have put more into it." She *could* have put more into it. Replacing the word *could* with *would* means she can be more involved in future classes and have a happier experience. How frequently do you say, "I cannot," or "I could not"? To create happiness, eliminate as many as possible and think, "Yes, I can."

### Rethink Should and Should Not

Closely related to *cannot* and *could not* are *should* and *should not*. Perhaps you are not feeling happy or satisfied about what you do because you think in these ways.

I should study more.

I should visit my grandparents more often.

I should work harder at my job.

I should exercise more.

I should lose weight.

I should not waste time.

I should not ever be late.

I should not get angry.

What emotions are likely to follow a thought of *should* when it is not acted upon? What feelings do you have when you believe you *should not* and then do it anyway? Guilt, frustration, and anger are common responses, and these emotions go hand in hand with unhappiness. "Shoulditis" is what Briggs (1977) calls this. She points out that "should-ought-must-have-to" messages lower self-esteem and lead to unhappiness. Also, an expression of *should* does not sound like fun. When someone says, "We should go to lunch" or "We should get together," does it sound inviting? Would not it be more positive to hear, "I would like to go out to lunch with you" or "I want us to get together"? Part of being fully alive is enjoying activities and wanting to participate rather than thinking you have to. Other forcing words similar to *should* that are best to avoid include *must*, *have to*, *need to*, and *ought* (Fig. 4-3).

So what is better to think and say? Happiness is more likely if, whenever possible, you replace forcing words with *want* or *do not want*. Consider first the activity or task. You probably do want to spend more time with friends so instead of "I should spend more time," you can think, "I want to spend more time." Wanting to do something may not be the case. Then you can focus on the outcome. For

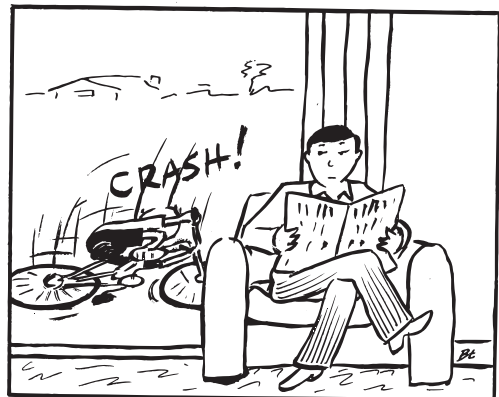
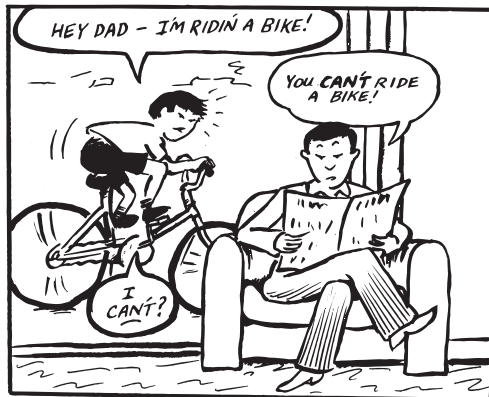


Figure 4-3

example, you may not want to study, yet you do want better grades. You can think, "I want better grades so I will study more." If you honestly do not relish doing the task and you do not want the outcome, either finish it anyway or get rid of the thought and move on with enjoyable living! Reword the other forcing words as well. When a student says, "I have to leave class early to visit a friend in the hospital." I reply, "Remember that you do not *have* to. You want to and have decided to leave, and it is fine."

These forcing words are used in **irrational beliefs**, unreasonable and exaggerated thoughts identified by Albert Ellis (1977), a well-known cognitive therapist. Some of these include "I cannot help it," "I cannot stand it when things do not go well," "I should be liked by everyone," and "I must be perfect." Ellis explained that people who carry around such overgeneralizations end up making themselves miserable. Challenging irrational beliefs is necessary for mental health. You can begin by changing the forcing words and, thus, chalk up another step in creating happiness!

### Concentrate on Positives

Personal put-downs are also obstacles to happiness. "I am no good." "I cannot do anything right." "I cannot make friends." "I am not attractive." A most devastating example of negative self-talk is, "I cannot change."

Consider the following damaging thoughts.

