

Leading a Wonderful Life

Practical ideas for all-round well-being

Comparing Notes with Dr Nick Baylis,

Consultant Well-being Psychologist, visiting Reigate Grammar School.

My thanks to Peter Chesterton, School Chaplain.

An Aide-Memoire : Thank you for this opportunity to compare notes on how we can help our life, and the lives of those we love and care for, go even better. I introduce 12 key themes, born of my premise that :

“Well-being is proven by the skill & drive to thrive & flourish in the face of life’s triumphs and adversities.”

The following themes are not only about how we heal ourselves (of emotional problems and unhelpful habits), but are also about how we can become exceptionally good at the things that most inspire us (the careers, sports, hobbies, and personal relationships).

To which end, we might wish to improve at least the following two essential abilities :

First : to love deeply and wisely (people, work and play); and to let ourselves be loved well (i.e. to understand healthy, nurturing ‘love’, by contrast to harmful ‘obsession’.)

Second : to be the centre-of-balance for one’s own life, rather than being a soul that is pulled off-balance by the life around them : perhaps by the incessant demands of blackberry phones, or by the exhausting, unsatisfying targets....the targets we are pursuing because of some bullying pressure, or to compete with others (by trying to be prettier, tougher, richer, cooler, cleverer or more popular).

*First, we need a sufficiently powerful reason to change the routine of our daily lives : **a reason WHY** :*

- 1) We each of us want a sense of progress and improvement in our Relationship with Life. The first thing this requires is our **Owning-up** to the *pain* in our lives (rather than anaesthetising or burying it), and our responding to the *heart-felt inspiration* in our lives – the motivations that most excite us and give us hope. (If we don’t make satisfying arrangements for our pains and our passions, we can suffer *psychosomatic illnesses* whereby our subconscious mind rebels against the situation by creating any manner of problems: skin-conditions, migraines, sleepless nights, depression or hyper-anxiety, all in an attempt to prompt us to take action.)

*My experience of therapeutic approaches and life-improvement psychology, suggests at least two powerful strategies for **HOW to change** :*

- 2) **Actively explore** what real-life changes work better than what we’re presently doing. Don’t wait to feel in ‘the right mood’ to start changing behaviour; it’s better to trust that highly dynamic action will itself change how we feel and think. We can guarantee these improvements will be inconvenient at first and will hurt for a while because they’re so unfamiliar, but such changes are the only way we can improve matters.
- 3) **Make Many Small Changes** in our behaviour so as to overcome inertia. Small changes loosen us up in preparation for major improvements.

*Now we have the ‘why’ and ‘how’ to change, let’s consider **WHAT to change** :*

- 4) **Develop our Skill of Relaxation**, because this improves *everything*. To achieve such helpful relaxation, experiment with **Doing Things Slower-Motion** (breathing, eating, speaking, driving, letter-writing) and notice how ‘slower’ often means more relaxing and more satisfying. In life, quality beats quantity.

- 5) **Actively Balance Yourself** : what decompressing activities and what healthy variety of people can you introduce into your evenings and weekends to refresh and rekindle you more fully? The better we can balance, the further we can reach in both our personal and professional lives. High-performers respect *all* of themselves and their dimensions.
- 6) **Nourish your Healthy Mind and Healthy Soul through the things you do** (rather than consume) : adequate sleep, sweat-making exercise, being outdoors in Nature, Artistic Self-Expression (song, dance, a musical instrument, painting), and pay special attention to giving and receiving lots of **Benevolent Touch & Rough 'n' Tumble** (via partner-dancing, country-dancing, martial-arts, and massage), because we are highly social animals. In short : *respect your Inner Wild!*
- 7) **Whole-Hearted Trying** is extremely satisfying and enlightening. We cannot control what life sends our way (whether the rotten eggs or victory laurels), but we can choose our response to it. (Do we respond with good cheer and creatively pressing on, or with sulking despair and withdrawal?) Trying hard never loses, because the activity nourishes us. Better to invest ourselves in **Lots of Wholistic, Highly Realistic Practice Scenarios** in which all the ingredients of the real activity are there for us to learn from, even though the task is *almost* overwhelming. (Far better this highly demanding training scenario, than trying to make the practise easier by breaking it down into bits and pieces.) Which means, if we love someone, inspire them to do things for themselves: don't spoil them with ready-made solutions. (Deeply loving parents can help their children to become highly capable by stepping back, letting go, and cheerfully **encouraging those we love to self-responsible discovery-learning**; meanwhile the parents redirect far more of their own energies to nourish their own loving relationship with their partner and friends, work and hobbies, and by so doing they inspire their children.
- 8) **Treasure and Channel your Emotional Energies** (the anger, the shame, the loneliness, the fear, the regret), so the energy acts as both a guiding compass and a motivating fuel to carry you forward on satisfying journeys and helpful goals. (The temptation is to use pain-killers to anaesthetise our more powerful emotional feelings : food, alcohol, pills, fantasy, music, excessive exercise or work... anything we might use to distract us or distance us from our uncomfortable emotion.)
- 9) **Question Technology's Dubious Claims** that having '*more, faster, easier, and further away*' is always *better*. (Technology is anything artificial that claims to make life easier for us : cars, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, mobile phones, the internet.) Explore for yourself whether life feels far better when we **invest ourselves wholeheartedly/wholistically**, by which I mean **focus and savour** (e.g. a few loving friends) rather than have more but diluted (e.g. many acquaintances); when we are able to *go slower* (e.g. a meal cooked with friends and eaten slowly) rather than rush n hurry; when we **try harder** (e.g. create our own music and song) rather than look for the easy option (consume ready-made versions/cash n carry); and are **close enough to hug/be hands-on/see eye to eye**, rather than skype and texting.
- 10) **Let more of your behaviour be playful**, humourous, colourful, varied, versatile, surprising, exploring, adventurous!
- 11) **Seek-out and overcome your fears and emotional traumas** (about public speaking, performing, eating, exercising, socialising, dancing, loving) rather than anaesthetise them and tiptoe around them and let them pull your life badly off-course. Note, too, how there has been an increasing 'cultural climate of fear' since the end of the 1960s (evident in popular films,

television, novels and design as well as epidemics of psychosomatic illness and addictive behaviours.)

12) **Honour and explore your heart-felt passions** and let the natural power of these passions replace your unhelpful, unwanted fears and behaviours.

In conclusion:

Let's aim high : (Most often we fail not because we've aim too high, but because we don't aim high enough to profoundly inspire our creative efforts.) ***What does it take to be gorgeous?***

I'd like to suggest it has a lot to do with being... Good-Natured and Whole-hearted; Caring and Sharing; Cheerful and Relaxed; Highly-Imaginative and Reality-Focused; Well-Rounded and Well-Grounded; Playful and Passionately Hungry for Progress; Creative and Action-Oriented; Hands-On and Fear-Challenging; Versatile and Adventurous.

Background reading: *The Rough Guide to Happiness: a practical guide to all-round well-being* (Penguin Books/The Rough Guides, 2009); and visit www.younglivesUK.com

Please visit my website at www.CambridgeWellbeing.com or email me : Cambridge@NickBaylis.com

Thank you for reading! And I wish you a wonderfully adventurous autumn. Nick Baylis
