



Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter
Edition 51: Watch Your Language!

1.823 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **7.29** minutes. And isn't your happiness worth it?

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Welcome to my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the Principles of Happiness and Positive Emotion in your life and work. SPREAD THE WORD: Please forward to a friend who needs more happiness.

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I. WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

So, I'm sitting in a Starbucks working on my computer, surrounded by conversations. I am not a snoop by nature, but when surrounded by Loud Talkers, I can't help but hear.

On my right sit two women coming from a class they take together once a week. "This is the only time we get to see each other!" they explain to a mutual friend who greets them. They plow on with their unsmiling conversation.

Excerpts: "my daughter hates everything I cook. She comes over for dinner every Sunday and no matter what I make, she picks at it. She should be more grateful." "Vegetables don't even keep a week. They should last a lot longer than that." "There's nothing but crap in <that store>. They should carry more stuff like <other retail store>."

The entire conversation goes like this: they should, they should. After about 20 minutes trying to ignore them, I finally have to pack up and leave. The spirit of pessimism and suffering they carry has infected me and I can no longer think. Ick

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"Hello!" I wanted to say; "Your daughter comes over to visit EVERY week. You have access to more fresh food than most in the world. You have choices about where you shop. !?"

I'm not going to tell people how to live their life, but excuse me while I offer a suggestion: Suffering is a choice.

## Suffering is a Choice

We buried a dear aunt on Tuesday, after she fought a two-year battle with brain cancer. She was not diagnosed until she was in Stage IV, and from the beginning the prognosis was grim. Her reaction from day 1: “whatever it is, we’ll put it God’s hands and what happens, happens.” She endured highly aggressive and experimental treatment, knowing from the start it would not cure her yet hopeful that what doctors learned from her would help future patients. Though she lost her hair for awhile, and eventually the ability to speak or walk, she was present at every family event and holiday, living life full out within the limitations available to her.

Was she in pain? Undoubtedly. Was she sad or angry at times? Surely. But I do not believe she ever suffered. She never said, “this shouldn’t be happening to me, or I should be getting better.”

Should. One word can make all the difference. The language we use can create suffering or acceptance.

I recently re-read a very powerful book written by a woman who had “suffered” for much of her life and who woke up one morning to realize that she had been the architect of her own hell on earth. She began to shift the stories she told herself and others, and eventually discovered that she could live a full and happy life EVEN IF NOTHING CHANGED EXCEPT HER LANGUAGE.

This excerpt from her book lays out her core belief:

*“The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought that argues with what is. When the mind is perfectly clear, what is is what we want. If you want reality to be different than it is, you might as well try to teach a cat to bark. You can try and try, and in the end the cat will look up at you and say, “Meow.” Wanting reality to be different than it is is hopeless. You can spend the rest of your life trying to teach a cat to bark.*

*And yet, if you pay attention, you’ll notice that you think thoughts like this dozens of times a day. “People should be kinder.” “Children should be well-behaved.” “My neighbors should take better care of their lawn.” “The line at the grocery store should move faster.” “My husband (or wife) should agree with me.” “I should be thinner (or prettier or more successful).” These thoughts are ways of wanting reality to be different than it is. If you think that this sounds depressing, you’re right. All the stress that we feel is caused by arguing with what is.*

*“A thought is harmless unless we believe it. It’s not our thoughts, but the attachment to our thoughts, that causes suffering. Attaching to a thought means believing that it’s true, without inquiring. A belief is a thought that we’ve been attaching to, often for years. “*

*I have never experienced a stressful feeling that wasn’t caused by attaching to an untrue thought. We have a thought that argues with reality, then we have a stressful feeling, and then we act on that feeling, creating more stress for ourselves.”*

From [Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life](#), by Byron Katie\*\*

### What Language Do You Use?

Think about the language you use, and the stories you tell yourself. Consider how those stories affect the way you react to what happens in the world. How often is your stress connected to a statement of 'should' or 'shouldn't'?

