

By Glenn Plaskin

The Simple Secrets of Happiness



In that state, do we ever take the time to ask ourselves: *Am I truly fulfilled? Advancing in my life? Challenging myself to the fullest? Mining the best there is in me?* To help answer those questions, we turned to two of the nation's leading authorities on human growth and development, Anthony Robbins and Deepak Chopra, M.D. Here, in separate interviews, they offer their insights into this thing we call growth.

his latest for teens, *Fire in the Heart* (Simon & Schuster)—defines growth as the “evolution of consciousness or spirit.”

“Studies show,” he says, “that most people stop growing emotionally after the age of eight! A part of our social conditioning says that once you’ve gone through school, growth should stop, when it really should accelerate. As adults, we also often lose our ability to have fun,” he observes. “Skiing, golfing, enjoying nature, playing with your kids—that’s what I’m talking about. Playtime is essential to growth, because that’s when we incubate our spirit and tap into our creativity.”

How We Get Stuck

● **We play it safe.** “Children are masterful at stretching their capacities,” notes Robbins, peak performance coach and author of *Inner Strength: Harnessing the Primal Forces Within* (Simon & Schuster). “Their bodies, minds and skills are advancing at a dizzying pace. Their curiosity is as boundless as their energy. Spontaneity flows.”

● **We believe false promises.** In our chaotic, stress-filled world, we too often fail to address “the deeper questions,” says Dr. Chopra, and focus instead on the lure of materialism. “We’ve been sold a false promise,” he asserts, “that money can buy everything—including happy emotions, intimate relationships and a good life. In other words, it can buy your soul. There’s the pervasive mind-set that something outside of you will ‘make you happy,’ but, in fact, there’s no relationship between what we call happiness and material success.”

As adults, however, we often become trapped in repetitive, mind-numbing routines. “We get into our comfort zones—safe, protected and bored—and are afraid to step outside of them. But the very

True success, Dr. Chopra maintains, is “the ability to love and have compassion, to find meaning in your life and to feel connected to your own creativity. Once you have all that, material success becomes simply a byproduct.”

Indeed, a recent study that analyzed happiness levels in 65 countries rated

Children live it. Businesses need it. Romance blossoms because of it. And the miracles of nature reflect it every day. What is this thing?

We call it growth—the ever-expanding capacity to evolve and reach beyond where we are toward what we can become. The very key to longevity is our capacity to keep growing throughout every stage of life—to be curious, mentally active and emotionally engaged.

Whether it’s learning French, volunteering at a hospital, weight lifting, mentoring a child, changing careers or constructing a birdhouse—any and everything we do has the potential to invigorate and challenge us.

Unfortunately, our plans and dreams are often put on hold simply because we “don’t have the time” or we’re “too stressed out.” Our jobs, our chores, our worries all seem to take precedence over the passion that prods us to strike out in bold new directions. We tend to feel stuck and stagnant, bored by our predictable routines and consumed by our many responsibilities.

comfort that protects us from the pain of growth can also imprison us. Rather than diving into life with the energy we did as children, we become overcautious and unable to sustain happiness because our growth is being thwarted.”

● **We stop learning and having fun.** Dr. Chopra, author of 38 books on health and spirituality—including

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the United States number 16. The study, published in the British magazine *New Scientist*, found that Nigeria had the highest percentage of happy people, with several other developing nations also near the top.

Robbins, who created "life coaching" 25 years ago, has advised enough of the rich and famous to have a pretty good idea of what does and doesn't make people happy. "Here we are, the most prosperous nation on earth," he says, "but 65 percent of the population is overweight, 19 million people suffer from depression, 50 percent of marriages end in divorce and 19 million are using illegal drugs! What's the problem? We're achieving our material goals, but we're suffering inside because success without fulfillment equals failure. Ultimately, the things we get will never make us happy."

● **We accentuate the negative.** "The major reason most people are in pain," observes Robbins, "is that they're focused solely on themselves—

their upsets, their challenges, their problems."

"Your emotions aren't somebody else's fault," comments Dr. Chopra. "If you feel pain, you need to understand its origin, to express it, to share it, to release it and move on. That's what an emotionally mature person is able to do. If you don't, remembered pain will surface later as anger, anticipation of pain will create anxiety, redirection of pain will show up as guilt, and all that pain saps your energy and brings on depression."

How to Truly Feel Happy and Fulfilled

Dr. Chopra believes that almost any problem thwarting your growth can be solved: "Just ask yourself: *What am I observing right now? What am I feeling? What need is not being met?* If you're unhappy, it's because the need for perceived survival or safety, for love or belongingness, for creative expression or achievement, for self-esteem or self-respect is not being realized."

Robbins asks: "What part of your life needs to grow more than any other? On a scale of one to ten [ten being the optimum], how would you rate your body? How about your work or relationships? Where are you compared to where you'd like to be? Once you get a clear vision of where you want to go, you can brainstorm ways to move yourself closer to your goal." Here are some ideas:

● **Be a child again.** "If you want to feel alive," advises Robbins, "return to your childhood. I don't mean being childish. That's when you focus on your problems—what isn't working out, what you 'can't do.' When you *become a child*, however, you see the world with fresh eyes. Kids can watch the same comedic video fifty times and laugh every time. Childhood is not an age—it's a state of mind."

● **Explore the mystery.** Dr. Chopra asks: "Do you ever take the time to be quiet and ask yourself: *Who am I? Where did I come from? Do I have a soul? What's the meaning and purpose of my life? What do I really want?* If you explore these questions, then you're glimpsing the mystery—and you're growing."

