

# FRANK NEWSLETTER APRIL

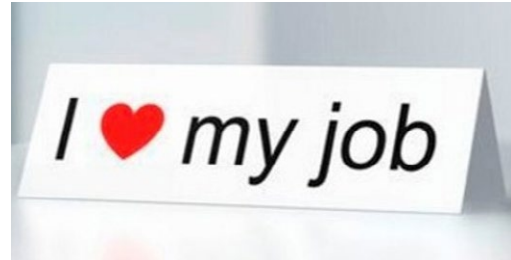
## HAPPINESS, FROM (HARD) WORK TO IDLENESS

In this article, I will take the reader on a little journey addressing happiness in the context of work and leisure time; (hard) work and idleness. This article is also about happiness and an involved mind, a wandering mind and a rested mind, as well as about “high intensity emotions and low intensity emotions”. Rather than making a conclusion or suggestion, I leave it to the reader to take of my musings what seems of value.

### About happiness at work

Confucius is quoted to have said, “Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.”<sup>(1)</sup> Certainly, I count myself among the fortunate ones who do love their job. I say “fortunate ones” as this may not be the day-to-day experience of every worker. “TGF” (Thanks God it is Friday) is a quick reference to the delight of the working week ending and the arrival of a weekend of leisure.

At least one comprehensive study (completed in the US) shows that emotional well-being rises by 15% over the weekends, only to drop again by Monday.<sup>(3)</sup>



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On the other hand, there are also studies<sup>(4)</sup> which show that people are happier during work time than when they are not working. A global survey<sup>(5)</sup> revealed that 54% of employees did not take up their full allowance of holiday days...

Lastly, as among others, psychologist Amy Wrzesniewski points out: our mind set has an important role in our level of satisfaction. We can see our work as a Job, a Career or a Calling: the latter two

perspectives tend to lead to greater work satisfaction. Wrzesniewski adds that it does not matter what jobs we have: “there are doctors who see their work as a job and janitors who see their work as a calling”.<sup>(6)</sup>

### Work-Leisure time: Work Hard – Play Hard?

Is there a connection between happiness at work and the happiness we experience when we do not work?

One example that there is such a relation can be found in the motto: ‘Work Hard-Play Hard’ which stems from the ‘80s and ‘90s and suggests that work and leisure go hand-in-hand, that a person finds happiness in immersing themselves in both highly stimulating work and leisure activities. The images of work that this motto conjures tend to be those of the “long hours in the office and early morning starts” ilk while images of play are perhaps “adventurous sporting activities in the weekends or playing racket ball or squash during lunch breaks”.

The emotions associated with “Work hard – Play hard” are what psychologists now refer to as “high intensity emotions”<sup>(8)</sup> – emotions such as excitement and elation.

We are not likely to associate “Play Hard” with listening to Beethoven’s violin concert D Major Op.61, reading



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a book, going to a poem recital or taking a leisurely stroll – activities that are more associated with “low intensity emotions”<sup>(9)</sup>. The commitment to hard work this motto celebrates speaks to the link between a stimulated and involved mind and happiness, addressed in one of my previous articles.

*Note: more about “high intensity and low intensity” emotions later.*

1) [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

2) [www.lateralia.es](http://www.lateralia.es)

3) Stanford report “Stanford Research explores weekend happiness” 20 February 2014

4) Sharon Ni Choncuir “Why we are happier at work than at home” Irish Examiner 28 September 2014

5) Society for Human Resources Management “SHRM Survey Employee Benefits 2018”

6) Yale psychologist Amy Wrzesniewski, quoted by Shawn Achor in “The Happiness Advantage” Virgin Books 2011

7) [www.weston.cards](http://www.weston.cards)

8) and 9) Emma Seppala “The Happiness Track” Piatkus 2016

The “Work Hard-Play Hard” concept was probably a more popular notion in the late 20th century than now, where especially Silicon Valley companies have started to introduce a different concept, perhaps best captured by “Work Smart” – where leisure time is woven into work time as well as workspace.



