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**The Key to Happiness and 3 Steps to Living it**

**By Jocelyn Joy Thomas**

Many people think that the key to happiness is in their goals. If I achieve xyz I will find happiness. The truth is anything that we set goals for whether it be career, marriage, traveling, these things are meant to enrich your life, not solely define your identity.

It’s a bit of a dilemma you’ve completed a degree in the career field you always wanted and while the work brings happiness to your life it doesn’t uplift you as you had imagined it would. Or you have fallen in love, yet it feels as if something is missing.

When we achieve goals, we expect to reach a plateau of happiness, but what we find is that there is something else we want now as if there is always something missing.

The reason is that while your goals are essential, they enrich your life, give you direction, purpose, and motivation, they are only things you set out along the way to learn and therefore grow and evolve from. They alone do not bring happiness. *The key to happiness is found in authenticity.*

**Why living authentically matters**

Let’s go back to those goals, how many of them are truly yours? For example, you may take up a certain profession because you thought it would make your parents proud, or make a lot of money. Yet, in truth these reasons are not from your heart and soul, they are not authentic.

I have a legal studies degree because I thought it was a practical career, would give me a stable income, and would be something my family would be proud of. Circumstances after my graduation made it impossible for me to find a job in that field and I ended up doing readings. This bothered me for quite some time, it didn’t go with my plan, I resisted. I felt ashamed for not doing something more traditional, and to this day most of my family doesn’t understand what I do.

Sometimes you have to break expectations that do not resonate with you. For me, a spiritual career works, it fits into my life perfectly and I feel it is a genuine calling, I did not see it that way in the beginning! It takes time to know yourself and trust what is true for you.

**What does it mean to live inauthentically?**

If you live inauthentically, in your career it means that every day you get up and do something to earn a living that feels just like that, earning a living, period. It's difficult to bring joy, creativity, meaning, excitement to the work, because you are doing it for a paycheck, in order to survive. The phrase, “It’s a job,” or, “It’s a Living”, comes to mind.

If you live inauthentically in love it means you pick the wrong person, someone that you might think is a safe choice, or a smart choice, worse someone that your parents/friends like so you go with it. You end up in a relationship that feels like a dead end. Every day you can’t bring your true voice, essence, or heart to the table, no matter how hard you try, you don’t resonate with that person. The way they view life and the things they want in life are not a match. It doesn’t make anyone bad or wrong, it just means you are living out of alignment with your authentic self.

The trouble with living inauthentically is that it creates a great deal of stress. Things internally, don’t line up, so it creates more stress on the whole system, both mentally and physically. There may be tendencies to overcompensate, to dull the problems down. Overspending, overeating, under-eating/dieting, smoking, drug/alcohol use, may be used to help but they only bring in more inauthenticity. The bottom line is, living inauthentically means you aren’t living for yourself, you are living against yourself.

**3 Steps to living authentically**

**Step 1. Self Awareness**- It starts with building self-awareness. Spend some time reflecting on your life, how often do you go with other people’s desires, plans, or ideas? We all do this to some degree, there is a natural give and take in life but if you notice a pattern of doing this in both big and small ways, then you are likely not living authentically.

Building self-awareness helps you to get back in touch with yourself. Answer these questions for clarity:

What do you need?

What do you want?

These are questions that when we know ourselves, we can answer easily. Yet, many, many people struggle with them.

**Step 2. Boundaries**- It is essential to build and maintain boundaries, if you don’t know what you really need or want it can be hard to define boundaries. So, in learning the answers to those questions you can start to define your boundaries and stop letting others walk right through them. Once you have established boundaries you will feel a sense of peace that you may not have felt in a long time.

**Step 3. Expression**- Once you know what you need and want and have learned to set boundaries you have begun to establish your authenticity. The next step is to express your truth and you can do this in two ways.

One, by maintaining your boundaries you will be expressing what you will and will not accept. If someone is trying to take too much from you, you express to them that you won’t continue on like this anymore. That can be a really tough thing to do and will take time and practice but it is vital that you stay true to yourself. Some people might not be able to handle it but most people will respect it.

Two, express yourself through creativity, this is also vital in that it gives you an outlet to connect with your soul and bring your soul's voice out into the world which is exactly why you came here. To express your truth out into the world. In small ways and big ways, any way you can think of. Writing, art, music, photography, cooking, mentoring, teaching, whatever way you wish, be creative.

Living authentically is your choice, and it’s one of the most empowering and healing choices you will ever make. Even making the smallest changes get you on the road to authenticity. Take time for yourself, respect yourself, and

make thoughtful, heart-based choices that resonate with you. Don’t forget to have fun while you are doing it!