

Sustainable Happiness? Six Ways To Get There by Catherine O'Brien, Ian Murray

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□In the past ten years there has been an escalating interest in happiness. Hundreds of books and studies have emerged to guide us toward finding the good life, but achieving personal happiness is only a part of the equation. When happiness is partnered with well-being and sustainability it takes on a whole new dimension: sustainable happiness.

□Sustainable happiness takes into account that happiness is interconnected with other people, other species, and the natural environment by a remarkable web of interdependence. This means that our daily actions and decisions contribute to—or detract from—our own well-being, and that of others. Sometimes things that make us happy may harm our community, ecosystems, or future generations.

□Sustainable happiness can lead to a more sustainable lifestyle and greater life satisfaction—and sometimes it’s right at your fingertips. Other times it involves reawakening to the joy that comes from simple pleasures or generating options for a lifestyle change. Here’s how you can start:

□1. Cultivate Appreciation

□According to happiness experts, gratitude and appreciation are associated with happiness and life satisfaction. Taking a moment to experience appreciation is a marvelous counterpoint to the constant bombardment of media messages that tell us we don’t have enough stuff or that we aren’t good enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, and so on. Appreciation brings us into the present. Perhaps it’s taking a few seconds to feel the delicate warmth of a winter’s sun on your face, birds singing early on a spring morning, or the delicious aroma of coffee wafting from the kitchen. Allowing yourself to absorb and appreciate the moment can be an antidote to stress.

□2. Embrace your Natural Highs

□Natural highs are natural, everyday things that are found—sometimes literally—right under your nose, like the fragrance of a rose garden. Tuning in to your natural highs alone could bring you hundreds of daily experiences of delight and contentment. Have you ever stood under a tin roof and listened to the rhythmic drumming of rain while the moist air cools you on a hot summer day? How about the sound of children’s laughter in the park?

□To seek out these experiences, simply pay attention to the wonder of the world around you. Here are some of the natural highs people have shared during the course we teach in sustainable happiness:

- Watching my daughter sleep
- The smell of the earth thawing in the spring
- Hearing an owl hooting at night
- The cold side of a pillow
- Feeling the sun on my face
- The sound of an iceberg breaking apart
- Hugs
- Smelling flowers, especially roses
- Gazing at the Northern Lights
- Hiking in the woods
- Riding my bike
- Birds singing in early morning
- Lying on the grass and enjoying a starry night
- The moment of bursting to the surface while swimming
- Watching a beautiful sunset

□3. Chart Your Sustainable Happiness Footprint

□ Take a snapshot of a typical day with a Sustainable Happiness Footprint Chart. Just list your activities from the time you wake up until you go to bed (such as eating breakfast, going for a run, heading to work/school, etc). Each column demonstrates how these activities impact you personally, and how they may impact other people and the environment.

□ You may want to chart your Sustainable Happiness Footprint for a week. Take a look at your chart and ask yourself if there is one thing you might shift to enhance your well-being, or the well-being of other people, other species, or the natural environment. [Click here to download a Sustainable Happiness Footprint Chart.](#)

□4. Create an Interdependence Map

□ The Sustainable Happiness Footprint Chart portrays the many decision points that are available throughout your day. You can create a more complete picture by drawing your own Interdependence Map—a visualization that demonstrates how your life is intertwined with the world around you. You can make your map as detailed as you like.

□ An Interdependence Map joins the dots of all the interconnections that contribute to the existence of a person, thing, or idea. You may think of it as a complex web that links us to others, both near and far, and all the things in between.

□ Imagine, for example, the story behind something as commonplace as a piece of paper. We can trace all of the factors that influenced its existence. If the paper was made from wood pulp, the map would include natural resources (trees, the sun, wind, soil, and water); historical inventions that affected the use of paper (printing presses); machines that were created to harvest trees, transport logs, and convert the wood into paper; energy sources for the various processes; water and chemicals at the paper mill; paper packaging resources; and even the human resources during all the stages of extracting, manufacturing, and transporting materials to the place where they are purchased.

□ Creating an Interdependence Map of your own can lead to important insights. The Interdependence Map for paper is quite basic in comparison to the complex webs that an individual might have. You could include: ancestors, family, friends, resources for shelter,

transportation, food, energy sources for clothing, electricity, and heat. Remember that each of these items is a hub for other webs of interconnection too. The one for food alone would be extensive.

□Once you complete the Interdependence Map, ask yourself this question: Is there one thing that I could change that would lead to sustainable happiness? Even one shift has ripple effects in the world. Many people find that changing something that contributes to their own well-being is a good place to start—like reducing the consumption of fast food, going for a walk after work, spending more time with family, turning off the TV, or starting a gratitude journal.

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□5. Make Your Own "Happy List"

□Take a few minutes to list all the things that make you happy. Jot everything down that comes to mind. Once you've made your list, look at each item and ask yourself if it's been too long since you engaged in something that makes your heart sing.

□The final step is to take a look at your list through the lens of sustainable happiness. Then ask yourself if anything on your list is detrimental to you, someone else, or the environment.

□6. Value Genuine Wealth

□Genuine wealth is found in relationships, natural beauty, and an appreciation for life, loving, and laughing. Building genuine wealth can be as straightforward as taking time for family and friends and enjoying your natural highs.

□Try this:

□Make a list of all your genuine wealth. You could include family, friends, education, the natural world around you, health, sensory experiences, political freedom, the ability to love and laugh, etc.

□Ask yourself if you take any of these for granted.

□Is there anything on your list that you would like to increase or improve in order to enhance your genuine wealth? If so, what steps do you need to take to accomplish this?

□How are you contributing to the genuine wealth of other people or your community? Is there anything more that you would like to do?

□Once you begin to draw on these sustainable happiness choices, you'll likely discover that there are many new choices that you can make—and they're already within your reach.