Strength to Strength
Happiness and Success at every Stage of Life

Arthur Brooks & Len Schlesinger
Leadership & Happiness at HBS

• Launched in spring 2020 as a 7-week EC course
• Repeated in spring 2021 x2 sections; Queue: 400+
• Material highlighted in alumni events
• Student Association incorporating material into wraparound student experiences
• Other business schools and companies inquiring about the curriculum
• Adoption by EdX for a MOOC and executive education
Class value proposition

- **UNDERSTAND**: The most effective leaders do not leave happiness up to chance
- **APPLY**: They manage their own levels of affect and life satisfaction for higher levels of effectiveness and career endurance
- **SHARE**: They manage to the well-being of those they lead for both ethical and practical reasons
Teaching method

• Read the primary research
• Discuss the neuroscience and behavioral science
• Translate into understandable language
• Create a practical strategy to improve personal behavior and leadership practice
• Share with colleagues and friends

Figure 1: Face Conditions (L-R) Neutral, Non-Duchenne smile, Duchenne smile
The General Happiness Scale

In general, I consider myself:

1 - Not a very happy person

7 - A very happy person
Class map General Happiness Scale (SWB)

Class average: 5.1

How happy are you? Let’s take a look!
Today’s agenda

An application of the L&H teaching algorithm to our current lives
THE FIRST QUESTION:
What can I expect in terms of happiness as I get older?

THE REAL QUESTION:
What can I do to get happier?
FIRST HALF + SECOND HALF

LIFE SATISFACTION

AGE

Without Controls

With Controls
FIRST HALF + SECOND HALF

![Graph showing life satisfaction over age with and without controls. The graph indicates a peak in life satisfaction around age 65, with a dip before and after. The x-axis represents age (16 to 88), and the y-axis represents life satisfaction (6.8 to 8.6). The graph is labeled with ages 53 and 65, highlighting significant points.](image-url)
LESSON 1.

Happiness usually declines and then rises, but contains a lot of uncertainty, especially at the end, and depends on our actions.

Goal: Get on the upper path, avoid the lower path.

How?
Who follows the lower path?
The burden of high achievers: Feelings of failure and lower psychological well-being (especially later in later life)

Carole Holahan & Charles Holahan
University of Texas at Austin
International Journal of Aging and Human Development (1999)
“I am rather despondent about myself. I have not the heart or strength at my age to begin any investigation lasting years, which is the only thing which I enjoy.”

Age 57
Two lessons
1. Decline is inevitable
2. The higher you go, the further you fall
LESSON 2.

Decline is inevitable, and the higher you rise on your success curve, the further you seem to fall

Question: Is there only one success curve?
Raymond Cattell’s Two Intelligences

• FLUID INTELLIGENCE: BRAINS
  • Complex problem solving
  • Working memory
  • Creativity and innovation
  • Decreases rapidly after 40

• CRYSTALLIZED INTELLIGENCE: WISDOM
  • Accumulated knowledge and experience
  • Wisdom and judgment
  • Teaching ability
  • Increases after 40, and continues to old age
FLUID VS. CRYSTALLIZED INTELLIGENCE

BELBASE, SANZENBACHER, AND GILLIS (2015)
BETTER WITH AGE

Creative Potential Half-Life

- Poets: 40.4
- Historians: 64.7

SIMONTON (1997)
“The aim and final end of all music is nothing less than the glorification of God and the enjoyment of man.”

Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750
LESSON 3.

Early on, rely on **fluid intelligence**, the basis of **innovation**

Later, rely on **crystallized intelligence**—wisdom—and focus on **instruction**

*Ask: What am I doing to share my wisdom?*
What other changes should I make?
Art, unstarted
(I can’t get no) satisfaction

The Hedonic Treadmill
Satisfaction ≠ Haves
Satisfaction = Haves ÷ Wants

“We need to learn how to want what we have, not to have what we want in order to get steady and stable happiness.”

-Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama
LESSON 4

Early on, add to build your life and career
Later, subtract to find your true self

Ask: What do I need to take away this year?
AM I ALONE ON THE JOURNEY?
He is like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, and who prospers in all he does.

Psalm 1:3
LESSON 5.

My true self is not the sum of my achievements. It is the sum of the love for the people in my life.

Ask: Am I surrounded by the people I love?
1. We can attain the upper path of happiness.
2. Decline is normal, and most noticeable if you are successful.
3. Find the second curve of success—become a teacher.
4. Take things away to find your true self.
5. Don’t go it alone.
For more…

• Contact us
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• Read and listen
  • Coming February 15: “From Strength to Strength”
  • Arthur’s “How to Build a Life” column in *The Atlantic*
  • Podcast: “How to Build a Happy Life”

You make this work possible
Thank you!