

MOTIVATION

You May Not Realize It, But These Little Things Are Making You Unhappy

By Sarah Hansen

Unhappiness comes in many shades of gray. Sometimes people just lack joy. Is their emotional darkness their own choice? Or, are life circumstances beyond their control? While depression, and other psychological diseases, are certainly a clinical illness and should not be minimized, there are also factors that contribute to feeling down that you can influence. Here are 50 reasons you may be unhappy, and suggestions on how to open the mental blinds to let the sunshine back in.

1. You worry.

“I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them have never happened.” – Mark Twain

Worry creates inner turmoil. It's like a rocking chair moving feverishly, but going nowhere. Worrying doesn't create action, it freezes you so you are unable to think clearly and make changes to ensure the negative outcome never happens. Your energy would be better utilized in changing things that you can control, and letting the rest go. Bobby McFerrin sang it simply enough, “Don't worry! Be Happy!” The lack of worry can certainly create happiness!

2. You hold onto the perceived idea of control.

“As your faith is strengthened you will find that there is no longer the need to have a sense of control, that things will flow as they will, and that you will flow with them, to your great delight and benefit.” – Emmanuel Teney

At times, people seem to believe that they stepped straight out of a superhero comic book. They believe that they can control everything very well and things will just turn out exactly what they planned. What a burden to carry! You would certainly need superman's strength to pick up that weight. However, the reality is that we don't have the ability to control anything else other than ourselves. Once you make peace with this, you find the pressure is off and you can start to enjoy the scenery of the journey, instead of plotting the impossibility.

3. You hold grudges.

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” – Mark Twain

Holding a grudge has about the same logic as drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. You are harming yourself by carrying all of that negative energy. Let the bitterness go... for your own benefit. The person who criticized you is probably having a great time without giving you a second thought, while you waste your life sending them death rays with your mind.

4. You believe everyone should play by your rules.

“If you expect the world to be fair with you because you are fair, you're fooling yourself. That's like expecting the lion not to eat you because you didn't eat him.”

News flash: the world doesn't live by your rule book. The sooner you accept this, the happier you will be. No one else got your memo about the way things should be done, how they should treat you, or how to live their lives by your standards and beliefs. People often get angry because someone violates their deeply-held ideals. Yet, trying to do an impossible task – getting everyone to live by your idea of perfection – is bound to create a lot of frustration. Simply take people as they are and appreciate the colorful spectrum of ideas and viewpoints, instead of feeling exasperated by them.

5. You compare yourself to others.

“Saying someone is ugly doesn't make you any prettier.”

Most people play the internal comparison game. Usually, they scrutinize only one small area of that person's life and see where the match up. For example, I may compare myself to Ironman Champion and Olympian Matt Fitzgerald and determine he's a better triathlete than me. (We aren't even in the same stratosphere by the way.) However, this is only one small area of life. Who knows? Maybe I can ride horses or sing better than him? Looking at only a small fraction of a whole person and ranking that part against yourself is a pointless activity. You are so much more than this one piece of your life that you have under the microscope at the moment. This habit will only create discontent in your life. If you simply can't stop measuring things, take an inward comparison dive instead. Are you a better person than you were yesterday?

6. You chose to be happy only when all of your dreams come true.

“Happiness is not determined by what's happening around you, but rather what's happening inside you. Most people depend on others to gain happiness, but the truth is, it always comes from within.”

Who is the happier person, the one who decides, “I will be happy when I make 100 million dollars,” or the one who believes, “I will be happy with a great supper and time with my family?” Having lofty goals are great. But when you tie your happiness to future successes that may or may not happen, you never find joy in the life you live today. Find things that thrill you today, and let tomorrow surprise you.

7. You are a glass-half-empty person.

“You become what you focus on and like the people you spend time with.”

If you're a pessimistic person, you will notice all of the bad in your life. Your perception becomes your reality. Instead, choose to focus on the best in people, the brighter moments, and the beauty and blessings surrounding you. The more you focus on the sunshine, the less the shadows will invade your perspective.

