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Ed Diener, an esteemed researcher at University of Illinois who established the definition and measurement of “Subjective Well Being”, has recently co-authored a book called Happiness: Unlocking the Secrets of Psychological Wealth with his son and fellow psychologist, Robert Biswas-Diener. The book is scheduled to come out in September and I recently heard Dr. Diener talk about some of the ideas in his book which I thought worth sharing.

Diener describes psychological wealth as a broad and deep sense of happiness, rather than just a sense of pleasure or an experience of positive emotion. Psychological wealth is a “balanced portfolio” consisting of

- Positive Attitudes,
- Positive Relationships,
- Spirituality/ Meaning,
- Engaging Activities,
- Happiness/ Life Satisfaction,
- Health, and
- Money

His book covers much of the research about how psychologically wealthy people function better in many ways and explores the “causes” of happiness. He includes information on how stress and negative emotions play an important role and talks about happiness being a process, not a static state or end result.

One concept that particularly caught my attention was his AIM model of positive mental outlook. AIM stands for *Attention*, *Interpretation*, and *Memory*. These are ways of thinking that become habits of psychologically wealthy people.

Attention: Where does most of your attention go? What types of things do you attend to throughout the day? Psychologically wealthy people look for and pay attention to the beauty and good in the world and in other people. They don't ignore problems, but the majority of their attention is focused on looking for the positive.

Interpretation: How do you interpret events that you experience or witness? What's the tone of your explanation? Interpreting many things as positive - not all things, but a majority - is a sign of a positive mental outlook and helps build psychological wealth.

Memory: When you remember things from your past, how do you approach the memory? We spend a lot of time with our memories, and you can learn to appreciate the memory rather than mull over it. The past is the past, and happy people tend to savor their memories rather than ruminate about them.

Dr. Diener talked about a conversation he had with the Dalai Lama about “stupid happiness”. The Dalai Lama shared an illustration that if a bear is chasing you, and you’re happy – that’s stupid. It’s good to be scared so you will run. Unpleasant emotions have their place in our experience, but by AIMing your thoughts, you will be more likely to avoid stupid happiness, and strengthen your psychological wealth.

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