

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy

Wednesday, 06 December 2017 06:31 - Last Updated Wednesday, 06 December 2017 06:47



Winter Wonderland

Dear Aunt Bossy,

I know you have answered the main thrust of this question before, but I need more than suggestions and advice on how to take my mind off myself and find Holiday Joy by paying attention to other people. It is all I can do to drag myself out of the house, and when I see all the happy and joyous people and decorations for Christmas, I feel like such a waste, such a loser. What is the secret to being like those people who are so happy about the holidays?

Lone Larry

Dear Larry,

This makes my heart hurt and I will try my best to give you some helpful advice.

The secret is there is no secret. Unhappy people are more unhappy during the holidays and group celebrations that remind them, once again, that they are not happy, and all the reasons why. This leads to horrible feelings of inadequacy and failure in life.

Happy people are happier during this time because they surround themselves with love and jump in with the expectation that everything will be stellar. This makes them feel good, not just about the world, but also about themselves.

You have to go about the very difficult business of learning how to be happy. Thoughts really are things, and you need to choose the good ones. I know I am a broken record on that idea, but it worked for me, and I've seen it work for hundreds of other people.

Pay attention to how you think. Identify the negative and kill it! Yes, I know there are lots of unpleasant things to deal with in life, but how you think about them is far more important than what they are. What you tell yourself about your circumstances molds your circumstances.

I do an exercise when I'm working with corporations where I divide the attendees into smaller groups and ask them to write a description of a day from hell in their lives and offices. After they read it out loud and I post it on a flipchart, we go through and look for the positive aspects. For example, if someone arrives in the morning to 200 emails, that is a good thing because it shows that people are reaching out for business or help. If the bus is late getting someone to work, it is more time to people watch, read, or meditate. If a kid vomits on the floor, you can always focus on how wonderful it is to have children. Same goes for dogs. If your spouse drives you nuts leaving cabinet doors open, you can be sure if they die you will long to see an open cabinet door. I'm not as certain about an empty toilet paper holder.

You have to be vigilant with yourself and switch the thought immediately. When I get hit by a blast of hot air from a bus in the summer, I always say to myself, "Bet that would feel good in the winter." If a meal is disappointing, I remind myself that it isn't my last meal. Even getting a middle seat on an aircraft offers the positive experience of practicing calm and being glad I got a seat at all. If someone is mean, that is a wonderful opportunity for a spiritual exercise, where you discipline yourself to rise above it and have empathy for him or her because they wouldn't be nasty if they were happy.

When you talk to others, present the positive. I train my clients to avoid saying things like, "You are concerned that your basement will be flooded because of the marsh next door." Change it to "You made it clear that you want a dry and secure basement, so that your house is safe from the environment as it changes." Or, "You are afraid you won't have enough money for retirement." Changes to "You want to be certain you take steps now so that you will have enough money to retire with ease."

Do the same with yourself. Don't tell yourself what you are afraid of. Tell yourself what you want

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the picture to look like. The sky dive isn't scary; it is an opportunity for you to have an exciting story.

No matter how bad it is, you can train yourself to find a positive, which greatly affects your body and your mind. There are lots of stories about people diagnosed with deadly cancers who watch nothing but Three Stooges movies, laugh like fools, and create anti-bodies and other mysterious things kick in to cure them. Really! Look it up.

While you are at it, look up some self-help books that teach some techniques to learn happiness. They aren't all corny and SNL worthy. And, even if the ones you find are a bit corny, they probably have some good ideas. You only need one to start. I got hooked with "Your Erroneous Zones." It is an oldie, but hits the key "secrets" clearly. The classic "Think and Grow Rich" does not just apply to money. Richness comes in many forms. Being happy is the biggest.

In the meantime, start immediately to write down any good thing that happens to you, no matter how minor. "Had a good cup of coffee today." "The line at the grocery was short." Keep a separate notebook for this, and you will be astounded at how much about your miserable life is actually good.

As for the immediate holiday, get out there and volunteer to help somewhere where people aren't as fortunate as you. I always recommend it, but the time is nigh!

Happy, Merry, and don't forget to give yourself the 3 Stooges videos for Christmas.

Best, Aunt Bossy