

Hi. This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. As always, thank you for tuning into our blog. As always, your comments are welcome. Let's have them. Ideas for future blog topics, and subscribe to our channel, the social media, Twitter, YouTube, etc. They're not getting the best press right now, but it is a great way for us to communicate with you, and we promise not to steal your data or try to steal your identity at all, not that we could do that anyway.

So, this week, I want to talk about a great book. It's called *The Happiness Hypothesis* by Jonathan Haidt. It's really a great book, and when we talk about family businesses, we talk about what do they really want in life? Well, they want happiness of course, but they want business prosperity and family harmony, and if you boil those two things down, business prosperity and family harmony, you're talking about happiness, and this is a fascinating book, written in a very easily-understandable format based on great research and all that, but it's really a terrific book.

If you've seen the Monty Python movie - The Meaning of Life, you know what constitutes happiness, and this is what they said in the movie - "Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in, and try to live in harmony with people of all creeds and nations." So, if you can do those things, according to Monty Python, you're going to be happy in life. And maybe it's not that ... Maybe it's not that simple.

There are four fascinating things in this book that I want to talk about. It's well worth your time, but let me just hit on four key things. The first is there is a catalog what detracts from happiness. What are five universal things that detract from happiness? A couple you can think of right off the bat. Relationships. If your relationships with your wife and kids, brothers and sisters are poor, that creates unhappiness. Shame. We know we did something wrong. We know we screwed up. That creates unhappiness. Noise. Great deals of noise create unhappiness. Commuting. Long commuting times was one of the universal factors which I found surprising. And then finally, lack of control, and this is how it relates to family businesses I think because so many people feel like they don't have control in choosing their role, responsibility, and accountability in the organization, and in the book, they point out that people who get workers who get lots of latitude in deciding how they're going to do their jobs are much, much happier.

So there's a takeaway right there for your family business. If you can give your employees latitude in how and even when and where they do their jobs, they're going to be much happier and more productive in the long run.

The second thing that I found fascinating is that we are ... We discriminate. We all discriminate. Every single human being on earth is continually discriminating, and we have these two reactions. We either like or we dislike something or we attract ... We approach something, or we withdraw from it. And if you think about it, when we were amoeba, it made a lot of sense because if you approach the wrong predator, so to speak, then you're a goner, so it makes sense for us to have a built-in negative bias, which is my takeaway. We have a built-in negative bias, and in a way it keeps us safe. We don't dash into a fire. We know that's something to withdraw from, not

to approach. It just makes perfect sense as a survival mechanism that the negative bias, the built-in negative would be a stronger emotion than the attraction motivation.

The third thing, and this is probably the biggest takeaway for me from the book is the concept of the rider and elephant. So when it comes to decision time, we all think we're very rational, dispassionate, decision-makers, and I'm here to tell you that is just not true. So, the way they talk about our emotional nature versus our rational nature is the rider and the elephant.

So you have all been to the circus, or you've seen working elephants on TV, and this great big, powerful, giant elephant, and you've got a little tiny maybe a boy or a girl riding on the neck of the elephant that's supposed to be in control. Well, that rider is in control only so long as the elephant will allow it. Strong emotions always trump reason the way an elephant can trump a small human rider when it comes to making decisions. If the elephant, by gosh, decides to go off in that direction, there's not a human being on earth that can prevent that elephant from doing so.

So, what they say in the book is that, "I can direct things, but only when the elephant doesn't have desires of his own. When the elephant really wants to do something, I'm no match for him." And I think that's a terrific point because, especially in the context of family businesses, there's always emotion built into the decisions, and to the extent that we can withdraw the emotion from the system, it helps people make better decisions, but we're really at our best when our emotions are congruent with our rationale, with our reasoning, and so when those two things are in harmony, we're at our very best. When the emotions are running amuck or we're trying too hard to be completely dispassionate, we're not necessarily at our best in our family businesses.

The fourth thing is the progress principle. So quick story. We have two dogs, and we have this place in a very remote part of North Carolina that we go to, and there's farm fields all around, and there's probably hundreds of acres where our dogs could wander off and do whatever dogs do, and yet they stick around and lay on the couch and sleep until we pull out a leash. And then, they are up and happy and scampering around like puppies because ... This is my wife's theory, our dogs are working dogs. They love to work. That gives meaning and purpose in their lives.

And people are that way. They generally want to work. They want structure in their group or in their organization, and that's what the work provides. It provides structure, and in some ways, meaning for life for people. It's the journey, not the destination, and that's the whole nut of the progress principle.

If you think that achieving a goal is going to make you happy, you're partially right, but we know, as we're on the way to achieving that goal, we're already building in the feeling of satisfaction and pride, and so when we actually hit the goal, sometimes it's almost a bit of a letdown.

So the point of this progress principle is to make the walk, make the journey pleasurable and enjoyable. It's not achieving the goal. It's the journey towards the goal, not the destination that you hit.

And then finally, where, unequivocally, in Haidt's opinion, does happiness actually come from? "People need love, work, and a connection to something larger. Happiness is not something you find, acquire or achieve directly. You have to get the conditions right, and then wait, and then happiness will find you." So, I think that's really similar to another book we reviewed a couple of years ago, Harry Clark's book, ***Mistakes Millionaires Make***, when the commentator said that basically, you really only need three things in life in order to be happy: Something to do, something to hope for, and someone to love. And if you can have those three things, you can enjoy happiness in life.

This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Love to hear your comments. Thank you.