

# Continuous Life Improvement

Post by “Garden Dweller” of October 2, 2019 at 9:04 PM

The Pursuit of Happiness: 21 Steps to Continuous Life Improvement

Learning how to examine one's life and change it to maximize happiness is a very powerful skill. Increasing one's tranquility and happiness can lift the human spirit to a high level of grace and dignity.

In this text, we propose a process of examining one's life and carefully reconstructing it to maximize tranquility and happiness. We encourage each reader to examine his own life and make improvements based on his own judgment and free will.

This strategy is not for everyone: it requires a certain level of discipline to be able to choose behavior and action that benefits one's life over the long term, rather than selecting instant gratification. If one is able to make decisions with maturity, the process of Continuous Life Improvement can lift one to a high level of happiness and contentment.

## 1. Be Sensitive and Learn From Your Senses!

Listen to what your body is telling you about the world. Your senses are your most direct and real connection with the physical world, and should be trusted more than dreams, imagination, things that you have heard from others or what you have been taught by others. Be sensitive to how your mind/body processes and reacts to physical sensations, and learn to recognize and distinguish negative sensations (pain) from positive sensations (pleasure).

Our written language is somewhat limited in the meanings it can convey through a single word. The words "pain" and "pleasure" are not adequate to describe the positive and negative sensations which we receive from our environment. Some synonyms for pain that one may sense include distress, dismay, discomfort, worry, anxiety, disturbance, fear, bother, discontent, displeasure, stress, distastefulness and unpleasantness. Synonyms for pleasure that one may sense include joy, peace, relief, comfort, contentment, enjoyment and satisfaction.

Learn to recognize which of your own feelings are positive, and which are negative by "listening" to or being aware of your own senses. Try to connect events, behaviors and actions which trigger these positive and negative feelings to identify cause and effect for positive and negative feelings.

Many sensations are not strongly painful or pleasurable, but one can often recognize that the body prefers one behavior over another, for example, depending on the outdoor temperature, the body may prefer sunshine to shade, or vice versa. Be open to these types of subtle sensations, both positive and negative.

## 2. Respond to Negative Feedback!

Be conscious of negative sensations and identify the actions, behaviors and situations that cause them. Find ways to change those behaviors to reduce or eliminate the negative sensations. Negative sensations include pain, discomfort, distress, anxiety, stress and fear.

When you recognize a negative sensation, try to determine which behavior or action caused the negative sensation and change it. Continually be aware of your sensations and strategically make changes in your life that relieve negative sensations. Eliminating behavior and actions that are the cause of negative sensations is a very powerful way to improve one's life. Repeating this process over time will create enormous improvement in one's life.

## 3. Be Rational!

The senses occur in the present moment, so one must use the rational mind to evaluate the cause of that sensation, which may have happened in the past. For example, "after drinking that tea, I became somewhat nervous and agitated...", which might lead you to suspect that drinking that type of tea causes a certain level of distress. One can then eliminate this behavior to reduce one's level of distress.

It is not always clear which behavior caused which sensation. The rational process of identifying cause and effect is an important skill and requires one to recall one's actions over time and discover clues that indicate which behavior affected one's sense of well being. Use cause and effect analysis to choose how to modify your behavior to reduce negative sensations.

## 4. Develop a Strategy!

A behavior or action which causes a negative sensation should be modified or eliminated to reduce the negative sensation. There may be a number of behaviors and actions that work together to cause negative sensations. Because the world is complex, this may require a multilevel strategy in response as one improves one's life.

Changes in one area may have unintended consequences in other areas. A unified strategy that makes changes in many areas may be more effective than making a single change at a time. Learning from others and comparing strategies may be effective if others are following a similar philosophy.

## 5. Be Good to Yourself!

Choose behavior that maximizes positive sensations. Fill your day with pleasant places, people, activities and events. Listen to what your senses are telling you, and take action to move toward that which is pleasant. Seek out beauty, comfort, joy and contentment. Continually reassess a behavior or action to determine whether it continues to be pleasurable, or if it is becoming less positive over time. Improve your life every minute by constantly thinking about how you could increase your happiness and tranquility.

## 6. Use Long Term Cost/Benefit Analysis!

It is important to rationally choose behavior and actions which maximize positive sensations. Use a long term cost/benefit analysis to assess whether a short term pleasure is worthwhile over the long term. For example, a sexual relationship may cause emotional distress in the future if one is not selective about the type of person one has a relationship with. Avoid behavior that causes long term negative impacts on one's life.

Assess a short term negative sensation which may resolve a problem based on the long term positive effects which it might bring. A visit to the dentist is unpleasant, but it can relieve a toothache and promote long term dental health. When considered on a rational basis, one can endure the short term pain for the long term benefit.

There are many such compromises which one must make in life. By focusing on the long term benefit, one can remain aware of the reason one is accepting the short term negative sensation. When the long term benefit no longer exists, one should then end the short term negative sensation.

In some cases, the best strategy may be to select a behavior which minimizes the negative effects of an activity which has some benefits. Working to earn money is a necessity in today's world. One can select a career with a minimum of negative impacts on one's life, and one can live frugally to minimize the amount of money needed. The negative aspects of one's time being controlled by others can be rationalized by the money which one can save for a future life unencumbered by work.

#### 7. Control Desires!

Recognize that there are some desires which are needs that every human must satisfy, for example, the need for food, water, shelter and friendship. Respect these desires and focus on satisfying them with appropriate responses.

Desires which are not necessary for one's basic needs are often desires which can damage one's happiness if one pursues them. Pursuing desires for political power, sexuality, wealth, conspicuous consumption and fame might bring fleeting satisfaction, but over the long term cause distress and pain.

Learn to recognize the difference between desires which are necessary for one's happiness, and those desires which are unnecessary and often destructive to one's long term happiness. Use discipline to say no to unnecessary desires. Consciously reduce one's thoughts about unnecessary desires.

#### 8. Be Loyal to Yourself!

It is important to be relentlessly and completely true to your own self-interest. Every other person who you are in contact with will try to influence your behavior toward their interests. Organizations and governments will try to impress your mind with the "duty" to put their interests first. Businesses will try to influence your behavior in a way that is likely to increase purchases from them and will increase their profits.

In order to find true happiness, it is important to put your interests in the primary position. Delegating decisions which serve the best interest of others can lead to bitterness, dismay, and the feeling of being cheated. By following your own best interest, you will be honest, true, predictable and reliable to yourself and to others.

#### 9. Choose Wisely!

There will be many decisions made throughout your life. They are all important. It is crucial to rationally choose the path your life follows, and to have the discipline to follow through with those choices. Many choices are difficult, and only by carefully considering the potential outcomes can one choose the optimum path. The best method is to rationally consider long term outcomes of action in the present. Consider, decide and act to live your life.

#### 10. Cultivate Friendship!

Friendship is a necessary human need. Your state of mental well-being is affected by the mental state of those around you, in particular family and friends with whom you have frequent contact over a long period of time. It is human nature to need association with friends.

Seek out people with positive thoughts and lifestyles and get to know them. Reach out to communicate with friends regularly. Invite others and meet with others as often as you can to build a group of friends. Eat with friends, share your food with friends. Help friends, and ask friends for help when you need it. Learn how to develop friendship and how to respond to the social dynamics within a group of friends.

Support your friends to help keep them in a positive state of mind. Work to maintain lifelong friendships. As friendship develops over time, one gains trust and the friendship strengthens to the point of one's friends being almost as important as one's self.