

You really can buy happiness

By Harvey Mackay

We've all heard the old adage that you can't buy happiness. Well, it turns out that's not exactly true. You actually can buy happiness – when you spend your money or your time on others.

Does that come as a surprise to anyone? It's true for individuals and companies alike. Corporations and organizations often choose a pet charity or cause to support. It's more than just a public relations move. Companies that care make huge impacts on their communities. Similarly, individuals feel the same effect. A great way to feel happy is to help other people by getting involved in volunteer work that supports your community. The experience of helping others can give you the perspective you need to appreciate what you have.

You don't have to look far to find an inspirational opportunity, especially around the holidays. During this traditional time for giving, organizations are clamoring for all kinds of help. Sharing precious time may seem burdensome, but the rewards are immeasurable.

I've written about one of my favorite days every winter, when my elf-assistant Greg Bailey and I take a shift ringing bells for the Salvation Army. Our kettle is proof that even when people can't spare time, they are generous with their money. The Salvation Army is always looking for bell-ringers, and they love having full red kettles. Those donations help buy a lot of happiness for people in need.

Researchers at the University of British Columbia and Harvard University found that people who buy gifts for others or make charitable donations are happier than people who spend their money primarily on themselves. These findings, reported in "Bits & Pieces," described how scientists asked 630 Americans to rate their general happiness, their annual incomes and their gifts to others, including charitable contributions. Researchers found that happiness was not related to how much money participants earned, but rather how they spent their money. The people who donated more money to charity or used it for gifts for others rated themselves much happier than the others.

Researchers also measured the rates of happiness for people who received profit-sharing bonuses of \$3,000–\$8,000 from their employers. Again, the researchers found that it was not how much money the participants received that predicted happiness levels, but rather how the recipients spent the money.

As part of the study, researchers gave participants a \$20 bill and asked them to spend it that day. Half were instructed to spend the money on themselves, while the other half were to spend it on others. You guessed it. The people who spent the money on others reported feeling better and happier than those that didn't. Therefore, if you want to improve your feelings of happiness, try spending even a small amount of money or time on someone else during the day.

There are plenty of other ways to be happy and successful without measuring how much money you make. Here's what works for the happiest people on Earth, according to research cited by The Week website:

- **Nurture your relationships.** The happiest people have lots of friends and strong family relationships.
- **Work hard (but not too hard).** Focus on the work you enjoy and tasks that you do well. Stay busy and involved, but not to the point where you feel constantly rushed to finish everything.
- **Don't stay in the wrong job.** A job you hate adds stress to your life that no amount of money can erase. If you're unhappy at work, find a new job that suits your temperament and skills better.
- **Plan happy activities.** Spontaneity is nice, but people who enjoy life actively plan for fun and recreation. Don't wait until the last minute: Decide on a few activities you like and put them on the calendar so they don't get lost in the shuffle.
- And I would add: **Share willingly.** When you share your gifts, whether time or money, you are giving the best gift of all. You may never know the impact your giving has on others. What matters is the impact it has on you. You'll soon find it becomes a habit.

Remember, you are responsible for your own happiness. You can choose to be happy. You can choose to share your joy. You can't force anyone to be happy, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try!

Mackay's Moral: Unhappiness always seeks to get. Happiness always seeks to give.

Reprinted with permission from nationally syndicated columnist Harvey Mackay, author of the New York Times #1 bestseller "Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive."