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BLOGPOST: Monthly motivation: On minimizing unhappiness



In our ['Monthly Motivation'](#) blog, philosopher Jörg Bernardy highlights topics that inspire us to pause and reflect for a moment. The October issue explores two unusual and rarely used skills: being unhappy and the art of omission.

How successful are you at minimizing unhappiness?

'Digital Minimalism' is the latest version of a trend that has been going around the world for several years. We're clearing out our homes, purifying our consumption habits, changing our diets, reducing our working hours, tidying up our relationships, mucking out our wardrobes and bookcases and taking digital detox breaks. Before you read on, please answer the following question: what constitutes happiness for you? What is it that makes you happy? Note down your answers – the more specific they are, the better.

Losing weight and investing: the art of omission

Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight knows that this is not an easy feat. To seriously shed weight, it usually doesn't suffice to change your diet and eat only healthy foods. One of the most effective methods is to skip entire meals and avoid certain products altogether. When dieting, it's not just what we eat that matters, but also what we leave out.

This focus on eliminating unwanted influences and adverse factors is commonplace in other areas as well. The investors among you know what the terms 'upsides' and 'downsides' signify. Upsides include all positive results of an investment, such as a favourable return. The downsides include all possible negative outcomes and losses that you can incur, with bankruptcy as the worst-case scenario. Especially for beginners the following rule is essential for survival: concentrate first and foremost on avoiding the downsides, then the positive results will follow of their own accord.

Even unhappiness must be learned

In his classic essay "The Pursuit of Unhappiness", psychologist Paul Watzlawick identifies one of the main causes of personal unhappiness: our talent for creating our own unhappiness to the best of our ability. But more than that, we voluntarily hold on to it and sometimes flatly refuse to let go of it. Or, as Watzlawick writes: 'Anyone can be unhappy; but making oneself unhappy is something that has to be learned; a little experience with a few personal setbacks doesn't suffice for that.' For this reason, Watzlawick devises a guide for all of us who throw ourselves into our unhappiness on a daily basis. In other words, his guide to unhappiness is a guide to happiness in reverse in that it shows us all the things we can avoid and should leave out.

Minimalism as a negative art of the good life

Take another look at your 'happiness list' from the beginning. Sometimes it's easier to define what makes us unhappy than to specify what makes us happy. It's in exactly this exclusion principle that we find the deeper wisdom of minimalism: instead of running from one feeling of happiness to the next, we simply minimize and eliminate everything that makes us unhappy. Even the ancient philosophers were devoted followers of the minimalist method, which might also be called the negative art of the good life.

The quest for the good life thus becomes the avoidance of the bad life. Or in a nutshell: achieving happiness by avoiding unhappiness. Does this idea appeal to you? Then create your own personal guide to unhappiness. I'd recommend you start minimizing your unhappiness as of today. Don't hold off doing so until the new year, or things might have an unhappy ending before you have even started.

'The goal of the wise is not to achieve happiness, but to avoid unhappiness.' (Aristotle)

Kind regards,

Jörg Bernardy

This interview was originally posted in our blog:

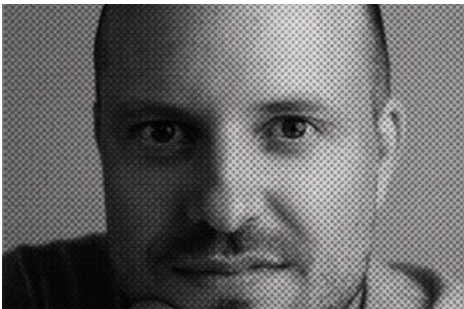
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