

Increasing Happiness Quotient of Teachers

22 June 2011

The issue regarding happiness of teachers is not new. It was raised as early as in 1934 in a Time magazine article. Today the challenge is even more as we live out a consumer-driven lifestyle, where the focus is on Me rather than on us, and where there is a lack of inter-generational understanding.

The key to school reform and educational leadership are happy teachers. The key to imparting whole-education and creating leaders of tomorrow are happy teachers. Likewise, the key to student achievement and their motivation are happy teachers. **Only happiness can make great teachers.**

I will not try and define what is happiness because its understanding is very subjective. Instead, my question to you is: what is it that you want out of life? Namely, what is your goal in life? Regardless of all the several responses that will be given, we need to ask another question. Why? You will realize that after having asked the question *Why* many times, we shall arrive at one word: happiness.

Challenges to Teacher Happiness

There are many challenges that schools and teachers face in being happy:

Lack of intrinsic motivation in most teachers.

Teachers have not thought nor do they look upon themselves as transformational leaders.

Shrinking student motivation and insufficient teacher-student contact outside classrooms.

Lack of student achievement, especially in all-inclusive mainstream schools.

Inability to balance work and life. After school, teachers revert to their domestic role and submerge themselves in it.

Work ethics wherein teaching is only for seven months in a year.

Over 50 percent teachers in Indus belong to Generation Y.

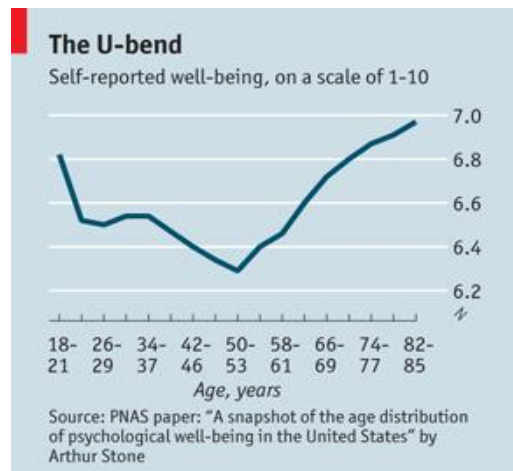
Research Findings on Happiness

While discussing the challenges of teacher happiness, we must remember that, the problem of teacher happiness is compounded by genetic and neuro-scientific factors. According to current research findings, **everyone has a genetic predisposition towards happiness.** Happiness is dependent on the following factors:

- **Genetics:** 50 %
- **Circumstances**(like age, gender, marital status, income, health, etc): 20 %
- **Attitude** (how a person thinks and acts): 30 %

Every individual has a **biological set range for happiness** which is inheritable. This is 50 percent. Lottery winners are an example. A study of 22 million-dollar lottery winners concludes that, they reverted to their baseline happiness levels after one year. Similar studies on paraplegics confirm these findings. They adapt quickly and within eight weeks report more positive than negative emotions. Within a few years they are just a little less happy than those who are not paralyzed. 84 percent paraplegics consider their life to be average or above average.

More recently, it is seen that age has a lot to do with happiness. People get happier as they grow older. According to the U-Bend theory, the rise in happiness starts after reaching the age of 50. Women are slightly happier than men but they are more susceptible to depression. One-fifth of all women experience depression as against one-tenth of all men.



Invest in the Process; and Not the Outcome

There is an insatiable desire in each one of us, that to be happy we have got to get something to do something, so that we can become something. Experience tells us that this may not always happen. Despite the best of planning our goals may fail us. So life "sucks!"

The mental model we have is based on an '*If and Then*' premise. *If* I have this *then* I shall be happy. Some of us who wanted something and got it are also unhappy. Undeniably, the present model is flawed and needs changing if we want to be happy.

Every 'something' that we have or we are thinking about has an *action* and an *outcome*. The former is under our control but the outcome is not. The outcome may be the very opposite of what we are wanting. Despite knowing this reality we continue investing in the outcome, getting more and more frustrated.

This has direct relevance to goal-setting. We set goals, we make plans, we measure them, we monitor them, and we psyche ourselves. Yet, despite everything we do, goals may often fail, or fail to satisfy.

As leaders, therefore, it is wise to **invest in the process**. John Wooden, a famous basketball player and coach, never spoke about winning. His advice to the basketball players was all about the process. When the game is over and you look yourself in the mirror, ask yourself whether you did your best; the score does not matter. And if you did your best, the winning part would have been taken care of.

What you get by achieving your goal is not as important as what you become by trying to achieve your goal. This is where happiness lies. Therefore, remember:

- The journey is the goal
- The journey is the process. The process is more important than the goal.
- Invest on the process – enjoy it. Savour the power of Now!
- Invest on the outcome to the extent that gives you direction

Life is a collection of several journeys. Life is not a destination.

