

1986

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Recommended Citation

Stensrud, Carol (1986) "On Seeking Joy: An Integral Part of Personal Wellness," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol5/iss1/7>

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ON SEEKING JOY: AN INTEGRAL PART OF PERSONAL WELLNESS

BY

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ABSTRACT

The connection between joy and wellness is explored in the article On Seeking Joy: An Integral Part of Personal Wellness. The basic premise is that without joy . . . one is not well. Joy helps us maintain our wellness and survive the stressful society we live in.

Seeking Joy is not as simple as it sounds. Many people do not know what they are looking for. Some generic joy factors are offered. These elements contribute to most people's happiness.

Joyseeking, a style of leisure counseling that helps people identify what joy is to them and get more of it is described. A definition, process, and sample activity of joyseeking provides a basic understanding of how this style of leisure counseling may lead people towards joy.

ON SEEKING JOY: AN INTEGRAL PART OF PERSONAL WELLNESS

This article is about the process of seeking joy and its integral connection to wellness. In this increasingly stressful, pressuresome, and "less humane" world of Hi-Tech that we live in today, personal wellness is our only hope for survival. The focus of the article will be on how Joyseeking, a style of leisure counseling, can contribute to personal wellness.

JOY AND WELLNESS CONNECTION

Joy and wellness . . . the terms go together easily. The joy and wellness connection is suggested by the many definitions of wellness that include the term joy. Wellness promotes a lifestyle that has new possibilities for a healthier, fuller, richer, more joyous and extended life (1). It's more than just not being sick, it's a positive state of health. Wellness involves the health of the whole person, the body, mind and spirit.

Important to the process of wellness are two elements. The first is self-awareness: knowing yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, peak energy times, and best nutrition patterns. It's knowing what makes sense to your body, mind and spirit. We do this through what I call personal biofeedback. No electrodes needed, just being in tune and observant of ourselves and our environment. Important to wellness is the acceptance of self-responsibility for a lifestyle that fosters optimal happiness and health. Discovering your personal needs and finding ways to meet them in positive, loving, healthy and joyous ways are the essence of wellness.

The second element critical to wellness is the belief that everything you do, think and feel, has an impact on your state of health (2). This is the old "you are what you eat" idea. This wellness belief reflects the laws of physics. For every action there is a reaction. If your stress level is up, conversely, your wellness level is down.

Joy directly affects personal wellness in a positive way. If you are happy, your chances of being sick are lessened. A positive attitude helps a person combat stress and tension (3). When you are happy, you move beyond the neutral state of wellness, "without sickness," into the positive side of wellness, "living with robustness."

So if joy is important to personal wellness . . . what is it? Webster defines it as a feeling of great pleasure and delight (4). It's that hard to describe state of ecstasy, bliss and that AHA! YEAH! YEAH! feeling. It is not merely the lack of negative feelings, but a positive state of being. I define it like this.

JOY IS A

PERSONALLY DEFINED STATE OF PLEASURE . . . UNIQUE TO EACH INDIVIDUAL

Yahoo!

Should It Be So Hard to Find ?

YAHOO! I say. So what's the problem? Seeking joy seems to be such a natural thing and its connection to wellness obvious. Then why aren't we all joyous? It seems we all have a wondrous ability and willingness to be joyous. Yet we hold back, using only a small fraction of our tremendous genetic endowment to feel "wonder-full, relaxed, soft, secure, and full of wonder and joy".(1)

One would believe that it is human nature to seek joy, peace and happiness. In today's world, full of demands and stress, seeking joy just may not come so easily. The message of the day is:

BE SUCCESSFUL!

Not only in business, but in relationships, family, and in personal wellness. By standards set by the norm, all may be in place, all may be

well. You're eating the right food and sleeping well handling stress OK, but the positives, the optimism, the joy may still be missing.(5)

We are supposed to embrace joy and wellness. At the same time, we have all kinds of external and internal messages telling us differently. Almost everyone suffers some guilt for taking time for themselves, embarrassment from personal pleasure . fear of things going "too well".(2) The messages are reflected in our shouldn'ts, couldn'ts, gotta go's, havin' too much fun, haven't the time and what would my mother think? feelings.

Answering the question why is it hard to find joy?, the messages are clear and the reasons many. The most important problem I feel that people have related to embracing joy is simple.

THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT JOY IS TO THEM!

One of the main things missing in the average American's life is an awareness of what really makes them happy. No, not what the neighbors think, nor what the current fad is, or living in what I deem the Dynasty Dilemma Dream . . but what is it that really pleases them. My simple question is "what brings you joy?" The response is often "I don't know, been busy with work."

The question is a stumper to many and understandably so. Very little focus is put on personal values related to joy. We have a society of people scrambling to find joy . . and they don't know what they are looking for. I sum this situation up with a wonderful old quote that goes like this . . .

IF YOUR SHIP DOTH NOT KNOW WHICH HARBOR IT SAILS TO . . .
NO WIND IS THE RIGHT WIND

In other words, if you don't know what joy is to you, then likely your search will be fruitless. No amount of looking will bring you to joy if you don't know what you're looking for.

SO WHAT COMES FIRST? JOY OR WELLNESS?

