

# The Difficulties of Pursuing Happiness – A Scientific Approach

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By Stephen

We can all be happy. However, finding and achieving happiness can be hard. The day-to-day challenges of our lives such as our jobs, family, friends, children, health, and relationships can all be barriers and contribute to making our lives unhappy. Our lives can become stagnant and our happiness plateaus. Pursuing happiness is made more difficult when we consider that the possibility of change may actually cause more discomfort; even if only for a short time. People are more likely to stick with what is familiar and comfortable rather than face change. You may be miserable and unhappy, but the fear of change and the pursuit of the unknown is usually enough to prohibit one's self from moving forward. In order for change to happen, we must first determine the actual problems so the pursuit towards happiness can begin.

Pursuing change can be the most difficult part for anyone. Removing ourselves from an unhappy situation requires energy and our lives, for a time, will often become unhappier. I like to call this process the **Reactant-Transition-Product dilemma**. I've based it on a scientific principal of chemical reactions. Let me explain.

A chemical reaction occurs because it is energetically favourable to do so. So, the total energy of the

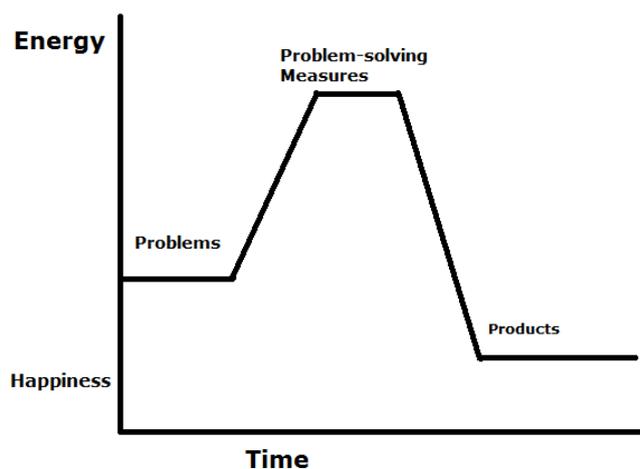
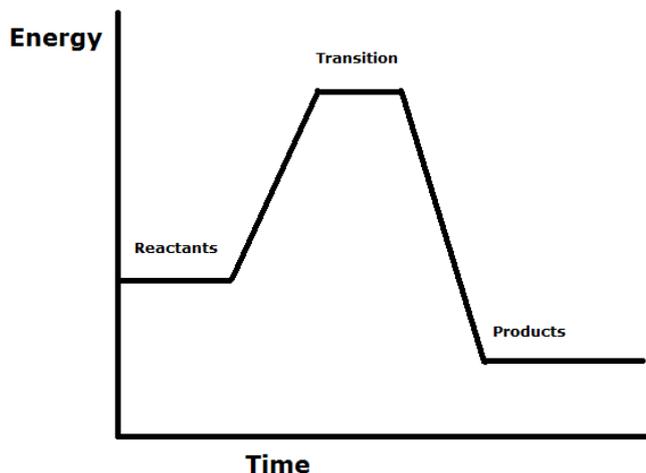
products is lower and more stable than that of the reactants (Bamforth, p.229).

However, for this reaction to occur, a transition is required. Let's look at it in a graph and use the process of alcoholic fermentation as an example.

Our reactant is glucose. Through the action and increased energy of 'fermentation' (our transition), the glucose is split into 'ethanol' and 'carbon dioxide' (our products).



This same theory can be used in the pursuit of happiness. The reactants become the problems that have led to your unhappiness, the transition is the measures you put in place to rectify these problems, and the products is the end result. The line becomes an



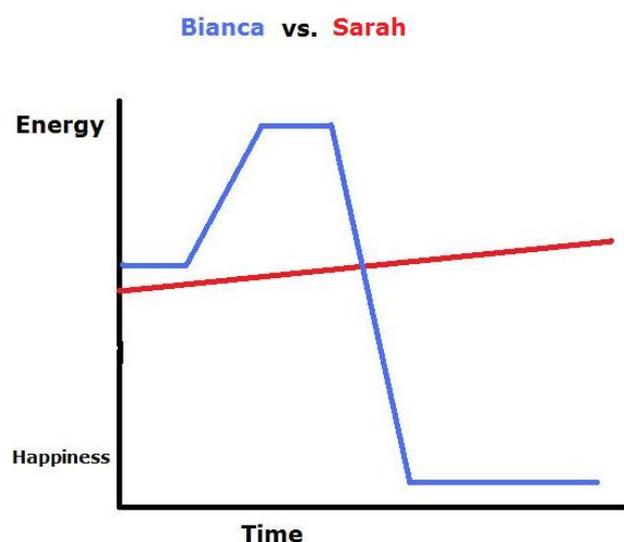
indication of not only your output of energy, but your happiness as well. The dilemma: by taking measures to improve your happiness, our level of happiness may drop further. However, with the strength and resolve to improve your situation, you will find happiness.

This brings me to my real life example. Several years ago, I was having a conversation with two friends about their respective relationships. Both had been in unhappy relationships for several years. Sarah wanted her boyfriend of five years to show more affection, contribute to their household and to finally propose. Bianca wanted her boyfriend of three years to get off the couch (and the Playstation) when she got home from work, to contribute to their household and to treat her with care and warmth. Both were in the pursuit of happiness, but neither was getting what they wanted and deserved – they were miserable.

After discussing the problem, we moved on to discussing how they believed they could rectify the problem. Bianca was fiery and proactive – she was determined to tell her boyfriend what needed to change and that if it didn't, their relationship was finished. Sarah was less enthusiastic. She started to make excuses for her boyfriend, told us that he would mature soon, that she really was happy. She clung on to the promises he had made in the past and the fear that if she told her boyfriend how she felt their relationship would end and the previous five years would have been a waste. Never did it occur to Sarah that she could find someone better.

Bianca confronted her boyfriend and told him her feelings. Soon after, they broke up. This was difficult for Bianca, they had been together for three years. In the pursuit of happiness, she was giving up the security, comfort and convenience of the relationship. When combining this with all the other aspects of her life (job, family, mutual friends, health), it was tough for Bianca. But Bianca had the necessary strength and resolve. Soon after, she met someone else more suited than her ex-boyfriend. Several years on, they are now happily married.

Sarah did nothing. She decided she was content to be unhappy. Her boyfriend has not changed and four years on, he has not grown up, nor does he show her the affection she craves (and he still hasn't proposed). Sarah is still miserable.



If we compare the two ladies using our graph, we can see who made the better choice.

Sarah (the red line) was marginally happier to start with; however, she took no action and her happiness has steadily declined ever since. Furthermore, she has gradually had to exert more energy.

Conversely, Bianca (the blue line) decided to make a change for the better. Initially, this decision meant she became unhappier and

that she had to put more energy into solving the problem. However, it wasn't long before she'd found happiness, a choice that means she exerts far less energy.

Sarah has now invested nine years into a relationship that has gone nowhere. Had she made the change four years ago, she could have invested four years into a different relationship. In contrast, Bianca spent one year being unhappy (the transition phase), and three years of relationship bliss (the final product).

Finding happiness has its difficulties, it's not always easy. However, do nothing and you will continue along a road of unhappiness, mediocrity and stagnation. It's easy to find the problems that are making us unhappy; the hard part is rectifying it. Only you have the strength and resolve to make yourself happy.

- *Stephen.*

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#### **References.**

Bamforth, C. (2006). Chemistry and Biochemistry for Brewer. *In Scientific Principles of Malting and Brewing*. American Society of Brewing Chemists, Minnesota. pp. 189 – 231. ISBN 1-881696-08-1.