

Proposal Professionals and the Pursuit of *Happiness*

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From the ancient Greeks to the present, we have debated the meaning of happiness. Today, there is a renewed interest in this subject from economists, political scientists, and psychologists. What makes people happy, and how might proposal professionals achieve a feeling of well-being inside and outside the workplace?

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is an elusive but widely used word. If you ask people what they want more than anything else in their lives, most will simply answer, “happiness.” And if you ask parents what they want more than anything else

for their children, the answer is very similar—“to be happy.” Happiness is even enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, which grandly announced that it was self-evident that all men were “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” that included “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Happiness may be an intangible

concept, but, for the past 2,000 years or so, philosophers, economists, and psychologists have energetically discussed and debated the meaning of this word. Over the past decade, there has been an explosion of research into what makes people happy that should be of great interest to proposal professionals. We all want to be happy, but many of us probably wonder whether there is any compatibility between achieving happiness and the day-to-day pressures and anxieties associated with the fast-paced and high-stakes world of proposal development.

To explore how proposal professionals might achieve happiness inside and outside the workplace, I first will briefly examine changing concepts of happiness from their origins to the present. Then I will summarize some of key findings about what makes people happy from the fields of economics, political science, and psychology. Finally I will apply these findings to the field of proposal development.

My examination of the concept of happiness is politically non-partisan and unrelated

to upcoming elections, political parties, political candidates, political belief systems, or legislation. My analysis, however, will address contemporary social, political, and economic conditions in the United States, and I will propose alterations to the way we now live and work that have political implications.

A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS

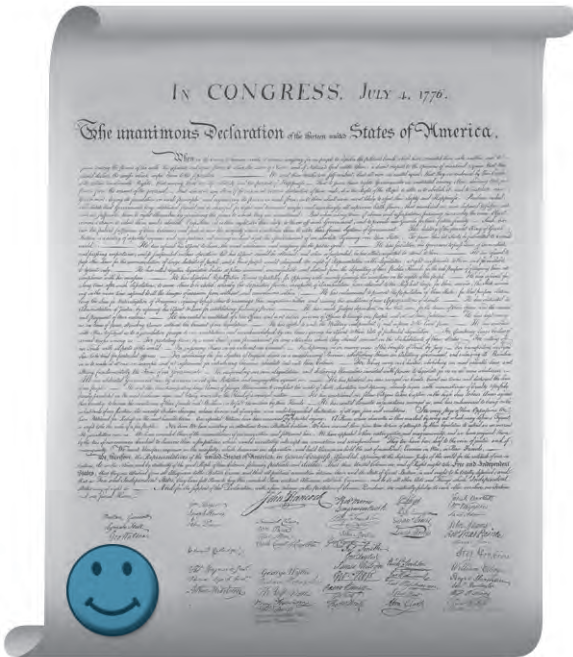
The meaning of happiness has changed dramatically from the ancient Greeks to the present. Greek thinkers differed about the meaning of happiness. Some of them thought our lives depended on the fortune or wrath of capricious gods, while others considered life cruel and unpredictable, and thus happiness could only be reckoned at the end of life.

In Athens, philosophers began arguing that individuals might be able to attain happiness. Socrates probably was the first major thinker to argue that individuals could achieve happiness, a “powerful and unpredictable force,” if they pursued a life of virtue, which to him was the highest aim of life. Aristotle, Plato’s most famous pupil, agreed with Socrates. The Romans followed Aristotle in arguing that happiness was the virtue of a well-balanced person.

The early Christians concurred with their pagan predecessors that true happiness was the “gift of God,” in the words of St. Augustine, but they doubted whether most people could achieve it on earth. Throughout the Middle Ages, Christians considered happiness only attainable in paradise or at the end of time. Since the Fall, unhappiness was the natural condition of a sinful humanity.

As Renaissance thinkers rediscovered Aristotle and classical thought, however, they began re-evaluating the potential for happiness in this life more positively. The concept of happiness, however, only became fully rehabilitated during the 18th century Enlightenment when thinkers boldly argued that suffering was not an inevitable consequence of life. Rather, happiness was a natural right that everyone might attain.

The French Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) heralded this intellectual and political revolution when it



proclaimed that government should strive for the “happiness of everyone.” Four years later, the new French constitution stated that the “goal of society is common happiness.” By the end of the 18th century, the concept of happiness had developed into a powerful democratic appeal with its emphasis on earthly contentment.

The goal of happiness became increasingly popular during the 19th century. Throughout this period, happiness lost its traditional association with virtue and instead became equated with economic advancement and increased opportunity.

Our attitudes about happiness have basically remained unchanged since the last century. In national and international surveys, most people indicate that they believe in happiness, even if they have trouble defining it. As Vladimir and Estragon plaintively lament in Samuel Beckett’s famous play, *Waiting for Godot* (1953):

“Vladimir: Say you are, even if it’s not true.

Estragon: What am I to say?

Vladimir: Say, I am happy.

Estragon: I am happy.

Vladimir: So am I.

Estragon: So am I.

Vladimir: We are happy.

Estragon: We are happy. (Silence.) What do we do now, now that we are happy?”

Estragon has posed an important question. Now that happiness is available to everyone, what does it mean today, and how are we supposed to attain it?