Should is a very complex, many-nuanced word that is used to express expectation, probability, or obligation/duty. You can view a detailed discussion of the word at [Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com). Here's my own interpretation of it: Should is my fantasy – what I want to have happen, what I believe ought to be happening right now. Often, what I think Should happen, does happen. But sometimes when I lay my Fantasy on top of Reality and they don't match, I get caught in the tension between the two, often leading into a down spiral.

"My boss always wants everything NOW. She should be more patient. I need time to figure things out. I'm so stressed, always looking over my shoulder for the next criticism. I hate this job...."

"I am eating a chocolate chip muffin. Oh, I shouldn't be eating this, it's bad for me. I weigh too much; I should be working out more. Crap, I can't do anything right, I can't even say No to a stupid chocolate chip muffin."

One way to get out of this down spiral is to notice the language you are using. It's not your boss or the muffin that cause your suffering – it's the story you're attaching that creates your stress.

Byron Katie created a process she calls The Work to help people examine and let go of their "shoulds." The Work consists of four questions and a Turnaround.

You start by creating a list of the "should" statements you carry with you – about others, about yourself. Then you work through the process to examine your thinking:

1. **Is it True?**  
(what's the reality of it? does your thought argue with reality?)
2. **Can you absolutely know that it is True?**  
(do you *know* their motives? are they really *causing* your feelings? where's your *proof*?)
3. **How do you react when you have that thought?**  
(uncover cause and effect – saying out loud your 'suffering.' Can you find a stress-free reason to keep the thought?)
4. **Who would you be without that thought?**  
(examine alternate perspectives)  
**Turn it around**  
(turn the statement around to see if it is truer when it applies to you. As long as the cause of your suffering is "out there" you have no hope. Bring it home to self, and you may have the power to let go. )

Let's apply The Work to the first situation above: *My boss should be more patient.*

1. **Is it True? is it true she SHOULD be more patient?**  
(well, not morally, but I'd be happier if she was.)



2. **Can you absolutely know that it is True** (that she should be more patient)?  
(Maybe that's who she is. Maybe I'm overreacting to what she says. I don't KNOW that it's true.)
3. **How do you react when you have that thought?**  
(I get all tense at my desk. I start swearing. I make more mistakes because I'm taking shortcuts to avoid her criticism. I go home and yell at my kids. I can't find a stress-free reason to hold that thought...)
4. **Who would you be without that thought?**  
(I would be more relaxed. I might take the time to "enjoy the scenery." I would get more work done. I might listen to her differently.)  
**Turn it around** (does one of these sound MORE true?)  
(She *shouldn't* be more patient. Hmm. I guess she isn't very patient, so this is pretty true – she is who she is.  
She should be *less* patient. Possible. That would get things done.  
I should be more patient. Ah, maybe.)

The next step, of course, would be to create a new statement about the situation that is more reality-based. Even if nothing changes, you can eliminate the suffering. For example, you might now say, "I will be patient with my boss' impatience; I am willing to live with it." Or even, "I look forward to my boss' impatience, because it keeps me on schedule."

This is a *very simplistic* example, but I hope it gives you an idea of how you might reduce your suffering by changing the language you use.

\*\*If you're interested in more on The Work, go to [YouTube.com and search for Byron Katie](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) – she's created a huge video library in which she works with different forms of suffering, from people living in war zones to the mundane issues of everyday life.

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The 13 Principles of Happiness provide a foundation for living a life that is less about suffering and more about making choices to support you.

Why not download and post a 1-page summary of all 13 as a reminder? You can do so here: <http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>. Don't suffer.

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II. IN THE WORKPLACE: LANGUAGE AND REALITY

With rare exceptions, everyone's affected by the current economic downturn. What language do you use in the workplace about what's happening?

- Do you speak of doom and gloom and what cannot be done because of limitations? Notice that your language may be creating a reality where people feel powerless.
- Do you discourage "negative" talk because it hurts morale? Be careful – your speaking may be driving such talk underground, where there will be lots of unproductive churning.
- Do you encourage people to talk openly about tough issues, and focus daily conversations on what is possible within the limitations? Your language can create a reality in which possibility and creative problem-solving thrive.

