

The 3 Basic Ingredients Needed for Life Happiness

One of the overarching desires in life – whether we admit it or not – is to simply be happy. We know it's not always feasible or realistic, yet it's something we desire on some level—for ourselves, our spouses, and most especially, our children.

Unfortunately, most of America isn't achieving that desired happiness. The 2017 World Happiness Report placed the U.S. at number 14, a [ranking achieved](#) after scoring “6.8 on a 10-point scale.” Perhaps even more alarming are America's internal happiness numbers. In summer of 2017, a Harris Poll [found](#) that only one-third of Americans could claim happiness.

On the bright side, these numbers show that some individuals, albeit a minority, have figured out the secret to achieving happiness. The question is, what is it?

Sociologist Charles Murray sheds some light on that question in his book [Coming Apart](#). According to Murray, his study of older individuals who express life satisfaction has uncovered three basic components in the happiness equation. These are:

1. Life Purpose

According to Murray, lasting happiness stems from doing something important in life. He goes on to say that “trivial” matters can bring temporary happiness, but that long-lasting satisfaction is only found in pursuing the important things in life.

2. Diligence

Long-term “effort,” Murray declares, is key to achieving life satisfaction. He notes, “The cliché ‘Nothing worth having comes easily’ is true.”

3. Responsibility

Taking “personal responsibility for the outcome is essential,” says Murray. “In the case of events close to home, you have to be able to say, ‘If it hadn’t been for me, this good thing wouldn’t have come about as it did.’”

So how do we seek to cultivate these three areas in our lives? Murray also provides insight into that question, and the answer is more straightforward than one might realize:

“There aren’t many activities in life that satisfy the three requirements of importance, effort, and responsibility. Having been a good parent qualifies. Being part of a good marriage qualifies. Having done your job well qualifies. Having been a faithful adherent of one of the great religions qualifies. Having been a good neighbor and good friend to those whose lives intersected with yours qualifies. But what else?”

Let me put it formally: If we ask what are the domains through which human beings achieve deep satisfactions in life – achieve happiness – the answer is that there are just four: family, vocation, community, and faith...”

Pretty simple, right? The problem is, these domains, which represent the bedrock of social capital, are the ones modern America is struggling to maintain.

Take parenting. While many Americans want others to [view them as a good parent](#), both fathers and mothers feel their career interferes with [spending enough time](#) with their children.

When it comes to marriage, it’s no secret that the institution is strained. Polls show marriage rates [declining](#) from 72 percent in 1960 to 50 percent in 2016. This decline is due in part to an [increased divorce rate](#), but also to the fact that many are not even [committing](#) to the marital union.

Job satisfaction is another area experiencing a decline in recent years. In 2014, *Forbes* [reported](#) that the job satisfaction rate had fallen to 52 percent, down from 61 percent in the 1980s.

Perhaps most startling is the decline of religion and community. In regards to [religion](#), “23% now describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or ‘nothing in particular.’” Several decades earlier, this number was less than 10 percent. Community decline, on the other hand, has been documented by political scientist [Robert Putnam](#) and is experienced through longer job commutes, less hospitality, lower voting rates, and declining club attendance.

As Murray explains, the categories of family, community, vocation, and religion are where “the stuff of life occurs,” and by extension, where we derive genuine happiness. Unfortunately, we’ve disdained many of these institutions by casting off diligence and responsibility in pursuing them.

Is it time we re-evaluated this decision to abandon these key institutions? And in so doing, is it possible we would see life satisfaction and happiness restored to many in society?