8. You are lonely.

The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.” — Mother Teresa

We are naturally social creatures and nurturing relationships makes up a large part of life. If you find yourself alone and depressed on a Saturday night, make an effort to change it. Finding friendships will certainly improve your enthusiasm for what each day brings. How do you find good friends? Seek out social settings with people who share similar interests and beliefs to build a common foundation and launch a great relationship. Smile, reach out, and be genuinely interested in others. You will be surprised how far this will get you in building life-long connections.

9. You seek materialism over everything else in life.

“Many people are so poor because the only thing they have is money.”

While money certainly is a great gain in this life, it doesn't bring happiness. Think about how you would feel if tomorrow was your last day to breathe. Would you really want to make more money, or would your focus turn to connecting with people or having certain experiences? If you live by your values, you will find more fulfillment than materialism could ever bring.

10. You don't make time for the right things.

“When you stop chasing the wrong things you give the right things a chance to catch you.”

We all lose our focus at times. However, keeping your activities aligned with your values is helpful in keeping a positive perspective. One good exercise is to list your values and rank them by their importance to you. Then, see how many of your daily activities actually align with your values. Is there a disconnect? If so, what can you do to change it?

11. You hang out with unhappy people.

“When you have to start compromising yourself and your morals for the people around you, it's probably time to change the people around you.”

You are the sum of the five people you spend the most time around. If your friends are constant sources of negativity in your life, it may be time to find more positive people.

12. You haven't discovered your purpose.

“Trying to be someone else is a waste of the person you are.”

So many people have subscribed to the lie that their life purpose is to make it to the weekend. No wonder there are so many miserable clock punchers in the world! Instead of existing, find a way to start living! Find your passion and purpose and pursue them, despite the fact that it may turn the mundane inside out and terrify you. Discovering your part in the story is one of the best pieces in life's adventure!



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13. You are more of an actor than an author.

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest achievement.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

You do the world a huge disservice when you try to be someone you're not. Be authentic. Playing a part you weren't meant to play to meet outside expectations is just asking for heartache. Even when you try to push down the pit in your stomach, a part of you will always know you are emotionally compromising yourself and your happiness to read lines that you didn't write, and worse, don't believe in.

14. You're stuck in your past.

“You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading your last one.”

Many people become the product of their pasts. They are the causalities of regret, sorrow, what ifs, and hindsight vision. While we can all learn from our past, staying there is not practical to living in the present. The past can't be changed or relived. To constantly dwell on it does not create an emotionally healthy outlook.

15. You keep thinking about your future and can't enjoy today.

“What you do today determines who you will be tomorrow.”

Some people focus so much on the stars that they miss the entire journey's sights, experiences, and lessons learned in getting there. Find as much joy in the adventure as in obtaining the end goal. If you don't, you will be frustrated until your future vision is reality. Since this may or may not happen, why limit yourself when you can find just as much happiness in the quest as in the destination?

16. You're unhealthy.

“The way you think, the way you behave, the way you eat, can influence your life by 30 to 50 years.” – Deepak Chopra

How you value fitness, healthy eating, stress reduction, and sleeping all impact how much happiness you feel. Emotions are linked to many physical properties in your body. The mind – body connection is very real, and often just adding exercise, sunshine, extra shut-eye, or a healthier diet can improve your mood immediately.

17. You're a perfectionist.

“In order to go on living one must try to escape the death involved in perfectionism.” – Hannah Arendt

There are three main types of perfectionism: self perfectionism – where you expect perfection from yourself; social perfectionism – where you believe others expect you to be perfect; and other perfectionism – where you expect others to be perfect. All three examples can be happiness busters. Being perfect is an unrealistic goal for you to place on yourself or others. Constantly falling short of the unattainable will continuously keep you blue.

18. You're afraid of failure.

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” – Winston Churchill

Some people are so afraid of making a mistake that they never try. Just imagine how that would have worked out when you were learning to walk! You'd probably still be crawling. Unfortunately, we sometimes lose our bravery as adults and fear trying anything because it may not work. If you embrace this mindset, you will never live up to your potential. This can create a huge dissatisfaction in your life.

