

The Happy Class Keys

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*Authors note: Most of these keys come from the book *The Happy Class*, but some of them and part of what is said about them are Russ Morrison's actual words taken from conversations that he and I had in 2008 that were not put in the book.*

This summary is meant to be a quick reference guide to the Keys to Happiness that came from Russ Morrison.

Happiness: It is good to understand that there are two kinds of happiness. They are so similar it can be hard to tell them apart at times.

One, I call situational happiness. Like a first kiss with a new boy you like or heading down a steep

rollercoaster or surfing a great wave or watching your child ride a bike with no training wheels for the first time. As you can imagine, the list of things that can cause situational happiness is nearly endless, so there is no shortage of opportunities.

The other one, I call True Happiness. Don't let my name confuse you. They are both important in your life. True Happiness is like waking up almost every morning excited about the day ahead even before you have thought about what kind of day it is likely to be. Sometimes it is said to be the people who have True Happiness see the 'glass half full rather than half empty'. But actually these people are happy when the glass is one quarter full, or an eighth full, or... I think you get it. These people are happy with who they are and the life they are living (given the circumstances they are living in, almost no matter what those circumstances are.)

So to maybe explain how these two forms of happiness work together, it might be like the ocean. Waves (like situational happiness) can come up high on shore and once they end, the water recedes back. But if you raise the whole water level/tide (True Happiness)

then even the smaller waves come up higher on the shore.

One more note -- happiness is one of those emotional feelings that are hard to describe. Happiness feels different for different people who show it in different ways. But in the end, we all know what happiness is.

Practice can make you happier: You can actually improve your happiness level without changing your circumstances. It's like singing. I'm a terrible singer, but with some guidance and practice I would be less terrible. Happiness is like that. And while I have no interest in improving my singing ability, I am and maybe you are as well, usually interested in raising my happiness level no matter where it is. Improving your happiness will not come from reading a book, but from actually practicing what things in that book that work for you.

There are no rules, only respect for yourself and others: If you can keep this concept near the center of all you do, it makes being happy easier.

It's really two concepts pulled together. First is 'no rules'. If you had no rules, then there would be no expectations of others and thus no disappointments. No disappointments would mean a higher 'tide' of True Happiness. 'No rules' means to set others free to decide on their own what they will do. By not trying to control others, you save energy and disappointment for yourself, and others will respond with genuine interest in you, if they really do care about what you are proposing.

That said, humans are not too good with 'no rules'. They seem to need some guidance. One of my favorite movie lines is when the Kevin Spacey character in the movie *KPac* is asked why there were no laws on his planet – his answer 'Every creature in God's universe knows the difference between right and wrong.' – Despite that humans seem to need more.

So I add the concept of respect, first for yourself and then for others. A simple example would be that out of respect for yourself you wouldn't give yourself drugs

that destroy your brain and certainly out of respect of others, you wouldn't give those drugs to anyone else.

Another example could be keeping your room neat. You might make your bed every morning out of respect for yourself wanting see a nice bed when you get home in the evening. Out of respect for others, just closing the door to your room should be enough, so they do not have to see the mess.

This combination of no rules and respect goes a long way when being a parent. Before telling your child what to do, consider why you are doing it. Is it out of respect or just some old rule you thought was right....?

Death and God: This is probably the number one key to True Happiness.... the 'killer app'.

All humans are mortal, and we all die. Actually, death is the defining characteristic of life. It's the one thing we all know will happen for sure.

Yet, it is a seldom discussed topic. It is even a seldom thought-about event. So my advice on this topic is to 'get over it', accept it, stop imagining that one day

you will wake up and some scientist will have invented the live forever pill (we have all had that dream...)

For Atheists this is pretty straight forward, 'when it's over it's over'. So it's best to make the best of the only thing you know, your life.

For people believing in God (like me), no matter what their religious or non-religious beliefs are, it gets more complicated. But at some point, it comes down to 'do you feel lucky?' Or better put, 'Does God give humans any form of existence after death?'

