

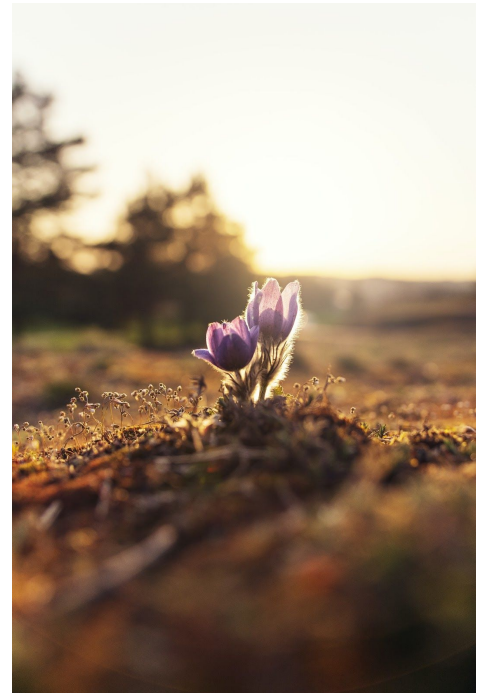
Growth Leads to Happiness Even in a Pandemic

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Like most schools in New Jersey, our school moved to remote learning during the week of March 16. At first teachers like me scrambled to modify our content to be able to deliver it 100% online, something very different from what we are used to. While this scramble caused many teachers, parents, and students a lot of stress and anxiety, I have to admit, I found happiness in stepping up to the challenge.

Finding Purpose

Stress and anxiety are caused when we resist our present circumstances and try to fight what IS. By embracing the challenge that faced me as a teacher, I found satisfaction and purpose through learning new technology, and trying to reach my students in spite of the distance that separated us. The personal and professional growth I have experienced during this time of social distancing and remote learning has proven the claim that happiness occurs in an atmosphere of growth to be true. Growth results in happiness. So how can you apply that to your own situation? Here are a few ideas: embrace the challenge, face your fear, and focus on the present.



Embrace the Challenge

First of all, when you are faced with a challenge, try looking at it as a turn in the road rather than a stop sign. Don't let the challenge stop you from what you want to do, rather look at it from different angles to see what opportunity for growth it presents. Embrace the adventure of it and explore. In this case I watched tutorials, attended

webinars, and reached out to my techie friends with my questions. While complaining about change was one option, that option gives the situation power and leaves the complainer in the role of “victim” of circumstances. I prefer to empower myself, and use the resources at my disposal to figure out a way to make the best of the situation. It doesn’t matter what caused the problem, it’s up to us to figure out a way to solve it.

Don’t Let Fear Stop You

Secondly, dive in. Don’t be afraid to mess up or look silly. Growth cannot come without taking risks. If fear of embarrassment or judgement keeps us from trying new things and taking risks, our lives will end up being so boring. I tried using Flipgrid for the first time as a strategy to engage my students. I don’t love the sound of my voice or the way my hair looks when I’m weeks over due for a haircut because salons are closed due to the pandemic. However, I put myself out there and had fun with it. It was not the great success I hoped it would be, because many of my students did not participate. I’m guessing that it’s because they feared embarrassment or judgement from their peers. I had fun role-playing in the video clips. The students that tried it ended up having a good time too. We cannot let fear prevent us from taking risks. We can’t take ourselves too seriously.

Experience the Present

The final reason I believe growth results in happiness is because when we are engaged in any activity, including learning, we are in the present moment. Rather than worrying about the future or regretting the past, we are focused on what we are learning or doing in the now. Many people call this being in the flow. When you are thinking only about the present activity, you get in the flow. Some of you may feel this way when you are writing, or playing basketball, or even playing video games. When you’re only thinking about what you are doing right now, the time can fly by. When you use that time to learn or create, you will feel a sense of purpose that accompanies happiness.

Take Time to Reflect

I hope that you will take time to reflect on the past several weeks since the pandemic shut down. Take notice of the new things you've done, new technology and skills you've learned, and notice the ways you have grown and stretched yourself. Think of the challenges you have overcome. Appreciate yourself and your efforts. Remember, happiness is a choice, I hope you will choose happiness today.