



The Happiness School

It's a thing we're all pursuing, but are we looking in the right places? One *WH* staffer heads back to class to find out...

By Alex Davies

Between, 'Did I actually shut the front door?' and, 'These tights are too see-through,' a slightly more profound concern sometimes hits me: 'I don't always appreciate life as much as I should.' Maybe it's the over-thinking Gemini in me, but I do worry my 90-year-old self might shake her fist back at this 31-year-old for being glued to her phone when there's a view to enjoy, or half-listening during chats with her mum.

Turns out there's a class for this kind of musing - which is where I wind up one Thursday evening at the Sydney branch of The School of Life, a global body dedicated to boosting

emotional intelligence. Leading the workshop, called 'How to enjoy life', is anthropologist Dr Monty Badami, whose life credentials include moonlighting as a celebrant, school educator and trainee army officer.

Over the three hours, Badami takes our assorted crew of 12 strangers (from the twentysomething French yogi to the entrepreneur dad) through topics that I expect (gratitude, value, living in the present) and ones I don't (death, art, advertising). Initial hesitancy aside, trading our stories and ideas becomes connecting, humbling and, at times, a bit emotional. I

leave feeling drained, but uplifted. Is that what Badami wants?

"The challenge is to get you folks acknowledging the value of experiencing and just sitting with the whole range of human emotions. So, the fact that you were uplifted and drained I think is really important to recognise," he tells me. "We all have different experiences, reactions, feelings, and that's cool because we have so many different ways to navigate the complexity of life."

So what did I learn from going back to school? That enjoying life is far too complex a topic to try for an A+, but these tips are well worth noting.

Think Like An Artist

During the workshop, Badami clicks through a slideshow to a painting of asparagus by Manet. Then a Cézanne still life of apples. His point: artists see beauty in the ordinary and appreciate things that are often neglected. So, if we thought like that, what might we see differently? "When we look through the eyes of an artist, we see the mundane things as not just a part of the everyday we take for granted, but having a really important place in the world we live in," Badami says. A woman to my right mentions she could enjoy architecture more, while I think of the details of my commute - the regular faces on the bus, the view of the bay as we go over the Anzac Bridge. Another guy mentions his mother-in-law's cluttered house, and how the objects she holds onto may have decades of intriguing history. It's a great reminder to tap into and shed new light on our surroundings. Contents of the crisper, included.

Create Rituals

During the session, we're asked to rate ourselves on how good we are at enjoying life in theory using a 1-10 scale. Then how good we are at putting that into practice. We all admit to faring better on the former than the latter. The thing is, says an unsurprised Badami, to actually do the things we love, sometimes we need reminders - or rituals. He gives us an example of one: he and his wife dedicate an hour each week to catching up over a cuppa. They do this minus the kids, who know to entertain themselves during the tea date. Rituals need a symbol (the couple always uses the same teapot), a practice (tea-drinking, chatting) and a name (they call it 'Tea for two'). I think about how much I love weekend brekkies with my partner, and what I can do to cement that as more of a ritual - I land on picking up two new KeepCups we'll use only over Saturday brunch.

Find Your Love Drugs

Not the kind your doc (or that dodgy guy in your unit block) dishes out, but other mood-altering items that give you an immediate lift and all of the warm'n'fuzzy feels - a hot bath, music, a sweaty run, hugs with loved ones. Badami asks us to make a personal list then, crucially, another list of the things we think we *should* value but really don't. (Facetiming my sister and the chai latte from my local cafe make it to my 'drugs' list, while nightclubs and clothes-shopping top my other one.) He explains, "If we can disentangle our sense of value from enculturated norms and pay attention to what really matters to us ... and really make a big deal of them, then we have a greater opportunity to use those things to help us to enjoy life."

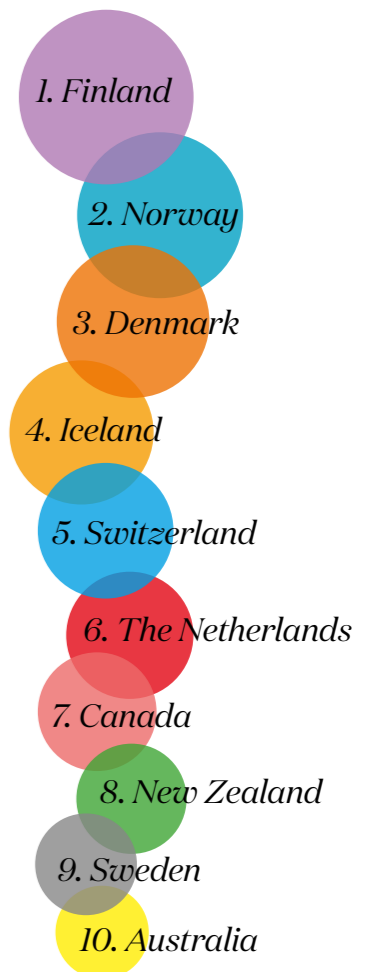
Switch Up Your Expectations

I notice Badami rarely uses the word 'happy' in the workshop, and ask him why. "Because happiness is only one of the many emotions we feel," he says, frankly. "It's great, but it's in honesty, vulnerability and frailty that we really connect and feel a part of something bigger because we know we're not alone." He argues that we shouldn't strive for happiness 24/7, because that can mean avoiding challenges essential for growth. Instead, he name-checks goals, such as meaning and fulfilment, and pursuing a 'good enough' life over a perfect one. The word 'vulnerability' hits home at the end of the night when he asks us to write down the worst thing that's happened to us. He reads the anonymous experiences out loud, providing the most poignant moment of the workshop. Sharing times of suffering (loss, grief, regret, self-doubt) connects and makes us compassionate, which is "the beauty of our species", says Badami. It's a feeling of connection that stays with me as I head home. How to enjoy life? With other people seems like a pretty great place to start. [urb](#)

World Class

We may not have scored top marks, but Oz fared pretty well in 2018's global happiness rankings.

SOURCE: 2018 WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT



Wellness Dictionary: Wabi Sabi (*wah-bi sah-bi*)

Permission to slow-the-eff-down, granted. This Japanese concept asks us to find joy in simplicity and look for the beauty in imperfection. It's all about decluttering, presence, nature and family.

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