To be happy, it makes little difference as to your beliefs, as the answer is pretty much the same. On this issue, you believe what you believe. And your belief has to get you past the point of worrying about dying. There is nothing you can do about it, as dying just happens...

You live the best life you can, and God is in control, you are not...

So, since you know that death is not worth worrying about, then nothing else can be so important that you need to worry about it. If you can stop worrying about the future, then you should be able to enjoy the True Happiness as it occurs in your life.

Decisions – ‘the Box’ and when to think:

Making decisions can be one of the hardest things humans do. They fret, they worry, and they make themselves unhappy all during the process and even afterward by second guessing their decision.

I break decisions into two discussions – first is when to think. There are three types of decisions-- large important decisions, small repetitive decisions, and everything else. Big decisions are worth spending some time thinking about. Small repetitive decisions are worth figuring out a good answer to, like finding the quickest way to work and back since it happens a couple hundred times a year. All other decisions should not cause you much concern or thinking time. Just pick one choice quickly and move on.

This philosophy makes most decisions unthreatening, like which lane of the freeway to be in... Really, I have watched people get frustrated, put themselves and others in danger, just trying to get a better lane, which in and of itself often slows down around the next curve. And even if it does save two

minutes, is the stress, high blood pressure, danger, etc. really worth it? Better to focus on the things that really matter.

The second item in decision-making is how to make big one-time decisions. I call my method of making these ‘the box’. Just picture yourself in a box with high walls on all sides, but open at the top. The box is of course your current situation. Now figure out all the ‘costs’ of getting out of the box. And there are always ‘costs’, like having to give up friends, or job security, or the good things about your current location. Take your time thinking of the costs, and get them all in your mind. Make a list if there are too many to focus on at one time.

Then imagine yourself out of the box. What will it feel like, what will you be doing? No ‘rose-colored glasses’, just a realistic assessment.

Now compare the costs and what’s it like being out of the box. Is there an obvious winner? If the winner is change, make the change. But just as important, is if the winner is no change. Then stop thinking about it. You have examined the choices and are making the right

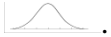
decision. Of course, later new facts may arise and create a different equation. Then you can do the process again.

People Do Not Change – at least not the way you want them to.

Missing this point can lead to spending time with, even marrying, the wrong people.

Try to avoid people who are trying to change you. You can feel this as they are often giving you ‘gentle’ hints on how you can be better at something.

Just as important, do not ‘go after’ someone who ‘will be’ perfect once you get them to change just a couple of things. It’s best to assume that these people will not change the way you want. Then ask the question, ‘if they do not change, do I want this person in my life?’ – Just live with that answer or commit yourself to probably years of struggle with no satisfaction.

The Bell Curve: It looks a little like this  . And most human behavior can be charted on a curve like it. For example IQ scores are like this with the most

people, (the highest part of the curve) being at 100. The curve goes down as we increase (or decrease) the IQ score, so that at about 160 (or 40) we have a very low part of the curve (not many people). A bell curve like this one works to explain things like the ability to hit a baseball, dance to hip hop, etc.

The reason to understand this concept is that it often helps you understand what is going on. Is the big part of the curve right? Like the curve for how dangerous you think marijuana is... or gay marriage. Facts often do not cause the curve to move very quickly.

It is good to know where you are on the curve. Let's say singing, for example. Maybe if you are out on the singing curve where we had the 160 IQ people, maybe then you should spend more time on your singing ability. Conversely, if you are sitting on the middle of the curve, maybe it's best you enjoy other people's singing.

Again and again, you will see this curve as it applies to you and as it applies to the people around you and the world in general.

Relax – laugh: Many people are good at this one. If you have been finding yourself feeling tense, unhappy and under pressure, this is often a great little trick to use to defuse.

