

## Happiness Defined

What is happiness? It is an emotion – nothing more and nothing less. And, like all emotions, it originates from specific chemical reactions and electrical impulses in our brains. But the million-dollar question is: What triggers the cerebral chemistry and electricity that we call happiness? The simple answer is: We are happy when good things happen and when people are nice to us. But his explanation is not completely accurate. Sometimes good things happen, and people are polite, and we are still unhappy. But why?

For instance, how can a person be completely unhappy after placing second in a baking contest that involved thousands of participants? Second place was a good thing in this case, right? Yet, our runner-up was devastated. She did not receive the first place Grand Champion ribbon. Meanwhile, another contestant was overjoyed and could not stop smiling or waving her honorable mention ribbon – one of ten awarded in the contest.

Another curious example of unhappiness occurred on a college campus. A young man meets a pretty girl in his English class, and they become friends. After a few weeks, he asks her on a date. She tells him that she finds him very attractive and a “great friend”, but she already has a steady boyfriend of two years. The young man is crushed. Instead of continuing as good friends, he breaks off all contact and refuses to speak to her ever again.

What is the difference between being happy and unhappy? Obviously the second-place finisher and the college man had unfulfilled expectations. Even though the baker was recognized as outstanding, and the girl was nice and very polite to the college student, it wasn't enough. We are happy only when events or outcomes are *good enough* and when people are *nice enough* to meet our expectations.

Parents understand this law of human behavior. How often do you hear them say, “Oh, don't tell the kids we might get ice cream after the baseball game. We don't want to get their hopes up just in case we don't have time.” The experienced parents know that if the kids expect or even anticipate the possibility of some ice cream, they will be upset if they don't get it. Therefore, don't place that expectation in their minds – just in case.

Successful businesses from mom-and-pop stores to multi-national corporations also understand this happiness principle. They strive to exceed their customer expectations because they recognize that if they:

1. Meet the customer's expectations, he/she is satisfied.
2. Exceed the customer's expectations, he/she is happy.
3. Greatly exceed the customer's expectations, he/she is very happy and a loyal customer.

Therefore, all of us, individually, decide *minute-by-minute* when we will trigger our brain to be happy by choosing our expectations and then deciding if those expectations are being met. That is why gratitude is the key to happiness. By counting our blessings and being grateful for all the

events and people in our lives – great, small, and routine, we can find recurring and lasting happiness.