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Being RICH With Happiness

Like most other Americans, I made some New Year resolutions. Many of us see the New Year as an opportunity for changes. This issue of *Parenting for High Potential* represents a change as we make a transition in editors. We welcome Jennifer Jolly as editor of *PHP*. She brings with her editorial experiences from several other gifted publications and holds an advanced degree in gifted education. Jennifer is only the third person to serve as editor of *PHP*. She follows the tenures of James Alvino and Don Treffinger. We cannot look to the future without celebrating the past. For the past 8 years, Don Treffinger has served as *PHP*'s editor. Don's dedication to this publication is unmatched. He applied his creative energy and editorial skills to raise the 32 issues of *PHP* that he edited to an unparalleled level. We wish Don well as he applies his creative energy to other endeavors, and we look forward to the new leadership Jennifer brings to *PHP*.



At NAGC's recent awards ceremony in Minneapolis, Don Treffinger receives accolades from NAGC president, Del Siegle, and former association editor Joe Renzulli, in recognition for completing 32 issues of *Parenting for High Potential-4* each year for 8 years.

There also has been a change in my personal life. A few days before Thanksgiving, I became a father for the first time when my wife delivered a healthy baby girl. Our lives certainly have changed with this new addition to our home. As the New Year approached, I pondered what I might wish for my young daughter. As I reflected, I remembered a classic line from Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Laura asked her mother for what she should wish, and Amanda responded, "Happiness . . . and just a little bit of good fortune."

At the core, happiness is what every parent wishes for his or her child. Since the beginning of its movement, positive psychology has focused on the study of happiness. Martin Seligman, who was honored a few years ago with NAGC's Presidential Award by Rick Olenchak, proposed an equation of factors that contribute toward happiness: $H = S + C + V$

H = Happiness

S = Set Range (genetics—about 50%)

C = Circumstances (8–15%)

V = Voluntary Control (past, present, future—35–42%)

Set Range/Genetics—Each of us is born with a certain set-point of happiness that contributes about 50% of our happiness. For example, happy people who have been known to lose limbs often return to their original happiness level within a year or so of the tragedy. Likewise, unhappy individuals who have encountered positive situations such as winning a lottery usually return to their set-point within a year or so.

Circumstances—The circumstances in which we live also influence our happiness. We don't always control these circumstances that influence our daily lives, although they account for between 8–15% of our happiness level.

Voluntary Control—Up to 42% of our happiness is within our control. This includes the way we choose to think about our past, present, and future. Happy people feel good about the past and do not obsess about unhappy times. They think positively about the present and are optimistic about their future.

We can do something about our happiness since some of these factors are under our control. Thomas Kehle, a colleague of mine at the University of Connecticut, has researched what makes people happy. While we may expect the response would be "lots of money," Kehle has found four interactive factors affect happiness. In his RICH (Resources, Intimacy, Competence, and Health) Theory, he proposes that improvement in any one component of the theory results in improvement of the others.

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your child to participate in the process by becoming an active contributor of reviews so others can benefit from your (you and your child's) perspectives.

Reach out to others. Reading or viewing groups can offer a safe and fun venue for gifted children to share ideas and supplement what is being read at school. Consider starting a "Flick-Lit" Club where members first read a book and then watch it on video. Discussions might focus on which format was most successful in telling the story or bringing the characters to life. Or, create a chapter of "The Reading Maniacs," an excellent example of how a group of mothers and their second-grade daughters joined together for monthly meetings to read and discuss books. The FAQs based on several years of experience can be read at: <http://www.kidsfirstsoccer.com/bookclub.html>.

Finding Resources

The most useful lists are those that go beyond merely naming titles. For example, Judith Halstead's *Some of My Best Friends are Books: Guiding Gifted Readers From Preschool to High School (2nd ed.)* lists discussion points for the referenced books. The Davidson Institute for Talent Development maintains searchable lists of both fiction and nonfiction titles with ratings and comments by a mix of parents, students, and teachers. To reach these lists, first go to: <http://www.ditd.org>. Select "Search Resources" (under "Resources" on the top menu), and look at the options listed under "Books."

There are numbers of lists for gifted readers on Hoagie's Web site at: http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/reading_lists.htm. And, for older readers, screened lists such as "Books That Don't Make You Blush" and "Selected DVDs and Videos for Young Adults" are available at: <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists>

Biography is an excellent place to look for age-appropriate reading for gifted children. As educator and author Bertie Kingore notes, biographies can serve as life models because they reveal the failures, hardships, and challenges of prominent, successful people.

Book suggestions from published lists are not the final word. However, let the suggestions of others serve as a starting point to guide you as you help your child become a savvy reader and viewer.

Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.

~ Francis Bacon

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Happy people have resources. They are not necessarily rich, but they have resources to ensure individual freedom and self-determination. Happy people have intimacy. Intimacy is defined as one or more significant personal relationships. It involves empathy and the appreciation and enjoyment of a friend's company. Happy people feel competent compared to some standard. They do not need to feel competent about everything, but they do feel competent in something. Competence is attributed to one's own abilities. Finally, happy people tend to have mental and physical health.

When each of these four elements is present, people tend to be happy. Parents of gifted children can use this model to help promote their children's happiness. They can provide their children with time and independence to explore their interests and talents. They can support their children's friendships with same-age peers and intellectual peers. They can help their gifted children recognize and appreciate their talents. Finally, they can encourage a healthy lifestyle that includes some physical activity and minimizes undue stressors.

As we move into the New Year, let us support our children and encourage them to pursue their interests and passions. We can help them believe they have the skills to perform well, see that what they are doing serves a purpose, and set realistic expectations for themselves. By encouraging these behaviors we will help them to lead happy, productive, and fulfilling lives.

Suggested Reading

Kehle, T. J., & Bray, M. A. (2004). RICH Theory: The promotion of happiness. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*, 43-49.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Simon and Schuster.