The Seven Characteristics of Happy People
By Thomas E. Menighan, RPh, MBA

Our profession is in the midst of tremendous change.
I could talk about the old days when I chipped ice for the soda fountain, or how I’ve been held up at gunpoint three times, or about how much I loved talking with my patients in community practice, what it was like to start a home infusion practice when there were no rules, or how much technology is changing the way we work. Or I could talk about what strong contributions are being made by so many to national pharmacy leadership. In short, I could write reams about leadership, experiences and issues.

Instead, I’ll share a few words with you about why I think the roles of pharmacists in your community are important. And I’ll do that within the context of describing the seven characteristics of happy people, adapted from a network news program a few years ago.

1. A sense of optimism. I’ve talked with hundreds of pharmacists this year and I’ve been amazed with the innovation and change they are creating. These folks wouldn’t dare to try new things without being optimistic of their success, or at least optimistic that if what they’re doing doesn’t work, they’ll find something that will. They’re spending their time creating options.

2. Good relationships. Most happy pharmacists I know work at meeting people and maintaining a network of both close friends and professional associates. It’s no accident that they’re the ones who participate in organizations or have strong family ties where they can nurture relationships. Participation in your local hospice, hospitality house, or cancer society chapter can not only help your community and give you a sense of fulfillment unmatched by other experiences, but can also help you build your network. The same is true for participation in your local or state pharmacy association, American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA) and your national professional specialty organization. Each serves an important role and deserves your support. Trust me, you’ll get more than you give.

3. A sense of control over your life. Many pharmacists are deeply involved in their careers and families. If you’re like most, you sometimes wish you had more time for one or the other. As many can attest, there is no magic formula for finding the balance that gives you a sense of control, but that need for control is powerful. Fortunately, because of the varied and plentiful opportunities available, and with the resources afforded by reasonable salaries, you can make choices about your career that may give you whatever level of control you need.

4. A belief in a higher being. The program I’m citing presented an interesting study, which examined how belief in a higher being affected people’s happiness. The study found that those people who believe there is something, someone, or somewhere larger are generally happier than those who don’t believe in either. I do know that all of us, no matter how good we are, had to have some help along the way, and not always from known sources.

5. A need for lifelong learning. No matter where you are in your career, there are more opportunities today than ever to expand and build your knowledge and skills. Your choices include continuing education, certificate programs, residencies, fellowships, specialty training,
other degrees, new jobs that force you to stretch, UHK (University of Hard Knocks), and how to raise a child or build a business. The more you learn, the happier you’ll be … guaranteed.

6. **A sense of contributing to the greater good.** This characteristic actually builds on the others and adds the need for community and professionalism by suggesting that happy people are always giving back. If you take advantage of opportunities to give back, to your patients, your employer, your family or faith, your profession or the community in which you live, you’re bound to find fulfillment and the feeling that it’s worthwhile to be on this earth. Just ask anyone you consider to be a contributor. You’ll find they get a great deal of satisfaction from giving.

7. **The knowledge that while looking for other things, happiness happens.** This characteristic is my favorite. If our goal is to get the cotton candy, or more money than someone else, we’ll never be happy. In “Walden,” Henry David Thoreau said, “A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.” And my first dean in pharmacy school reminded us that we were entering a profession where we would never have to worry about money. He challenged us to find ways to contribute to our patients, our communities, and our profession. He promised that if we did, we would be happy. My own experience bears out his prediction.

In writing this, I’ll feel successful if I’ve flipped a few switches. One of the most important influences I can have is to convince you to be a part of something. It’s often said that one of the biggest reasons people don’t join their professional organizations is that they’ve never been asked. Well, I’m asking you now. Participate in your profession’s organizations and in your communities. Take the challenge to become leaders in our profession. Find the fulfillment, the knowledge, the experiences and the challenges that will make you better.

I guarantee, you’ll be happier for it.

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