

5 suggestions for flourishing more fully

For a web-based version of this handout with hyperlinks to all mentioned articles, books, videos and other resources see the 25.05.14 blog post on www.stressedtozest.com.

Professor Ken Sheldon is a bit of a hero of mine. I've followed his research for many years and have great respect for his work and what I've gleaned about the way he leads his life. I have just been looking at the recording of a lecture he gave at the University of Missouri a little while ago. The points he makes about how to flourish more fully are still pretty much bang on.

To find out more about his work, you can visit his website. There he provides PDF's of some of his ground-breaking research publications. This list could do with updating though. Some of his most intriguing papers have been co-authored with Sonja Lyubomirsky and her site provides further recent PDF's of their shared and other related research studies ... including the excellent "*Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way*" and "*The challenge of staying happier*". Ken has also written a series of fascinating books. Examples are the recent "*Self-determination theory in the clinic: Motivating physical & mental health*" and "*Positive motivation: a six week course*" as well as the ambitious "*Optimal human being*".

In his lecture "*Pursuing happiness: What works and why*", he gives five "*happiness prescriptions*". They're well worth noting and it would make excellent sense to check out how fully we're following these suggestions in our own lives. Here they are:

- ✓ Focus more on changing what we **do**, rather than on what we **have**. Then vary what we do (guard against getting into ruts). Humans quickly habituate/get used to new situations. There are evolutionary survival advantages to this process but it drives *hedonic adaptation* - a process where despite improvements in our circumstances (new job, bigger car, welcomed relationship, etc), we tend to return fairly soon to a largely genetically determined *happiness set point* (or set range). However we adapt less to new activities than we do to new acquisitions. Most of us know this, but we still tend to underestimate how much fresh activities can benefit us more than new possessions.
- ✓ Pursue **intrinsic** goals for **self-concordant** reasons - out of interest, not pressure; expressing identity, not reducing guilt. A blog post I wrote a while ago about "*Self-determination theory*" gives more details about how the kinds of goals we choose (*intrinsic* or *extrinsic*) and the motivations behind our choices (*autonomous* or *controlled*) have major impacts on how fulfilled we become.
- ✓ Try more often to be your **unguarded self** in social situations. The *unguarded self* is a way of describing how we are when we're with those we know and love. The *social self* describes how we tend to act in less familiar social situations. People have higher wellbeing when they are more often able to be their authentic *unguarded self* (both through their behaviours and through the relationships **[Cont.]**

& environments they have developed in their lives) – see, for example, Ken's paper *"What does it mean to be in touch with oneself?"* for more on this.

- ✓ **Balance** your time across your day. To flourish more fully, research suggests we should honour our needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Satisfying say a couple of these needs does not adequately make up for ignoring the third. The paper *"The balanced measure of psychological needs (BMPN) scale"* explains this more fully and you can check on how you're doing by filling in the BMPN questionnaire.
- ✓ Try to manage your life so that you feel **autonomous, competent** and **connected**. These central psychological wellbeing needs – basic nutrients for happiness & flourishing – are illustrated in the handouts on *"Psychological needs & wellbeing"* further down this website's *"Good knowledge"* page on *"Self-determination theory"*. And for a true wealth of further information go to the major *"Self-determination theory"* website.

These really are a wise set of suggestions to pay attention to. Good luck in exploring how to *"flourish"* more fully in your own life.
