

My heart is in the Work. –Andrew Carnegie

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/opinion/david-brooks-the-small-happy-life.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=opinion-c-col-left-region®ion=opinion-c-col-left-region&WT.nav=opinion-c-col-left-region&r=0>

The Small, Happy Life DAVID BROOKS

A few weeks ago, [I asked readers to send in essays](#) describing their purpose in life and how they found it. A few thousand submitted contributions, and [many essays are online](#). I'll write more about the lessons they shared in the weeks ahead, but one common theme surprised me.

I expected most contributors would follow the commencement-speech clichés of our high-achieving culture: dream big; set ambitious goals; try to change the world. In fact, a surprising number of people found their purpose by going the other way, by pursuing the small, happy life.

Elizabeth Young once heard the story of a man who was asked by a journalist to show his most precious possession. The man, Young wrote, “was proud and excited to show the journalist the gift he had been bequeathed. A banged up tin pot he kept carefully wrapped in cloth as though it was fragile. The journalist was confused, what made this dingy old pot so valuable? ‘The message,’ the friend replied. The message was ‘we do not all have to shine.’ This story resonated deeply. In that moment I was able to relieve myself of the need to do something important, from which I would reap praise and be rewarded with fulfillment. My vision cleared.”

Young continues, “I have always wanted to be effortlessly kind. I wanted to raise children who were kind.” She notes that among those who survived the Nazi death camps, a predominant quality she noticed was generosity.

“Perhaps,” she concludes, “the mission is not a mission at all. ... Everywhere there are tiny, seemingly inconsequential circumstances that, if explored, provide meaning” and chances to be generous and kind. Spiritual and emotional growth happens in microscopic increments.

Kim Spencer writes, “I used to be one of the solid ones — one of the people whose purpose was clearly defined and understood. My purpose was seeing patients and ‘saving lives.’ I have melted into the in-between spaces, though. Now my purpose is simply to be the person ... who can pick up the phone and give you 30 minutes in your time of crisis. I can give it to you today and again in a few days. ... I can edit your letter. ... I can listen to you complain about your co-worker. ... I can look you in the eye and give you a few dollars in the parking lot. I am not upset if you cry. I am no longer drowning, so I can help keep you afloat with a little boost. Not all of the time,

but every once in a while, until you find other people to help or a different way to swim. It is no skin off my back; it is easy for me.”

Terence J. Tollaksen wrote that his purpose became clearer once he began to recognize the “decision trap”: “This trap is an amazingly consistent phenomena whereby ‘big’ decisions turn out to have much less impact on a life as a whole than the myriad of small seemingly insignificant ones.”

Tollaksen continues, “I have always admired those goal-oriented, stubborn, successful, determined individuals; they make things happen, and the world would be lost without them.” But, he explains, he has always had a “small font purpose.”

“I can say it worked for me. I know it sounds so Midwest, but it’s been wonderful. I have a terrific wife, 5 kids, friends from grade school and high school, college, army, friends locally, and sometimes, best of all, horses, dogs, and cats. Finally, I have a small industrial business that I started and have run for 40 years based on what I now identify as principles of ‘Pope Francis capitalism.’ ”

Hans Pitsch wrote: “At age 85, the question of meaning in my life is urgent. The question of the purpose of my life is another matter. World War II and life in general have taught me that outcomes from our actions or inactions are often totally unpredictable and random.”

He adds, “I am thankful to be alive. I have a responsibility to myself and those around me to give meaning to my life from day to day. I enjoy my family (not all of them) and the shrinking number of old friends. You use the term ‘organizing frame’ in one’s life. I am not sure if I want to be framed by an organizing principle, but if there is one thing that keeps me focused, it’s the garden. Lots of plants died during the harsh winter, but, amazingly, the clematises and the roses are back, and lettuce, spinach and tomatoes are thriving in the new greenhouse. The weeping cherry tree in front of the house succumbed to old age. I still have to plant a new tree this year.”