To relax, I personally use old movies. I can watch *You've Got Mail* at least once of month and still it relaxes me. Figure out what it is that will relax you, a competitive game of handball with your neighbor is not it, good exercise maybe, but you still need an escape.

Go find it...

Accept reality: Good news is usually easy to accept, so mainly I am talking about bad news here.

You got fired (or even just a warning), your boyfriend is moving out, or that sure fire investment just went to zero. You know the stuff I am talking about.

I do not mean skip the grieving time. Feeling sad about losing someone or something is part of healing. But the faster you accept your new reality, the faster you will make decisions and take actions that will work to bring happiness back to your life. Don't dwell on your

loss. Dwell on what you are going to do now that you have suffered that loss.

Focusing on today rather than yesterday will bring more long-term happiness than spending too much time in the past.

Forgive, Forget, Move On - Don't Let Anyone/Anything Spoil Today or Tomorrow: This is pretty similar to Accept Reality. If you can forgive someone, that's great, if you can forget, that is good too. But even if you cannot forgive or forget, make sure that you 'move on'. That is the most important part.

The most important person to learn how to forgive is yourself. If you have made a mistake, get over it. You cannot go back and undo it. All you can do is learn how to forgive yourself so you can move forward.

You cannot stay happy being mad or frustrated at someone or something. Your boss skipped you over for a promotion and gave it to his cousin, or the guy who golfs with him on weekends or whatever. Maybe you cannot forgive or forget, but you can move on. And what does 'move on' look like? First accept reality. Your boss

really did this thing. Now what do you do? Take your time. This sounds like a big decision, but there's no sense making a decision while you're emotional. Slow down and think about it. Stay or leave or???? After you have all your alternatives figured out, use the 'the box' and hopefully an obvious winner appears, and you can 'move on' (which may mean actually staying at that job... but probably not.)

Once you decide on how to 'move on' you'll start to feel better quickly – and you will be more receptive to the things that do make you happy.

Guilt/Mistakes: A great way to ruin today is feeling guilty about mistakes made in the past. I do not know how to say this any better. The past is over. You cannot change it, so once again accept reality and move on....

That said, the past definitely affects your present and your future, so ignoring the past is not a good plan either.

For example, you dumped your girlfriend for a new one. You realize too late that the old one really was

much better for you. You wish you had never pushed her away... stop... stop wishing you had done things differently. You didn't, so accept reality, check your alternative and move on... even if 'move on' is a desperate attempt to see if she will take you back.

Of course, from her side, this is what it looks like. She made a mistake thinking you were a loyal trustworthy boyfriend. You broke her heart. She is wishing that either she had never met you or you were the kind of boyfriend she really wanted. If you make an attempt to try again, her decision becomes whether to not waste more time on you and get her heart broken all over again or give you a second chance... (My personal advice to her is 'people do not change', you will break her heart again, so 'move on' and let you go, but then who knows....)

Worry: This is the twin sister of Guilt. Simply put, worry is wasting today thinking about bad things that might happen in the future. Pointless. And worse, worry is a great killer of present happiness. Just stop.

This does not mean to throw all caution to the wind and just do whatever you want and the future be damned.

Planning for the future is a perfectly good use for part of today. And by definition, planning is thinking about the future. Buying life insurance, so your children have the money to go to college is planning for a bad event in the future... Living in a house that can withstand an earthquake is probably good planning in San Francisco, but maybe a waste of time in Racine, Wisconsin.

I think you get the difference. Thinking about bad things in the future (worrying) is a waste of time if there is no 'affordable' plan to solve the potential problem...

Who are you? What do you want your life to be about? And who will go with you? This is another of the important keys to True Happiness...

First make an honest assessment of yourself, things you do well, things you do poorly, things you like doing, things you do not like doing. Things like you

really like meeting new people (or not). You love creative cooking, but not everyday cooking. You're good at math, and you are terrible at music. Write this stuff down and take your time doing it.