19. You're insecure.

"The task we must set for ourselves is not to feel secure, but to be able to tolerate insecurity." Erich Fromm

Growth happens outside of our comfort zones. If you are too insecure to move out from the familiar, you will never know the joy of conquering your fears and finding your wings. After all, a bird has to eventually jump to discover he can fly. You can't stay in the nest forever and be happy watching others soar.

20. You're in debt.

"A man in debt is so far a slave." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Too much debt can cause stress, broken relationships, and financial hardships. Working out a plan to get out from under pain of payments can often bring peace of mind.

21. You seek validation.

"Learn to love yourself first, instead of loving the idea of other people loving you."

If you keep looking for others to determine your own worth, you will always be disappointed. No person except you should have the power to determine your happiness or value.

22. You neglect personal relationships.

"Don't choose the one who is beautiful to the world; choose the one who makes your world beautiful."

Most deathbed confessions don't lament spending more time chained to the office or making money. Most people regret the relationships that were neglected in pursuit of things that suddenly lost their importance. Remember, don't neglect your friends and family. Their love is more valuable than anything else in the end.

23. You procrastinate.

"Know the true value of time; snatch, seize, and enjoy every moment of it. No idleness, no laziness, no procrastination: never put off til tomorrow what you can do today." – Lord Chesterfield

Procrastination is an endless spiral into frustration. The more you do it, the heavier your load. It's like trying to run a marathon while picking up rocks along the way. Eventually the stress gets too heavy.

You should finish projects and drop those rocks so you stay light and able to maneuver through your day without dragging 20 other projects you have put off behind you.

24. You're not learning.

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.” – Henry Ford

Learning new things brings joy in the discovery of growth. If you've stopped learning, embrace a new hobby or discover a new interest. You will find that the excitement of learning brings you extra spring.

25. You have unrealized dreams.

“All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.” – Walt Disney

The ghosts of dead dreams can haunt us. Fortunately, you can always breathe new life into your vision by finding the courage to follow new and exciting possibilities.

26. You're bored.

“The life of the creative man is lead, directed and controlled by boredom. Avoiding boredom is one of our most important purposes.” – Susan Sontag

Many people go through life unchallenged, and this can lead to boredom. After all, technological conveniences, safety regulations, and the ease of modern living can often take the adventure out of life. Some people get stuck in a rut, and become dull without the rough stuff to sharpen things up a bit. There are many ways to still find the wild in your life. You just have to make it a goal to do things that scare you enough and wake you up to the amazing life adventures available to you.

27. You're too busy.

“Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michaelangelo, Mother Teresea, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, etc...”

If you are spending your time being busy instead of being focused on the things that make you feel alive, you will find happiness an elusive pursuit. Instead of just being busy, learn to refocus your time so that you are effective, while not wasting time on things that won't contribute to the best life. After all, you can find many things that take up your time, but don't take you anywhere.

28. You don't sleep enough.

“I love sleep. My life has the tendency to fall apart when I'm awake, you know?” – Ernest Hemingway

People who suffer from insomnia have a 10-fold chance of developing depression [↗](#) compared with those who sleep well. Sleep issues have also been linked to many other health issues. So, if you aren't sleeping well, it's time to remedy this issue.

29. You don't spend enough time alone.

“Solitude is the place of purification.” – Martin Buber

Sometimes, we don't take the time to separate ourselves from the noise of life to just rejuvenate our minds and focus inward. It's okay to take time to be alone in a way that relaxes you; whether that's having a coffee on a park bench under a tree or taking a week-long backpacking trip through the Alaskan mountains. However you spend your solitary moments, don't

forget to take time to step away from all the craziness of life and refocus. Your mental mojo will thank you!

30. You don't take the time to set goals.

“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.” – Tony Robbins

An aimless life is the source of disappointment and frustration in life. Instead of just letting things happen to you and trying to keep up, create your own future by setting goals and following through on them. One of the greatest joys in life is seeing a goal come to fruition.

31. You're dependent.

“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.” Denis Waitley

While it may be easier to depend on others, becoming independent is one of the hallmarks of adulthood. Those that cling to others with no plan to break free often struggle with self-esteem. It's hard to find your wings when weighed down by other people's agendas.

