

December 2014

## Four Steps to Joy

by Chris Alexander

Can you recall learning to read? Your first success at multiplication? Think back, to the days of milk money, school Thanksgiving plays and the casual sadism of dodgeball. Now, do you remember your earliest training in mental health? Which of your teachers led you in the playful, organized study of happiness?

In a culture focused on financial achievement, material possessions as a measure of personal worth and competition as a national goal, our schools, not surprisingly, missed the boat in teaching us about the most important part of being human: the creation of a happy, meaningful life. We sweat out a decade or two over grammar and grade curves, penmanship and popularity, then spend the rest of our lives figuring out the lessons of being human; establishing credibility, integrity, purpose. Some people wander trippingly into happiness: others seek it all their lives. Is happiness just the luck of the draw? Maybe not.

Living happily is a set of skills, no more sophisticated, than 7<sup>th</sup> grade math. Read on to learn a four-step process for rejuvenating, reconnecting and relating the minutiae of everyday life to the grandest scheme of all: the radical, simple crafting of joy.

### Step 1: Start with Synergy

Synergy, the phenomenon of the total being greater than the sum of its parts, is the reason housework can be done three times faster by two people than it can by one. Synergy is the magic that grows teamwork, artwork and flights of sheer genius. When Synergy is at work, we experience \* "Flow". In Flow, we are challenged, completely immersed, at the peak of our game. Moments stand still while time speeds by. People experience Flow in all kinds

of activities. Flow is the singular experience of happiness through dedicated effort. Synergy, the melding of body, spirit and mind the in attainment of the goal, is the precursor to Flow.

You increase Synergy by noticing and attending to it. Fatigue decreases Synergy, as we grow too tired to seek out new experiences. But those who can step over to the easel, the garden, the piano, are richly rewarded in bursts of energy and excitement.

Your mission on the road to happiness is to recognize your experience of Flow and Synergy, to actively work to increase those experiences, and to refuse to settle for less than the things that turn you on, light you up and make you smile from ear to ear.

### Step 2: Make Room

When you try to work in a crowded kitchen or at a messy desk, you see the importance of tidying up before you start. The human soul delights in order. An uncluttered desk and a clean pad of paper invite creative activity: Synergy is more attainable if you clear out the stuff that gets in your way. Like taking out the trash, cleaning up mentally gives you the spiritual space to work.

The goal in cleansing the inner ecology is to target and reduce negative thoughts that increase anxiety, replay old situations and keep us stuck. To reduce unhappy thoughts, start by forgiving

yourself. Be gentle and less than "perfect". Be occasionally blemished; wear mismatched socks; say No when you don't want to say Yes. Give yourself permission to nurture and protect your essentially perfect self, and let your image take care of itself.

### Step 3: Consider All Your Options

When Synergy starts working its magic, creative thought skyrockets. It's inevitable: there's less negative stuff dragging you down; fewer howls and horrors from the past. Creativity can be applied to everyday life, but often isn't. Part of the problem is that there are so few true options presented to us. Why are there four hundred brands of cereal at the supermarket, and four that are sugar-free? The illusion is that we have a plethora of choices, but what if the choice is between a thousand things we don't want?

Don't just settle for what everyone else does. Ask, "Will this road take me where I want to be?" Then choose what looks right for you.

### Step 4: Use What Works for You

To consider all your options, recognize the unusual, the frowned-upon, the seemingly illogical as true potential choices. Staying true to your values is crucial, because choices that make sense to most other people may not work for you. Decide what's most important and make your choices without being swayed by the general consensus.

When you were a kid, you probably didn't spend time wishing you were financially better off, or wondering where your career was headed with every report card. Older people often say that if they had it to do over again, they would have been much less serious and had a lot more fun. They would have taken more chances, exercised their options more fully. Those of us who fall in the middle of the age range can learn a lot from the children we were and the old folks we will become. Make happiness your goal, so everything else leads to and follows from your ongoing creation of the joyful life.

\*Csikzentmihalyi, Mihalyi. Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.

Creating Extraordinary Joy (Hunter House; 2002) by Chris Alexander inspires you to make choices that fulfill your deepest needs. Learn to envision and create the most important sort of happiness; an excuberantly joyful life. For more info, please contact:

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Chris Alexander M.A. (Org Psych.) is a renowned speaker, author and business building strategist. He has spent the last 20 years helping people and organizations maximize their potential for greatness, so they can achieve wealth, health and extraordinary joy. Founder of Synergy Executive Education, Chris' main

goal is to turn stressed out frustrated workers into dynamic, team playing go-getters. He customizes programs for many major corporations and also reaches people on a personal level.

Delivering his messages with high impact, Chris Alexander makes a difference through his gifted, insightful and humorous speaking style. Leading companies and organizations throughout the world have profited from his expertise and business building talents. Recently, Chris addressed his largest audience with two PBS TV shows, titled Creating Extraordinary Joy and Joy in the Workplace. His drive time radio talk show, TrendTalk on KUCI 88.9 in Irvine reaches more than 500,000 listeners every week. He is the host of Adelphia's TV show: Overcoming the Odds and Time Warner's "Working Wardrobes for A New Start". In 1999, along with a team of educational specialists, Chris won the Los Angeles area Emmy Award for overall excellence in business education.

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