

Successful living: How to have a Quality Life

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Here is a fact about human nature: our brains are prewired to seek out what is in our self-interest. The problem is that we often don't know what actually is in our self-interest. For example, we fail to gain the benefits that cooperation would yield for us.

Science informs us that we survived as a species (instead of becoming extinct as so many, many other species have) because we learned to cooperate on projects that we could not handle alone. We set a goal to erect a bridge across a river or to build a residence and we realized that the project was too big to do by ourselves so we enlisted the cooperation of others and we got it done. There are benefits to cooperation. Many of us are not aware of these benefits; we thus often do things that are not in our true self-interest. It is a moral truth that today we need *more cooperation* on worthwhile goals that enhance the quality of human life.

Successful living is concerned with how to live a good life, how to be a good person, how to live the optimal life, how to live well and live happy, as we provide a *Quality Life* for all. When we engage in self-defeating and counter-productive behavior we are doing things that are not in our self-interest.¹

Examples of such conduct would be violence, self-mutilation, ruthless exploitation (such as holding slaves, or murder, or rape, or even disregarding worker safety standards.) Cheating others, baiting and switching, engaging in angry quarrelling, polluting the planet which we all inhabit - these are also forms of conduct that violates a happy life.

A life of real success would include harmonious human relationships, and this report shall explain how to achieve them. Logical deductions can be made from the basic assumptions which we shall soon present. These premises normal people usually find to be reasonable and acceptable. Most folks who try it out find that it all makes good sense.

What are the basic assumptions? Some values are more valuable than others. How can we tell the better from the worse?

It has been shown by a logical demonstration, by a proof discovered by a genius, that one *individual*, having individuality, seen as ‘unique,’ is worth more than all the things in this world, and that one material *thing* is worth more than all the babble, the theories and systems and ideologies. A person is worth more than a thing, and a thing is worth more than a number. As we know, a thing can rust out and be discarded as trash; and a number can be erased. Human life, though, is never trash; it is valuable, uncountably valuable. That’s why it is wrong to murder or rape, or to connive and exploit, to enslave and deceive.

Those who understand these relationships can be said to “know their values.” Once you know the theory and practice of successful living – once you know your values - you will put people first. Then far below you will rank materialism and ostentatious consumption. And you will also realize that systems, dogmas, opinions rather than facts and evidence, isms, labels, and stereotypes have the *lowest* positive value to us.

Indifference to one another has zero value, while cruelty, sadism, personal corruption, and sociopathy have negative value; they are dis-values. Sociopaths commit disvalues.

We don't need more sociopaths. Selfishness is the opposite of living successfully, of living the quality life – the god life. Selfishness is worth less than zero. In this way we can tell better from worse.

The happy principles we offer in this report are not rules or commands; they are not absolutes. Instead, they are guidelines to living a trouble-free life, a smooth balanced harmonious life – an honest life, a life of humility and serenity, of peace of mind and peace in the world – a life of justice. The world is not fair but each of us can engage in fair-dealing: we can resolve not to cheat our fellow-man, not to cut corners, not to have fun at the expense of others, not to 'put people down.' It helps to know our Quality Life values.

Therefore I shall soon present some of the initial basic assumptions. Picture this: If you think you are alone on an island then all you need to be concerned about are the Laws of Nature: you don't want to hurt yourself. If however it turns out that you encounter another individual on that island the laws of human nature come into play. "I don't want to hurt myself" becomes: "I won't do to anyone what I don't want them to do to me. I will strive to do no harm !"

If you have enough cognitive assets (enough sense) you will be respectful, show some consideration, and radiate good will, seek the benefits of cooperation, encourage sharing. {"To do otherwise with this party I just encountered is to risk making an enemy who might fight me over the resources available on the island. I'd better show him that my attitude is that we're both better off if we work together."}

Due to your awareness of the principles of successful living, in as many ways as you can you will want to make everyone

concerned, all parties, a mutual winner. You will be careful to avoid selfishness. You will do random acts of kindness and express deliberate feelings of compassion and empathy. You will strive for clear, accurate, adult communication. You will neither act superior nor play the victim. Furthermore you'll be *mindful* that your biases can become liabilities. One has a liability when one confronts another and shows disrespect. This lessens the chances of your living a happy life, one of high quality.

