

Interoffice Memorandum

to: Dr. Billy Reynolds, Dean of Liberal Arts, & Sandy Bohnet, Vice-President for Human Resources

from: Jenny Ott, Communication Instructor

subject: Sabbatical Leave Proposal

date: November 5, 2013

Sabbatical Leave Proposal: My Happiness Journey – Your Happiness Journey

Requested Date for Leave	Beginning with the fall 2014 semester and ending before the winter 2015 semester. (I would also accept leave beginning with the winter 2015 semester and ending before the summer 2015 semester.)
Statement of Purpose	To examine what it means to be happy so as to develop tools for self and others to create personal “Happiness Journeys.”
Description	<p>What is happiness? What makes people happy? How can I cultivate my own lasting happiness? How can I help others cultivate their lasting happiness?</p> <p>As many search for their higher purpose in life and by default what makes them happy, I have been fortunate to already be living my best life in my relationships and in the work I do, and as a result I am happy. However, this is a sabbatical about discovering what happiness is, what makes people happy, and ultimately creating more happiness in my life and developing tools to help others do the same.</p> <p>There are some things I already know about happiness (and a few of them are cliché): happiness is journey, not a destination; happiness is like a smile—we all have one, but mine is different than yours; understanding happiness takes an open-mind; money can’t buy happiness, but happy people are more likely to have personal success, be healthy and have strong relationships; and probably the most important thing I know about happiness is that I’m already happy. So, while I’m already happy, and not depressed nor unhappy (most of the time, anyway), I wonder—could I be <i>happier</i>? How can I cultivate an authentic happiness that <i>lasts</i>? Could the cultivation of my own happiness journey also provide an opportunity to inspire others to make a positive difference in their own lives (which ideally would create a ripple effect to others)?</p> <p>I don’t think I’m alone in asking these questions, incidentally. The premiere edition of <i>Live Happy</i> magazine cites that “[i]n 2000 there were 50 books published on the topic of happiness... [and] this year more than 1,000 books on happiness have been released in the last three months alone” (2013, 4). In a recent online search about happiness, I discovered Harvard University’s most popular course is on Positive Psychology which “focuses on the psychological aspects of a</p>

fulfilling and flourishing life. Topics include happiness, self-esteem, empathy, friendship, love, achievement, creativity, music, spirituality, and humor” (Marlisa, no date, par. 3). (Harvard is not alone—Emory University offers its Happiness course in the Sociology department.)

The fact is, most scholarly research focuses heavily on what’s wrong with people and how to fix it—this is most noticeable in the field of psychology (reference the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, affectionately called the “DSM”). Yet, while the field of communication tends to be more descriptive and less evaluative of people’s communication behaviors, it still can lean more negative. I even find myself citing more negative communication examples in class—despite my typically happy disposition.

Happiness (or satisfaction, success, fulfillment, joy) has been studied and discussed for ages in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and to some extent in communication—namely interpersonal communication. My goal during my leave would not be to complete any original research on happiness, or to exhaust the literature already published on the subject. I also don’t want to live another person’s vision of happiness. Instead, to achieve my objectives, I want to digest what others have written, said, and thought about the subject—especially those considered to be the leaders on happiness in academic and non-academic circles. It would amiss at this point not to acknowledge author Gretchen Rubin and her book, *The Happiness Project*, as the impetuous idea for this sabbatical. I also seek to embrace some diametrically opposed ideas and behaviors on my happiness journey: to work smarter and maximize my time, while slowing down to appreciate the fact I have precise time; to do less so as to have more; to be wiser and more enlightened by enthusiastically embracing who I am right now, rather than seeking to be better; to connect with others, while taking more time for myself, etc.

In the earliest stages, I have already started to explore what makes me happy and unhappy, and it’s no surprise that at the core of what brings me joy is teaching. I am at my best and I feel my best when I am engaging in my craft—teaching others how to live more fulfilling lives through appropriate and effective self-expression and engagement with others in various contexts. This is true not just in standing before a classroom to facilitate learning in real time, but also in the creation and preparation of questions, ideas, and exercises that engage those who show up to learn. Helping others access what inspires, energizes, and fuels them is a big part of my happiness journey—and certainly will continue to be for this process. As a result, one of the “products” from this leave will be the development of tools for others at KVCC to use to explore and create their own “Happiness Journeys.”

If you’re wondering what a Happiness Journey looks like, author Gretchen Rubin, in her book *The Happiness Project*, defines it this way, “A ‘happiness project’ is an approach to changing your life. First is the preparation stage, when you identify what brings you joy, satisfaction and engagement, and also what brings you guilt, anger, boredom, and remorse. Second is the making of resolutions, when you identify the concrete actions that will boost your happiness. Then comes the interesting part: keeping your resolutions” (2009, A Note to the Reader, no page number). In her book, Rubin identifies a dozen concrete and measureable resolutions she tackled each month for a year (2009, 9). Here are the twelve resolutions that comprised her “happiness project”:

1. Vitality: Boost Energy.
2. Marriage: Remember Love.
3. Work: Aim Higher.
4. Parenthood: Lighten Up.
5. Leisure: Be Serious About Play.
6. Friendship: Make Time for Friends.

7. Money: Buy Some Happiness.
8. Eternity: Contemplate the Heavens.
9. Books: Pursue a Passion.
10. Mindfulness: Pay Attention.
11. Attitude: Keep a Contented Heart.
12. Happiness: Boot Camp Perfect.

While I might discover that Rubin’s happiness project looks a lot like my own, it also may not. As a result, I may attempt to incorporate all, some, or none of these subjects into my own journey toward more, lasting happiness. As Rubin notes early on in her book, discovering and determining what inspires my happiness is as individual as the journey itself. The process has to unfold in its own way—and I’m committed to allowing it to do so—as I will be for those I desire to empower in their own journeys upon the conclusion of my sabbatical.

