

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 115 - 3 Happiness Pillars Everyone Needs To Know: Dr Rangan Chatterjee

I heard your conversation with Mo in the hotel room last night, which was fantastic, so good. And I agree with what you and Mo were saying. Happiness is a choice when you understand what happiness really is.

What is it?

It's not a thing that you can get to. It's not something that you can pursue directly.

It's something that ends you when you do the right things. And the right things for me are when you focus on the three... I call happiness as three-legged stool. Alignment, contentment, control. You can apply it to anything in life. I think that's what happiness is. And I think we are pursuing it. People say we shouldn't be going after happiness, we should be going after meaning. Have you heard that?

Yeah, all the time.

Right. I have a different perspective. Meaning and purpose is really important. No question. But I don't think that's happiness. It's meaning. It's a necessary ingredient for happiness, but it's not happiness in and of itself. And I don't mean to be controversial, but let's say a soldier fighting in World War II against the Nazis. One might make the case that that has meaning. It doesn't mean they're happy.

100%.

Right. So meaning and purpose is subtly different. Have you heard of the Japanese concepts of Iki-Gai?

Yes. Yeah.

I love Iki-Gai. This idea that we should be looking... We're not should be, but we could be looking for something in our life that we enjoy, that we're good at. That's what the world needs and what pays us money. The kind of holy grailers it were. And I remember writing about this in my second book on stress. I remember the book came out and I was in London. I was giving a talk. And at the end of the talk, we were doing Q&A. I remember the back right of the hall, this young lady had a hand up and she said, Dr. Shashji, I'm an 18-year-old Japanese student living in London. I've grown up with the concept of Iki-Gai my entire life. And frankly, I found it demoralizing, demotivating, too high a bar for me to get to. And that's stuck with me, mate, because I thought since then, okay, that's so interesting because I love this concept of Iki-Gai. She grows up with it and finds it off-putting. I think the problem with these grand ideas of meaning, purpose, Iki-Gai, as much as I like them, they're not for everyone. Someone might be hearing that in a call centre right now. They don't like their job. They're doing it. They're like, what, Iki-Gai, are you kidding me, mate? I just want to get through and pay the bills. So I think, I bring it all back, is this call happiness still that I've created? Is it applicable in all situations? I think it is because if you look at it through the lens of what we're talking about, this comes under alignment. So that chat working in the call centre, they do the exercise and they figure out kindness is something that's really important to them. Then, if on the way to work, they stop in the coffee shop and they're kind to the barista, they get on the bus to work and they're kind to the bus driver, they go to the job that they don't particularly like, but they are kind to their colleagues and their boss. They're living an aligned life. They're living with meaning. It doesn't mean that the job that they're in currently is the job that they love and they're going to be in forever, but they're living in harmony with who they are

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and that's going to mean that meaning and purpose come naturally as a byproduct. So I want people to really focus on alignment. It's one pillar of happiness and I think your meaning and purpose will come.

Can you talk to me about control as well?

I thought long and hard about this word control. And I am an art. What's it the right word to use? And I expect some of my patients, I expect some of my friends. I don't really think it is when we understand. It's about what are the things that I can do in my life that gives me a sense of control. We know from the scientific research, when you have a sense of control, you have better relationships. You have longer relationships. You're healthier. You have lower stress levels. You live longer. So it's that sense of control. And that could mean many things to different people. For me, I'm really big on morning routines. I know for me, if I get up early, if I have time to myself to have a little routine, I've almost got this like resilient bubble around me. It doesn't matter what's going on in the world. It doesn't matter how bad work may or may not get that day. I've got an element of control because I've sort of nurtured that routine for myself. So that's one way that people can think about control. Another way people might want to think about control is... And there's a chapter in the book called Talk to Strangers, which is basically this idea that actually relationships are very important, of course, but there's kind of two different kinds of relationships. They're the deep nurturing, intimate relationships, but there's also those kind of almost trivial interactions that we have day to day. So when you say hi to the barista, or I said hi to your work colleagues when I got here, those little things, they are not trivial. There's a network in your brain called the sociometer. It's constantly detecting your external world for threats. And when it receives positive information like a smile, like a bit of a nod, a handshake, it sort of relaxes. Your stress levels go down. You feel a sense of connection with the world around you. We're coming back to control. You feel that the external world is safe. I've got a degree of control. There is order in the world. Let's focus on these simple things you can do each day. If you say hi to the Amazon delivery driver and smile at them, say thank you to the barista and say a few nice words to them. Say hi to the bus driver and smile at them. Thank the postman. You are working on your happiness. You know, it seems trivial, but it's not. The research is so, so clear, right? Because it gives you a sense of control. Second pillar of the three. We've got a touch on the third pillar before I start getting into all of these topics. It's so interesting that these are the things that we're talking about today because I think I spent all weekend reading about studies on the importance of, you call it the sociometer in the brain, but just that thing that connects you with your tribe. But please do get into the third point, which I think you said was contentment. Contentment, yeah. Contentment is about feeling calm and that sense of peace when you're at peace with your life and you're at peace with your decisions. So what things in your life give you that sense of contentment. And I really feel it's these three things. When you put them all together, the side effect of doing them is you're happy. Yeah. Right. But also happiness is not often what we think it is that, that big billboard image of the happy family on the beach with a smile on their face in the ocean behind them, right? That to me is not happiness. That's a pleasurable experience. Yeah. It can form parts of a happy life, but that's not happiness. You

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can be sad and happy. The way I look at happiness, core happiness, I was thinking about this last week, I was chatting to someone who, who was going through grief. Someone very close to them had died and we were having a really long, deep conversation, but they were present with their grief and they were able to share with me exactly how they were feeling. No masks on at all in terms of these kind of metaphorical masks that we put on. They were just being themselves. That's core happiness because they're aligned, right? Their inner thoughts are, I feel sad, upset, frustrated for my loss and their external actions are completely aligned with that. So I kind of feel really what happiness is about is living an intentional life. It's about taking the time to understand who you are, defining for yourself what happiness is or what success looks like, not using society's definition. You posted a few days ago, don't use society's definition of fun, right? That's a great post, you know? Just because society says to have fun, you need to go to a bar, have loud music on and get drunk. Well, if you like to sit at home in the bath reading a good book, that's great. If you don't, that's fine as well, but it's got to be you. It's your value. So I can't tell someone what they need to necessarily do in all aspects of their life to be happy, but be intentional about your life.