

Mark Twain's Top 9 Tips for Living A Good Life by Henrik Edberg

“It’s no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense.”

“Let us live so that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.”

“When your friends begin to flatter you on how young you look, it’s a sure sign you’re getting old.”

You may know Mark Twain for some of his very popular books like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. He was a writer and also a humorist, satirist and lecturer.

Twain is known for his many – and often funny – quotes. Here are a few of my favourite tips from him.

1. Approve of yourself.

“A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.”

If you don’t approve of yourself, of your behaviour and actions then you’ll probably walk around most of the day with a sort of uncomfortable feeling. If you, on the other hand, approve of yourself then you tend to become relaxed and gain inner freedom to do more of what you really want.

This can, in a related way, be a big obstacle in personal growth. You may have all the right tools to grow in some way but you feel an inner resistance. You can’t get there.

What you may be bumping into there are success barriers. You are putting up barriers in your own mind of what you may or may not deserve. Or barriers that tell you what you are capable of. They might tell you that you aren't really that kind of person that could do this thing that you're attempting.

Or if you make some headway in the direction you want to go you may start to sabotage for yourself. To keep yourself in a place that is familiar for you.

So you need give yourself approval and allow yourself to be who you want to be. Not look for the approval from others. But from yourself. To dissolve that inner barrier or let go of that self-sabotaging tendency. This is no easy task and it can take time.

2. Your limitations may just be in your mind.

"Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."

So many limitations are mostly in our minds. We may for instance think that people will disapprove because we are too tall, too old or balding. But these things mostly matter when you think they matter. Because you become self-conscious and worried about what people may think.

And people pick up on that and may react in negative ways. Or you may interpret anything they do as a negative reaction because you are so fearful of a bad reaction and so focused inward on yourself.

If you, on the other hand, don't mind then people tend to not mind that much either. And if you don't mind then you won't let that part of yourself become a self-imposed roadblock in your life.

It is, for instance, seldom too late to do what you want to do.

3. Lighten up and have some fun.

“Humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.”

“Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.”

Humor and laughter are amazing tools. They can turn any serious situation into something to laugh about. They can lighten the mood just about anywhere.

And a lighter mood is often a better space to work in because now your body and mind isn’t filled to the brim with negative emotions. When you are more light-hearted and relaxed then the solution to a situation is often easier to both come up with and implement. Have a look at [Lighten Up!](#) for more on this topic.

4. Let go of anger.

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.”

Anger is most of the time pretty pointless. It can cause situations to get out of hand. And from a selfish perspective it often more hurtful for the one being angry than the person s/he’s angry at.

So even if you feel angry at someone for days recognize that you are mostly just hurting yourself. The other person may not even be aware that you are angry at him or her. So either talking to the person and resolving the conflict or letting go of anger as quickly as possible are pretty good tips to make your life more pleasurable.

5. Release yourself from entitlement.

“Don’t go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first.”

When you are young your mom and dad may give a lot of things. As you grow older you

may have a sort of entitlement. You may feel like the world should just give you what you want or that it owes you something.

This belief can cause a lot of anger and frustration in your life. Because the world may not give you what expect it to. On the other hand, this can be liberating too. You realize that it is up to you to shape your own life and for you to work towards what you want. You are not a kid anymore, waiting for your parents or the world to give you something.

You are in the driver's seat now. And you can go pretty much wherever you want.

6. If you're taking a different path, prepare for reactions.

"A person with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds."

I think this has quite a bit of relevance to self-improvement.

If you start to change or do something different than you usually do then people may react in different ways. Some may be happy for you. Some may be indifferent. Some may be puzzled or react in negative and discouraging ways.

Much of these reactions are probably not so much about you but about the person who said it and his/her life. How they feel about themselves is coming through in the words they use and judgements they make.

And that's OK. I think it's pretty likely that they won't react as negatively as you may imagine. Or they will probably at least go back to focusing on their own challenges pretty soon.

So what other people may say and think and letting that hold you back is probably just fantasy and barrier you build in your mind.

You may find that when you finally cross that inner threshold you created then people around you may not shun you or go chasing after you with pitchforks. They might just go: "OK".

7. Keep your focus steadily on what you want.

"Drag your thoughts away from your troubles... by the ears, by the heels, or any other way you can manage it."

What you focus your mind on greatly determines how things play out. You can focus on your problems and dwell in suffering and a victim mentality. Or you can focus on the positive in situation, what you can learn from that situation or just focus your mind on

something entirely else.

It may be “normal” to dwell on problems and swim around in a sea of negativity. But that is a choice. And a thought habit. You may reflexively start to dwell on problems instead of refocusing your mind on something more useful. But you can also start to build a habit of learning to gain more and more control of where you put your focus.

8. Don't focus so much on making yourself feel good.

“The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up.”

This may be a bit of a counter-intuitive tip. But as I wrote yesterday, one of the best ways to feel good about yourself is to make someone else feel good or to help them in some way.

This is a great way to look at things to create an upward spiral of positivity and exchange of value between people. You help someone and both of you feel good. The person you helped feels inclined to give you a hand later on since people tend to want to reciprocate. And so the both of you are feeling good and helping each other.

Those positive feelings are contagious to other people and so you may end up making them feel good too. And the help you received from your friend may inspire you to go and help another friend. And so the upward spiral grows and continues.

9. Do what you want to do.

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did so. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

Awesome quote. And I really don't have much to add to that one. Well, maybe to write it down and keep it as a daily reminder - on your fridge or bathroom door - of what you can actually do with your life.