

 Happiness Exercise 5 min Client No

Chasing Happiness

When it comes to happiness, research has found that many people fall prey to what is known as the impact bias: the tendency for people to overestimate the initial impact and/or duration of an emotional event (Gilbert, Driver-Linn, & Wilson, 2002). Simply put, this means that many people believe that certain future events, like buying a new car or house, getting married, or passing an exam, will make them happier than is the case. These events may provide some increased level of happiness, but the duration and intensity are far less than often expected. A possible reason for this is that we quickly adapt to new situations. In the literature, this is called “hedonic adaptation” (Frederick and Loewenstein, 1999).



Goal

The goal of the exercise is to make clients aware of the impact bias and the implications of faulty affective forecasting for well-being. It can make clients aware that it is important to enjoy the present moment, rather than (continuously) believe that happiness will be found in the future if certain conditions are being met. In other words, postponing happiness for some uncontrollable future circumstance is unlikely to result in happiness.



Advice

- This exercise can also be used as homework. During the next week or so, the client can be asked to become aware of his/her tendency to believe that happiness lies somewhere in the future. What exactly are the promises that the thoughts about the future hold? What does it feel like to believe that a future event will cause happiness? Etc.



References

- Frederick, S. & Loewenstein, G. (1999). Hedonic adaptation. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 302-329). Russell Sage Foundation.
- Gilbert, D. T., Driver-Linn, E., & Wilson, T. D. (2002). The trouble with Vronsky: Impact bias in the forecasting of future affective states. In L. F. Barrett & P. Salovey (Eds.), *The wisdom in feeling: Psychological processes in emotional intelligence* (pp. 114-143). Guilford Press.



Chasing Happiness

Instructions

Is the grass always greener on the other side of the fence? Thinking about happiness as a way of life, rather than a moment in time, can give us the false perspective that we need to chase happiness. People seek happiness in their lives but should appreciate and cherish the moments in life that did and will bring them happiness. For example, people may believe that if they had more money, they would be happier, or they would be happier if someone loved them or if their circumstances changed. In this exercise, you will have an opportunity to compare the things you *think* will make you happy in the future with the things that actually made you happy in the past.

1. Take a moment to reflect on any event and situations that would make you happy, like buying a nicer car, buying your own home, saving enough money, getting married, and others. Write down what these happy-making events and situations might be.

2. Then think about the moments in the past that made you happy. For example, your graduation day, getting a promotion at work, buying your first car, and the like. Were you finally happy when you achieved these moments? Write down some reflections on these moments and your happiness during those times.



3. Now reflect on events of the past that contributed significantly to your happiness. Write down the events that come to your mind.

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write down events that contributed to their happiness.

4. What kind of conclusions can you draw about the real sources of your happiness?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write down conclusions about the real sources of their happiness.