● **Choose change—or it will choose you!** "Your body changes whether you like it or not," notes Robbins. "So will your relationships. Change is automatic, but progress is not."

In his action-oriented approach to growth, Robbins insists on the need to break free of "the grind" and all the tedium that goes with it. "Life isn't boring—you are!" he often tells his seminar participants. "Remember: Every muscle in your body only grows by demand. If you don't use it, you lose it. Emotional muscles need flexing, too. Faith unused shrinks, passion unexpressed wanes, courage underutilized fades. The only thing that destroys fear is action—which creates momentum."

According to Robbins, these are the five stages that lead to change: "One: You become satiated, sick and tired of the status quo. Two: You feel dissatisfied, unhappy and yearn for something better. Three: You reach a threshold at which you can't go on any longer as you are. Four: You gain insight and finally see your situation clearly. Five: You experience a trans-

The True Happiness Growth Quiz

We asked both Deepak Chopra, M.D., and Anthony Robbins to create a list of questions that can spur you toward a happier and more fulfilling life. Take time to ponder and answer these 20 questions and grow!

Dr. Chopra's Growth Inventory

1. Are you curious about how things work?
2. Are you nurturing and improving your relationships?
3. Do you take time to play?
4. Do you spend time with nature?
5. Do you exercise regularly?
6. Do you meditate or pray?
7. Do you work with a spirit of service?
8. Do you know the meaning and purpose of your life?
9. Do you have heroes/role models from legend, mythology, history or religion?
10. Are you aware of your unique talents?

Robbins's Growth Inventory

1. In the last six months what new skill, activity or hobby have you tackled with relish and how have you pushed yourself beyond your usual limits?
2. What have you read, listened to or witnessed that changed your perspective on life?
3. How have you expanded your social circle beyond your usual peer group?
4. What have you done recently to help others or contribute to a cause by sharing your skills?
5. When was the last time you took a vacation and what new place did you find fascinating?
6. What romantic surprises have you cooked up for your mate?
7. How have you improved your home environment?
8. What are you doing to enhance your spiritual life?
9. What serious challenge have you had recently and what did you learn from it?
10. What are you doing to strengthen and tone your body or to make yourself healthier and more attractive?



“To put joy in your life, learn to be a child again. Childhood is not an age; it’s a state of mind.”

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formation and step into the unknown, taking immediate action. This is the moment that can change it all. Remember: Either you choose change or it chooses you.”

● **Embrace the new.** Robbins believes that a part of choosing change is to discover and associate with new people, those who can inspire and challenge you, be role models or mentor you, those who are living the kind of life you want. “Talk with them, mirror them, discover their perspective. Find out how are they doing it.”

Dr. Chopra concurs: “We all need meaningful relationships that stimulate us. Hang out with people who ask questions, who have a sense of wonder. Rather than saying: ‘I’m tired of sitting around having the same conversation with the same people,’ why not rediscover life as it is—fresh, bizarre, scary, challenging, exhilarating and endlessly interesting?” Asks Robbins, “Wouldn’t it be interesting to go to a rap concert just for the insanity of it? How about the circus? Or parasailing or a political rally?”

● **Give to grow.** When you find a way to contribute and help others, you jump-start your own growth, says Robbins. “The more you contribute, the more you grow; and the more you grow, the more you contribute. You come to realize that you’re responsible to life for something. When you discover what that is—when you genuinely focus on contributing to other people—your life is transformed in an instant.”

According to Dr. Chopra’s “spiritual law of giving, your gift can be as simple as a greeting, a compliment, a gesture of goodwill, a prayer. There’s a sense of greatness,” he says, “even exaltation, in giving, and it helps us grow by expanding our sense of self.”

● **Get moving.** Dr. Chopra says that when you’re feeling down, antidepressant and antianxiety drugs are usually not the answer. “Unless you’re in a

psychotic depression, there are a number of simple things you can do to lift your mood. These include: vigorous exercise, getting a massage, seeing a wonderful movie, laughing, creating something, listening to music, getting quality sleep and talking about your feelings with friends.

“When your entire being is stimulated and involved,” he observes, “the symphony of your internal pharmacy”—mood-enhancing chemicals in the brain such as dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin—is released into your bloodstream. “No antidepressant can equal that symphony,” he says, “because it was orchestrated by your own inner intelligence—your spirit.”

● **Love somebody.** Finally, both Robbins and Dr. Chopra agree that if there’s one sure path to growth, it’s the human capacity for love. It can be romantic love, love of family, friends, animals, nature, art, beauty. “Love,” says Dr. Chopra, “is a powerful spiritual force, and when you nurture it, you feel a sense of mystery.”

Robbins identifies four stages of love, each more spiritually evolved than the last. Stage One: demanding it, as babies—and some adults—do; Stage Two: giving it but expecting to be repaid in kind. “Your mind-set is that of a horse trader”; Stage Three: giving love freely with no strings attached; Stage Four: loving without limit as Mother Teresa did. “This kind of love is the ultimate spiritual growth.”

Dr. Chopra, whose entire philosophy of healing is based on love, spirit and gratitude, offers a “growth challenge” to all who are interested in stretching beyond where they are today. “First, find your unique talent and make that the driving force of your life. Second, make each decision based on whether it will increase the experience of love in your life. Third, take time to be still and commune with nature. Last, make time for play and recreation.” The result? A life of great joy. **FC**