

Technically Yours Teamann

By: Tracy Horrell, Western Middle School

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

I am currently in my 3rd year as a principal. My first time as head principal required me to move away from a place that I had lived for 17 years and I had worked in the same building for all 17 of those years. I had grown close with my former coworkers and knew most of them personally. Suddenly, I found myself working extra hard to gain trust and getting to know a new place and a brand new staff. On top of trying to navigate a new school and a new town, I also found myself battling an illness that would require an organ transplant. Stress was overtaking me and happiness wasn't something that I was cultivating for myself.

Statement of Your Wondering:

Recognizing that my stress, both inside and outside of the job, was overtaking my own happiness, I wondered if there were ways that I could intentionally cultivate my own happiness. Would being purposeful with creating opportunities to provide happiness to others and myself lessen the stress and create more happiness within myself?

Methods/Procedures:

Happiness begins at home, so creating opportunities to create that joy before leaving home became the first priority. I began by evaluating my morning routine at home. I took a closer look at the times in which I awoke. I also evaluated my morning breakfast choices. I knew that I need to fuel my body for the day if I were going to be able to physically feel better to start the day.

Next, I researched and found a bingo-like board that included a variety of small opportunities that I could utilize to create happiness in others. I evaluated the various ideas and prioritized the ideas that I felt best fit my own personality and ideas that I thought I could easily maintain with implementation.

Finally, I began a gratitude journal to jot down my daily pockets of happiness throughout the day. This was done nightly, before bed.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

Learning Statement #1:

If you want to be happy at work, you must be happy at home.

I was waking up later than I should have and found myself rushing around in order to help my wife with getting the kids around. I decided to set my outfits aside for the entire week. This allowed me extra time to get ready in the morning because the decision of what to wear was already done.

Breakfast also became a focus. Rather than just a cup (or two) of coffee before I left for work, I began making time for breakfast. Eggs, english muffins, or a smoothie were the few things that I tried incorporate into my mornings.

While I did find that this helped, it became more difficult to get the breakfast made and eaten consistently. My health began to deteriorate and it was physically impossible to eat food that early in the morning.

Learning Statement #2:

The more happiness you bring to others, the more happiness you bring to yourself.

I started by printing out the bingo-like board and keeping it at my desk, where it was visible daily. Each day, I chose one or two ideas to try. Sending a personally hand-written note to a staff member, buying my office staff their favorite coffee, or even just smiling at every person I passed in the hallway were some of the easiest, yet best ways to make others happy.

What I realized, through my gratitude journal, was that making others feel better, in turn, makes me feel better. Seeing others happy, naturally made me happy. It also forced me to carve out small bits of time dedicated to just happiness. Having been an assistant principal for 7 years, I knew how taxing the job would be and also how lonely and, sometimes, unforgiving the job can be. I knew the importance of focusing on the good because the bad can so easily take over, sometimes.

The intentionality of this was the hardest part. Keeping the bingo board visible was important. I had to tape it up beside my computer sometimes to remind me. I also had to cross things off as I completed them so that I saw the daily goal of things that I had yet to complete. It wasn't about completing them all, though. Some of the ideas were better for me and my personality and I tended to recycle some of the ideas that I found success with.

Learning Statement #3:

Health is happiness.

In a nutshell, I learned the hard way that you cannot put your job before your health. The month of March seemed to really take a toll on me. I quickly saw where my health was impeding my ability to do my job effectively. And, as you can imagine, bad decisions make for unhappiness. When I would forget to do something, I would get frustrated with myself, as I'm sure others were frustrated with me. It also caused unneeded stress.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

My research took place during some of the hardest months of my life. When I first began this project, I knew that I was not feeling well, however, I didn't realize to what depth that was linked to my own physical health. Prior to Christmas, my wife was determined to be a living donor for me. Because we both work in Education, we originally decided that the transplant would take place once school was dismissed for the summer. However, my health was quickly diminishing and it was affecting my ability to think clearly and physically make it through the work day. The constant pain and mental fog required us to move the date up to Spring Break. Over Spring Break, I was given a chance for a better life. My wife gave me one of her kidneys and I found myself away from school/work for the next 8 weeks. Those 8 weeks were some of the hardest weeks of my life. But they, in some ways, have also been the best.

Through my recovery, I was able to witness just how supporting my staff was. They were no longer strangers to me. This new community was now surrounding me and my family with so much love and support. Teachers rallied behind me. I received daily texts, emails, phone calls, and visits. For the first 3 weeks upon my return home, someone from the school stopped by with a meal or a card or even root beer floats. (She new how to bring the smile to my face!)

It has been a struggle for me to show just how truly I have appreciated the immense amount of support I have received during this time. My happiness during this time wasn't linked to the meals or the gift cards; rather, my true happiness during this time was hearing how much I was missed by students and staff. It was the texts and emails checking on my well-being. It was the daily visits to just see how I was doing. It was the emails of support from parents.

There's the age-old saying that says, "You never know how much you will miss something until it's gone." Well, I feel that is also true of happiness. You can never truly measure your happiness until you step outside of the role. In the future, I want to continue with the small things and the gratitude journal, but I always want to capitalize on time given for breaks. Fall Break, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Spring Break, and Summer--these are times to recharge, re-energize, and reset the happiness meter.

In the end, happiness is what you choose to make of it. Seeking out happiness and investing in others to cultivate happiness within them will always be something that will make this job more than just a job.

References:

2016 The 30 Day Happy Administrator Challenge, Jan 8th 2016, Amber Teamann, Albemarle PR,
<http://technicallyteamann.com/2016-the-30-day-happy-administrator-challenge-goals-thefirstyear/>.



Happiness Among Stress

By: Tracy Horrell

Background:

- Currently finishing my 3rd year as a principal at Western Middle School
- Prior to that, I had worked in the same building for 17 years.
- New job required me to move to a new town.
- I found myself battling an illness that would require an organ transplant.
- Stress was overtaking me and happiness wasn't something that I was cultivating for myself.

Statement of Wondering:

Are there ways that I could intentionally cultivate my own happiness? Would being purposeful with creating opportunities to provide happiness to others and myself lessen the stress and create more happiness within myself?

Collecting Data

- Started at home: Morning routine was key
 - ◆ Earlier wake up time
 - ◆ Making breakfast a priority

- Todd Whitaker's "Happy Administrator" Board
 - ◆ Prioritized ideas that fit my personality
 - ◆ Checked at least 1 or 2 off each day

- Gratitude Journal
 - ◆ Quickly jotted down something good from my day

Findings

Learning Statement #1:

If you want to be happy at work, you must be happy at home.

Learning Statement #2:

The more happiness you bring to others, the more happiness you bring to yourself.

Learning Statement #3:

Health is happiness.



Next Steps:

1. Make time for self and reflection during the busy school day.
2. Monitor diet and eat healthy.
3. Look for ways to bring happiness to others.

References

Technically Yours Teamann, 2016 The 30 Day Happy Administrator Challenge, Jan 8th 2016, Amber Teamann, Albemarle PR, <http://technicallyteamann.com/2016-the-30-day-happy-administrator-challenge-goals-thefirstyear/>.