



Happiness is an Option for Lawyers...

By: Dr. Maynard Brusman

“One of my favorite musical groups once wrote a song called “Happiness is an Option”. Maynard Brusman can show even the most jaded lawyers out there that ‘happiness is an option’ for them in a way that they might never have noticed or seen before. Believe it or not, attorneys can be happy in both their personal and professional lives. It takes time and effort, but Dr. Brusman can show you how.”

**John Faricy, Senior Partner
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In the increasingly demanding world lawyers face; many lawyers desire to achieve professional success, a fulfilling life, and true happiness. However, achieving both their personal and professional goals sometimes proves to be very difficult. Many lawyers report being unhappy with the choices they have made and desire a different future.

Most lawyers live extremely busy and stress-filled lives. They experience a great deal of pressure from the billable hour requirement and client/firm demands. Finding a balance between work and life without sacrificing professional success, deciding on the best practice area or work setting, and making possible career transitions can be challenging tasks, even for the most talented and effective lawyer.

Working in a law firm can present significant challenges. Becoming a partner has become more and more difficult. Some attorneys thrive in certain law firm cultures and have difficulty when there is a poor fit. A number of lawyers choose to develop their own practice or seek alternative careers. Lawyers frequently find

marketing their practice or creating a career that is more aligned with their values and evolving interests a significant challenge.

You have made a major investment in your legal career. You've earned the right to both career success and a happy personal life.

The happiness self-assessment quiz will help you determine just how happy you are!

Happiness is an Option for Lawyers Self-Assessment Quiz

We are all trying to be happy and achieve success in our work and personal lives. Mostly we react in a positive and productive manner. However, many attorneys are describing their lives as so busy, working so many hours, that they often feel physically and emotionally exhausted.

Happiness and success in your work and personal life requires being clear on your purpose, mission, and values. It is really self-management. The way you keep balance in your work and life is to set priorities and focus on what is truly most important.

Think about the past month. For each of the work/life pressures listed below, indicate how much each has been a source of distress for you.

Score each item according to how much of the time each statement applies to you.

The Scale: 1(never), 2(rarely), 3(sometimes), 4 (often), 5(always)

- ___ 1. I feel overwhelmed by too many tasks and responsibilities-juggling priorities.
- ___ 2. I am very busy and impatient.
- ___ 3. I get angry on a frequent basis.
- ___ 4. I work long energy-exhausting hours.
- ___ 5. I find it difficult to pace myself.
- ___ 6. I feel pressured by too many demands from clients.

- ___ 7. I am more reactive than proactive.
- ___ 8. I find it difficult to stay agile, flexible, and resilient and focus on what is important.
- ___ 9. I feel I have lost my energy and enthusiasm for practicing law.
- ___ 10. I find it difficult to appreciate what I have.
- ___ 11. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of billable hours required.
- ___ 12. I frequently feel unappreciated.
- ___ 13. I can't remember a time when I experienced "being in the flow".
- ___ 14. I am a perfectionist.
- ___ 15. I am uncomfortable with marketing and practice development.
- ___ 16. I feel that my work does not reflect my vision, mission, and values.
- ___ 17. I have forgotten what motivated me to practice law in the first place.
- ___ 18. I dislike most of my clients.
- ___ 19. I am pessimistic about the future.
- ___ 20. I find it difficult to create a healthy work/life balance

___ **TOTAL SCORE** Add up your results and to find out what your score means.

Total Points:

1-30

HAPPINESS MASTER

You are doing a great job attaining happiness. Congratulations!

LEARNING

You are somewhat happy in your life and work. There is still room for improvement.

51-100

RED ALERT!

Unhappiness may be a serious problem for you.

Hopefully, you feel this self-assessment quiz provided you with insight on how happy you are in your work and life.

What Makes People Happy?

The good news is that most lawyers can achieve happiness in their lives. The first step is to be aware of the factors that contribute to happiness and subjective well-being. Research shows that the following seven factors highly correlate with people being happy.