This scale of purpose is not for everyone, but there is something beautiful and concrete and well-proportioned about tending that size of a garden.□

http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/style/2015/05/19/tips-increase-happiness/cGRqb6QAawfzq00nYBEyhP/story.html?p1=Article_Related_Box_Article#

10 tips to increase happiness

- 1. Keep a “gratitude journal.”** Record the small joys of everyday life
- 2. Make a “gratitude visit.”** Write a letter expressing your appreciation for what someone else has done to change and shape your life, then read it to that person.

- 3. Change your behavior.** Get enough sleep, exercise; read a book you love; spend time outside; meditate.
- 4. Smile (even when you aren't happy).** The mere act of smiling triggers physiological responses in your body in positive ways.
- 5. Perform random acts of kindness.** Volunteer; donate to a charity; give a gift to a friend.
- 6. Find "your match."** Figure out your strengths and find ways to use them (in your job, in your community, in your family).
- 7. Keep things in perspective.** Avoid over-reacting to the many lesser stresses of daily life.
- 8. Spend money on the right things.** Focus on things like experiences (travel, tickets to the big game or a concert) and less on belongings (car, watch, purse).
- 9. Avoid comparisons.** Comparing your own life to those of others (especially as portrayed in holiday letters and on social media) can lead to unwarranted depression and loneliness.
- 10. Build and maintain close relationships.** Our relationships with family members, romantic partners, and friends have a substantial influence on our own happiness.

CATHERINE A. SANDERSON

http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/2015/05/18/the-happiness-professor/2j2vzwMQBGZbv6kWAiGFRJ/story.html?s_campaign=email_BG_TodaysHeadline#

Psychologist Catherine Sanderson practices what she preaches

Happiness can be elusive, more so than fame or fortune for many. Successful people are not necessarily happy. But happy people are more likely to be successful. And healthier. And they tend to live longer.

Interest in the subject has soared — even the United Nations issues World Happiness Reports. It is a matter of intense study by social scientists. Among them, Catherine A. Sanderson carries a megaphone so large that she is often introduced as the “Professor of Happiness.”

On many given Sundays, the Amherst College psychologist roams stages in far-flung cities, enlightening and delighting crowds of baby boomers with her rapid-fire delivery, self-deprecating asides, empirical data laced with humor, and PowerPoint lists of what makes us happy. Like close friends. Shopping — for others, not ourselves. Both eating and exercising. Nature.

Conversely, Sanderson points to what can make us unhappy. Money, for sure. Children and marriage, for instance. Even weather: In many polls, North Dakotans are happier than Californians. Really.

Oh, both religion and sex do make us happy, though Sanderson admonishes: “Not at the same time.”

Sanderson wants to help put happiness within reach of her audiences and her students too — and in so doing, make herself happier. It is her consuming passion, and its tenets help define how she lives her own life. She’s studied relationships and happiness for two decades. And her work is driven by lessons she learned from her mother’s premature death 11 years ago.

She is nothing if not in a hurry. Sanderson speaks at a rate that approaches 200 words a minute, perhaps because she has so much to say and do. If happiness is defined by constant motion, then Sanderson, who is 46, must be overjoyed.

On Amherst’s easygoing campus, she exceeds every speed limit. She teaches full-time. She has a long queue of students who have chosen her as their adviser. She makes evening visits to dorms to talk to small groups of students about how to start and nurture happy relationships. One night last month, she stopped by two dorms on a Monday evening, expecting perhaps 20 students in all. There were 22 at the first session, and 30 at the second.

Sanderson, whose mother died of ovarian cancer 11 years ago, draws on that experience to host a cancer support group at her home. She ran this year’s search for Amherst’s new athletic director, and she is the college’s faculty liaison to the NCAA. And there is family: She and her husband, Bart Hollander, have two sons, 16 and 14; and a daughter, 10.

In her spare time, she teaches aerobics at a local gym. It is the only place she’s called Cathy.

“In the faculty dining hall, you can hear her voice clearly,” says Catherine Epstein, the faculty dean at Amherst. “When you get to Amherst, you quickly hear about Catherine Sanderson.”

One thing Epstein said women scholars learn early on: It is inadvisable to have children during the arduous six-year tenure process. But Sanderson had her first two children, and was pregnant with her third, by the time she was awarded tenure in 2003. So, Epstein said, she too had three children while seeking tenure.

