

# Three Roads to Happiness

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Here are three simple suggestions for finding greater happiness in your relationship: Don't look forward. Don't look back. And don't think too much about yourself.

Can three such simple statements really affect our happiness? Let's take a look.

Consider the first suggestion, "Don't look forward." Most of the things we worry about concern the future, right? How secure is our job? Will we get that promotion? Is the economy going to hold? Could that simple cough our son or daughter has be a sign of something serious? It's been said that 90% of the things we worry about never come to pass. If this is true, then pulling in the reins on our unproductive thoughts could free up of a lot of wasted mental energy—and the mental turmoil that accompanies them.

Now let's look at suggestion number two, "Don't look back." Like things we anticipate in the future, we also carry around memories of the past, and these often contain negatives that we anguish over as well. A comment we made to a coworker. Selling or buying a house at the wrong time. An argument with our spouse that we're still fuming over—mental exercises that consume our energy but give us nothing in return.

Now we come to the third "don't," which deals with that most important, but undiscovered center of the universe—us. So much of our thinking is inwardly focused and amounts to little more than white noise, like a radio stuck between stations. How do we look? Is that a new wrinkle? Where did those extra pounds come from? What should we wear? Why didn't so-and-so call us back?

Now add to these three mental energy hogs the myriad other distractions we face daily: the ringing phone; blaring TV, the stack of emails awaiting our response; the barking dog. Most of us are so consumed with distractions that we find little time to recognize, much less appreciate, the really good things in our lives.

Of course, living in the world we do, we can never completely escape this "noise." But by simply becoming aware of it and keeping it in check, we can create "quiet space" for ourselves, a small garden of mental serenity in which we can relax and let our mind wander to the beautiful things surrounding us. Maybe we'll notice a sunset on the way home from work, or the flowers blooming in the back yard, or the things we admire in our spouse that seem to get lost in the melee.

"Three Don'ts," you say, "I thought negatives were disempowering." Some can be. But here they serve a useful purpose—they help keep our mind from wandering into

unproductive places. Like Do Not Enter signs, they keep us from venturing into nonproductive areas and help us focus in the present.

Freedom is wonderful, but unrestrained freedom can be like a runaway horse whose activities involve little more than fighting for survival and reacting to the events of the day. Some restraints are good, because they corral our thinking and add depth and meaning to our lives.

And what, you ask, does limiting our mental chatter have to do with creating a happy love life? Think of it as taking a mental vacation. Vacations don't eliminate our problems, they simply offer us a chance to escape Life's pressures and freshen our outlook. Vacations help us get back in touch with our feelings and rediscover the things that are important in our lives. Ever wonder why romances blossom on vacations? And you can't beat the price—it costs nothing!

Another nice thing about the three Don'ts is their simplicity—they slip easily into our frenetic lifestyles. You don't need a workbook or have to go to classes to implement them. In fact, you could write all three on a gum wrapper. So, in answer to the question, "Can something so simple really work?" the even simpler answer is, why not give it a try? You have nothing to lose—not even the gum wrapper.