

Life, Liberty and the **Pursuit of Happiness**

By Julie Fuimano, Executive Coach

The Constitution of the United States affirms that each person is endowed with the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In this three part series, we are exploring what these three rights mean for us. In the first part of the series, we discussed the difference between living an extraordinary life and struggling to survive. In part two, we explored our right to liberty and our freedom to choose. In this article, we explore what it means to pursue happiness.

Benjamin Franklin said, "You have the right to pursue happiness but you have to catch it for yourself." What he means is that although you have the right to pursue what makes you happy, you have to determine what happiness means to you and go after it.

The pursuit of happiness may or may not actually make you happy. Many people miss the fundamental truth of what happiness is. People who pursue happiness through external means including fame, fortune, material accumulations, or the right job or mate, soon find that once they've attained the thing they thought they wanted, happiness does not come or if it does, it does not last. They may have experienced feelings of accomplishment or perhaps what they truly enjoy is the chase itself, which means that once caught, the thrill is over. It is often our disappointments or tribulations that force us to ask and answer the questions, "Is this all there is? And What makes me happy?" You cannot pursue happiness if you don't know what it is you want.

The fact is that happiness is a state of being. It is something you are. Therefore, you cannot find happiness outside you. It will not be found in the attainment of goods or material things, or in finding the "right" person or community. You cannot have enough stuff to make you happy. Happiness is only to be found within you. It is experienced in your travels along your life journey. It is in this moment, right now, if you choose it. So there is a distinction to be made between the "pursuit" of happiness and the "inner experience" of happiness.

Perhaps what the founding fathers meant was that you have the right to live your life in a

way that brings you joy and happiness. Interesting that they identified "Life and Liberty" first before the "Pursuit of Happiness", isn't it? Can you be happy if you are struggling to survive? And can you pursue a life that makes you happy if you are not free to make choices that honor you?

If your energies are focused on surviving or swimming around in the muck - guilt, fear, people-pleasing, burdens from your past, etc. - then it is very difficult to have room for happiness, contentment or peace. You must achieve a level of survival to free yourself to be your authentic self. This is a state free from the self bondages and other-imposed prisons. It is then you are free to create environments that will bring you joy or support your happiness. You build a life where each day you choose to spend your time in ways that add value to you and make you feel good. Some of these things may include doing work that is meaningful, living in the geographic location that best serves you, respecting your body in every way, mastering and maximizing the use of your mind and spending time only with people who support your best you. This is the path to a great life and is the prescription for happiness. We create external environments that support our ability to thrive as a human being. This naturally leads to happiness. In the end what makes us most happy in our lives is living a life with meaning, knowing that we have used all of the gifts we were given to do all we could to make the world a better place.

What gets in the way of your pursuit of happiness? In my work with clients, several obstacles have been identified including complacency, ambivalence, never stopping to ask if they were happy, not knowing what makes them happy, always looking to someone else for the answer to their puzzle, people-pleasing, putting everyone before themselves, hiding in addictions such as work or caretaking, and thinking they "should" or are "supposed to" be doing a particular thing without ever stopping to question it. In other words, they are programmed and their beliefs no longer serve them. One client spent so much of her life, time and energy caring for others, she admitted, "I have become an empty shell who does the laundry."





Are you caring for others first because it is all you know or what you were taught? Are you scared to care for yourself because you think it's wrong? Or perhaps you feel guilty about challenging the 'rules' by which you've been conditioned? Are you fearful of what others might think if you

start to do things that bring you joy? ("What will they ever do without me?") Many people hide in doing for others because it's easier to look outside yourself than to do what is best for you.

In the book, *The Journey Called YOU*, you learn the art of self-wonder and take a journey within so that you can identify what happiness means to you and chart your course to achieving it. The book also takes you on a journey through the obstacles that life places in your path so that you can achieve peace and the freedom to just be you.

You deserve to be happy. You have the right to be happy. You need to explore what happiness means to you. You also need to let go of everything that impedes your experience of happiness. You make choices about how to think about life and events. Everything is a learning experience. We create our own unhappiness when we refuse to let go, when we insist upon attempting to control things over which we have no control, and when we are not honest with ourselves about reality. And when we create unhappiness, we are not free, and we struggle to get by.

I want you to discover happiness, to enjoy all the wonders that life has to offer. Be willing to ask the questions about what brings you happiness and joy and go catch some happiness. It is everywhere along your journey. It's not a destination; it's a state of mind. To fully express who you are, to engage in activities that support your values and maximize your strengths, and to be with others who stretch you and support you to be your best, this is happiness. This is my wish for you. Happy living!



Want to explore what happiness would look like for you? Julie Fuimano, MBA, BSN, RN is an Executive Coach working with leaders to be more emotionally intelligent and masterful communicators so they can better navigate through a sea of politics, assess and diagnose difficult situations, and deal with conflict gracefully. She facilitates groups to help build high performance teams that align behaviors with the organizational vision and values, cultivate cultures of excellence and positively impact the bottom line. Julie is the author of "*The Journey Called YOU: A Roadmap to Self-Discovery and Acceptance*," the manual for personal leadership and is available for speaking engagements. To explore how coaching would work for you or your organization, call (610) 277-2726. Sign up for our e-newsletter or purchase your copy of the book at www.nurturingyoursuccess.com or write to JulieFuimano@phillyfitmagazine.com.