No wishful thinking here... and no judgments about yourself. If you are 30 pounds overweight... that doesn't mean you can't lose it, it just means right now you are 30 pounds overweight...

Next is what do you want your life to be about? This not a single answer question, as you can be a great mother, a good teacher, a local politician, a South American travel expert and an over 40 singles top ten tennis player in your city. Some of these can be 'big' goals and some can be smaller. And, yes, they will compete with each other for your time.

Now look at how you are spending your time in an average week and average month... Does it have any relationship to your skills? Does it have any relationship to the things you say you like to do? Are you giving your time to the things you say you want your life to be about. If not, why not?

Lastly, find someone who will be compatible with what you want your life to be about. If you do, those moments of happiness will increase... What if the woman described above (the mother, teacher, politician, traveler and tennis player) is dating a guy she met at the tennis club. He is not interested in politics, doesn't much like to travel, and has no children... I am not saying 'no' here, but remember, he is unlikely to change, so on those other important parts of your life you will probably be going it alone...

Will you change what you want your life to be about... probably 'yes'. I think the younger you are, the more often all these changes happen. There is nothing wrong with things changing. They may change for reasons you may not even be aware of. That said, when you change the direction of your life, it can cause major imbalances in the relationships you already have, especially with a spouse... I am not saying to fight changes to those things you know your spouse will not be joining you on, but do note that it can stress relationships and sometimes be the underlying cause of divorce later.

Believe in yourself, be your biggest

cheerleader: This is a hard one for some people. I am not telling you to start bragging to others about your skills or things you have done. The first thing is to believe in yourself, silently to yourself. Every human has things they are better at and worse at than other people.

I love music. I cannot sing a note nor keep a beat going with any instrument. But I did notice that I was good at picking what songs were going to be more popular than others. So whenever I heard a new song with friends, I would tell them what I thought... and I when I was right, I would remind them that I had picked that song. After a while, people started asking me what I thought of a new song... It felt good when they did...

Maybe you have read more about the Civil War than most people, maybe you know about Dilbert. If you cannot find a facet about yourself that you want to cheerlead, pick one out that you can learn. Believe in your ability to do that particular facet well and then focus on it.

Once you have one (or more) things you like about yourself, you will see life expand from there.

Believing in yourself goes a long way toward having self-confidence and ultimately finding True Happiness.

One true friend: Let me make this one very easy. A good dog can be your one true friend. They have the advantage of always listening to you talk and always wanting to be with you no matter what. While dogs are great, it is great if you can find at least one person you can tell anything to with no fear. No fear of being told you are stupid. No fear of being told exactly what you should do. No fear of that friend betraying you. No fear of having that friend abandon you.

These true friends can be somewhat difficult to find. We often marry them. Sometimes we get these people early on in life. If you do, do not let them drift away. Technology makes distance not as much of a factor today. Call, chat, email, send photos.... stay in touch. You will need these friends more than once in your life. "In every life a little rain will fall" – and it will be much easier to get past it with one true friend.

Don't let your goals get in the way of your life:

This often seems counter intuitive. If I am heading toward the things I want my life to be about, how can that be a problem?

One point to make here is to be sure that you are enjoying the process of obtaining any goal you have, and that even if you do not obtain that goal you will feel good about the time you spent on trying to get it...

A second point is that obtaining a goal may not come with the lasting excitement and happiness you might think. It is often true that the journey/process of reaching a goal brings more happiness than the final act of achievement.

A third point is to know what you're missing in the rest of your life while focusing on a goal or two.

It is a one, two, three punch against letting goals dominate your life. Do things that are not 'on point'. Take that trip to Europe before you are 30, even if you cannot 'afford' it. Travel real cheap; it can be done. Take road trips to parts of your country that you have not seen before. Go to the movies (not always waiting for them to show up on TV), go to a play, an opera, the ballet, an art

museum, find a trail to walk on, join a gym with no hope of looking buff. Again the list is endless. Just experience life, before it's over.

