



Achieve Your Goals Podcast #134 - How We Can All Choose to Be Happier [My Letter to Katie]

Nick:

Welcome to the Achieve Your Goals podcast with Hal Elrod. I'm your host, Nick Palkowski and you're listening to the show that is guaranteed to help you take your life to the next level faster than you ever thought possible. In each episode you will learn from someone who has achieved extraordinary goals that most haven't. He's the author of the number one best-selling book, *The Miracle Morning*, a hall of fame and business achiever, an international keynote speaker, ultra-marathon runner and the founder of VIPSUCCESSCOACHING.COM, Mr. Hal Elrod

Hal:

Hey everybody, welcome to the Achieve Your Goals podcast. This is your host and your friend, Hal Elrod. Today I've got something a little different for you. It actually should be a relatively short podcast. I know in the past when I say that it never is, but today I'm actually going to read something to you so I think that keeps it a little more controlled as long as I don't ad lib too much at the end. What I'm going to read to you is actually a letter from a girl named [Katy 00:01:08], and my response to her letter, and then her response to my response.

The way this came about is I'm actually preparing for our upcoming Best Year Ever coaching call and as I was preparing for our coaching module, the topic is holistic happiness, I was doing a search on my computer to see if I had anything I'd ever written or recorded on the topic of happiness and I came across this article that I wrote in 2008 for Bliss Magazine on the topic of how to choose happiness. It's based on my response to this letter from Katy and her letter to me and how she responded to my response. She wrote to me, she was a college student feeling hopeless and telling me about her depression and why she can't be happy.

You'll hear her letter, my response, and then you'll see in her final response how she was able to immediately apply the advice that I gave her and how it completely shifted her perspective and opened her eyes to new possibilities and enabled her to immediately begin to transcend her depression. I hope this helps you, or someone that you know, to be happier or find happiness, or overcome anything that's holding back from being happy, whether that be depression or what I've recently discovered is known as the hedonic treadmill.

It's the idea that every time we achieve something that we think will make us happy it becomes our new set point and then happiness goes back to the way that it was before. The happiness set point that we have tends to stay relatively the same no matter what we accomplish, what we achieve, or what we get that we think will make us happy when we actually get it, then we set a new goal post, we raise the standard of what it takes to make us happy and we just keep going on this treadmill never actually getting anywhere. That was my first tangent that extended the length of the podcast.

All right, here we go. This is Katy's letter to me back in 2008, gosh time flies. She says, "Hi Hal. Recently I stumbled across your website and read your motto, 'Happiness is a choice, I chose to be happy.' I thought about that statement for just a moment before coming to the conclusion that happiness is not a choice at all, but rather the result of a decision made prior to its outcome. In your case you chose to survive, you wanted happiness in your life so you decided to fight for it. Having reversed this role you could have easily given up and wallowed in your own sorrow and self pity, but you didn't."

"What's my point? For many people happiness is a challenge. I do not know any one person who does not want to be happy, yet so many of us are sad. No matter how much I try to cast away my depression and be happy, I simply can't win. What is your explanation for this conflict? Sometimes I wish I could ignore my depressive states but instead I find myself in a snowball of antagonizing thoughts and overwhelming sadness. Hal, I would like to be happy more than anything but I simply am not. I think for many people becoming depressed has much more to do with their body's chemistry and make up. For some, they can become successful in overcoming great trauma, but for others where no trauma has ever occurred being happy is a luxury that is altogether a foreign emotion."

"You do not decide emotions. Whatever emotions a person may feel is not their fault that it is there, nor is it their choice. When I am depressed I cannot up and decide that I will feel happy today, I might be content with thinking positive things for a few moments but again in this case the sadness will overcome."

Happiness is a choice, if this is true then why can't I win? Someone once told me that for every negative thought a person may have it takes five positive thoughts to even things out. I suppose for some people this tactic may work, but for me I think that bad things far outweigh the good. Thanks anyway, Katy."

As you can imagine when I got Katy's letter I took it really seriously. It really caused me to think, re-think, my own philosophies on happiness. Here was my response, "Hi Katy. I really appreciate you taking the time to write me and thank you for your kind words and honesty. You write very well and your thoughts are very insightful so I will attempt to do justice to your inquiry. You are absolutely right, no one can just snap their fingers and be happy, it's not that easy, but it is simple if you know what to do. Much in life is simply a matter of perspective. It's not inherently good or bad, but it is how we choose to look at life that makes the difference."

"Although you can't always control what happens to you, you can absolutely control what you think and how you feel about it. Please allow me to explain. You mentioned in your letter that you find yourself in a snowball of antagonizing thoughts and overwhelming sadness. Well, is it not possible then that your thoughts, which you do have a lot of control over, at least consciously, can cause this sadness? How can you think new thoughts? You have to develop new empowering habits, ones that make you happy. Take a moment and think about when you are depressed, what are your thoughts? Are you thinking about how grateful you are for all that you have in your life? How much you've accomplished? How many people love you

and how much joy, opportunity and love awaits you in your future?" Are you thinking other thoughts, depressing thoughts?"

"My guess is that you are consumed with thoughts about your inadequacies, faults, shortcomings, negative circumstances, worries, et cetera. Because you see Katy, everyone has both. If I always chose to think of the latter of course I'd feel bad. I would be depressed just as you or anyone else would. I'm sure you don't think that happy people are only those who are perfect, without any faults or shortcomings, do you? Of course not. The difference is what they choose to focus on. People that you might call negative people are often justifying their negativity by saying that they are being realistic. I like to think of it this way, in life we have two pages to focus on at any given time. One page lists everything that is positive, all that we have to feel good about, and it makes us feel good when we focus on it."

