Three Traps People Fall Into That Limit Their Happiness

By Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

Almost every action we take in life is aimed at achieving or maintaining "happiness"—that elusive state where we feel contentment, satisfaction, and even bliss. TalentSmart® has by now tested more than a million people and trained tens of thousands more, and we are often struck by the commonalities we see between people, particularly when they fall victim to the same traps that limit their ability to reach their full potential.

To that end, here are three prominent traps which people fall into. They are easily fixed, but until then they severely limit our potential for happiness.

1) We Hold Our Feelings In

One of the great misconceptions concerning emotional intelligence is that it is about repressing our feelings and holding them in. While it is true there are feelings that high EQ individuals do not allow to erupt on impulse, that does not mean those feelings are not expressed. Emotional intelligence means honoring our feelings and allowing ourselves to experience the catharsis that comes from embracing them for what they are. Then we express them in a manner that helps rather than hinders our ability to reach our goals.

2) We Fight Change

Change is an inevitable part of life, and those who fight it do so because they are struggling to remain in control. The problem with this approach is that fighting change actually limits our control over the situation by putting up a barrier between ourselves and the actions we need to take to improve our situation.

The idea here is to prepare for change. This is not a guessing game where we test our accuracy in anticipating what comes next, but rather it means thinking through the consequences of potential changes so that we are not caught off guard if they surface. The first step is to admit to ourselves that even the most stable and trusted facets of our life are not completely under our control. People change, businesses go through ebbs and flows, and things simply do not stay the same for long. When we allow ourselves to anticipate change—and understand our options if changes occur—we prevent ourselves from getting bogged down by strong emotions like shock, surprise, fear, and disappointment when changes actually happen. While we are still likely to experience these negative emotions, our acceptance that change is an inevitable part of life enables us to focus and think rationally, which is critical to making the most out of an unlikely, unwanted, or otherwise unforeseen situation.

3) We Numb Ourselves With Technology

Everyone deserves the opportunity to binge-watch a TV show now and then or to switch on our Kindle and get lost in a book. The real question is how much time we spend plugged in (to video games, the TV, the tablet, the computer, the phone, etc.) and whether it makes us feel good or simply makes us numb. When our escape becomes a constant source of distraction, it is a sure sign we have fallen into the trap of too much of a good thing.

If we want to cut back on the amount of time we are plugged in, we have to choose blocks of time where we can cut the cord and go offline. It is amazing how refreshing these breaks are when we choose an alternative activity that is equally stimulating. As we grow more comfortable without the pacifier of technology, we can gradually increase the amount of time we spend away from it.

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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* and the cofounder of TalentSmart, the world's leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. Dr. Bradberry has written for, or been covered by, *Newsweek, BusinessWeek, Fortune, Forbes, Fast Company, Inc., USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post,* and *The Harvard Business Review.*