



## **Make Rock Bottom Your Solid Foundation**

There are countless experts with multiple degrees who are all too eager to give advice on how to be happy. While I have tremendous respect for anyone with training and advanced degrees, I often draw my most significant insights from a group of individuals who graced my childhood and lacked any degrees or material wealth.

Our neighbors sponsored a group of what was then called “displaced persons” from the camps of Europe to our Pennsylvania community. I could not have been more than seven or eight when I first met these people. They spoke in heavily accented English, for the most part, wore hand-me-down clothes, and no member of the group of about ten people had what you might call a “professional” job. One man, named Max, worked in a watchmaking store, and a gentleman named Henry toiled in the steel mill. Others were store clerks and waitresses, and one man drove a bus for the city.

I was to learn later that each one of them had experienced unimaginable horrors during the war. Indeed, there was an incredibly sweet woman named Jenny who walked with a terrible limp as the result of brutality. On the surface,

they had no reason to be happy, let alone smile.

My first memory of all of them stemmed from a community picnic. A few people brought instruments to the picnic, and the group clapped their hands, danced and sang in a European dialect. As a child, I remember them inviting me to dance and to sing with them. The laughter and love within the group were infectious.

In the years I knew them, indeed blessed years, here is what they taught me and shared with me about happiness in spite of everything.

- 1. Live.** No matter what is bothering you, you are alive, and life offers endless possibilities. You have a responsibility to those who may not have been so lucky. As long as there is life, there is hope, and there are possibilities.
- 2. Adjust.** Years later, I asked one of the people in the group how she could be so happy after all she had experienced. She shared that she had her bad days and her sad moments, but she didn't let that define her *now*. She said that no one likes a sad person and that our attitude touches other people.
- 3. Love.** Love comes in all forms, and if we allow it, it will come to us. It doesn't necessarily have to be romantic love. It can be the love of a living thing, the love of music, the love of family and friends.
- 4. Accept.** One of those in the group once explained, without going into detail, that she had lost everything dear to her. She could not help it or stop it. She accepted what had happened, but more so, she had accepted herself. Whatever might be making you blue, don't stop loving yourself.
- 5. Influence.** Your kind words, thoughts and deeds have a tremendous and positive effect on people. Without reason, extend yourself to others; smile without motive; show acts of kindness no matter how small or meaningless they might seem.
- 6. Appreciate.** Be gracious when others try to reach out to you. Be happy when someone is trying. "Thank you very much, I appreciate it" can open the doors to magical things.
- 7. Laugh.** A little laughter can help mitigate many things. I don't care if it's funny music, cat videos or listening to Steve Gilliland on SiriusXM radio's Laugh USA or Jeff & Larry's Comedy Roundup (shameless plug).
- 8. Model.** Set an example of how to live life by giving, helping and contributing your talents. Be the person other people want to be around and follow.
- 9. Believe.** None of us truly knows what the future will bring, and it is why we should never deem that sadness, disappointment, failure or rejection will be with us forever. Things will change. After all, if nothing ever changed there would be no butterflies.

My final consideration on the remarkable group of "displaced persons" is that one of their children became a well-known physician and another became a

television network executive. The watchmaker came to own his own business. The bus driver started his own charter bus company, and today that business is exceedingly charitable.

All of these people and their families managed to be triumphant by being happy even when there was no reason. They discovered that the secret to being happy is accepting where you are in life and making the most out of every day. In my own journey, I realized that happiness is the result of a personal determination, and small changes can add up to huge results. If you want to be happy *make rock bottom your solid foundation.*

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*“You gave them a beautiful balance of professional advice and motivation through your stories of family, work and life. I’ve never heard our audience laugh so hard. They were with you all the way because you are so relatable; they were captivated by your insightful, authentic and down-to-Earth anecdotes of success and failure. The standing ovation you received was a testament to your skill as a speaker and storyteller. Many people told me that you were our best keynote ever, and I agree.”*

**Sally Newell-Cohen, Chief Operations Officer,  
Toastmasters International**

## LOOKING AHEAD...

### Steve's October 2018 Schedule

- 4 - Minneapolis, MN
- 8 - Horseshoe Bay, TX
- 9 - Asheville, NC
- 11 - Denver, CO
- 13 - Myrtle Beach, SC
- 16 - St. Cloud, MN

- 17 - Clearwater, FL
- 18 - Deptford Township, NJ
- 20 - Austin, TX
- 24 - Ocean City, MD
- 25 - Greensboro, NC
- 29 - Naples, FL
- 30 - Jackson, MS

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