"The other page lists everything negative, all that we lack, all that we have to feel bad about, and it makes us feel bad when we think about it or when we focus on it. However both are reality, both are real and true, but which one we choose to focus on most often actively and consciously determines how we feel most of the time. As I said, if I were to focus on, think about and dwell on my faults all day, all the problems in my life, I'll surely end up depressed. Katy we do have the opportunity to actively choose our thoughts, but you do have to be conscious about your choices and when your mind wanders, or your thoughts get away from you, you have to step up and choose to think positive thoughts that direct your focus on what you want and what you will commit to do to create what you want, as well as what you already have to feel good about."

"It's like anything in life, if you want to be successful at it, you have to work consistently at it. Remember that in life extraordinary results require extraordinary effort. Consider that all of us already have everything we need to be the happiest we could ever be. It's simply up to us to acknowledge that truth and be present to it in each moment. I hope this letter gives you new perspective on happiness and can help in some way you to be happier. Again, we can't just snap our fingers so don't expect overnight results, but after a while your conscious efforts to be happy will become a part of who you are, and then it won't take effort anymore. I promise, I've done it and I've seen countless others do it as well. Good luck on your journey, and please let me know if there's anything I can ever do to add value to your life and your happiness. Always with gratitude and love, your friend Hal."

Now I'll be very honest with you guys and gals, when I sent that I didn't know if it would have any effect. Honestly I think I was probably a little bit pessimistic, expecting a response like, "Hey, thanks anyway Hal. I'll keep going on about, seeing things the way that I see things." I was very, very encouraged when I got Katy's response. This is the letter that she wrote back.

"Hal, thank you so much for listening to me and for taking my words seriously. I really appreciate it. Somehow you were able to turn my backwards way of thinking around so that I have a new perspective on the way I think and the way I rationalize my thoughts. We do have complete control of our thoughts, you are right. Whatever thoughts we choose to focus on, whether they

are negative or positive will determine how we feel in the end. It is completely my fault that I have chosen to focus on what is wrong instead of what is right. However I cannot justify or find a reason why I made that decision, other than maybe that bad things are easier to believe and therefor easier to dwell on."

"Honestly that is not even what is important in this matter. What's really important is that I start doing something now to rectify the situation. I guess you could say that happiness is your ultimate goal and choosing to focus on positive aspects of our lives, as well as stopping the snowball of negative thoughts, are choices we must make to realize that goal. One reason that I find all of this complicated is that happiness should not be this much of a fight. In the whole scheme of things what do I really have to be sad about? Not much, yet I still am. That's why I doubted your motto, if happiness really is a choice and I realize that the sentiment is true, yet I am still not happy, what am I missing here?"

"Your thoughts and input on this were so encouraging and comforting because I can now see that we must make a conscious decision to focus more on what's right in our lives than on what's wrong. Having realized this I am excited to develop these new empowering habits, and like you said it probably will take time but it is time I am willing to commit to. Hal thank you for taking the time to read my letter and putting some much thought into your response. It truly means a lot to me, your passion for life is contagious and I wish you the best in all that you do. Feeling so grateful, Katy."

If you look at the way that she signed her first letter, "Thanks anyway, Katy," and then the second letter it was, "Feeling so grateful, Katy." The final thoughts on this are, Katy's letter really opened my eyes. For me the concepts that I have learned through my experiences, to me they seemed obvious and it had been through the mentors in my life and some of the experience and the realizations that I had had throughout my life. But unfortunately it's not that easy for everybody as Katy articulated. Happiness takes conscious attention until it becomes our natural state of being. Much like Katy said, "Why is it so difficult?" Well it's kind of like if you want to get your body in shape, it takes work, right?

If you want to be physically fit, you've got to work at it. Why would it be different to be emotionally fit, or spiritually fit, or relationally fit? Each area of our life, it does take a conscious, consistent daily effort to thrive in those areas. It's not that happiness is going to be our default state of being, but it is, as Katy said, it's something that we all aspire to. Whether you use the word happiness or joyful or, I don't know, emotionally intelligent, whatever the term is for you, it's something that I think that we all do. We all want to feel good and that's why we do what we do, because we think that the things that we're doing will make us feel better. Sometimes they're short term pleasure decisions, it makes us feel better in the moment, but it causes long term pain, like eating that donut or eating that cheese burger, eating an unhealthy food brings us short term pleasure but may have negative consequences in the long term.

One thing to consider is you're choosing doing the things that will make you happy, focusing on the positive thoughts. Make sure that the choices and the decisions that you're making and

the actions that you're taking are in alignment with not just short term pleasure but long term happiness and fulfillment. If you want to read the letters that Katy and I wrote back and forth to each other, you can find the transcript underneath this podcast at halelrod.com/podcast. In case you're not aware of that, all of our podcast episodes, at least all the recent and future episodes, we do provide written transcripts in case you want to go back and read or highlight anything that we talk about during the show.

I think that's it for today. Now by the way if you do want to get some coaching from me ongoing, we do have the Best Year Ever coaching program that actually, I run it. I've ran it for about four years, but I did bring in my good friend and business partner John Berghoff to co-host and co-coach that program. You can actually get one dollar seven day trial at bestyearevercoaching.net, again that's bestyearevercoaching.net. It's really focused on high level personal development. Topics like emotional intelligence and time management per activity and happiness and building teams, and all of the above. Again that's at bestyearevercoaching.net to get the seven day trial. I think that's it. Hey, we kept it pretty short today. I love and appreciate you guys and gals, thanks so much for being a loyal listener of the achieve your goals podcast. I will talk to you next week. Take care everybody.

Nick: Thank you so much for tuning into this episode of the podcast. We want to know what were your big takeaways from this episode. Simply head on over to halelrod.com/134 for episode one hundred and thirty four and just leave a comment there on the show's page, letting us know what your big takeaways were.

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Speaker 3:

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