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How Common Wisdom Can Increase Joy, Happiness, and Success

Editor's note: *Just prior to publishing this article, we learned from Dr. Gabayan, the author, that she lost her home in the Pacific Palisades fire. She believes her resilience, as she describes below, (one of the 8 life skills in her book that together = wisdom) is getting her through this tragedy. Dr. Gabayan told us, "And as one of the thousands of people who sadly lost their home in the recent Pacific Palisades wildfire in Los Angeles, I learned that these elements of wisdom aren't just concepts; they're lifelines. In times of upheaval, it's essential to focus on the wisdom of taking things one step at a time. Whether you've suffered losses from a wildfire, earthquake, mudslide, hurricane, flood or other life challenges, it's important to take time to reflect, prioritize your self-care and find inner strength. I'm grateful to have these skills as I navigate the uphill journey of rebuilding our lives, and hope they can help you too."*

By Dr. Laura Gabayan

After my body started to encounter medical challenges in 2013, my life turned upside down. I was preparing to stop working as an ER physician. I also used my research skills to study the wise and wrote a book with the results. I uncovered the eight elements that define wisdom as life skills we should all adopt to improve our lives.

I interviewed 60 "wise" adults. The "wise" interviewees included everyday people, such as a librarian, a widow (of two husbands), an orthodontist, a concentration camp survivor, a concert pianist, a CEO of many companies, non-profit leaders, multiple spiritual leaders, and other nominated individuals. The interviewees did not know one another but shared a similar message: wisdom was a state of being and meant having peace and happiness. It was a code word for being fulfilled and living a life of depth.

Based on my research, I scientifically defined wisdom as eight elements: Resilience, Kindness, Positivity, Spirituality, Humility, Tolerance, Creativity, and Curiosity. Each component is the secret to mastering life and has a chapter with relatable examples from interviewees in our book, *Common Wisdom*.

Let's take a closer look at these eight elements.

1. Resilience

Resilience was the top life skill discovered in our study. It is the ability to bounce back after a difficult or challenging experience. In life, it is especially important to persevere and be resourceful. Having resilience is having problem-solving skills that can help you in any situation. The most successful people attribute their progress to resilience.

2. Kindness

Kindness is a trait that is valued by all societies and organizations. A kind person is friendly, generous, and thinks of others. Everyone wants to surround themselves with caring and giving people. It is very easy to do and has far-reaching consequences. Being kind shows confidence, calm, and good judgment. As Mark Twain said, "Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear, and the blind can see."

And while being kind to others is essential, it starts with being kind to yourself. Honoring what brings you joy is a compelling way to respect and love yourself.

3. Positivity

Being optimistic in life can increase your joy. It's all based on your perspective. A positive person approaches life and obstacles as opportunities. Positivity is related to resilience. When encountering a challenge, a positive person recognizes that it is happening for them and not to them. Instead of asking, "Why me?" they think, "Why not me?"

To increase your happiness, surround yourself with people who have positive perspectives rather than negative thoughts. Positive people bring excitement and light to whatever situation they encounter, and their positivity is contagious.

4. Spirituality

Spirituality is the belief that there is something greater than us. It is the connection you feel with someone that you can't explain. It is an intuition or gut sense that may not make intellectual sense.

A large part of your success is based on the amount of heart you put into something. For example, if you believe in the goal of an organization, you will be more committed to its mission.

5. Humility

When asked about humility, C.S. Lewis said, "It's not thinking less of yourself, but of yourself less." Humility is a virtue that has been recognized as important throughout time. A humble person has depth of character. They do not need to be the center of attention and are not concerned about being viewed as "less than" by others. It does not make them feel "big" to make others feel "small."

Being humble is also a key to building meaningful relationships. A humble person is down to earth and open to learning new things. They naturally attract friends and are valued members of the community.

6. Tolerance

You can increase your tolerance by accepting those with different beliefs and practices compared to your own. Being tolerant is being unbiased and open-minded. To increase your problem-solving skills, be open and inviting to different views.

Tolerance also allows you to have a more diverse group of friends. It can take you out of an echo chamber of your beliefs, and bring in new perspectives that make you a more well-rounded person. Understanding different viewpoints can only lead to more tremendous success in whatever you pursue.

7. Creativity

Creativity can help you view problems from different perspectives. This life skill lets us feel magic and see positivity in every situation. It allows us to imagine and envision different outcomes. We all learned to play as a child. It is this type of imagination that can strengthen your core. In every situation, creativity gives you inner joy and hope. It also introduces an air of lightness that attracts others.

8. Curiosity

Another way to increase your joy, happiness, and success is to be curious. The foundation of all the above elements is a desire to learn new things. Curiosity is the reason you have shown interest in this article. This life skill can help you master life and your personal satisfaction.

Curiosity allows us to ask, How can I live my best life? Instead of accepting things "as they are, think about what can be."

Understanding these 8 "Common Wisdom" elements can be magical. Mastering these life skills can transform your life and make you feel better. Just remember to be patient and kind to yourself along the way. The journey above can take a lifetime!

Dr. Laura Gabayan is a physician, researcher, Psychology Today Contributor, and author of two books: *Common Wisdom: 8 Scientific Elements of a Meaningful Life* and *Common Wisdom Journal*. Her books uncover the results of her new study, The Wisdom Research Project.

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