

# Achieving Happiness

> Ask struggling adolescents why they get high on drugs or alcohol or seek sex without intimacy or commitment and they're likely to tell you they just want to be happy. Ask young professionals why they're so driven to make money and they'll talk about all the things they'd get if they were rich—things that will make them happy. Ask adults why they had affairs or left their families and you'll hear it again: "I just want to be happy." So why aren't more people happy?

One problem is unrealistic expectations. Some people think of happiness as an unbroken series of

pleasurable emotions; they hope to feel good all the time. Others expect a much more intense or lasting feeling of joy when they achieve a desired goal. As a result, when getting what they want doesn't produce the feelings they expected, they fall into the kind of despondency conveyed in the famous Peggy Lee song: "Is That All There Is?"

There's great danger in confusing a sustainable state of happiness with fleeting sensations of pleasure and fun. Those who make pleasure-seeking the focus of their lives soon find themselves needing new and different sources of pleasure. It's

like a drug addict who needs continually higher doses to get high.

Happiness is a less intense but more durable feeling of well-being. It's not a continuous state. No one is happy all the time. Though we may experience extraordinary moments of joy or despair, happiness is a kind of emotional resting place of quiet satisfaction with one's life. The art of living a happy life is a balance between getting what you want and learning to want what you get. ■

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