

Clear Reflections Psychotherapy, PLLC

Traci Breniser Wilson, MA LLP

5 Attitudes Wired in Happy and Successful Brains

I've been studying psychology and self-improvement for a long time now. A lot of my research includes getting into the minds of happy and successful people (by asking questions and observing their behavior), and then trying to determine what it is that makes them the way they are.

One thing I've noticed about almost every single happy and successful person is that they share a lot of the same attitudes and beliefs about life.

I've carefully examined people from all different professions – actors, scientists, comedians, business owners, athletes, musicians, etc. – and often times the ones who are the most happy and successful are also the ones who share very similar philosophies.

Here are some of the fundamental attitudes and beliefs that I believe contribute to their happiness and success:

1. Failure is a part of learning.

This is one of the most commonly recited mantras in self-improvement – but for good reason. Individuals who see their mistakes and failures as a learning experience are much more prone to happiness and success.

When we adopt the belief that “failure is a part of learning,” we become more resilient and courageous in the face of new challenges.

Instead of avoiding situations where we may embarrass ourselves or temporarily hurt our self-esteem, we embrace these challenges in life, even when we know they can be risky and painful.

When we do fail, we don't see it as the end of the world, but a point to grow from and improve upon. Here are some of my favorite quotes illustrating this concept:

“I didn't fail a thousand times, I only found a thousand ways that don't work.” **Thomas Edison**

“I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” **Michael Jordan**

“Failure is the foundation of success, and the means by which it is achieved. Success is the lurking-place of failure; but who can tell when the turning-point will come?” **Lao Tzu**

2. Focus on solutions, not just problems.

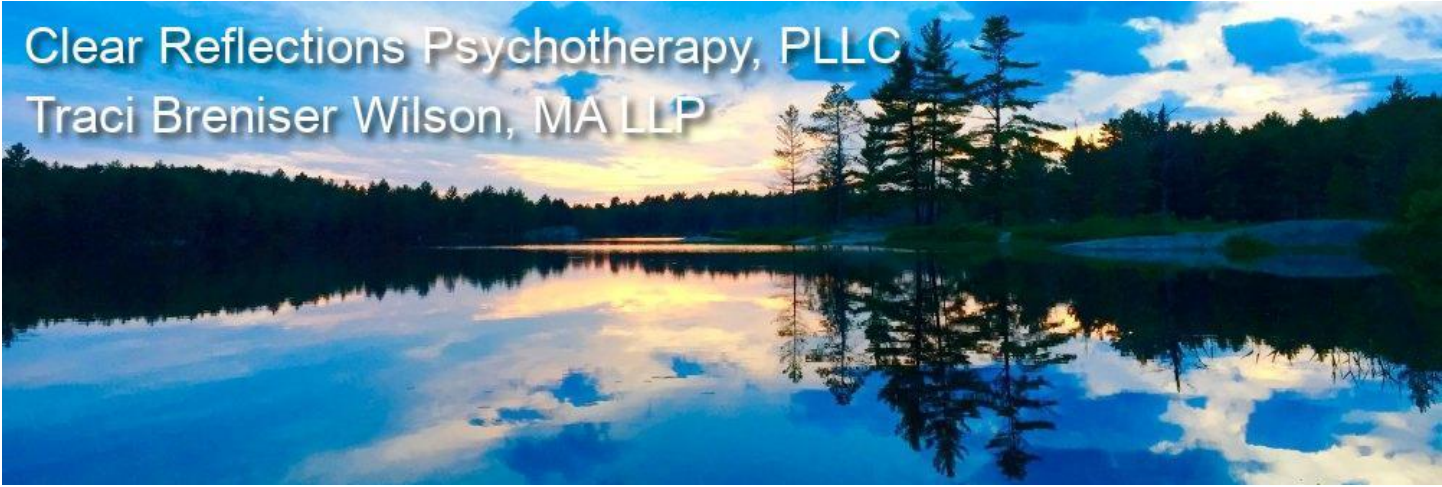
Many people are great at finding problems and being critical about their lives; however, they do this without ever suggesting a possible solution or alternative to their situation.