We do not like the way we look. We can not stand our bodies. We think we are stupid, incompetent, untalented, and in many cases, unlovable. We think our thoughts are wrong and inappropriate and our feelings are wrong and inappropriate. We believe we are not important, and even if our feelings are not wrong, we think they don't matter. We have never come to grips with ourselves, and we look at ourselves not through rose-colored glasses but through a dirty, brownish-gray film. (Beattie, 1987, p. 109)

Other thoughts are less blatant. "She is smarter than I am," "My brother was more popular," "I wish I were prettier," or "I could have done better." Because they are subtle, you may not even recognize their damage. Any time you use a qualifier and think or say, "I am *only* a kid," "I did not do *much* in high school," or "I have *just* had work experience on a farm," you are taking away from your sense of self-worth and well-being. During job interviews, many applicants who make the mistake of emphasizing what they lack lower their chances of getting the job.

People who engage in negative self-talk and see the worst in everyone and everything seem addicted to negativity and can be called *negaholics*. Those who suffer from negaholism limit their own abilities, convince themselves that they cannot have what they want, and sabotage their wishes, desires, and dreams (Carter-Scott, 1989). They also dampen the spirits of others. Qualifying thoughts and comments can emerge even under positive circumstances. A clerk said, "Even when I feel proud, I qualify it by thinking that we were so busy at work that anyone could have made as many sales as I did." After recognizing this, she began to challenge such thoughts by telling herself, "Even though we were busy, I do not know that anyone else could have done as well as I did. I made the sales, and



that's great!" Whenever you hear yourself saying something like, "I received a good grade, but it was an easy test," rephrase the thought. Why would anyone use negative self-talk instead of positive? Such a person might have had well-meaning parents who did not want their children to seem conceited or vain. They might have encouraged them, instead, to be modest and not to think too highly of themselves. For an unfortunate few, it is the result of direct put-downs that they have internalized. Negaholism is frequently handed down from generation to generation (Carter-Scott, 1989). Julie spoke of her mother's emphasis on negatives. "I was excited about a piece of pottery I had finished and told my mom to come see it. She walked in, and the first thing she said was that the table where I had placed it needed dusting!"

Thinking and speaking negatively about yourself lowers self-esteem and leads to unhappiness. What about other negativism? The use of what are called "bummer" words (Buscaglia, 1982) can depress your spirits. Try saying these words aloud slowly.

no	never	gloomy	bored	hate
not	ugly	dumb	bleak	wrong
negative	sick	bad	worthless	awful

Did you notice any change in your feelings? Most people become aware of how depressing both the sounds and the images of the words are. *Depressing*, by the way, is a "bummer" word. Now say the following words aloud.

yes	laugh	fun	able	love
cheerful	right	smart	great	excited
super	well	good	wow	alive

A fascinating study showed that higher use of positive emotion words relative to negative ones was associated with better health (Pennebaker, Mayne, and Francis, 1997) and that people who used more positive emotion words and fewer negations were perceived more favorably by others (Berry et al., 1997). Just by using different words you have more control over your mood, health, and interactions. Imagine going through life thinking and verbalizing in "bummer" language. Instead, think differently and increase the number of positive words you use.

After you rid yourself of negatives, remarkable things can happen. When you employ positive self-talk, your mental image will focus more often on what is good about yourself, what you can do, and what you have done well. Most important, you will know that you can change if you want to change. You will no longer put yourself second or third in all aspects of life. If someone is truly better looking or more talented, you can acknowledge this as a reality yet understand that it is only as important as you make it. Concentrating on positives in yourself and others creates a happier reality.

*Be not afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact.*

—William James



## Seek Alternatives

An important part of the thinking process, and essential for achieving happiness and satisfaction, is the ability to recognize alternatives. “Locked-in” thinking can be depressing because it limits you to only one way of viewing life; it can also be tragic. The story is told of a woman who is waiting for a phone call from her boyfriend, Buster. The call does not come and, in despair, she kills herself (Buscaglia, 1982). This tragic and desperate behavior, as in most suicides, is the result of an inability to think of any possible alternative. In contrast, my students can suggest several other scenarios. First, they let Buster off the hook by giving reasons for his not calling. A unique one is that he had not paid his phone bill and found that his line was dead. If, in fact, Buster no longer loves the woman, alternatives are still possible. “Find a better Buster!” is a common recommendation. “Maybe the truly mentally healthy individual is the one who has the most alternatives, the most viable alternatives” (Buscaglia, 1982, p. 108). Remember that any problem has more than one solution.

The happiest people are those who do not limit their choices. Being confident that you can solve your problems by thinking of several options is a sign of maturity and strength. Critical and creative thinking skills, discussed in Chapter 1, emphasize unlocking people’s minds, seeing a multitude of possibilities, and then exploring alternatives.