32. You don't think you deserve happiness.

“We all of us deserve happiness or none of us does.” – Mary Gordon

Some people have the warped idea that they don't deserve happiness. They may have guilt about their past and feel they should be punished, or just don't feel that they are worthy of such an emotion. Happiness is something everyone should experience. If you don't feel you are worthy of it, it is time for a re-adjustment of perspective. Give yourself permission to find your happy place.

33. You're always just one step away.

“Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction.” – Erich Fromm

If you are someone who is always one step away from being satisfied, this may be hurting your chances for happiness. If everything is just out of reach, you will never experience the fun you can have in every moment given to you. If there is always something you need to fill up your life, when will this end? Most people who think this way don't realize that they will never be able to satisfy the greed monster inside. They truly believe their own self lie that if they just have this one last thing, happiness will find them. Those who learn to embrace the joy of the moment, instead of putting it off to a distant future that will never happen, will find that they love life so much more than those always trying to fill the bottomless pit.

34. You ignore opportunities.

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.” – Thomas Jefferson

Sometimes, when opportunity comes to knock on the door, people just decide to keep the TV droning on and not to answer the door. Or, the opportunity looks too much like work, or pushes them out of their comfort zone that they choose to pass on it. However, if this becomes a habit, you will find yourself frustrated when you see times where you passed when you should

have held on with every fingernail fiber. It's hard to be happy when you can't hold onto the good things that come your way. Take the risk, and jump; you may be surprised how much it changes your life for the better.

35. You're complacent.

"Don't let your special character and values, the secret that you know and no one else does, the truth – don't let that get swallowed up by the great chewing complacency." – Aesop

It's very easy to become complacent. Yet, you can leave this monster any time you want to start swimming toward a better future instead of floating wherever the waters take you. There is a joy found in the struggle that you will never experience in a passive existence.

36. You hate your job.

"Whatever your life's work is, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better." – Martin Luther King Jr.

You spend most of your life working. So, if you are in a job that you hate, it's really hard to keep a happy outlook. The best way to change your life is to begin working toward your passion, not just a paycheck.

37. You chase the wrong things.

"When you stop chasing the wrong things you give the right things a chance to catch you."

Sometimes we get confused about what really is important for us. Do a deep dive inside to discover what you value most. Then, don't waste your life chasing the things that don't really matter.

38. You have no spiritual life.

"In the mental calmness of a spiritual life, I have found that the answers to the whys in our lives are able to come to you." – Clarence Clemons

Many studies [🔗](#) have shown a correlation between spirituality and increased happiness. Being part of a group of like-minded people who focus on helping others and unconditionally loving people certainly would help you find fulfillment in life. Also, many people find prayer and meditation to be very calming and beneficial to their emotional well being. All of these factors, as well as many others, contribute to an overall better mental outlook of people plugged in to the spiritual realm.

39. You have no real friends.

"Making a hundred friends is not a miracle. The miracle is to make a single friend who will stand by your side even when hundreds are against you."

While your world may be full of acquaintances, if you don't have a few close friends that will stick by you no matter how rough the storm is, you will find yourself in a sad state. Life is about connecting with people, and if you aren't sure how strong yours are, it may be time to find some friends who will always be there. You will feel more confident in your future by knowing that you will always have support.

40. You're afraid of yourself.

“I’m sure not afraid of success and I’ve learned not to be afraid of failure. The only thing I’m afraid of now is of being someone I don’t like much.” – Anna Quindlen

As strange as it sounds, many people are afraid of being themselves and don’t trust their own instincts. While no one is perfect, if you can’t trust yourself, who else can you trust? Learning to put faith in your own decisions and life course will create a much more satisfying journey than constantly doubting yourself.

41. You care too much about what others think.

“Too many people buy things they don’t need, with money they don’t have, to impress people they don’t know.”

Once people finally accept the reality that you can’t please everyone, life gets so much easier. In fact, having a goal to try to please everyone will simply drive you crazy. There is no reason to exist with other people’s motives and thoughts whispering in your ear. Break free of the people-pleasing cycle and learn to live your own life.

42. You don’t relax.

“To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don’t grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float.” – Alan Watts

All work and no play will drive all happiness far away. We all need some down time. If you aren’t getting enough, you are probably fighting back some frustration and stress that don’t have to hold you down. Learn to place a higher priority on learning to de-stress. Your mental and physical health will improve dramatically if you learn to take time to rest and rejuvenate.

43. You don’t take risks.

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” T.S. Elliot

Many people don’t push their life to the limits. If you’re feeling a bit unchallenged and unchanged, maybe it’s time to revisit some risks and push yourself a bit farther. You may find yourself exploring uncharted territory while your friends kick back into the easy-chair arms of the familiar. The excitement of getting over your previous limits creates an enticing existence.

44. You’re impatient.

“Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.” Robert Schuller

I’ve always struggled with patience. It’s so hard to wait, but sometimes that’s all you can do. When you learn to approach times where circumstances force you to slow down, try to keep a positive outlook on the situation. After all, the time will pass either way; you can choose to be calm and take your time to make the best decision, or you can make a hasty turn that takes you down a much worse road.

45. You don’t learn from your mistakes.

“You cannot change what you refuse to confront.”

Have you ever noticed how some people never seem to learn? Even though they always come to horrible outcomes, they continue with the same pattern of self-destruction. While it's easy to see this happen to others, it's much harder to recognize it in ourselves. If something goes wrong, as tempting as it may be just to block the memory, it's far better to think through how the negative result occurred and how you can avoid replicating it in the future. Our mistakes do serve a purpose, no matter how painful it is, we need to learn from them.

46. You don't have a dog.

“A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than you love yourself.” – Josh Billings

Pet therapy is so effective², it is utilized by hospitals, nursing homes, and disaster relief agencies such as FEMA. Studies show that petting animals releases oxytocin, a feel-good hormone, in both the dog and human. It just stands to reason that having your own live-in pet therapist with a wagging tail and puppy-dog eyes will make you smile and brighten your day.

47. You equate comfort with happiness.

“Western culture has things a little backwards right now. We think that if we had every comfort available to us, we'd be happy. We equate comfort with happiness. And now we're so comfortable we're miserable. There's no struggle in our lives. No sense of adventure. We get in a car, we get in an elevator, it all comes easy. What I've found is that I'm never more alive than when I'm pushing and I'm in pain, and I'm struggling for high achievement, and in that struggle I think there's a magic.” – Dean Karnazes

Just because you're comfortable in your life and job, doesn't mean you're necessarily happy. Learn to distinguish between the two feelings. You may discover that even though you have a cushy life, you are dealing with depression. If so, find what makes you happy, and pursue it even at the cost of your comfort.

48. You don't love yourself.

“If you are happy, you can give happiness. If you don't love yourself and if you are unhappy with yourself, you can't give anything else but that.” Gisele Bundchen

It is impossible to find happiness if you don't love yourself enough to pursue it. While it may be hard to get out of the boxing ring, it's time to stop beating yourself up and learn to love the person in the mirror.

49. You play the victim card.

“It's hard to be happy when the world is conspiring against you. People who take on the role of a victim, are never happy. This is because they don't have any control. They believe that their unhappiness has been caused by an external factor and it can only be taken away by the external factor. They live in the miserable land of 'if only.'”

If you live your life as a victim, you also believe the lie that you have no power to change it. That's not a way to embrace a meaningful existence. Instead, change your faulty belief systems and empower yourself to take responsibility for your actions and the corresponding reactions you encounter. Never give your power away to someone else.

50. You don't allow yourself to be happy.

“You know why it's hard to be happy? It's because we refuse to let go of the things that make us sad.”

So, what are you holding onto that's making you sad? It's a fair question to ask yourself. Sometimes, we consciously choose unhappiness because we can't let go. Or, we unknowingly chose it because we haven't taken a good, hard look at our lives and discovered what we need to cut out. The choice to be happy ultimately lies in your hands. Happiness doesn't have to be elusive. Sometimes, all you have to do is to open the door to the thrilling possibilities before you.