Self-Actualization

Intrinsic or self motivation comes to those who are self-actualized, i.e., are able to realize their full potential. The general scientific belief is that an individual can actualize herself only after her basic safety and emotional needs have been met. The scientific community is of the view that lower order needs must be fulfilled first, before higher order needs can be satisfied. I disagree.

Let us take the example of a terrorist being hunted down. He knows that sooner or later he will die. He has little or no food, no sleep, no shelter, and no medical support. Yet he is happy because he believes in the cause he is fighting for. So while the teacher's basic needs are being fulfilled, we must simultaneously help her to address her higher order needs through purpose, vision and goal, becoming a lifelong learner, and being reflective as much as possible.

The self-actualized teacher stands out as:

A role model.
Intrinsically motivated
Mission focused.
Empathetic and extremely caring towards children.
Lifelong learner.
Invests quality time in her self.

Happiness Strategies

For purposes of specificity, the model offered by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs could provide the framework for self-actualization of Indus teachers. Accordingly, the following goal is recommended for each school:

“To enable a minimum of 15 percent teachers achieve self-actualization as envisioned in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, whilst ensuring that we meet the safety and social needs of all teachers by 15 June 2012.

Goals are quite meaningless unless they can be measured. The following measuring parameters could be considered:

- International benchmarks in academics, sports, and other areas.*
- Teacher attrition with a minimum retention of 4 years.*
- The ratio of insider : outsider promotions should be 2:1*
- Teachers leaving during the academic session.*
- Feedback from students and other teachers.*
- Application of outcome of minimum 12 action research teams.*
- Contribution to community – once a month*
- Goal-setting by all teachers and students.*

In order to address the complete range of social, esteem and self-actualization needs, the following are recommended: (Figure 1)

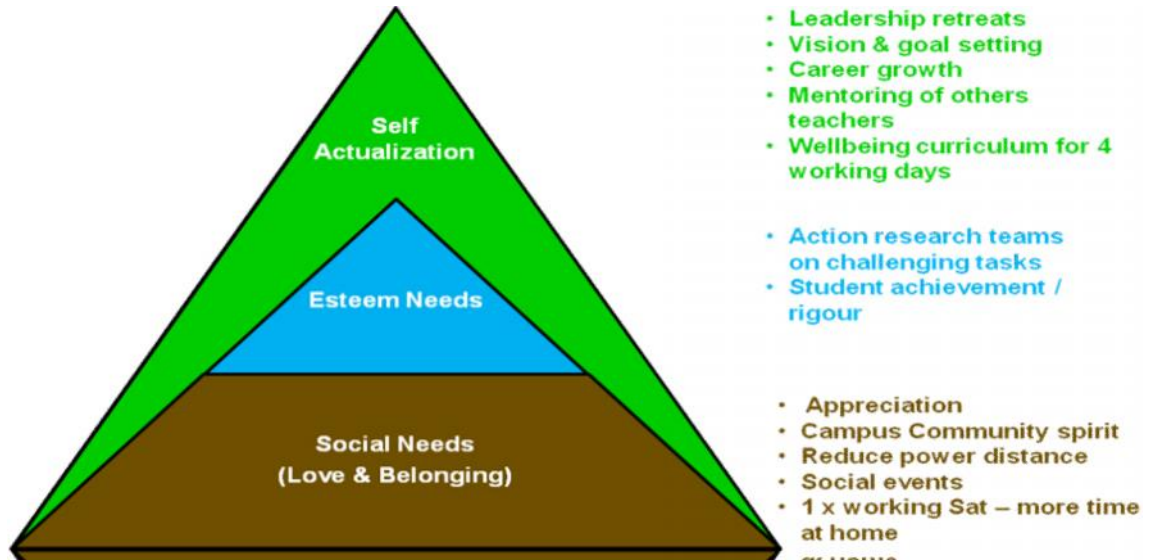


Figure1: Happiness Strategies for Teachers

Conclusion

For optimum teacher happiness the work ethics and work-place skills must change. This will happen when teachers are intrinsically motivated, and look at teaching not as a job, but as a career, if not a calling.

Work ethics encompasses the weightage being varied between teaching, leisure, self development and home. Work ethics will change only when we become our own gurus to train ourselves to be better leaders, better human beings. In order to bring about this change, teachers need a 'growth mindset'. Such a mindset believes that man is not born with fixed intelligence. Rather, Man is born potential; talent can be developed.

This is the extraordinary teacher.

I would urge you to look inwards and re-order your goals, re-arrange your priorities, and become the change you want, in your personal and professional lives. Respond to the rich aspirations within to be leaders of change.