Deciding on choices is difficult for some people. Because of our original socioeconomic status and upbringing, the concept of alternatives may not be easily grasped, or effective decision-making skills may be lacking. In addition, life delivers some devastating blows, and we may feel trapped by circumstances. Education about choices is a necessity, and society can be instrumental in providing encouragement, training, and resources related to bettering one’s life. This book encourages individuals to learn how to make wise choices.

## Take Positive Action

Seeing alternatives is not beneficial if you do not act. In fact, understanding what to do and then not doing anything can be stressful. A frustrated student came to me one day after reading several self-help books. She said, “I am so upset because now I know what to do, but I am not doing it!” I reminded her that human beings are not perfect, helped her plan some action steps, and encouraged her to continue to work on desired changes. Taking action and taking responsibility for outcomes are signs of a mentally adjusted person. Lack of action often leads to unhappiness.

It costs far more not to change than to change. The alternative to change is stagnation. To stagnate is to die while still breathing. (Adams, 1987, p. 206)

Looking for what can be done in any circumstance is happiness producing, and you can be proud of any positive action. Cheri is unhappy about her sloppy roommate. What can she do about it? If she does nothing, is she pursuing happiness? Cheri can start with the easiest possible solution and act on it. If it does not work, she can go to the next one. If she exhausts all the alternatives, she still has a choice. She can accept what she has not been able to change, or she can remove

herself from the depressing situation. A story is told of a man who prayed every day that he would win the lottery. One day he heard the thunderous voice of God: "If you want to win the lottery, at least buy a ticket!" Wasting precious time and energy bemoaning your plight in life is draining and not conducive to happiness. Instead, do something constructive, learn from mistakes, and avoid negative situations in the future. Then pat yourself on the back for taking action and enjoy the energizing feelings from taking even a small step!

*Life is in your hands. You can select joy if you want or you can find despair everywhere you look. Kanzantazkis says, "You have your brush and colors. You paint paradise, and then in you go."*

—Leo Buscaglia

### Avoid Chronic Procrastination

Putting off activities, which is known as **procrastination**, can deprive you of a more positive future. Procrastination can be used in a creative ways. You can, for example, choose to postpone a tedious task in order to engage in a pleasurable activity. You may decide to put something off because it is low on your priority list or because you want to allow time to make a thoughtful decision. In that case, delay can work in your favor.

**Chronic procrastination** is the habit of postponing and it blocks happiness. If you want and plan to complete a task, putting it off delays the happiness of achievement and creates stress in the meantime. It becomes a major obstacle to happiness. "The demands and responsibilities of adult life are much greater, and procrastination begins to feel more like a prison than a game" (Burka and Yuen, 1983, p. 15). Despite the difficulty, when the consequences of procrastination are faced, most people want to change. Consider the costs (LeBoeuf, 1979).

- *Waste of the present:* I will do it tomorrow, but tomorrow may not come.
- *An unfulfilled life:* Today will not count for anything if nothing is accomplished.
- *Boredom:* Life can become dull and flat when filled with things undone.
- *Anxiety:* Working under pressure at the last minute is a stressor.
- *Impotent goals:* Goals not acted upon are like hot air, one "I am gonna" after another with no results.
- *Unsolved problems:* A constant plague of these is like vermin, one breeding another and another.
- *Continuous frustration:* Not getting any "wants" becomes disheartening.
- *Poor health:* Putting off taking care of self or maintaining safety can be harmful.
- *A mediocre career:* Delay and inaction lead to nonproductivity, and even though most procrastinators claim that they will be different at work, the habit lingers.

A study of college students showed that procrastinators reported higher stress and more illness late in the term; overall, they were ill more often. They also received lower grades on all assignments. Procrastination of this type was a

self-defeating behavior marked by long-term costs (Tice and Baumeister, 1997). Anyone who wants to live a happy life would adopt the worthy goal of defeating procrastination.

Discovering why you procrastinate can help you find another way to satisfy your need or to decide whether the reason is worth the costs.

1. *Do you procrastinate because the task seems overwhelming or unpleasant?* In Chapter 3 you learned how to break a goal into smaller action steps. This puts an end to initial procrastination and motivates you to take the second step. Unpleasant tasks can be evaluated. (1) How important is this? (2) How bad will it be if I don't do it? (3) What are the rewards? For example, cleaning toilet bowls is not high on most people's lists of desirable tasks. Next time you are faced with the chore, apply the three questions. If you honestly decide that cleaning the toilet is unimportant, that it won't be so bad left undone, and that the rewards are not worth the effort at the time, then you are not procrastinating!
2. *Is an procrastination excuse for a poor performance?* This is like trying to make two wrongs into a right. Most students who leave major projects to the last minute do poorly.
3. *Are you waiting for more time?* Ironically, people will say, "I did not do well because I ran out of time," and they will expect to be excused because of lack of time. Another procrastinating message about time is, "I will do it when I have more time." We will never have more time and allowing too many demands on our time leads to pressure. Procrastinators are often time-wasters who do not use small time segments. Even though enjoyable activities are important, people who say they do not have time are often using a great deal of it for enjoyment. If you are not an effective time manager, review the time management section in this book.
4. *Do you use procrastination to gain sympathy?* Donna played the "poor-me" game to explain why things did not get done. "I wanted to be a good mother and take the kids to the zoo, but too many other things came up" and "I have more things to do than most, and I cannot afford to take time for myself" were some of her pleas for sympathy. When a friend told her that she was tired of hearing all her tales of woe, Donna maturely took a look at herself and decided to end the game.
5. *Are you defending against blows to self-esteem by putting things off?* "I did not get it done" may be a cover-up for "I was afraid it wouldn't be good enough." Perfectionists tend to procrastinate for this reason. Check your behavior. If you have a pattern of procrastination, do something about it now!

### Live in the Present

When are you living your life? This may sound like a senseless question, yet asking it *is* sensible! Do you harbor thoughts such as "I will be happy when I graduate" or "I cannot wait until I get to move away from home and be on my own"? Describing this type of thinking as "futurizing," Dyer (1990) calls it a most destructive habit.

Your life is not a dress rehearsal for the future. It is right here and now. (Carlson, 1999)

In the book *Making Peace with Yourself* (Bloomfield, 1996a), a chapter is devoted to “I will be happy when.” It is interesting that many of the events are opposites (when I get married, when I get divorced, when I have children, when the children leave home). All are excellent examples of “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” Many of us live the first half of our lives postponing satisfaction and the last half with regrets. Fulfillment is just over the hill (Bloomfield, 1996a). When I hear people say, “I cannot wait until the weekend,” I often reply, “I hope you can, and I certainly hope you enjoy each minute from now until then!” Too many people seem to be focused on endings—the end of the week, the end of the day, the end of the school term—and then want time to go even faster. Happy, satisfied people create happiness by an ongoing process of living *now*.

Another habit is one I somewhat jokingly call “pasturizing,” or mentally living in the past. “If only I had married John instead of Jim” and “I wish I had started college right out of high school instead of later” are examples of wishful thinking that destroys opportunities for present happiness. People who converse only about accomplishments or problems from the past are not living in the here and now.

Well-adjusted people accept and appreciate the past and can enjoy nostalgia. Wise individuals use the past as a series of vast learning experiences to make the present more rewarding. Happy people plan for their future and anticipate to a certain extent, yet they keep focused in the present. What is happening now can be unpleasant, and you will, at times, hope tomorrow comes quickly. If you make a habit of living elsewhere, you will realize too late that you have not really lived. Focusing on life as a journey, not a destination, is helpful.

Recognize that “now” is the only time you ever really have. For example, when Lynn graduated from college, she began her career full of excitement and hope. That same month a malignant brain tumor was discovered and removed. Lynn survived the delicate surgery and the cancer treatment and spent several months in a rehabilitation center. Lynn was very positive and hopeful for the future. Nine months after the tumor was found, Lynn was buried in the local cemetery, leaving behind many who loved her. Nobody is guaranteed a future. It is a depressing thought but one that can keep us focused. Happiness must be practiced in the present. A consolation is that Lynn created and experienced happiness in the “now” of a short life before her illness.

The only reality is the now. Yesterday is gone, and there is nothing you can do about it. It is good because it brought you to where you are right now. Tomorrow is a wonderful thing to dream about, but it is not real. And if you spend your time dreaming about yesterday and tomorrow, you are going to miss what is happening to you and me right now. (Buscaglia, 1982, p. 75)

### Enjoy Life’s Pleasures

“Stop and smell the roses.” What a delightful idea! How often do you do it? “Roses” can be anything as long as pleasure is felt. Sensory delights are everywhere. Do you see sunsets? Do you feel awe when viewing nature’s treasures? Do you smell the scents of the seasons? Do you marvel at a snowflake? Do you hear



**Figure 4-4** Take time to enjoy the beauty of nature.

the delightful songs of birds? Positive feelings are generated by pleasurable sensory stimulation. **Peak experiences** are brief moments of extreme pleasure (Maslow, 1968). Often these come from the simpler pleasures of life. Being open to new experiences allows us to create happiness. “Fully alive people are aware of the thorns but concentrate on the roses” (Powell, 1976, p. 57).

