**NOTES OF A PSYCHOLOGY WATCHER**

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**ALL THE UNHAPPY PEOPLE**

*I don’t think I’m either pessimistic or optimistic; I’m realistic. I don’t disparage your joy, but I think true joy only arises from acknowledging our despair.*

--- Rollo May, Ph.D.

Psychologists as part of their training have worked to understand the roots of their joys, miseries and despair. None of us want to suffer, or experience pain, but we learn, and relearn to acknowledge, bear, and put into perspective our inevitable unhappiness. This learning often brings greater emotional maturity, resilience and empathy --- post-traumatic growth some say, making us better prepared to help others.

There is an upsurge of research on positive psychology to teach people ways to aspire to virtues, character strengths, and happiness.

Since suffering is inevitable, it makes sense to teach our patients methods to systematically promote self-punishment, guilt, and anxieties ---- on the route to post-traumatic growth. If you know how to make yourself miserable, just think what you can do with this knowledge.

 Teaching misery is not an easy task.

Tolstoy, in the first sentence of *Anna Karenina*, tells us why understanding unhappiness is so challenging *---* “All happy families resemble each other; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” (1)

 The message here is that happy people have no history --- they get up in the morning, go to work, and come home --- drama, they don’t have.

Psychologists are exposed to the dramatic stories of their patients in predicaments and interesting events --- the more narrative a life is, the worse it is. Unhappy families all have stories ---- *and each story is different.* (2)

 Since each story is different, we must teach our patients some general principles of misery that apply to all unhappy people. To help psychologists teach their patients how to make the most of their individual unhappiness, I turn to a wonderful book: “How to Make Yourself Miserable. Another vital training manual.” (3)

**SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MISERY**

**Seventeen Basic Pessimistic Philosophies**

1. I can’t do it.
2. I never could do anything right.
3. I have the worst luck in the world.
4. I don’t have a chance, so why try?
5. I’m all thumbs.
6. I’d only get hurt.
7. It would never work.
8. It’s not in the stars.
9. It’s never been done before.
10. It’s not who you are, it’s who you know.
11. It’s too late now.
12. It’s later than you think.
13. You can’t take it with you.
14. What good could come of it?
15. The piper must be paid.
16. The wages of sin is death.
17. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

**How to Make Yourself Miserable About the Future**

1. Refuse to accept what cannot be changed.
2. Establish unrealistic goals.

**What not to accept:**

1. Don’t ever accept your age, or your weight, or your height, or your face, or your ethnic group, or your socioeconomic level.
2. Don’t ever acknowledge the fact that you make mistakes.
3. Don’t ever accept the possibility of failure, and don’t ever prepare for it with alternative plans.
4. Don’t ever accept the fact that most people will never realize how great you are.
5. Don’t ever believe that the things other people have which you’ve always thought would make you happy aren’t making them happy either.

**What goals to establish:**

1. Find the perfect mate.
2. Find the perfect job.
3. Write the Great American Novel.
4. Get even with the cable company.
5. Develop a foolproof system to beat the stock market.
6. Fight City Hall, and win.
7. Get revenge for every injustice you’ve ever had to put up with in your entire life.
8. Never be unrealistic again.

**THE REJECT-ME MOVE:**

YOU: “Tell me frankly, what do you think of me? Be perfectly frank.”

REJECTOR: “I think you’re very nice.”

YOU: “No, tell me exactly what you think. I admire frankness more than

 any other quality.”

REJECTOR: “Well…to be perfectly honest I do think you act a little neurotic at times.”

YOU: “Is that so! And I suppose you think *you’re* perfect.”

I could go on and on with sure-fire methods to be miserable --- if you are rich, poor, handsome or beautiful and to develop the full guide to the dynamics of rejection, and more.

But did you expect all the principles in one article?

**References**

1. Tolstoy, Leo. “Anna Karenina.” New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
2. Morson, Gary Saul. “The Moral Urgency of Anna Karenina.” *Commentary.* April 2015, Vol. 139: No.4.
3. Greenburg, Dan; Jacobs, Marcia. “How To Make Yourself Miserable.” New York: Random House, 1966.