

BALANCING TOMORROW, TODAY™

by Stacie L. L. Morgan, Ph.D.



Welcome to the column designed to help you balance all of the things you have to do with what you really want to do! I will be rotating my focus on what we are all trying to balance at home, at work, and in our businesses. I want to hear from you, so feel free to e-mail me and let me know what you find difficult to balance and I'll take a crack at it.

I was struck recently by a study that says Americans are experiencing more unhappiness today than they have in the past decade. This research was conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center. I've got to tell you that I am always a little cautious when I look at studies such as these, because they are based upon a sample of people willing to tell you their woes and can potentially be skewed by the interviewer or questionnaire. My point, however, is in no way to discredit this study. The fact that this research was even conducted, and then published, means that we have "happiness issues."

I have found that unhappiness is most often related to disillusionment -- when our current reality does not match up with our expectations. It seems that we all tend to remember the way things used to be and base our future expectations on the past.

Every one of us can remember calmer, simpler, happier times from days gone by...because we all keep getting older (darn it!). We also find that as we grow older our responsibilities keep shifting, taking us out of our comfort zone just as we get comfortable. Our responsibilities are either rapidly increasing as we travel from teenagers into adulthood, or they are continuously changing as we transition into different phases of adulthood. So although my soon-to-be-teenage son is already getting his feet wet with the onslaught of new responsibilities, even my five-year old can remember simpler, happier times!

In addition to the changing nature of our responsibilities, we've all come to the realization by now that the world we live in is not going to become less complex. We can also agree that political and social affairs show no signs of settling down for a while. So what is a "worry-wart" to do? How can we calibrate our expectations so we can find more happiness within our existing world and within our imperfect lives?

The answer lies within our individual power of perspective. Yes, you read me right, *perspective*. We can focus on the negatives in our lives or the positives, it is our choice. We can bemoan the lost pleasures of our youth and simpler times, or we can create new pleasures only possible now, at our current age and in our complex time.

Instead of trying to balance yesterday's happiness with today, we can look at how much stronger, wiser, kinder, we are because of what we've been through and set our sights on new joys that we have never considered before.

Using myself as an example, I will tell you that I have never felt a greater sense of community and outreach since the devastation of terrorism and natural disasters besieged our world. I have participated in acts of kindness and have experienced the joy of making a difference in ways I could not even think of in simpler times. I still get scared sometimes, but I find even more happiness now because I'm looking for it. And to tell you the truth, those simpler, happier times...often only look that way from here, from today's complex vantage point. I remember being bored and wondering if this was all there was to life and wondering how I could make a difference. Well, our world and our time is nothing if not filled with opportunities to make a difference, and find happiness in the process!

So how can we balance tomorrow's happiness today? Well, there are some people who claim this can't be done, that happiness is based upon the structure of our individual brains and is predetermined by genetics. I know, it makes me giggle even writing that, but there are credible people with some data on this point of view. What I have found, however, is that our happiness correlates directly with our expectations and our faith. If we expect simpler times to be happier than complex times, we will be constantly disappointed and our ability to be happy will suffer. If we expect complex, turbulent, chaotic times to be happy, it can happen! Okay, do you need a little help on that last one? Here you go:

- Trust today that each of us has a purpose and to be happy is part of the plan.
- Know that you can find something to be happy about each and every day.
- Believe that complex times and rapid change create more opportunities to do good things, to find happiness and to share it.
- Have faith that there is happiness to be found in every hour of every *today* and in all of your *tomorrows*.
- Happiness is about perspective. If you look for it and expect to find it, happiness will appear.
- If you can't find it, e-mail me and I'll help you find it.

We all have the power of perspective and have everything we need to balance tomorrow's happiness, today. Let's do it! Remember, balance is a process...not a destination.

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