

THE NAVIGATOR

Charting your Course for a Purposeful Life
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Happiness is a Habit. Cultivate it.

For those of you who have teenagers, and those of you who have ever had teenagers, imagine how amazed and thrilled I was when our 18-year-old daughter, who is in school in Europe this year, asked me to travel with her for part of her break. So during our two and a half weeks in April, we explored around the Mediterranean, mainly in Italy. We both love photography and, in fact, we knew it would be our favorite activity to do together on this trip. On the Amalfi Coast, we found an abundance of captivating vistas and designs. It was a feast for the eyes and sometimes it was almost too much to believe. Hundreds of photographs later, we both have lots to show for our travels. We discovered that more often than not, our eyes are drawn to different subjects, so it was fun sharing our photos with each other every day. Really, the photography was over the top, and still our precious time together was the highlight of the trip for me.

Ours is not an easy relationship. We are both high-spirited, strong-willed risk takers, so I knew we had the potential for a rough trip. However, I also knew how important it was to go. I actually thought quite a lot about how we could both be happy on this trip. A wise counselor, Roger Kirby, advised me to “be with, not against.” And he encouraged me to relate to my almost-adult daughter as I would relate to a friend. Those two attitudes stood me in good stead. I chose to be happy.

As you might imagine, there were many crossroads on our trip, and we worked out every challenge, often laughing our way through. To our daughter’s credit, she was as aware of the potential for trouble as I was. She, too, was motivated to have fun and be happy. For her our entire trip was an oasis from the struggles of being a student and she didn’t want to ruin this oasis, so she was motivated.

Happiness is a habit. Cultivate it. – Kathleen Lansing

This is a lesson my friend, Kathleen, heard from her mother many times. It became part of her understanding of how the world works. Recently she imparted it to me, and it immediately reminded me of the choice I had made to be happy with our daughter.

At many of life’s crossroads we can make the choice to be happy. It often requires giving up having things the way we wanted them and accepting some other version of reality. It reminds me of my old days as a spoiled brat, when pretty much everything had to be my way or the highway. Some of us have to learn this flexible approach to life, and it is a rocky path at first. Until we begin to see how it works. Can we teach this flexibility to our



The Navigator is a quarterly newsletter for all who have an interest in wealth. The rich really are different, but not in the ways most people think. Many envy the wealthy and presume they have no problems, but in fact, they face unique psychological challenges. Thayer Willis, LCSW, wealth counselor, speaker and author of *Navigating the Dark Side of Wealth: A Life guide for Inheritors*, helps her clients develop the meaningful lives we all treasure.

children? You bet. The most powerful teaching method, as always, is the example we set. And in addition to modeling flexibility and the choice to be happy, we can enhance the lesson by paying enough attention to recognize when our children are at this kind of crossroads. Then we can take the opportunity to listen to them explore the possible choices at hand. As most of us know, it can be very difficult to switch our only-my-way-attitude and take a new approach to a course of action. Make no mistake though, the most powerful teaching method is example.

Bring to mind your family members. Which ones are happy? Can you tell how they have cultivated happiness? Are they flexible? Do they have a healthy sense of humor? Do they find ways to continue to grow? Do they have a great sense of freedom? Are they smart about which battles in life to fight? Are they grateful and appreciative? Do they surround themselves with positive people? Have they discovered the joy of helping others?

Ironically, the choice to be happy sometimes is based on an apparent contradiction. Think about a time when you made the decision to do the right thing, when it was tempting to take the easy route. It is the private choice to be virtuous that leads to happiness. In wealthy families, often offspring are shielded from life's tough choices, and thus actually robbed of the opportunity to access the rewards of a choice well made.

At a crossroads in our life, the contradiction for most of us in choosing the road to happiness is that sometimes that road is not our first choice. We must remember to be open to all options. First, we each have the challenge of defining happiness by making a choice to have flexibility in our attitude regarding our approach to a course of action. Second, we each have the challenge to follow through with that choice we made. It is a true gift to make sure the younger generation has opportunities to make these tough choices.

This Spring, when offered the trip of a lifetime with our daughter, I knew that happiness for both of us was at stake during this trip. I am grateful for many years of experience, which helped me recognize the crossroads. I knew I had to be careful to prepare my heart and head for this adventure. With a little care and intentional flexibility, we found it within us to have a happy trip. At many points it was easy.

After all, it is far more likely that we will achieve a goal, like the goal of happiness, if we first identify the target.

You can make these choices too. Just look around you. The world is full of opportunity.

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