For Sanderson, the academic elements of happiness and close relationships also animate her private life, she says. And she seems taken aback when she is asked whether she is happy. “I couldn’t give these talks if I wasn’t happy,” she says, frowning. “If I wasn’t living this, it would be hypocritical.”

As a doctoral student in psychology at Princeton in the 1990s, her research focused on relationship satisfaction and health behaviors. When she landed at Amherst in 1997, it was to teach Close Relationships. And also health psychology, at a time when researchers were finding increasing evidence that happy people are healthier.

The exclamation point on her popular lectures on happiness is her list of 10 suggestions for increasing happiness — all empirically based. Some, like exercise and reading good books, had long been part of her life. She has adopted others because she found the research on their efficacy compelling.

And then there is her drive. Her mother, Judith Sanderson, was only 57 when she died, just four months after her diagnosis. “Her death was a clear reminder to me that life is short and unpredictable, and that finding ways to create a happy and meaningful life is extremely important,” Sanderson says.

“I love doing the happiness talk in part because it reminds me of what makes people truly happy,” Sanderson says. Simply giving her speech on happiness, she adds, makes her happy.

Which dovetails neatly with one of the main points she makes to her out-of-town audiences: “The best way to cheer yourself up is to cheer someone else up.”

Not surprisingly, Sanderson is among the most popular teachers at Amherst. Her classes fill up rapidly. Many former students invite her to their weddings, and later on send her baby pictures.

Which is how Steven Schragis found her. Schragis, who founded [One Day University](#) nine years ago, seeks out the country’s best university professors to speak to crowds of adults, mostly baby boomers, on Sundays in hotel ballrooms around the country. (In Boston, the Globe co-sponsors the events.)

To attract those paying customers, Schragis has roamed the campuses of the nation’s top colleges and universities, recruiting professors — 187 so far — based on student ratings. That’s how he found Sanderson.

“She is the perfect example of what we look for — an incredibly talented professor who can entertain as much as she can educate,” Schragis said. Of the 187 professors, he ranks Sanderson among the top five.

Of course, audiences delight in her subject matter. When Sanderson appeared in front of an older audience, mostly retirees, in Naples on Feb. 8, she had some welcome news for them: People in their 70s are happier than college students.

And she keeps them laughing. Her talks, to both students and boomers, are sprinkled with interesting asides, rooted in scientific research but delivered off-handedly — “Married women who are happy are less likely to cheat. Those who do cheat are more likely to be unhappy. Men? They cheat at the same rate whether they are happy or not.”

Sanderson's onstage chops may be partly genetic. Her father, Allen R. Sanderson, teaches economics at the University of Chicago, where he has long been among that university's most popular professors.

At Amherst, she doesn't teach a course in happiness per se. But the ingredients for her traveling roadshow are drawn from several psychology courses she teaches, including one on close relationships and another on the psychology of good and evil.

It is the subject of close relationships that has made her a big draw for her informal evening meetings with students, many of whom find forming such ties among the most daunting challenges of their college years.

Students lounge on couches, as Sanderson drills down into her list of how to start, build, and nourish close relationships. And those include one critical step that many shy away from. When you find someone you like, she says, you have to send a signal to that person — a step that risks rejection and requires you to become vulnerable.

She knows whereof she speaks. When she was a at Stanford, she and a fellow student became very good friends. "But there was no romantic stuff," she said.

In the fall of her senior year, she decided she really liked him, that "there was a connection." So she took a chance and told him so. It went badly. She remembers what he said: "No, I don't feel that way about you. I'm really not attracted to you."

So she dropped the issue — until the spring. She tried again. Same result.

"So I said to myself, 'OK, fine. I'm done.' " The following January, Sanderson invited him to dinner. "I opened the door, and he took me into his arms and gave me this totally romantic, open-mouthed kiss. And I was like, 'What is that?' And he goes, 'I love you.' And I said, 'I know. I know.' "

Sanderson paused, smiled, and then added: "And that's my husband."

Some students whooped in delight. Others clapped. Most laughed. And off in the right corner, one woman student sat quietly, smiling through tears of happiness.