1. Strong social relationships
2. Physical health and fitness
3. Feelings of competence and control
4. Progress on meaningful goals
5. Marriage
6. Positive self-esteem and optimism
7. A clear sense of life purpose

Martin E.P. Seligman covers a number of these factors in his book *Authentic Happiness* (Free Press, 2002). He teaches that happiness can be cultivated by identifying and using many of the strengths and traits that one already possesses – including kindness, originality, humor, optimism, and generosity. By frequently calling upon one's signature strengths in all crucial realms of life, people not only develop natural buffers against misfortune and the experience of negative emotion, they move their lives up to a new more positive plane.

Positive psychology researchers Dr. Nansook Park, Dr. Christopher Peterson and Dr. Martin Seligman have been studying 24 character strengths in depth, and are looking at the role of individual strengths in creating subjective feelings of happiness. A study with more than 4000 participants revealed that five key strengths – *gratitude, optimism, zest, curiosity, and the ability to love and be loved*– are more closely and consistently related to life satisfaction than the other strengths.

A very compelling reason to give special attention to these five key strengths is that each strength on the list is, by definition, mutable and can be learned. We can all become more *grateful, optimistic, zestful, curious, and loving* if we are willing to make a concerted effort to do so.

Martin Seligman, founder of the positive psychology movement, suggests that lawyer imbalance, and therefore unhappiness, has three causes:

1. Lawyers are pessimistic and are rewarded for their pessimism
2. Young lawyers have jobs with a lot of pressure and low decision latitude. The result may be poor health and low morale.

3. The practice of law is to some extent a zero-sum game.

He claims it is easy to remedy the problems of pessimism and low decision latitude by learning “flexible optimism” and in-house firm training and mentoring programs to address systemic issues. Seligman believes that the win-lose adversarial legal process might be a significantly more difficult problem to solve. More focus on mediation and negotiation may provide some relief.

There are many outstanding lawyers who are happy, functional, and able to integrate their professional and personal lives. In order to convert professional success into personal happiness, you need to leverage your strengths, mediate your weaknesses and learn some specific happiness enhancing strategies.

Happiness Strategies

In the demanding world lawyers face; becoming change and stress resilient are essential components of happiness. Resilience is the ability to persevere and adapt when overcoming obstacles. It is the key to happiness and success at work and in life. The secret to the emotional intelligence competency of resilience is *accurate* thinking. It is important to challenge limiting beliefs and negative thinking. Managing stress and dealing with change allows you to excel in the workplace while maintaining a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle.

The legal profession is currently experiencing increasing numbers of lawyers who are dissatisfied with their careers and abandoning the practice of law for less stressful career alternatives. Contributing factors include anxiety, depression, relationship issues, and questions relating to personal values and the meaning of life.

Unmanaged stress increases anxiety, depression, anger, substance abuse, and feelings of unhappiness- all of which decrease quality of life and workplace productivity. In fact, a study done at John Hopkins University found that out of 104 occupational groups, lawyers were the most likely to suffer from depression- more than three times more likely than average. High levels of stress are reported by almost 3/4 of lawyers and resulting in damage to the physical health or emotional well-being of 1/3 of these attorneys.

Increasing billable hour requirements, time pressures, and work/life balance issues are frequently cited as the reason for the high rates of lawyer dissatisfaction. Attorneys complain of little time for themselves or their families. In contrast, happy people are less self-focused, less hostile, more loving, forgiving, trusting, energetic, decisive, enthusiastic, creative, sociable and helpful.

The greatest source of stress is the tremendous internal pressure and anxiety that we create for ourselves through...

- *worrying* about situations we can't control
- *perfectionism* - expecting too much of ourselves or others
- *competition* - turning every encounter into a win-lose situation
- *self-criticism* - focusing on faults, rather than strengths
- *insecurity* - looking to others to provide emotional security rather than ourselves
- *powerlessness* - failing to see the choices that are available
- *hurrying* - constantly pushing ourselves to perform better and faster
- *comparison* of our achievements, or lack of them, to those of others
- *pessimism* - expecting the worst from life
- the *unrealistic expectation* that life can be problem-free

Take action to make things better. How? Experiment with these strategies. Begin with one specific behavior change item. Then, commit over 21 consecutive days to record, measure and implement successful change.

Focus on the Positive . Write down your most proud accomplishments. When do you exhibit peak performance?

Get Organized Put important things first. This is the habit of self-management. It involves organizing and managing time and events around personal priorities.

Do It Now Procrastination breeds stress! Do your most difficult task at the beginning of the day when you're fresh; avoid the stress of dreading it all day.