### Work-Hard Play Hard and the “chase mentality”

Where the “Work-Hard Play-Hard” motto can become a challenge for our wellbeing is when this turns into what psychologists refer to as a “chase mentality”<sup>(11)</sup>, “success alcoholism”<sup>(12)</sup> or the “hedonic treadmill”<sup>(13)</sup>.

Harvard Professor Leslie Perlow states that this mentality is fueled by “FOMO” (the Fear Of Missing Out)<sup>(14)</sup>.

Many studies, as psychologist Emma Seppala reports <sup>(15)</sup> show that constantly trying to get things done can be detrimental to one’s health, can reduce productivity and can increase negative interactions with co-workers.

The chase mentality is *future orientated*: the treadmill that happiness comes with achievement of a.b.c., rather than that *happiness is enjoying the process of our pursuits* whether we actually achieve the desired outcome or not.

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### Countering the chase mentality: bringing our mind to the present-meditation

It is no surprise that psychologists studying happiness, in an effort to counter the chase mentality, have put their attention to what can be done to bring our minds to the present. In one of my previous articles, I addressed the concept of “flow”, where we are fully immersed in our activity, whether work or leisure; this is one path.

Another path to deliberately bring the mind to the present is a practice which has been around for millennia: meditation. A lot of research and testing has been done on the effects of meditation over the last decades. Indeed, as several psychologists<sup>(17)</sup> report, there is substantial evidence that meditation does help with mind wandering and can reduce stress and anxiety among other ailments.

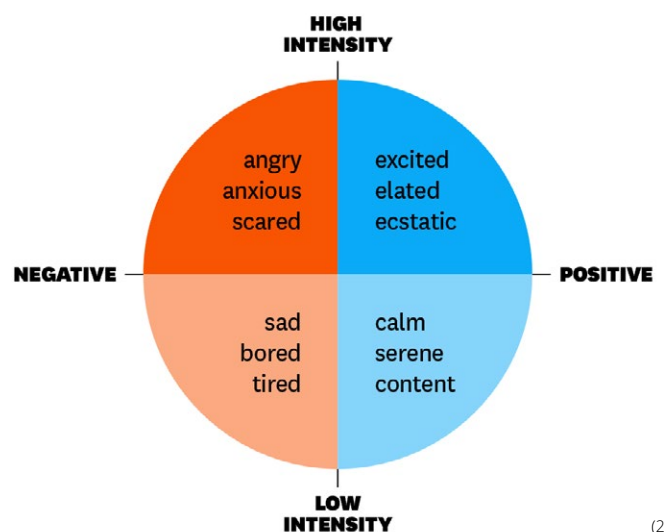


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Meditation can be defined as a set of techniques that are intended to encourage a heightened state of awareness and focused attention. Nearly every religion, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism has a tradition of using meditative practices <sup>(18)</sup>.

In Psychology Today’s March 2016 issue, it mentions that meditation can be traced back to as early as 5000 BCE. A growing part of the world’s population meditates, the estimated figures range from 200-500 million <sup>(19)</sup>. A 2017 study published in the US <sup>(20)</sup>, showed that 14% of the US population had tried meditating at least once.

### Mapping Positive and Negative emotions according to intensity



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### High and Low Intensity emotions

Delving deeper into the chase mentality, psychologists addressed another component: the intensity of our emotions, distinguishing firstly between high intensity and low intensity emotions<sup>(22)</sup> and then further segmenting positive and negative emotions.