Here are some of the underlying assumptions, the premises, and a few of the implications that follow from them: You begin to build a quality life for yourself when you regard each individual, or a group of them, as deep, complex, as having a story to tell. And when a situation arises where there is interaction with another person, as a result of understanding these concepts, you seek to add value to that situation; you give that person your attention, you show that you care. For the fact is that successful living is about caring and sharing, and offering a helping hand to those less fortunate, or to those in need.

In every situation that comes up you will seek to make things better. This implies that it is good sense to: "Make yourself better!" You will work on self-improvement. You'll be *mindful* that it is worthwhile to pursue self-development. And in this way you will grow in self-understanding.

Did you know that we have a moral obligation to be good and to be happy. To be good, morally, is to have a good character. This is a big subject, and more will be said about this later.

How can we sum up in one short phrase the idea of being true to yourself? When you are true to your own true self

you have authenticity, integrity, and honesty. Let's speak of it as "being real."

Being real implies living up to what you believe and not having double standards, one for yourself and one for others. It includes having high ideals (moral principles) and having your conduct correspond with those ideals. Some of us will do this consciously at first, until we make a habit of it, and some of us do it already intuitively.

Being real is a matter of degree and a person who knows how to live successfully will want to gain a high degree of this personal quality. It amounts to an increasing correspondence with an improving self-image.

All components of a Quality Life fit together in a pattern, like the solution of a puzzle. Once you get on the right track your logical thinking will enable you to find the balanced pattern, the web of life and human relationships.

With this new knowledge put into practice by enough of us who learn these points, our relations with one another will markedly improve. There will be less heated quarrels, more anger management, more harmony, and more peace of mind. Families will know how to be functional rather than dysfunctional. Members of the family will defer to one another, will show respect. Our lives, due to this new insight on the principles of successful living, will be safer, more efficient, and more prosperous.

We will prosper as a result. There are two ways this can happen: we can acquire more money, or we can arrange things so that the basics necessary for a quality life will cost us less.

Since, due to our brain wiring, it is a fact of human nature that most everyone can sense injustice, once we know about the life of quality we will seek Justice. We will want to achieve balance, we will want things to fit. Without Justice there is no Peace. If one desires peace, he or she will work for, or at least be an advocate for, Social Justice.

We have now presented values in their correct order from better to worse since we are aware that some values are of more value to us than others. We may have known it already but now we are even more aware that caring (if one wants to live a successful life) is better than indifference.

As everyone knows, positive values are better than negative values; but what is not commonly known is that what is richer in properties is better than what lacks them. Value, it turns out, is a function of meaning: the more valuable something is, the more meaningful it is to us, and the more meaning we find in something the more we will regard it as having value.

In addition, we now realize that when one views each individual as possessing indefinitely-high value, one is seeing things clearly and is on the road to living successfully. We also understand now that if someone is *that valuable*, one would no more want to harm him or her than one would want to desecrate a treasure. If someone is uncountably valuable then it is counterproductive to deliberately cause that person harm. Be *mindful* that harm or abuse can be both psychological and physical. When something is done to hurt others, whether it is ridicule, bullying, or what is called “collateral damage,” value is lost.

As we go toward zero-value we are going in the direction of

inertness, apathy, and death. In contrast, as we go toward more positive value (as we add more properties, as we enrich the concept) we are going in the direction of life, of life more abundant.

Hence it is imperative for us to: Do no harm!

As one works for social justice, works for a quality life for all, one is careful to *avoid violence*, and instead to employ nonviolent direct action. This is action, not passivity. And it inflicts no violence, no harm on other people. Recall that successful living is about caring: Take care of yourself, and take care of someone else.

Those who live successfully know how to gain value: They want to empower people from the bottom up; to give them a road to social upward mobility; provide opportunity. Also, they foster community and take on responsibility. A good motto is: “No rights without responsibility.” Falling into a state of dependency is not advisable. Yet, of course, we all depend on the wonders that were invented before we came along; and we depend on each other.

Another imperative of successful living for us is: Whenever you can – without being a martyr - work to alleviate and reduce human suffering. As you pursue this goal take care of yourself so that not only will you be strong enough to be of help to others, but you won’t have a happy life unless you stay healthy. The next point is also important!

Each of us has a moral obligation to be morally good, to be happy, and to dispel unhappiness.