Why would people not take the time to marvel at life? “I am too busy. I do not have time” is a common excuse. Ask yourself when will you have time and when will you not be busy? “If we wait for everything we want ac-

complished to be completed before we celebrate, we will miss the party of life” (Pearsall, 1988, p. 61). “But I have to clean the house” and “I cannot stand it if the yard is not in good shape” are detriments to enjoyment (unless you enjoy cleaning the house and doing yard work). Joys are missed when we are rushing through life. Be sure to slow down and experience joy—over and over (Fig. 4-4).

### Count Your Blessings

One day a student remarked, “Sometimes it helps when I stop and think of what is not wrong with me and then I feel grateful.” Too often we forget how fortunate we are. Think right now of how many blessings you have. Are you healthy? Do you have loving relationships? Can you see and hear? Consider what life would be like without one or more of your senses. Peggy, a remarkable blind woman, told of overhearing a person complain about having to take a bus. Peggy’s thought was: “I wonder how she would feel if she always had to walk 10 blocks to a bus stop even on the coldest day, and she was also blind.” In the process of creating happiness, it can help to experience an occasional reminder of how bad things could be and be reminded of our blessings. Equally affirming is to keep in mind that for every act of unkindness, there are a million kind acts, a network of good (Dyer, 1992).

### Give to Life

Happy people not only take in the wonder and beauty of life, but they also give back to life and pursue a meaningful existence. Self-centered people tend to be unhappy, whereas those who contribute develop a positive legacy that will remain after they have died. Self-actualization, the pinnacle of the hierarchy of needs, is more likely for those who are reaching beyond self and contributing to the greater good of humankind. Joy comes from giving, not getting; from contributing, not acquiring (Dyer, 1992).

Giving to life does not necessarily mean great works. You can create satisfaction by doing worthwhile and purposeful deeds. Possibilities are all around. When was the last time you visited someone in a hospital or a nursing home? Have you recently volunteered to help in a worthy cause? Have you taken the

**REFLECT AND APPLY****Reflect**

- ◆ Think of a “cannot” statement you have used or heard. Then reword it.
- ◆ If you have a “should” in your life, change the thought to a “want” in one of the suggested ways.
- ◆ Select one of the ways to create happiness and use it.

**Apply**

- ◆ Practice saying both “bummer” and “positive” words and then compare your emotional reactions.
- ◆ Make a list of your blessings.
- ◆ Do something positive for another human being.

time to do a favor for anyone? When did you last send a “just thinking about you” card or note? Have you even smiled at someone recently? Buscaglia (1982) underscored this point, “Every day you take from the ground, you take from the air, you take from the beauty, what are you giving back?” (p. 82). Even the smallest gesture can do wonders for another and, in return, for you. In the depths of the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001 came countless expressions of generosity and giving that shed some light on the anguish. A major reason for enhancing self-esteem is to have something to offer. We can only give what we possess, and the more we have, the greater our capacity to give.

Each of us can make a difference. We can choose to live a life in which we can say, when we die, that the world is a better place for our having been here. (Jampolsky and Cirincione, 1990, p. 5)

**Develop Nourishing, Rewarding Relationships**

A primary objective of this book is to help you learn to develop positive relationships. Their value in the creation of happiness is unquestionable. Love and belongingness are human needs. Enjoying a supportive network of close relationships is associated with happiness (Myers and Diener, 1995). In Chapter 12 we will explore these concepts of relationship building further (Reflect and Apply).

**LOOKING BACK**

- Having realistic expectations about happiness is wise. Realizing that unhappiness is a part of life is realistic and can help you appreciate your happiness even more.
- Happy people learn from their misfortunes and grow from adversity. They know that happiness does not magically come from external sources. One must be happy inside; if not, all the outside sources in the world will bring only temporary happiness at best.

- Happiness is within reach, yet it does not automatically fall into anyone's lap. Initiative and effort are necessary. A reservoir of internal happiness must be created. Externals then can add to what is already there.
- Creating happiness means developing a high degree of self-worth, a positive attitude, and an internal locus of control.
- Happy people rarely use excuses and negative words. They look for possibilities, not limitations.
- Happy people see alternatives. Avoid negative self-talk and chronic procrastination.
- Individuals who create their own happiness are active and do what is best for them. They do not "faturize" or "pasturize." They make good use of the past and strive for a happy future, yet they live in the present.
- Happy people are seekers in life who enjoy discoveries and simple pleasures. They stop to "smell the roses" and count their blessings. Because they are truly happy within, they tend to reach out and provide happiness for others.

*Alas for those who never sing but die with all their music in them.*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes