

Workplace Wellness



Identifying Three Common Happiness Hackers

by William Nippard, RDH, Certified Life Coach • williamnippard@gmail.com

The most significant aspect of your daily routines is likely with whom you spend time. In even the briefest of interactions, people have a way of bringing out the best in you and refueling your spirits or sucking joy from your day, draining you of motivation and happiness. Although most seem blindly unaware of the negative impact they can have on those around them, people's attitudes and energy are as contagious as any physical pathogen.

Prolonged exposure to stress and negativity compromises many aspects of our neurology, including damage to neurons in the hippocampus which affects reasoning, emotion, and memory. Typically, the chatter of your joy thieves is not only emotionally burdensome, but also often irrational, making any attempt towards positive influence taxing and futile. For this reason, our well-being demands that we be strategic in choosing with whom we spend time and, when possible, avoiding the joy thieves at all costs.

One of your most auspicious life skills is the ability to identify stress-inducing people who rob you of happiness in the moment and then, once recognized, to know how to deal with them. Let's consider three personality types:

1. THE NEGATIVITY SPRINKLER

Sufferers of this attitudinal ailment have trained their brains to scan their environments for disappointments, flaws, potential threats, and negativity, becoming a suspicious individual, oozing with hopelessness, warnings, and dismal predictions for their future. Their intense focus on the negative blocks any form of hope and optimism from their sensory radars. They have become so convinced of their justification for cynicism/pessimism that their mission becomes to convince others of their miserable outlook by seeing life through their foggy, short-sighted lens.

The best solution for dealing with a negativity sprinkler is to keep your distance. If being in the presence of a negativity sprinkler is inescapable, be determined to bring your own weather and do not allow their thunderstorm to cloud your sun. This will require intentionality.

Second, try to be the first to speak so you can set a positive tone. Be prepared for them to counter or dismiss your optimism and, once they do, confidently balance every negative supposition with a best-case scenario. Avoid the temptation to politely agree with their pessimism or cynicism as this will typically be their encouragement to dial up their intensity.

Finally, find a reason to excuse yourself from the conversation and get as far away from the rainstorm as is possible.

2. THE MASTER MANIPULATOR

Likely one of the most difficult happiness hackers to detect is the person who cleverly, but unfairly, influences you for his or her selfish gain. On the surface, the manipulator appears friendly and really interested in you. He or she gets to know you well, including your weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Often likeable and usually quite familiar with your history, manipulators always have a hidden agenda behind their investment in the relationship. They have learned how to make you feel guilty, happy or obligated enough to demand another piece of your time, energy or talent. They rob joy from you because you are constantly under the strain to give, while seldom receiving. Deep inside, you feel used, taken advantage of, and manipulated, yet there is something about the relationship that keeps you going back.

An effective way to determine if you are being emotionally taxed by a manipulator is to review the history of the relationship. Analyse the situations when you have been in the company of the master manipulator. Through reflection, determine if the relationship is typically win-lose rather than win-win. Once a manipulator succeeds in taking advantage of you, he or she will likely try again and again until you put a stop to the mistreatment.

Since the manipulator's mission is to exploit your weaknesses, it is understandable that you may blame yourself for not satisfying the manipulator. Be aware enough to understand that you are being tricked into believing you are the problem



so you can be taken advantage of by the manipulator. Realize that any relationship in which you are not respected and do not feel comfortable is an unhealthy one.

The most powerful course of action is to politely and firmly say “No” to any unreasonable request. It is not your responsibility to rescue or change a manipulator and if you value your happiness, whenever possible, avoid sharing space with this dangerous happiness hacker.

3. THE SELF-APPOINTED JUDGE

Judgmental people are loud and firm with their proclamations of right and wrong. To such disparaging people, “different” cannot be a neutral word. If someone behaves differently from them, makes a different decision or adheres to an alternative life philosophy, a label of condemnation is quickly applied.

Instead of appreciating diversity and learning from those who are different from them, judgmental people belittle others. This happiness hacker smothers your passion or joy for life and has a way of minimizing what is most important to you...even unloading guilt on you for being “wrong.” If you are different from them, there is a firm line drawn in the sand and, make no mistake about it, you are on the wrong side.

Your individuality can never be fully expressed around these happiness thieves so it is best to keep as much distance between you and them as possible. The biggest temptation to resist is mirroring their behaviour. Be ever mindful that their statements of judgment come from a weary, unhappy place deep within them. Because they feel lost, empty, and disconnected from the world around them, they have chosen to project their own unhappiness onto others.

Miguel Ruiz once remarked, “When you are immune to the opinions and reactions of others, you won’t be the victim of needless suffering.”¹ To attain the highest level of wellness, self-approval is what we seek; not social approval.

Following an assault of condemnation, it is vital to regroup with those who love and appreciate you. Find security and strength in those who embrace and adore you. Be ever mindful that, regardless of your motives or kind actions, there will always be those who have a problem with your behaviour. Do not claim ownership of THEIR problem.

Happiness Hackers have loud, emotional energy. They tap into the overflowing wells of your good nature and, although you may want to help, their irrationality is an impediment to their receiving help. Responding to them emotionally only adds salt to their thirst. Because your energy reserves are finite, why waste them on someone who refuses to own their own toxic attitudes?

The best protection for your happiness is to distance yourself from them and, if confrontation is unavoidable, interact with them only through facts, not emotion. To succeed in your resolve, you must first become competent at recognizing those who steal your joy, energy, and morale. Once identified, be firm in establishing your boundaries and time limits. Your happiness is too precious to allow a hacker to rob you of your attitudinal strength and health.

Reference

1. Ruiz M. *The four agreements: A practical guide to personal freedom*. San Rafael, CA: Amber-Allen Publishing; 1997.