<i>Stop Perfectionism</i>	Perfectionism is often a poor use of time. Not everything requires perfection. High priority items require more perfection than low priority items. By demanding perfection of yourself and others, you may be wasting time in unnecessary effort.
<i>Change Attitudes</i>	Think of stressful situations as a <i>challenge</i> to your creative thinking, rather than looking at them as insurmountable problems. Generate solutions.
<i>Learn to Say "No"</i>	Say "no" when your schedule is full: to responsibilities that aren't yours; to emotional demands that leave you feeling exhausted; to other people's problems that you don't have the power to solve.
<i>Take Care of your Body</i>	You will have more energy and become stress hardy when you eat a balanced diet, get sufficient sleep and exercise regularly.
<i>Optimistic Self-Talk</i>	Use positive self-reinforcement: "I can handle this one step at a time", instead of frightening or depressing yourself by coming up with reasons why you can't cope.
<i>Support</i>	Actively seek support from friends, colleagues, and family. Don't be a Lone Ranger.
<i>Express Gratitude</i>	Take time to appreciate what you have. Express appreciation to others.
<i>Take Charge</i>	Take responsibility for making your life what you want it to be. It is more empowering to feel a sense of control and to make decisions. Commit to what will bring meaning into your life and take action.

LAWYER GETS A LIFE

I recently worked with a very successful high-performing attorney working for a Silicon Valley Law Firm who burned out. He was working 80 hours per week and exhausted. The pressure of meeting the billable hour requirement and professional goals was having an adverse affect on his health and home-life. **Based on his values and life purpose, we worked on a process to transform his work life.** He took several assessments to help determine his current state of happiness, work/life balance, stress resiliency, and emotional intelligence. We collaborated on creating some goals to make his life more sane and enjoyable. He had to work hard to establish some new habits

He took on some new and exciting marketing tasks and reduced his client case load. He started an exercise program and renewed his interests in several community and family-related activities.

In addition to work, the attorney made his health and family a priority. He learned how to become more stress resilient. As he became more stress hardy, he was able to more fully engage in his work for the law firm. He became much happier with his career and personal life.

Take Action

As an attorney, you are used to asking tough questions. Making changes in your life aligned with your values and purpose requires asking yourself insightful questions that reveal what matters most to you and how much is enough.

HAPPINESS is an OPTION for LAWYERS **Self- Reflection Questions**

A coach might help you with the process by asking you the following questions. How would you respond?

- What makes you happiest? When were you happiest? How did you become happiest?
- What brings vitality to your life? What's your proudest achievement? In what situation do you feel most alive?
- Which areas of your life are neglected or overemphasized?
- What kind of process do you use to manage stressful situations?
- Are you progressing towards meaningful goals?
- When have you felt fulfilled? What were you doing? Who was there with you?

- When was the last time you experienced satisfaction in your work? What did you do that brought you satisfaction?
- In what ways do you think you are contributing to the greater good of the people in your firm and your clients?
- How much is enough?
- What matters most?
- Is forgiveness a possibility?
- Was there a time in your life when you felt most alive, creative, excited, successful, and enthusiastic?
- Deathbed exercise: if you were to imagine yourself in the future, lying in bed, living your final moments of this lifetime, and you looked back at your whole life to remember moments of happiness, which memories would come up?

In our busy world, full of distractions, it is easy to lose focus of what is most important. Tape a copy of these happiness tips in your briefcase to remind you of your commitment to lead a happy and fulfilled life.

Top Ten Happiness Tips for ATTORNEYS

1. Maintain a balance between your professional and personal life.
2. Express gratitude to others.
3. Create positive and collaborative interpersonal relationships.
4. Remember that enthusiasm and happiness are highly correlated.
5. Focus on strengths and ask for multi-rater 360 -degree feedback.
6. Consider forgiveness.
7. Focus on the fact that there is no relationship between money and happiness.
8. Develop and maintain a supportive network of close relationships.
9. Create a personal purpose/mission statement aligned with your values.
10. Care about character in your professional relationships.

“The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win you're still a rat.” -- Lily Tomlin

Happiness is clearly an option for lawyers. It takes time, effort and wise choices to realize your fullest potential and a happy life.

'Happy people plan actions, they don't plan results.'
-- Denis Waitley

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