

Concentrate on doing what you love best

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When I deliver a particularly clever bit of trivia at home, my wife often asks me a rather pointed question. "If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?" I have no pithy comeback for that one. I also have no explanation as to why my brain can't dig me out of the sinkholes I encounter from day to day. Perhaps there's no correlation. Does intelligence have anything to do with success and wealth? Are wealthy people any happier? Apparently not, according to author Raj Raghunathan, a marketing professor at The University of Texas at Austin's McCombs School of Business. His recent book, "If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Happy?" tries to answer some of these questions, in a light, self-help kind of way, with a bit of science tossed in for good measure. We all suffer from some sort of inner turmoil, things that give us strength and others that present hurdles. Those A-type personalities want to be the best, but herein lies the dilemma, not just for them, but for all of us. Just how do you measure "best"? It's all very subjective and the number of awards or salary bonuses are not a true reflection of one's accomplishments or brilliance. We compare ourselves to our peers, friends and acquaintances. We follow some of our high school or college classmates on social media, to see what they're up to. What we're really doing is trying to gauge how successful they are so we can feel good, or bad about ourselves. It's a double-edged sword, that's why I personally avoid such comparisons. It's extremely important to avoid that ugly, green-eyed monster known as jealousy, or its sibling, envy. Very nasty duo indeed. Raghunathan points out that instead of comparisons, we should concentrate on what we're really good at and what we enjoy doing. By letting go of apples-to-oranges comparisons, we are free to feel deeply about what we care about. And that, my friends, is seldom money, power or success. The more we like what we do, and have the freedom to do it, the better we will become. As we evolve, we will become experts in our own right. I have never considered myself an "expert" at my craft, but I do believe I have reached a certain level of proficiency. I think I have a knack for storytelling, finding the golden nuggets in every person's story, and shining them brightly. I have a way of making people feel comfortable with me, allowing them to open up, perhaps laugh a little and enjoy the interview process. I think that often, we simple humans fixate on the wrong things. We dwell on mastery, belonging and autonomy, but what's really important is what we bring to the world. Yes, that unique piece of us that we offer freely, and donate to the rest of humankind, is priceless. If you've ever sat on a board, or been involved in volunteer work or any organization, you will know that every individual can offer some pretty interesting insights into things. Others may have a totally different way of looking at something. I always recommend to others to try tilting their heads a bit "you'd be surprised what you see at that angle!" In order for us to be fulfilled, we need to find something that not only makes us happy, but that we find meaningful. We need to "get lost" in ourselves every day, to fully enjoy our activities. All we have to do is look at our children. They're not distracted by end-result strategies, tactics or achievements. They revel in the moment and simply enjoy what they're doing. I'm a big child, I admit it. I love being in the moment with my sci-fi shows or my toys, I mean collectibles! I think being lost for a moment or two, in one's own imagination, is amazing. I've always been a believer in the concept that the more complicated the mind, the greater the need for the simplicity of play. We overburdened adults also need a daily reality check, which puts things in perspective. Our jobs don't necessarily make us happy, even if we have that dream job or ideal career. In our work, we still tend to measure ourselves against our peers, and we link our happiness to our accomplishments. That's a big no-no, according to the experts. We have to let go of the concept of "measuring up." We find that we may have a great productive week, or even year, but then we have to be even more productive the next. We have to constantly improve and that's not always easy. In my job, I place the biggest expectations on myself. I work hard to give the readers what they want, need and deserve, within the confines of the space limitations of the paper. Also, there are only so many events to cover and so many hours in the day. People are either optimists or pessimists when it comes to whether good or bad things happen. By and large, our lives are reactionary, not proactive. I was reminded recently that life doesn't happen TO us, but FOR us. Life presents us with challenges and opportunities. It's how we run with them that matters most. I think deep down inside we all want to be productive and contribute to society. We want to help make the world a better place, not simply exist, during our limited time here on earth. Here's to a fulfilling and productive 2019 filled with promise and opportunities! Be free, and fly!