One thing I sometimes do is to step back and pretend my life is a book that I am reading. I am the main character in my own book. The question I ask myself at those moments is, 'If I was reading this book, what would I want the main character to do next?' And the answer usually is not go back and work some more overtime or sit home another night watching mindless television.

Money: First, let me say that money is not the root of all evil. Let me also add that money cannot buy happiness (Oh, it can buy a few moments of situational happiness, but like a drug, you have to keep upping the stakes to make that work.)

I used to run a celebrity management company. If one of the bookkeepers was depressed over money, I would ask them, "As a group, who is happier, your clients or your friends?" The answer was nearly always 'They are pretty much the same'.

You need food, health, and safe shelter.

After that, money just buys different things in your life. Which is really more fun, trying to find the best taco place in Los Angeles or the best steak place in New York City? Actually, they both sound like fun to me....

One more thing to know -- Money can destroy happiness. More precisely the effort to get more money is what does the destroying. Don't spend or plan to spend more money than you have. It causes debt, especially credit card debt, the worse kind.

Credit card debt will eventually cause you to 'need' to work more to make more. If you want to work more because you are having so much fun at work, that is great. But working to make money to pay credit card debt means you have headed your life in the wrong direction. Happiness will not be found in credit card debt.

Do what you like doing as often as possible: If this seems like a 'duh' to you, that is good.

It's as simple as it sounds, except that many people can look and see just how few hours they spend each week actually doing what they really like doing. Do the math for the last month, and see how you stack up. It's up to you to decide what is the right amount of time spent on different things and what is the right balance...

Set them free: The 'them' are the people in your life -- your friends, your spouse, your children, your co-workers... everyone around you.

The freeing is your simply letting go of your expectations for them and letting them figure it all out for themselves.

Stop demanding that your daughter become a doctor or your husband make more money at his job. Or your children play soccer or go to the school dance.

You may have noticed that I offer more parent/child examples as in my experience that is the most important time when you need to set someone free.

When you give up your expectations for the people around you, you may be surprised at what decisions they do make, the achievements they

accomplish. They will like you more for cheering them for what they want to do. And in the end, all of this will make you happier...

Don't forget to have fun: Fun comes in many ways. Lying next to a swimming pool doing nothing can be fun. Playing penny-ante poker with friends can be fun. Try seeing a good movie, reading a good book, playing Monopoly, going to a basketball game. There may be more ways to have fun than anything else. The trick is to do them -- Don't just 'plan' to do them, 'talk' about doing them, or 'wait' for the perfect moment to do them.

My personal plan is to try to do some kind of fun activity every day for at least an hour – but that is just me.

Giving and getting: Everyone does both in life. But givers seem to be happier than takers. They may have less 'stuff', but they are never worried that someone else has more than they do, and they are seldom short of people who want to be with them.

A second point here, not to be missed, is that, if possible, spend more of your time with givers than takers. It rubs off, and their spirit and happiness will help yours.

When I mean givers, I do not mean just material things, it's also time (like a friend helping you with your homework when there is nothing in it for that person), and support (like going to your band recital, or reading a poem you wrote).

Real givers never expect anything in return. Their reward is doing something they like to do, helping others.

If possible, be a giver....

Bonus thought...

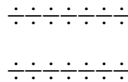
Just say 'Yes': This is not really a happiness key. Maybe it's more like something that will give you a richer life.

The idea is simple. Just say 'yes' to things more often than you are comfortable saying that 'yes'. I do not mean to say 'yes' to things that are bad for you, like

drugs or driving your car recklessly to show friends how cool you are.

I mean say ‘yes’ to things like – a trip to Africa, or the opera (for some people those are the same stretch). Try skiing (at least once), sing in your church choir even if you cannot sing (I did that one, it was fun, and I am sure I was never on the right note. But, the other members of the choir were happy that I tried... only once.)

I have met more interesting and special people and done more interesting things... simply by saying ‘yes’. Try it.



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