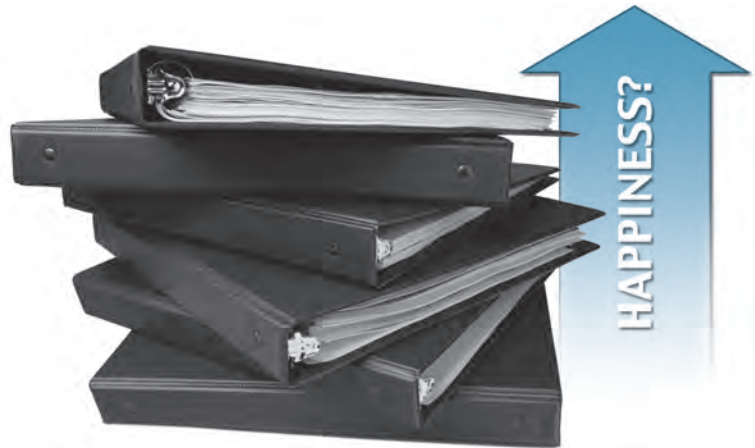
MEASURING HAPPINESS

Although happiness means different things to different people, most of us equate it with joy, exuberance, satisfaction, well-being, and peace of mind. While happiness is a completely subjective feeling, it can be measured with reliability and validity on two different kinds of self-rated surveys. Surveys about happiness focus on short-term situations while surveys about life satisfaction take a much longer view. The World Values Survey, the European Values Survey, the US Social Capital Benchmark Survey, and surveys in individual countries provide us with detailed data about individuals’ feelings of

happiness and life satisfaction.

For example, the US General Social Survey has asked the following question about happiness almost every year since 1972: “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days. Would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” In the World Values Survey, respondents are asked to provide a numerical answer from 1 (dissatisfied) to 10 (satisfied) to the following question: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” These same surveys also ask very specific questions about what makes respondents feel happy.

These studies have gathered an immense amount of demographic data about such categories as age, sex, and occupation. One survey in 1965 involved 23,875 people in 11 countries, while another examined data from 163,538 respondents in 16 countries from 1980 to 1986. They provide us with considerable information about the relationship between demography and subjective well-being.



Today, we also can measure happiness through certain types of brain activity by correlating EEG measurements with feelings. Positive feelings are directly correlated with increased electrical activities in the left front brain while negative feelings produce increased electrical activity in the right front brain. Even in newborn babies, happy activities, such as sucking on a pacifier, set off electrical activity in the left front brain while unhappy activities, such as sucking on a pacifier with a sour taste, produce the same result in the right front brain.

This pattern remains constant through adulthood. People with active left front sides

of their brains smile more and report more positive feelings and memories than adults with active right front brains. Many happy people probably have a brain chemistry that is conducive to happiness and biological parents with a predisposition to happiness. Because about half of our personality traits derive from our genetic inheritance, biology and luck play an important role in our pursuit of happiness.

The study of the human brain confirms two important characteristics of happiness. First, happiness can be measured objectively by certain kinds of brain activity. Second, what people think they feel and what people actually feel about happiness is really the same thing.

The World Values Survey measured trends in happiness levels in 24 countries from 1946 to 2007. The most extensive data comes from the United States, and it shows that from 1946 to 2006 the level of happiness in the general population has not increased. However, a subset of the data indicates a slight downward trend from 1946 to 1980 and a slight rising trend thereafter. Britain has a similar profile. In addition, the percentage of Americans who report being “Very Happy” has been slowly declining.

Other countries show a rising trend in happiness. The places with the most steeply rising levels of happiness are India, Ireland, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and South Korea, while countries with rising levels of happiness include Argentina, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. Three countries—the United States, Switzerland, and Norway—show no changes in levels of happiness, while four countries—Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Germany—show a slight downward trend.

In general, people in wealthy countries are more likely to report greater subjective well-being than people in poorer countries. These nations also have other important characteristics in common—human rights, equality between people, political stability, and high levels of interpersonal trust.

The World Values Survey and other studies enable us to determine what makes people happy in the US. According to Table 1, which

is based on a survey of 900 working women in Texas, on a 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) scale, women rated sex the highest and commuting the lowest activity. Working ranked just above commuting on the bottom of the scale.

Activity	Average Level of Happiness*
Sex	4.7
Socializing	4.0
Relaxing	3.9
Praying/Worshipping/ Meditating	3.8
Eating	3.8
Exercising	3.8
Watching Television	3.6
Shopping	3.2
Preparing Food	3.2
Talking on the Telephone	3.1
Taking Care of my Children	3.0
Computer/E-mail/Internet	3.0
Housework	3.0
Working	2.7
Commuting	2.6

*Scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Table 1. Working Women in Texas Rank Happiness Levels of Daily Activities

In Table 2 (previous page), these same women ranked their levels of happiness while interacting with different people. Socializing with friends and family ranked the highest while being alone and talking to their bosses produced the lowest levels of happiness on scale of a 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest).

Interacting Activity	Average Level of Happiness*
Friends	3.7
Relatives	3.4
Spouses/Partner	3.3
My Children	3.3
Clients/Customers	2.8
Co-workers	2.8
Being Alone	2.7
Boss	2.4

*Scale of 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest)

Table 2. Interaction and Happiness Levels Among Working Women in Texas

The US General Social Survey asks people how happy they are and what parts of their lives produce different levels of happiness. Based on their answers, we can identify seven factors in the United States that greatly affect people's level of happiness. In Table 3, the first five factors are listed in descending order of importance.

Factors
Family Relationships
Financial Situation
Work
Community and Friends
Health
Personal Freedom (Important but Unranked)
Personal Values (Important but Unranked)

Table 3. Major Factors Affecting Individual Happiness in Order of Importance

The results of the US General Social Survey have been duplicated in other national surveys and in other countries. Family relationships and the quality of our private lives are the key factors that affect our level of happiness and sense of well-being. This can be demonstrated by looking at Table 4, which is based on 2003 data from more than 90,000 people in 46 countries. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), respondents ranked events that decreases their happiness. The events that elicited the highest ratings were separated (rather than married), unemployed (rather than employed), and health.

This data demonstrates that family relationships account for substantial differences in levels of happiness. Unemployment is disastrous for many individuals not so much because of the loss of income but because of the loss of work, which destroys self-respect and the social networks created on the job. Finally, people care greatly about their health, although healthy individuals tend to overestimate the loss of happiness that people actually experience from serious medical conditions, with the exceptions of chronic pain and mental illness.

Event	Fall in Happiness*
Financial Situation	
Family Income down by one-third	2
Family Relationships	
Divorced (rather than married)	5
Separated (rather than married)	8
Widowed (rather than married)	4
Never Married	4.5
Cohabiting (rather than married)	2
Work	
Unemployed (rather than employed)	6
Job Insecurity (rather than security)	3
Community and Friends	
"In general, people can be trusted" (percentage saying yes down by 50 percent)	1.5
Health	
Subjective health down 1 point on a 5-point scale	6
Personal Freedom	
Quality of Government	5
Personal Values	
"God is important in my life" (you say no rather than yes)	3.5

*Scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest)

Table 4. Effects of Events on Individual Happiness

CAN MONEY BUY HAPPINESS?

Until recently, economists assumed that a person's material circumstances drastically affected his or her subjective well-being. This has translated into the popular notion that money can buy happiness. However, recent studies by economists have refined this assumption about the relationship between wealth and subjective well-being.

It is true that regions and countries with the highest standards of living in the world—Western Europe, Scandinavia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand—tend to score highest on happiness surveys. It also is true that within countries, there are differences in perceptions of happiness that are correlated with income.

As Table 5 indicates, in the United States 45 percent of respondents in the top quarter of income indicated that they were “Very Happy” as opposed to 33 percent in the bottom quarter. While only 4 percent of the top quarter stated that they were “Not Too Happy,” the figure increased more than three times to 14 percent for the bottom quarter.

In Britain, comparable figures were 40 percent and 29 percent in the “Very Happy” category and 6 percent and 12 percent in the “Not Too Happy” category. Within a given country, people who earn more money usually are happier than those far below them in income. This trend supports the contention of Woody Allen that “Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons.”

However, there are limits to the amount of happiness that money can buy, and it diminishes as individuals earn more income. Although per capita incomes have changed dramatically, levels of happiness as measured by surveys have not appreciably changed.

Since 1950, living standards have doubled in the United States, but the percentage of people in the “Very Happy” category has not increased. In Japan and Britain, the same is true. It seems that when people become wealthier in comparison to others in the same country, they become happier. But when countries become richer, the aggregate level of happiness does not increase.

Economists provide several explanations for this seemingly puzzling trend. First, they have argued that increases in income beyond an average per capita income of \$10,000 per year (in the United States, average per capita income is \$37,500) have little affect on happiness because monetary increases have a diminishing utility. If I earn \$25,000 a year, receiving a \$5,000 raise may enable me to purchase a home or health insurance for

my family. But if I earn \$100,000, receiving a \$5,000 raise will not change my life very much.

As Daniel Gilbert, a Harvard University psychologist and the author of the best-selling *Stumbling on Happiness* (2005), has pointed out, “Wealth may be measured by counting dollars, but utility must be measured by counting how much goodness those dollars buy. Wealth doesn’t matter; utility does.” As income rises, dollars usually do not purchase increased pleasure. Extra income provides extra happiness for the poorest part of the population. Extra income provides diminishing happiness as you get wealthier because you already are living comfortably. People often over-estimate the utility that they will receive for their dollars and tend to be overly optimistic about its impact on their lives.

Take my neighbor, for example. He is an excellent craftsman who spent months at great time and expense enlarging his kitchen and dining room. When I asked him if his wife and two young children were excited about the new addition, he smiled and said that the excitement had completely disappeared after one week. They had quickly become habituated to their new surroundings and no longer considered the addition very special. Their subjective experience of diminished utility was disappointing to him, but this is common. We often equate wealth and material improvement with increased utility, but more money and possessions do not necessarily increase our happiness or pleasure on the scale that we anticipate.

A second explanation is comparative in nature, as the British economist Richard Layard has argued in *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005). Many people believe that relative, not absolute, income matters the most. In other words, my income does not

Ratings	Percent (%) United States		Percent (%) Britain	
	Top Economic Quarter	Bottom Economic Quarter	Top Economic Quarter	Bottom Economic Quarter
Very Happy	45	33	40	29
Quite Happy	51	53	54	59
Not Too Happy	4	14	6	12
Percent (%) Total:	100	100	100	100

Table 5. *Happiness and Income in the USA and Britain*

automatically make me happy, but a comparison between my income and those below me might. As H.L. Mencken once quipped, a “wealthy man is one who earns \$100 a year more than his wife’s sister’s husband.” If you are making more money than your neighbor, you may feel happier.

Whether or not you are happy with your income depends on the norm that you use as a yardstick. For many Americans, that norm is based on two factors—what you are used to earning and what other people you know earn. The first factor depends on habituation and the second on social comparisons. That is why economic growth does not automatically generate greater feelings of well-being. As our incomes increase, so do our expectations.

In addition, when given a choice most people choose economic security over a higher income. As Table 6 shows, in a 1993 survey on the “very important” aspects of money, “security,” and “being able to help your children” came out on top while “pleasure” was rated lowest.

Category	Percent (%)
Security	78
Being Able to Help your Children	63
Comfort	62
Freedom	58
Pleasure	45

Table 6. “Very Important” Aspects of Money

If our desires and standards of comparison increase as rapidly as our material achievements, then increases in income are unlikely to enlarge our sense of subjective well-being. At the bottom of the economy, the poor and near-poor will benefit from economic growth because for them more money does buy happiness. But for the middle and upper classes, only the hedonistic treadmill lies before them. As the Red Queen says in *Alice in Wonderland*, “it takes all the running you can do to stay in the same place.” This is why impressive increases in the standard of liv-

ing have not made Americans happier today than 50 years ago.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN HAPPINESS

If money does not increase happiness very much beyond about \$10,000 annual per capita income, what does? The answer—social capital—may surprise you. In 2000, Robert D. Putnam, a political scientist at Harvard University who specializes in the study of democracy in Europe, published a best-seller titled *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. In this fascinating study of changing American behavior, he helped popularize the concept of social capital as a major predictor of satisfaction.

In the words of Putnam, while “physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and

the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue.’ The difference is that ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.”

Social capital has an individual and collective dimension. On the individual side, people make connections that benefit themselves. For example, job seekers often “network” to find employment because most of us get jobs not because of what we know but because of who we know. Social capital usually trumps human capital when seeking employment.

On the collective side, when individuals make connections and work together, their neighborhoods and communities benefit. Social connections foster reciprocity, trust, and cooperation. That great philosopher Yogi Berra understood the value of social capital when he advised that you should “always go to other people’s funerals – otherwise they won’t come to yours.”

When individuals make connections and work together, their neighborhoods and communities benefit.

Social networks may include your extended family, the members of your church, your neighborhood association, the local bridge club, your colleagues at work, an alumni organization, or a local music society. All of them serve as the glue that helps bond us in a large, impersonal, and complex society like the United States.

Although social networks can have negative consequences, such as religious sectarianism, intolerance, and corruption, the US states, countries, and regions of the world with the highest levels of social capital foster more mutual support, trust, cooperation, and institutional effectiveness than places with lower amounts of social capital. Putnam's point is that social capital makes a big difference in our sense of well-being.

Based on the research of Putnam and other scholars, we can pinpoint the specific kinds of social capital likely to promote a sense of happiness. Marriage is extremely important. As John F. Helliwell and Putnam point out, despite the high rates of separation and divorce in the United States, "being married increases both life satisfaction and happiness, especially when the alternative is being separated or divorced." The impact of cohabitation, as opposed to marriage, is positive, but not as strong as marriage. "Contrary to what is sometimes believed, we find that marriage appears to increase subjective well-being equally among men and women."

Marriage and children have a major affect on adult social networks. Parents are much more likely to be involved in religious activities and community organizations than people of the same age and social status that are either not married or childless. Married couples with children tend to be active volunteers, although they may spend less time socializing with friends and neighbors than their non-married peers. Putnam argues that marriage is so important to subjective well-being that it is the happiness equivalent of quadrupling your annual income.

Marriage is the greatest source of well-being for most adults because it provides emotional and material support along with companionship. In surveys, individuals rate their spouses as far higher sources of satisfaction than parents, siblings, same-sex and opposite-sex friends, children, work associates, and neighbors.

Family, friends, and neighbors also play an important role in our feelings of happiness. Throughout the world, people report that good relationships with family and friends are important to their happiness, far more important than money or fame. In both US and Canadian surveys, frequent and positive interactions with family, friends, and neighbors are directly associated with the highest assessments of happiness.

People with close family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers are less likely to feel sad or lonely than those with weaker social connections. They often have a greater sense of self-esteem too. Friendship may be increasing in importance as a prerequisite for subjective well-being because divorce, geographical mobility, and smaller families may be reducing the importance of family ties, especially for adults.

Individual perceptions of health also play an important role in determining our feelings of happiness. In world surveys

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from the 1980s to the present, self-assessed health status is the single most important factor in determining well-being. Here is where social capital plays a crucially important role.

Socially isolated people are more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, overeat, and engage in other unhealthy behaviors than individuals with strong social networks. In addition, social networks furnish assistance, such as transportation and convalescent visits, to their members. Finally, having strong social networks may have positive biochemical effects on the body that helps our immune systems fight diseases and the wear and tear of daily life. Studies in the US, Japan, and Scandinavia have demonstrated that socially disconnected people are between two and five times more likely to suffer from ill health than individuals with close connections to family, friends, and organizations.

In the US, even moving from a state with high social capital, such as North Dakota, to a state with low social capital, such as Mississippi, increases the chance of poor health between 40 to 70 percent. In fact, in one study, researchers concluded that relocating to a state with high social capital is the equivalent of quitting smoking. There is a strong correlation between public health and social capital. The more we are socially connected, the less likely we are to have colds, heart attacks,

strokes, depression, cancer, and premature death, or to commit suicide.

Today, there is an epidemic of obesity in the US. About 35 percent of all adults are obese, and 65 percent of all adults are either overweight or obese. Based on this evidence, we might conclude that this problem is evidence of a lack of social connectedness among many adults. Could fraying social bonds be one of the causes of high levels of obesity?

Along with marriage, social connections, and health, religion and religious activities are strongly associated with social capital and happiness. On surveys, those who report that “God plays a very important role in their lives,” in Helliwell and Putnam’s words, “have higher reported measures of both life satisfaction and happiness.” People involved with religious organizations are less likely to smoke and drink alcohol than those who are uninvolved. Religious people also tend to have longer life-spans and a more optimistic outlook on life than their non-religious cohorts.

Organizations where people worship together are one of the most important sources of social capital in America. Half of all memberships in the US are religious in character; more than half of all individual charitable contributions go to religious organizations; and more than half of all volunteering occurs

through churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious institutions. Membership in religious organizations is closely associated with other forms of civic involvement from volunteering to serving on juries.

Religious organizations are superb incubators of social capital. Members make friends, learn to run committees and give speeches, provide social services, visit the sick, and develop a host of civic skills. In any week, about 40 percent of Americans say that they have been involved in religious services and religious activities. Religious individuals also are more likely to contribute time and money, and to volunteer outside their own religious organizations than non-religious people.

There is a glaring exception to these religious generalizations, and that is evangelical and fundamentalist churches, such as Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, and the like. These are the fastest growing religious sects in the US, and are concentrated in the South and Southwest where social capital is the lowest in the country. Evangelical and fundamentalist social capital usually stays within the church, and church attendance is not positively correlated with community involvement. These denominations are less likely than other religious institutions to offer social programs and community outreach services, except right-to-life activities.

There are three other major factors that affect our social capital—age, education and intelligence, and gender. In surveys, respondents rate their well-being highest when they are young and when they are more than 65 years, if their physical health is good. Happiness and well-being are rated lowest by those in the 35-44 or 44-54 years age groups.

States with large numbers of poorly educated adults have lower levels of social capital than states with higher student test scores on standardized tests, higher high school graduation rates, and higher rates of attendance at post-secondary educational institutions. In general, increasing levels of education are associated with improved health and more income, but, aside

from these factors, education seems to have little impact on happiness, at least in the US. Education has more of an impact in poorer countries on subjective well-being because it is more closely linked to income and occupational status.

Intelligence also seems to have very little relationship to happiness. While levels of education have risen dramatically in the US since World War II, there have been no overall increases in levels of subjective well-being.

Finally, there is a relationship between gender, social capital, and a sense of well-being. In North America, Asia, and Scandinavia, life satisfaction is slightly higher among women than men. In Russia and the former Soviet Union, the opposite is the case even though there has been a decline in men's general health in these countries.

All over the world, women are more adept than men at making and keeping social connections. In the US, women make more long-distance calls than men, send three times as many greeting cards and gifts than men, and write more personal letters than men. Women spend more time visiting friends than men, and among young people, while men are more likely than women to play computer games, women are more likely than men to send emails.

Men join more organizations than women, but women spend more time participating in them. Women spend more time than men in

Intelligence also seems to have very little relationship to happiness.



informal conversations and participate more in religious activities than men, which is the gateway to volunteering and philanthropy in America. Women are strong creators of social capital.

The evidence is overwhelming that there is a strong, positive relationship between social capital and feelings of happiness and well-being. When people are involved with families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers and actively involved in organizations and the civic life of their communities, they feel happier and more satisfied with their lives.

Social bonds are the most important predictors of life satisfaction. When people have supportive friendships and marriages, they are happier than people who are socially isolated. Robert E. Lane, the author of a comprehensive study of happiness in America, *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* (2000), summarized this point well when he wrote that “most of the pleasures of life are not priced, are not for sale, and therefore do not pass through the market.” Attending an organizational meeting on a regular basis is the equivalent of doubling your income when it comes to generating happiness. What are the implications of this fact for proposal professionals?

HAPPINESS AND PROPOSAL PROFESSIONALS: AN OXYMORON?

If companionship and not income or commodities is the most important source of happiness and life satisfaction, then perhaps we need to re-examine the way we work and live. Below are my key recommendations for achieving a measure of happiness inside and outside work. They are based on the premise that we cannot achieve happiness if we pursue it directly, which is a reasonable conclusion to draw from the research. Instead, we are likely to be happiest if we increase our social capital.

BE GRATEFUL AND ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

Proposal professionals wear nice clothes and live in nice houses and apartments. They drive cars that usually start in the morning, and they have jobs that are meaningful to them and of value to their organizations. For all this we should be intensely grateful and appreciative.

The amount of commodities we have accumulated is not as great a predictor of happiness as is our attitude about them. If we constantly desire more, we always will be frustrated, disappointed, and unhappy. If you want to compare yourself to those around you, the best way to adjust your expectations is look at those below you and not at the people above.

Money does not buy happiness, but living comfortably is conducive to a sense of well-being.

According to the Internal Revenue Service, in 2005, real median household income in the US was \$46,326. Men earned an average salary of \$41,386, while women earned \$31,858. The official poverty rate was 12.6 percent, and 37 million people lived in poverty, more than 13 million of whom are children. Even more are without health insurance. Proposal professionals should not ignore the fact that many of them are underpaid and overworked, but they are living or can expect to live solid middle-class lives, and for that they should be deeply thankful. Money does not buy happiness, but living comfortably is conducive to a sense of well-being.

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BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

About 70 percent of our feelings of happiness are based on the quality of our social relationships with families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. This is the single most important conclusion about the connection between social relationships and a sense of satisfaction and well-being. Among the elderly, few individuals regret not spending more time at work, but many lament not having been better parents, spouses, siblings, or friends.

The people who rate themselves the happiest believe in sharing, belonging, and giving of themselves to others. People who are actively involved in organizations and who volunteer and are philanthropic are far more likely to be healthier and happier than individuals who are socially isolated and unconnected to their communities. Be kind and generous inside and outside work, and you will increase your social capital.

CREATE A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES WELL-BEING

Paid employment has a strong impact on the well-being of most adults. When employees are satisfied with their work conditions, job performance improves, absenteeism declines, company loyalty increases, and there is less uncooperative and destructive behavior on the job.

Well-being declines in the workplace when jobs combine very high demands with little opportunity for personal control and autonomy. This is the most common cause of job-related stress. At the same time, the anxiety associated with this kind of work environment inhibits employees from learning new skills and knowledge and being able to change their approach when confronted with new requirements.

There are numerous ways in which proposal professionals can create more well-being in their workplaces. I will mention just



one. I am constantly appalled by the poor working conditions of many proposal professionals. Too many of them spend long days packed together around one long table working on their laptops, often in a room with bare walls and no windows. I am not sure which is more depressing, putting people into such a bleak, inhospitable work environment or accepting these work conditions as a fact of life. All of us need privacy—to think, to daydream, to call our children when they come home from school, or to dispute a credit card purchase that mysteriously turned up on our monthly bill.

Companies should strive to find comfortable accommoda-

tions for their proposal teams. Treating the proposal team decently means providing a work environment with at least a modicum of privacy. Anything less is an affront to ordinary human dignity. When organizations act kindly toward their proposal teams, they encourage the proposal team to act kindly toward each other. Strong social capital is based on reciprocity and a sense of fairness, which includes the provision of an adequate work environment.

GO WITH THE “FLOW”

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has argued that the most enjoyable and affirmative activities are often those that most engage and absorb us. He called them flow experiences, which are a “state in which

10 KEY FEATURES OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT ARE CORRELATED WITH HIGH LEVELS OF WELL-BEING:

- Opportunity for personal control and autonomy
- Opportunity to use skills and abilities
- Clear and realistic goals
- Variety in work tasks
- Job security
- Appropriate compensation
- Good working conditions
- Supportive supervision
- Good relationships with co-workers
- Being valued.

people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at a great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.” At their best, flow experiences provide individuals with a sense of discovery, creativity, and mastery over some field or topic.

Flow experiences are so enjoyable to us that we are willing to expend great time and energy on them. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow experiences have eight characteristics in common. They: (1) can be completed by us; (2) demand our focus; (3) have specific goals; (4) furnish immediate feedback; (5) require deep involvement and concentration; (6) give us a sense of control over what we are doing; (7) energize us; and (8) are so absorbing that we lose track of time.

By their very nature, flow experiences cannot occur too frequently. If they did, we would be too exhausted and absorbed most of the time. But when they appear, we should embrace them.

In many ways, proposal development lends itself to flow experiences with its focused and intense work. Who among us has not been intensely gratified by working on an outstanding technical or management

volume or bringing a year-long proposal development effort to a successful conclusion? By its very nature, proposal development is so demanding that often it requires work that absorbs time and energy and that requires our deepest involvement and effort. In our work environments, we need to engage in tasks that develop our sense of competence and participation.

In proposal development, personal well-being will be enhanced when individuals are

able to pursue their own goals in ways that are valued by their peers and organizations. What makes work stimulating is working toward a satisfying goal, not simply attaining it.

MAKE PEACE, NOT WAR

The states with the highest social capital in the US have the lowest rates of crime, violence, and delinquency. In one survey, respondents were asked if they would “do better than average in a fist fight.” Nearly half of residents in Louisiana, West Virginia, and New Mexico—states with some of the lowest social capital in the country—agreed with that statement compared to less than a third of the residents of South Dakota, Maine, Iowa, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Nebraska, which are among the states with the highest social capital. Wherever social capital

In proposal development, personal well-being will be enhanced when individuals are able to pursue their own goals in ways that are valued by their peers and organizations.

is high, so are mutual trust, cooperation, and altruism. As a result, there is less violence and crime.

If you want to sustain strong social bonds at work and within your community, be cooperative, collaborative, and promote reconciliation. This will increase your sense of well-being along with those around you. You may achieve your goals by being adversarial and highly competitive, but only at the cost of poor social relations, which decreases everyone's happiness, including your own.

STAY HEALTHY

There are many aspects of our health that we cannot control, but personal behavior accounts for about 70 percent of it. There are obvious ways we can all improve our health. First, build your social capital. People with strong social connections are healthier than socially isolated individuals.

Second, eating properly and exercising regularly fosters happiness by increasing our energy, our sense of satisfaction, and our opportunities for enjoyment. As Dr. George Sheehan, the guru of running, once said, "Fitness has to be fun. If it is not play, there will be no fitness. Play, you see, is the process. Fitness is merely the product." He concluded that running would not add years to your life but life to your years. Adults need to engage in playful, energetic activities to keep healthy.

Companies and proposal managers can take concrete steps to encourage good health among their proposal teams. The most basic step would be to lock the proposal room for one hour in the middle of the day and strongly encourage everyone to leave the building for a brisk walk, regardless of the season. Too many proposal professionals spend their days and evenings inertly occupying a chair in front of a computer munching on unhealthy foods and consuming too much caffeine and sugar.

If you are a proposal manager, set a good example by providing your team with a map

of the walking paths around the office and taking frequent walks yourself.

HAVE FAITH

People with strong spiritual beliefs are happier than those who lack them. Being active in religious institutions often improves health and lengthens life spans. Despite the fire and brimstone and sermons about guilt and sin that pour forth from many religious institutions, religious people are more optimistic than their nonreligious neighbors.

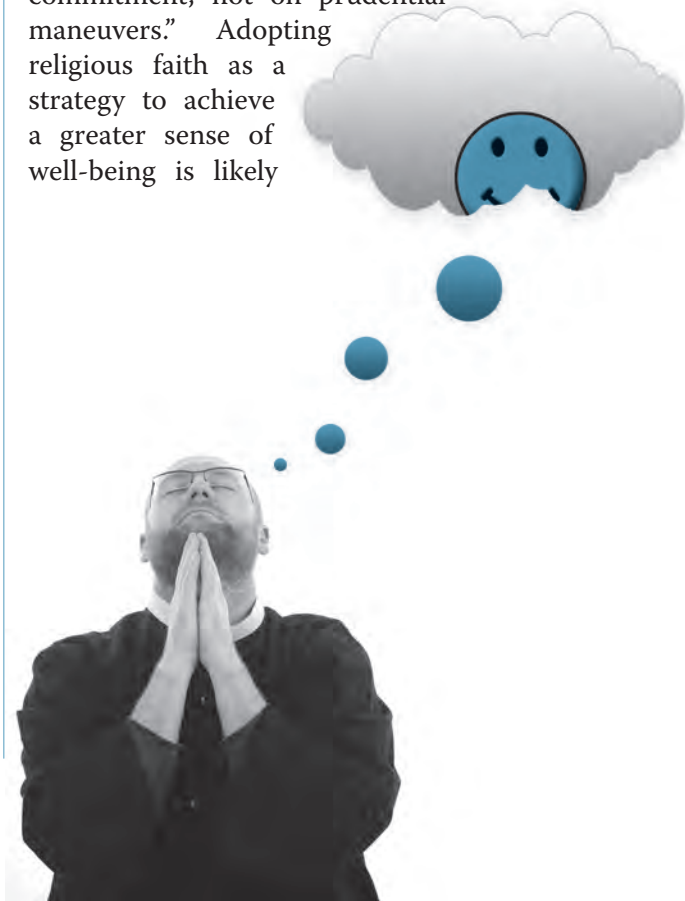
Religious institutions help congregants make friends, provide opportunities to learn important social and leadership skills, provide a support network when illness and tragedy strike, and encourage volunteerism and generosity.

The exceptions to these religious generalizations are evangelical and fundamentalist churches, which do not foster civic engagement.

Nonbelievers, however, should not join religious institutions just to become happier. In the words of one scholar, "true religious belief is founded on a spiritual

commitment, not on prudential maneuvers." Adopting religious faith as a strategy to achieve a greater sense of well-being is likely

Too many proposal professionals spend their days and evenings inertly occupying a chair in front of a computer munching on unhealthy foods and consuming too much caffeine and sugar.



to fail. Happiness is probably a by-product of religious participation, not a cause, because it is social in nature.

SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC POLICIES THAT INCREASE SOCIAL CAPITAL AND HAPPINESS

The research on social capital and happiness has profound implications for public policy. Income is not the most direct source of happiness. Instead, in the words of Lane, “we get happiness primarily from people; it is their affection or dislike, their good or bad opinions of us, their acceptance or rejection that most influence our moods.” Consequently, we need to “move from an emphasis on money and economic growth toward an emphasis on companionship.” As he points out, “in rich societies, for people above the poverty line, more money as compared with friendship and community esteem, a loving spouse and affectionate children, quickly loses its power to make people happy.”

This is a heretical idea because we consider such concepts as “happiness” and “well-being” to be “externalities” in the impoverished vocabulary of most contemporary economists and politics. We need an economic and public policy that focuses more directly on building social capital and creating the conditions for happiness. However, changing public policy will be difficult because democratic politics usually do not contribute to people’s subjective well-being. Most Americans say that they dislike politics because of its competitiveness, abrasiveness, and the feeling that voting and participating in political contests do not make much of a difference.

Nevertheless, I recommend that we find ways to improve on the following in the realm of public policy:

- Monitor levels of happiness at least as thoroughly as we do economics and income

Most Americans say that they dislike politics because of its competitiveness, abrasiveness, and feeling that voting and participating in political contests do not make much of a difference.



- Reduce levels of poverty because poor people usually have the highest levels of unhappiness
- Reduce unemployment because not working deprives

people of their self-esteem and cuts them off from their social networks at work

- Keep inflation low because high rates of inflation increase the costs of daily transactions and induce uncertainty about the future, both of which lead to unhappiness
- Promote family-friendly policies at work and in our communities because good family relations are a major source of happiness for spouses and children
- Expand public spaces from sidewalks to community centers to parks because they are sites where social capital is built
- Address global climate change because it will seriously affect everyone’s happiness
- Support activities that increase volunteerism, philanthropy, public service, and civic involvement because they are major sources of social capital.

STUMBLING TOWARD WELL-BEING

Right before he died in 1832, the philosopher of utilitarianism Jeremy Bentham wrote a touching birthday message to a young girl. “Create all the happiness you are able to create: remove all the misery you are able to remove. Every day will allow you to add something to the pleasure of others, or to diminish something of their pains. And for every grain of enjoyment you sow in the bosom of another, you shall find a harvest in your own bosom; while every sorrow which you pluck out from thoughts and feelings of a fellow creature shall be replaced by beautiful peace and joy in the sanctuary of your soul.”

This is eloquent and sage advice. Our happiness is directly related to the social connections we create around us. Happiness comes from two places—from within and from our families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and from engagement in our communities. If we build social capital where we live and work, then we are likely to be happy.

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*Create all the happiness
you are able to create:
remove all the misery you
are able to remove.
Every day will allow you
to add something to the
pleasure of others, or to
diminish something of
their pains.
And for every grain of
enjoyment you sow in the
bosom of another, you
shall find a harvest in your
own bosom; while every
sorrow which you pluck out
from thoughts and feelings
of a fellow creature shall be
replaced by beautiful peace
and joy in the sanctuary of
your soul.*

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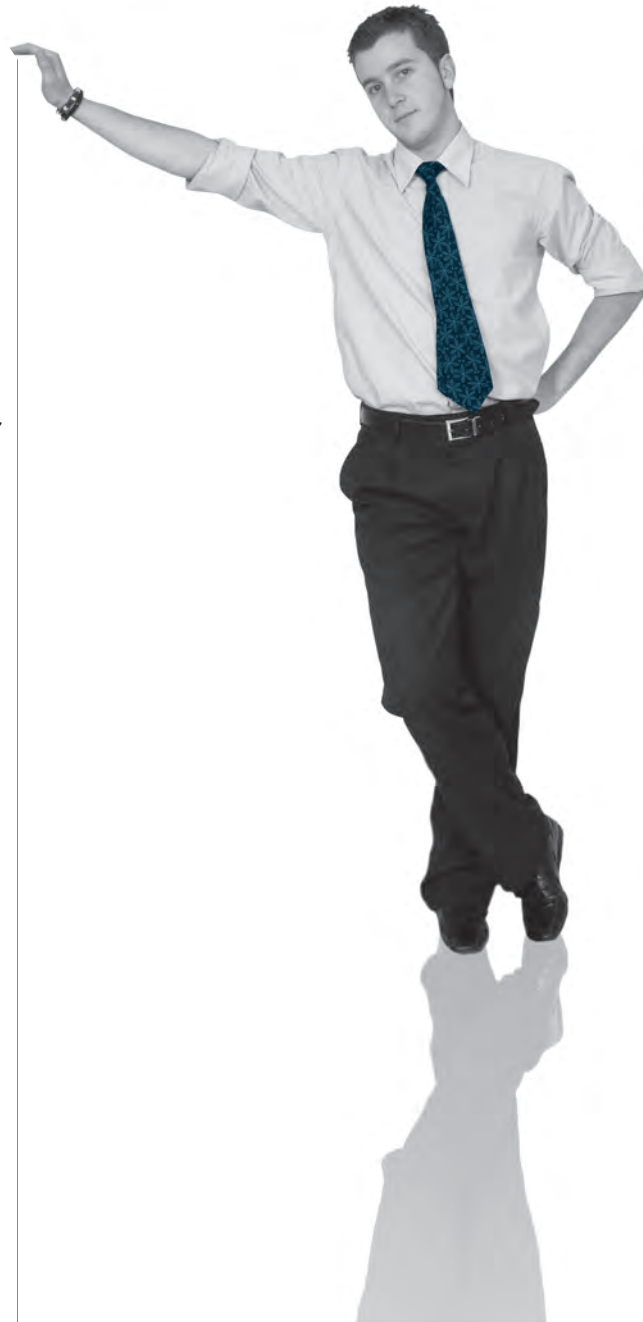
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