They complain about this and that, but they never take an active role to actually improve these things. They focus on problems not to learn from them or fix them, but to make excuses for why their lives are miserable and unpleasant.

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I believe acknowledging problems in life is important. I don't recommend that we ignore things in our life that disturb us or make us unhappy. However, it's also important to think of ways we can actually respond to these problems and change our circumstances.

Ruminating over problems in our life without a plan to take action is not only a waste of time, but it makes us even more sad and depressed. If you're going to be critical about something in your life, focus on the ways you can actually make a difference.

Happy and successful people only think about problems when they are looking to improve them. They do not use them as excuses or self-deprecating banter.

*"Focus 90% of your time on solutions and only 10% of your time on problems." **Anthony D'Angelo***

*"I believe that if you show people the problems and you show them the solutions they will be moved to act." **Bill Gates***

*"Looking back, I realize that nurturing curiosity and the instinct to seek solutions are perhaps the most important contributions education can make." **Paul Berg***

3. Be grateful for what you have.

Happy and successful people are incredibly grateful for their lives and everything they have: their relationships, their home, their job, their possessions, their talents, their achievements, etc.

Although successful people are often thought of as always hungry and striving – always trying to improve things, achieve their goals, and make things better – this inner drive doesn't take away from the fact they are very happy and content with their lives.

One of my favorite things to do is watch successful people give thank you speeches after achieving something really great. This is when their true colors shine through because you can tell many of them are extremely grateful for all the people and good fortune that contributed to their success.

Gratitude is an irreplaceable characteristic of true happiness and success. Even if we achieve great things in life, without gratitude we often find ourselves empty and discontent. Make sure you take the time to reflect on how lucky you are as a person (I believe everyone can find something to be grateful for).

*"He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has." **Epictetus***

*"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us." **Albert Schweitzer***

*"Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation." **Brian Tracy***

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4. See the bigger picture.

Happy and successful people have an uncanny ability to put things into perspective and see the “bigger picture.” They rarely get caught in the heat-of-the-moment or act impulsively. Instead they are calm, centered, and understanding that there is much more to the world than what immediately meets the eye.

If something goes wrong in their life, they don’t get too upset because they know that life goes in phases, and there will always be highs and lows. No single moment in life can ever define you because you are a dynamic individual in a dynamic world.

On the other hand, people who can’t see the “bigger picture” often get overwhelmed and flustered when something goes wrong. They are too narrowly focused in the moment, and not taking the time to step back and see the larger view of what’s happening.

“In order to properly understand the big picture, everyone should fear becoming mentally clouded and obsessed with one small section of truth.” Xun Zi

“I always had a larger view. I’m interested in real life – my family, my friends. I have tried never to define myself by my success, whatever that is. My happiness is way beyond roles and awards.” Amy Adams

“We think too small. Like the frog at the bottom of the well. He thinks the sky is only as big as the top of the well. If he surfaced, he would have an entirely different view.” Mao Tse-Tung

5. Learn from other happy and successful brains.

Happy and successful individuals know that we can learn a lot from other happy and successful individuals. Having people to look up to is a great resource for learning the beliefs and habits that contribute to other people’s success, and then modeling those beliefs and habits in our own lives.

If you want to improve a particular area of your life, then find a couple people who already excel in that area of life. Study them. Ask them questions. Have them show you their technique and share their stories.

The more willing you are to learn from others (especially people who are more skilled or intelligent than you), the more successful you will be. Talking and listening to others is one of the best ways to get more perspective into what you want to improve in life – and how you can do it. by Steven Handel

“People never improve unless they look to some standard or example higher and better than themselves.” Tyron Edwards

“The best teachers of humanity are the lives of great men.” Charles H. Fowler

“Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.” Mark Twain

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Traci Breniser Wilson is a clinical psychologist with offices in Brooklyn, MI. She has 30+ years of experience and specializes in eating disorders, weight loss, depression, anxiety, marriage repair and enrichment, addiction, grief and loss, Christian therapy, and goal achievement. For more information on this topic or other mental health questions, feel free to contact Traci.

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