11),12),14),15), 21), 22),23, 25), 26), 33) Emma Seppala “The Happiness Track” Piatkus 2016  
 10) www.vecteezy.com  
 13) Martin E.P. Seligman” Authentic Happiness” Nicholas Brealy Publishing 2017  
 16) www.media.istockphoto.com

17) Sonja Lybormisky “The How of Happiness” Penguin Books 2017 and Emma Seppala “The Happiness Track” Piatkus 2016  
 18) www.verywellmind.com  
 19) and 20) Mira Rakicevic “27 Meditation Statistics for your Well-Being” 3 January 2021 www.disturbemenot.co



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Findings showed <sup>(23)</sup> that “westerners and particularly Americans” equated high intensity positive emotions such as excitement, elation and ecstasy with happiness, rather than low intensity positive emotions like calmness, serenity or contentment. The downside reportedly being that high intensity emotions (while having their place) can lead to both physical and mental fatigue <sup>(25)</sup>.

Negative high intensity emotions are anger, anxiety and scaredness, vs negative low intensity emotions like sadness, boredom and tiredness. Negative high intensity emotions, reportedly, can lead to worrying and “catastrophic thinking” which raise stress levels and fatigue <sup>(26)</sup>.

The suggestion coming from this research is to *allow and value more low positive intensity emotions*.

### TOP GOLFERS AND LOW POSITIVE INTENSITY EMOTIONS

Dr. Bob Rotella, a sports psychologist who has coached some of the world’s best golf players reports <sup>(28)</sup> that top golf players, when walking from one hole to the next (an average of 10 minutes<sup>(29)</sup>) deliberately give their “concentrated mind” a break by going into ‘low intensity emotion’ activities such as daydreaming, concentrating on their breathing, counting the trees on the course or thinking about someone ill or handicapped- all of this to distract themselves and keep their brain quiet, almost inactive.



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### Idleness and doing nothing

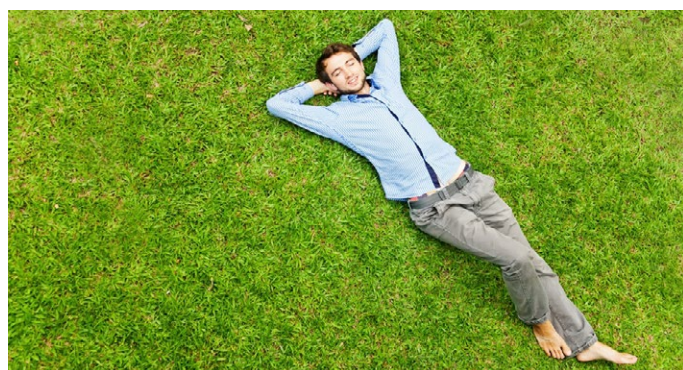
This brings me to the ultimate low intensity state of being: doing nothing, idleness. The question being: can it be positive for our happiness?

One of my tennis friends shared with me, after a practice session, the saying: “the older we get, the wiser our father becomes”. “Doing nothing” is still a challenge for me, but at least now, perhaps finally, I have more of an open ear for it.

My father (who did meditate twice a day and embraced oriental philosophy) certainly kindly suggested “doing nothing” to his 14-15 year old son, who himself was very focused on “doing well”. At the time, I gazed to him in bewilderment, “What do you mean, Dad?”

Idleness is lowly rated. However, there is evidence that the real creative moments happen when we are in fact “idle”, as research by Jonathan Schooler <sup>(31)</sup> suggests.

This research showed that people are more creative after daydreaming or letting their mind wonder. A recent study published in the Netherlands <sup>(32)</sup> suggests that “idle or leisure time can complement the achievement of goals.” Emma Seppala, whom I have quoted before, in her book “The Happiness Track” <sup>(33)</sup>, having reviewed the latest studies on the topic, concludes: “Being idle leads to heightened levels of wellbeing...”



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Frank van Lerven CFP®



24) Tony Crabbe, Shutterstock  
27) www.wellnessworkdays.com

28) Dr. Bob Rotella with Bob Cullen “How Champions Think in Sports and Life” Simon Schuster May 2015

29) www.golflink.com

30) www.shutterstock

31) Jonathan Schooler and Jonathan Smallwood “The Science of Mind Wandering: Empirically Navigating the Stream of Consciousness” Annual Review of Psychology, September 2014

32) Relaxnews “Is Idleness the key to happiness?” 30 July 2020