Undoubtedly, this is a sabbatical proposal with high hopes. A reprieve from a semester of regularly faculty assignments would allow me the time I normally wouldn’t have to read, look inward, talk to and with others, listen deeply, reconnect with others and self, cultivate additional positive energy, knowledge, new approaches, novel insights (at least to me), and revitalize my investment in enriching myself so that I may enrich and uplift, inspire, and raise awareness, inform, and motivate others. In sum, so that I might gain more happiness in my life, and ultimately so that others might gain more happiness in theirs.

Objectives

Not only will I increase my knowledge on happiness during my sabbatical, but ideally, I seek growth emotionally and in my relational skills. Specifically, I will:

1. Clarify and define happiness.
2. Understand others’ views of being happy.
3. Apply happiness variables personally.
4. Create a personal happiness journey.
5. Evaluate the successes and difficulties of the process through personal on-going reflection.
6. Create exercises, tools, materials for others’ use on their happiness journey (this includes infusing materials in my current academic courses, as well as in the workshops I will lead upon the completion of my sabbatical).
7. Organize and plan workshop sessions for students, staff, and faculty at KVCC on creating individual happiness journeys.

The “Plan”

Generally speaking, in order to meet the objectives noted above, I plan to follow most of Rubin’s Happiness Project process: Preparation, Resolutions, and Maintenance. This includes reading academic and non-academic sources (books, articles, research) and having discussion with those who consider themselves to be happy (and not). However, I’m not sure I can separate my reading, discussion, application and reflection into separate chunks of time as I see all of it as an integrated process. Additionally, I’m not sure I’ll be in the maintenance stage during the sabbatical itself—that likely will come later. Nevertheless, instead of Rubin’s Maintenance stage, my third stage will likely manifest as a creative, organizational, reflective, preparation stage for the workshops that will mark the end of my sabbatical. I anticipate being able to note additional successes and difficulties of the process as it continues to unfold, during the subsequent facilitations I will lead.

Benefits

The benefits of such a project might seem inherently obvious, but I want to acknowledge that there are more than intrinsic rewards (for me and others) that will likely result. “Happy employees produce more than unhappy ones over the long term. They routinely show up at

work, they're less likely to quit, they go above and beyond the call of duty, and they attract people who are just as committed to the job" (Spreitzer & Porath, par. 1). The ultimate benefit of a project like this is to access what the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business suggests is at the heart of happiness on the job: "thriving" where employees stretch beyond being "content... satisfied and productive" and reach for "engage[ment] ... and are highly energized... know[ing] how to avoid burnout" (par. 2).

These benefits are not far-fetched for a place still affectionately called, "Happy Valley." Take for example, the KVCC Board of Trustees' Values: "Caring & Respect, Integrity, Excellence & Quality, Humor & Well-Being, and Teamwork & Stewardship... shall guide all policies and practices [of KVCC]" (BP 402; emphasis added). The notion that happiness—or at least elements of it—in statements like, "too much fun is just enough at KVCC" acknowledges that when we're happy (either through fun or laughter or both) we tend to enjoy our work, which translates to wholeheartedly and enthusiastically serving students and each other. It's what other researchers studying happiness call "flow... that state of total engagement" (Mann, 2013, 52). And it seems most organizations could benefit from more "flow" on the job. Take the Gallup Organization's Q12 Employee Engagement Survey Results that suggest nationally 72% of employees are either not engaged or are activity disengaged on the job (StrengthsQuest Educator Seminar).

Of course the benefits of a journey like this will not be limited to increased employee satisfaction, productivity and engagement. It will be in the ripple effect this has from one person to the next—at KVCC and away from KVCC. Where those who are introduced to the concepts of creating a happiness journey move away from *surviving* to *thriving*, and help others to do the same (Fredrickson, as cited by Mann, 2013). Where the benefits of happiness include: "better health and longer life, more fulfilling marriages and relationships, higher incomes and more financial success, better work performance and more professional success, more altruism and community involvement" (Diener, as cited by Mann, 2013, 57).

In sum, this sabbatical's objectives and benefits meet all of the general criteria guidelines for Sabbatical Leaves:

1. There's no doubt that in learning how to positively thrive by increasing my happiness that I will *increase my professional effectiveness* as a faculty member, as a chair, committee member, and active member of the KVCC community.
2. Additionally, as noted above, this sabbatical will *enhance KVCC's ability to fulfill its mission and/or improve service to students* through my communication with others about creating their own happiness journeys. Workshops will be open to faculty, staff, and students. I will work with the Student Success Center and Faculty Success Center to offer these workshops.
3. The opportunity this sabbatical provides for *refreshment of mind and body, creative challenges, and/or incentives for critical thinking* is inherent in its purpose and goals. As noted early on in this narrative, I seek some opposing goals—relaxation and mindfulness, creative thought and simplicity, time with others and time alone—but I need the time and space to disconnect from routine so that I may reconnect with what will be my next chapter.
4. Finally, this sabbatical leave *exceeds the routine, ongoing professional development* that I typically seek from conferences/workshops, reading scholarly journals and engagements with colleagues. In breaking from the conventional path, I hope to achieve greater insight and awareness. As a leading happiness researcher notes, "Not everything has to be complicated all the time" (Steger, as cited in Levitt, 2013, 45).

**Anticipated
Income (during
or after leave)**

I do not anticipate any income to be generated while on leave, or upon completion of my leave that would be considered “future income” resulting from the work I complete during my leave.

Budget

I anticipate no budget expenses for this project in addition to the one semester of release time, including my duties as Academic Leader of the Communications Department and work on other committees I am part of.

References

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