

Book Summary:

Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment by Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D
Donna Schilder 10/30/04

My passion for the book Authentic Happiness:

I have passion for the book's premise that if we can identify and utilize our signature strengths in our lives, we will be happier and more fulfilled.

I want to focus on Retirement Life Coaching as a new part of my business, and I believe that lack of use of signature strengths in retirement is part of the reason some people are unhappy, unhealthy, and listless when they retire. They've used some of their signature strengths in their work and when their work is gone, they lose their passion and sense of purpose. I believe I can help people find ways to utilize their signature strengths to achieve an energizing and meaningful retirement. I see retirement as a chance for many people to utilize more of their signature strengths than they did in their work and child rearing years.

In tandem, I have observed that many people see retirement as a time to devote themselves to their pleasures and, as a result, they get lethargic and depressed. They are getting too much of a good thing, and they are getting too little gratification in their lives.

Three Big Ideas and from Authentic Happiness and Their Implications

1. We have a chance to be happier if we understand the difference between pleasure and gratification and cultivate each in different ways

I think it will be helpful for retirees to understand the difference between pleasure and gratification, so that they can effectively increase both during their retirement.

Pleasures are fleeting positive raw feelings that habituate easily. Pleasures are about the senses and emotions. They are often brought on by physical, social, or environmental factors (e.g., eating ice cream or feeling warm rain on your face).

Gratifications, on the other hand, produce a state of flow, total absorption, and suspension of consciousness through the pursuit of a noble or higher purpose (e.g., helping someone find a new job, running a marathon, learning to sing a song, or writing a book). Gratification is the opposite of pleasure in that it creates meaning and blocks emotion.

Pleasure consumes the moment; gratification invests in the future. Pleasure is easy; gratification is hard-won.

2. Enhancing Pleasure in Our Lives

I believe that habituation of pleasure is part of what creates a negative experience for some who retire. All of the sudden they are able to lie on the couch and watch television or read as much as they want. They do it constantly, and soon they are desensitized to their pleasures.

You can avoid habituation by spreading out the instances of pleasure in your life so that you experience them more intensely.

You can also enhance your experience of pleasure by savoring it. This means having a conscious focus on experiencing pleasure. It requires attention to the present and not thinking about the future. Techniques for savoring include: sharing, memory-building, self-congratulation, sharpening perceptions, and absorption.

Mindfulness is another way to increase the pleasure in your life. Mindfulness is careful observation of the present in a slow state of mind. Meditation is an affective way of increasing mindfulness, but just slowing down and sensing your surroundings can enhance mindfulness.

3. Increasing Gratification in Our Lives

Gratification is characterized by challenge, concentration, goals, feedback, effortless involvement, sense of control, and suspension of the awareness of time and self.

I have witnessed retirees who are unbalanced. They focus their attention on seeking pleasure and devote little energy toward gratification and higher purpose.

I will help my Retirement Transitions clients to increase their gratification by helping them select activities that employ their signature strengths.

The most important question emanating from this book is:

When do you find yourself doing exactly what you want to do?

The answer to this question is your first step toward increasing the sense of gratification in your life.