If being well isn't joyous . . . then being well won't last. We seek pleasure. We are simple in nature. I contend that joy is an integral part of wellness, the part that makes total wellness tolerable. In a world of work and competition, the dictate to be "well" is just one more constraint on an individual. The messages are clear to "Be Good," do aerobics, eat right, stop smoking, watch your weight, your cholesterol, your vitamins . . your manners. Oh, and don't forget to dress for success. All important messages. All more norms to conform

to. All adding more stress to our lives and not necessarily wellness.

In order to really take on a life-long plan for wellness, I believe one must insert joy into the program. In order to do this, one must know what it is. The dictionary definitions are not helpful. As a Joyseeking counselor, I cannot send one of my clients on a mission to find . . . delight, rapture or bliss. These items aren't on the market yet. I must direct people to sources of joy, each very personal to them. I must first help them zero in on just that . . . what is joy to them.

A PRESCRIPTION FOR JOY

So what do I do? What is my prescription for joy? My answer is that there is no prescription. Joy is a very personally defined state of being that cannot be easily dispensed.

However, I do believe in some common factors that make us happy. My investigations (6, 7) point to five important elements that contribute to most people's happiness. I call these elements Generic JOY Factors.

These factors are keys to JOY. Keys that we must shout out, affirm and help people get more of. HERE THEY ARE!

GENERIC JOY FACTORS

INTIMACY

Beyond bedroom activities . . . family, friends, and loved ones,
companionship, conversation and commune with the world.

FREEDOM

That perception of no rules or constraints

BEING IN THE MOMENT

Feeling immersed in the instant, clear physical and mental
focus, loss of time . . . that "runner's high"

CREATIVE INPUT

Being able to make a difference, putting the "You" into
an activity

THE OUT OF DOORS

Space, nature, green, animals, plants, trees and flowers . . .
peace, quiet and tranquility

These elements contribute to most people's happiness . . . we must help them find them.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND JOY

Do people really need help finding joy? I have been asked this a million times. Before the question rolls off their lips, the answer is clear YES! Our nation is full of people who are just not overjoyed. Low-level depression and stress are part of many people's lives. People do need an injection of Joy to survive in this stressful world.

The obvious question asked is then, but how? How do you help people find joy? My response, Joyseeking.

Joyseeking, as defined by this author, is a positive leisure counseling approach: one that reflects a period of maturation, refinement (8) and growth in the leisure counseling field. Joyseeking approaches to leisure counseling and education align with preventative health practices and the newer wellness or well-being trend (9), and has as its core the belief that people can move from poor, negative or neutral states of health to very positive states of human excellence. The joyseeking process does not focus on the negative. It focuses on positive movement towards JOY.

Joyseeking is NOT "helping people use their free time" as so many have tried to define it for me. It IS a process of increasing personal options for joy. I believe that joy can be found in all aspects of life, but that the most successful searching takes place in our most free and self-directed life space . . . that being our leisure.

It is a process that is best described as pragmatic, do what feels best, explorative, creative combination of many previously practiced types of leisure counseling. In basic terms, I explain joyseeking as a process of helping people define what personal joy is to them, and then get more of it!

THE JOYSEEKING PROCESS

It's time to get down to some practicalities . . . some processes for seeking JOY. My system is simple to describe, yet not so simple to

implement due to the beauty of human diversity. The process is a recipe that goes like this:

JOY SEEKING RECIPE

A. IDENTIFY PERSONAL JOY FACTORS

B. INSERT THEM INTO YOUR LIFE

C. CONTINUE TO AFFIRM JOY IN YOUR LIFE
HOLD ON TO IT FOR YOUR LIFE!!!

The process utilized to facilitate joyseeking needs to be individualized. Some people need an educational approach, others a counseling approach. The key is creativity, flexibility and refined counseling competency.

A sample Joyseeking activity that I do with people is called My Personal Joy Rights. This exercise helps people assess, affirm and communicate their personal joy factors. It is a combination of a leisure bill of rights (9), and affirmation writing exercise.(2) Here are the instructions.

Think for a minute about activities and things that make you happy, possibly some that other people may not know about, or ones they give you a hard time about. Write them down. Next, take a nice piece of paper, something that will last and put on the top of the paper MY PERSONAL JOY RIGHTS Then write this simple declaration, "I maintain the right to . . ."
" listing your joy rights. Here are mine.

MY PERSONAL JOY RIGHTS

I MAINTAIN THE RIGHT TO . . .

HAVE TIME ALONE

MAKE PLANS FOR NO PLANS

EAT WITH MY HANDS

BE SILLY

ENJOY ONLY THE CRUST OF BREAD

DANCE ALL NIGHT

Now, paste it up in a conspicuous spot, copy it and give it to all your best friends, mail it to your enemies . . . help your family and friends make their own. Affirm your personal joy rights!

CONCLUSION

Joyseeking is a style of leisure counseling that serves to enhance personal awareness, affirmation, and insertion of JOY FACTORS into a person's life. The more joy we have in our lives, the closer to wellness we'll find ourselves. Seeking Joy is an integral part of our personal wellness.

MAY YOU FIND YOURS . . . AND . . . ENJOY THE SEARCH

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