

Use the smile test to limit stress and fulfill your desires

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I like to read. Over the years, the written word has fueled my imagination, relaxed me, entertained me and even inspired me. On the negative side, I remember staying up late at night, crying over some tearjerker novel or biting my fingernails over some blood and gore thriller.

Harmless, you might say, but needlessly, repeatedly, activating our fight or flight response can actually create heart attacks. I don't read breath holding, adrenalin pumping, heart rate accelerating books anymore or watch movies or television programs that trigger my stress response. That was a no-brainer decision.

But yesterday, I was trying to finish a self-help book on my favorite topic, creating your best lifestyle, and I noticed myself sighing. Yes, the author had good advice on how we sabotage fulfilling our dreams, with page after page of how we unwittingly do this. Why, then, was I sighing? The author was picking, as even I was prone to do when I practiced psychotherapy. The idea was, in order to move forward, let's process the failures, focus on our fears, understand, so as to break unhealthy cycles. Now I just call that needless picking.

I put down my self-help book and smiled. I believe what we focus on, bring our attention to, we create. If we want great relationships, jobs, peace of mind, let's focus on doing and having just that. If we focus on how we're not doing things right, we'll discourage ourselves, wreck our momentum and enthusiasm to succeed. If we yearn and yearn, focus on the absence of what we have, we'll only bring more of the absence to ourselves.

"Where our attention flows, energy goes," was drilled into me during my yoga teacher training. If we want to move an arm, have just the slightest intention, energy flows to move our arm. We don't doubt our arm will move, or process it, or focus on how not to do it. We expect our arm to move and it does. In the same way, if we want love, harmony, peace, and abundance, then focus, energize and expect them.

I can identify books and movies that hype me up or wring out my emotions. But what about noticing the more subtle signals, like sighs, frowns, foot tapping, or tiredness, that can clue us in when something may not be healthy or helpful in creating our best lifestyle?

Apply my smile test: IF AN IDEA, ACTION, OR PERSON MAKES YOU SMILE, YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY TO CREATING YOUR DREAMS. Happiness, the bottom line of our goal -setting, will come when we surround ourselves with these ideas, actions and people. Simple.

Here are a few changes I've made that make me more present focused, light-hearted, and smiley.

- Read only books I like. My integrity is intact if I don't finish a book!
- See only movies that entertain me. It's OK to leave a movie I don't like.
- Stop watching the evening news and frowning while I cook dinner. I can be an informed citizen by reading the newspaper or viewing online headlines and have less blood and guts, gloom and doom.
- Notice when I'm smiling and do more of it.
- Notice when I'm frowning and do less of it.
- No picking allowed... at me, others or listen to other's picking. We are whole and beautiful the way we are.

Make your own list.

You're invited to hear me speak on "Success, Chopra Style" on Tuesday, January 29 at 2 PM at the Anna Maria Island Branch Public Library in Holmes Beach, 778-6341. No charge.