

PhD

Pursuit of Happiness Day

We believe these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

—Thomas Jefferson
The Declaration of Independence, 1776



THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

DELIVERING 
Happiness



THE "SPARK"

Last fall Zappos.com CEO Tony Hsieh and Delivering Happiness CEO Jenn Lim stopped by the University of Iowa during their cross-country bus tour. Their mission was to travel the country to talk with schools, nonprofits, businesses and communities about applying happiness as a model at work and in life.

They asked students to think about their goals and pointed out that no matter what their goals were — "own a business," "make a lot of money," "travel the world," "find my soulmate" — if they asked themselves "why?" the answers came down to the same sentiment. They wanted to be happy.



Tony Hsieh and Jenn Lim from Delivering Happiness speaking at the University of Iowa

HAPPINESS

With some 27,000 books and articles published on the topic in the past year and a half, happiness has gone "prime time." This is not all good; there are plenty of charlatans in the mix, making comfortable livings on "fluffy" motivational clichés, delivered to people in need. But floating to the top of the pile are a growing number of social scientists with important research-based discoveries to share. We are learning that happiness is a mixture of several factors. Part of it depends on biology — perhaps as much as 50%, but social and environmental conditions matter too.





Among the things that contribute to happiness are time with family and friends, satisfying work, a sense of community, trust in neighbors, and gratitude. What doesn't seem to matter much are lots of education or money – past what is required for modest comfort. According to happiness pioneer Martin Seligman, one of the best ways of discovering happiness in our lives is to use our unique strengths to contribute to the happiness of others, e.g. volunteerism, civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, service projects, individual acts of kindness.

THE IDEA

I soon realized that my courses and vision of education were aligned with the mission of Delivering Happiness, so we decided to do something about it.

On April 13, 2012 – Thomas Jefferson's birthday – colleges and universities across the country will be invited to participate in a PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS DAY teach-in. While higher education may play an important role in preparing students for the job market, its primary purpose is to deepen and enrich student lives. On April 13th faculty across academic disciplines will be asked to use their classrooms as laboratories to make a difference. This can take the form of a community project, special assignment, single lecture, or brief announcement. It can happen inside or outside the classroom. The one criteria that ties these ideas together is the belief that to “feel good” one needs to “do good”! Is there a way you can guide your students toward a larger purpose?

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

—Winston Churchill

NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW

For decades many Americans have pinned hope for a better life on higher incomes. Many are still struggling, but overall we experience abundance never before imagined. A flurry of research in the emerging “science of happiness” field demonstrates that after basic needs are met, economic success adds little depth to our lives. Relationships matter more.

A conversation is starting to emerge, however.

1. The science of happiness is finding its way into colleges and universities around the world.
2. Happiness campaigns have been launched in cities from Victoria, British Columbia to Seattle, Washington.





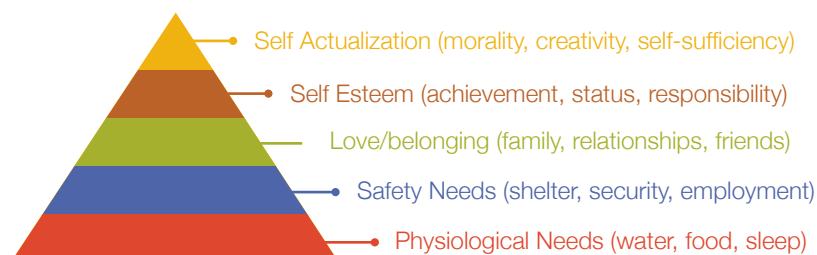
3. Enlightened companies, such as Zappos.com and The Container Store, are beginning to place a higher priority on the well-being of their employees.
4. The United Kingdom just launched its Action for Happiness campaign, and Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK would publish a happiness index with quarterly GDP figures.
5. The Gallup-Healthways organization now polls happiness in the United States and 150 other countries on a daily basis.

At the UI I have seen many students drift away because they couldn't see a deep enough connection between their lives and the subjects they were studying. For these struggling students, the promise of a career that will provide more than adequate income is not enough. They are looking for something more.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls it “flow” — a state of being in which one becomes so engaged in an activity or experience that nothing else seems to matter. Creativity expert Ken Robinson refers to it as “the Element” — the place where the things you love to do and the things you are good at come together. Psychologist Martin Seligman describes it as the “meaningful life” — where an individual’s “signature strengths” are used in the service of something larger than one’s self.

A NEW VISION

Many students are familiar with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid, the largest and most basic levels of needs are placed at the bottom, while the need for self-actualization sits at the top.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

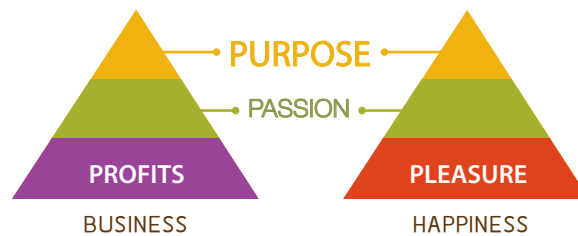




What many don't know, however, is that later in life Maslow wanted to adapt this hierarchy for the individual, and apply it to businesses and organizations. Sadly, he died prematurely in 1970, with his vision unfulfilled.

This idea is being rediscovered by some of the most innovative companies.

THE PARALLELS OF A GREAT BUSINESS AND HAPPINESS



Source: *Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose*

“**And while there’s been a lot of talk over the years about work-life separation or work-life balance, our whole thing is about work life integration. Because it’s just life — and the ideal would be if you can be the same person at home as you are in the office and vice versa.**”

—Tony Hsieh, Zappos CEO

THE FIRST STEP

A small group of colleagues are being asked to conduct a preliminary teach-in on their campuses by October 31, 2011. The objective will be to think creatively and boldly, and develop ideas for others to build on for the April 13th, 2012 event.

Each class will address the pursuit of happiness concept with a unique approach, and there are plenty of needs to consider. Anxiety and depression are on the rise on college campuses. We are a social, interconnected species. If we ignore the unhappiness brought on by ills such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice, can we truly find happiness?





IN CONCLUSION

This spring UI students and I learned another valuable lesson from a class visit. Ashton Kutcher (That '70s Show, Dude, Where's My Car?, Punk'd) spoke about “Newtonian Physics”— specifically, Sir Isaac Newton’s third law of motion that states “for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.”



Ashton Kutcher as a guest speaker at the University of Iowa

If you want a “happy life,” Kutcher advised, focus on enriching the lives of others. The more happiness you put out into the world, the more joy will find its way back to you.

Now that’s a science experiment I can get excited about!

Please join me and Delivering Happiness in sending a collective message of happiness and hope from campuses across the country. And then let’s see what comes back!



David L. Gould
Faculty
The University of Iowa