Note that ants, tigers, and anteaters have brains, albeit somewhat primitive. Normal human beings, however, have developed a functioning cerebral cortex in the frontal lobes of their brains. The primitive brain, the **amygdala**, tells us to over-eat, to have frequent fr and indiscriminate sex, to get hostile, while the **cerebral cortex** tells us it is not wise to over-indulge or too look for a fight – that it is not in our best interest. That cortex is our mind working for us.

The imperative for the happy, successful person is: **Be mindful!**

Reviewing what is necessary for a life of quality, we need to care about each other; and we need to practice being happy. Have you noticed that happy people do not become terrorists, or whiners, or those feeling like victims?

We also realize that we need to find ways of facilitating upward social mobility and ways of providing folks with greater opportunities. This applies to all of us: Be a do-er not just a talker. Get something worthwhile done.

Becoming the best possible person facilitates our living the best-possible life, and successful living enables us to become the best we can be. Living a healthy, flourishing life on an ongoing basis necessitates our possessing **a good character**.

If we want to live in harmony with nature , we would strive to maximize value and to minimize disvalue (chaos, misery, destitution and avoidable suffering.) We would support practical policies that implement this.

In addition, recall that research in Brain Neurology has shown that we are pre-wired to seek our own personal benefit. A

question that arises is: What is that benefit and how can we attain it?

Research by Dr. Post at Case Western Reserve has revealed that if we ‘make someone else happy’ we are then happy too. We come to feel our life is making a difference when we act this way ; life seems more meaningful to us. It is a good feeling! It lifts us up. If we trust others, treat them decently, they often tend to treat us the same way. It is a win/win situation, all around. Those who apply the basic principle “Make things better” to themselves would strive to become even more successful than they already are. They would devote themselves to achieving this goal. In the process of doing so they would develop to the point where others might with some accuracy describe them as having ‘a good character.’ Let’s delve into this further in the next section.

ON HAVING A GOOD CHARACTER

Wide agreement can be seen on the claim that if one has a good character, all else being equal, one will tend to perform worthwhile actions; will tend to “do the right thing. People of good character are *honest* individuals. Being good often results in doing good but not necessarily the other way around: even criminals may sometimes do something good; but of course cannot accurately be described as having a good character.

Furthermore, if one has a good character one will be likely to keep one’s promises, will honor one’s contracts, fulfill one’s obligations, be responsible,

A person of good character will strive to adhere to some principles – such as the following:

A SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

- 1) Honor and respect every individual.
- 2) Everyone is doing the best one knows how. If we knew any better we would do better. It's mainly due to ignorance why we behave badly.
- 3) We are all in this together. We're all just trying to make a life.
- 4) Work for mutually-beneficial relationships. What really helps you, helps me; and vice versa.
- 5) Strive for excellence in performance! Aim to be a good person, one who values deeply yourself and others.
- 6) Be authentic! Don't be a phony; be true to your true self.
- 7) In every situation in life the central question to ask yourself is:
What action can I take here and now to create the greatest all-around value?
- 8) Provide everyone the full opportunity to express their creativity.
- 9) Empower the individual to express more of his full potential.
- 10) Look to creative design to solve problems.
- 11) Be consistent: Do not have double standards, one for yourself, and others for other people.
- 12) : Include as many as possible into your in-group – widen your moral compass – be inclusive.

13)) Help those in need.

14) Be honest. Don't deceive others or "put them on" just for fun. Don't toy with people.

15) Be lawful: Do not violate the law unless it is a bad law, one that violates human dignity by contradicting one of these principles.

16) Recognize the individual's right to be autonomous. Acknowledge a person's freedom over his/her actions or physical body.

17) Be aware of the justice principle: acknowledge a person's right to due process, fair compensation for harm done, and fair distribution of benefits.

18) Acknowledge a person's rights – among which is a right to life, to information, privacy, free expression, and safety.

As we mentioned earlier, none of these principles are absolutes, they are guidelines. Successful living does not deal in absolutes. This writer is not interested in, and has no use for, moralism.

Becoming an early adopter of these concepts will make you wise and will contribute to bringing everyone closer to living a happy, successful, quality-filled life.

End Note 1) [Self-defeating behavior may be described as conduct that rates a low degree on the QL measuring scale: *i.e.*, a low Value Quotient on the Hartman Value Profile; or a low rank on a social happiness index.]

