

10 STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

5.1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: **Quality of life (QOL)** is the general **well-being** of individuals and societies. QOL has a wide range of contexts, including the fields of international development, healthcare, politics and employment. Quality of life should not be confused with the concept of standard of living, which is based primarily on income. Instead, standard indicators of the quality of life include not only wealth and employment but also the built environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging.

According to ecological economist Robert Costanza:

While Quality of Life (QOL) has long been an explicit or implicit policy goal, adequate definition and measurement have been elusive. Diverse "objective" and "subjective" indicators across a range of disciplines and scales, and recent work on subjective well-being (SWB) surveys and the psychology of happiness have spurred renewed interest.

One approach, called Engaged theory, outlined in the journal of *Applied Research in the Quality of Life*, posits four domains in assessing quality of life: ecology, economics, politics and culture. In the domain of culture, for example, it includes the following subdomains of quality of life:

- Identity and engagement
- Creativity and recreation
- Memory and projection
- Belief and ideas
- Gender and generations
- Enquiry and learning
- Wellbeing and health

Also frequently related are concepts such as freedom, human rights, and happiness. However, since happiness is subjective and difficult to measure, other measures are generally given priority. It has also been shown that happiness, as much as it can be measured, does not necessarily increase correspondingly with the comfort that results from increasing income. As a result, standard of living should not be taken to be a measure of happiness. Also sometimes considered related is the concept of human security, though the latter may be considered at a more basic level and for all people.

5.2 PHYSICAL DIMENSION: Underlying most goals is an assumption that working towards a goal will improve quality of life, for ourselves and/or others we care about. With each of our long term goals come many choices and decisions, including what to try and how much effort to put in. By assessing your current quality of life, you can focus on the gaps and opportunities you have to make some improvements.

Understand the aspects of your life and experiences that most closely connect with the quality of life desired. Which of your behaviors impact your quality of life? A few decades of research on what correlates most with quality of life gives us categories like the ones listed below with a useful mnemonic of 'PERMA' :

- **P: Positive emotions:** The moments and extended periods we have of different positive moods, including feelings of happiness, gratitude, closeness, confidence, peacefulness, and awe-inspired.
- **E: Engagement:** Periods of time when we are so engaged with the activity we're working on that we have a clarity of focus, time seems less relevant, and we are challenged at a level to which we're attracted. This is frequently associated with 'Eustress', which the positive opposite to distress.
- **R: Relationships:** The quality of our relationships with others is very highly correlated with our overall quality of life. The strength of our social support structure or 'Personal Safety Net' is fundamental to our coping skills and resiliency when facing challenges in our lives. Our relationships are also a primary source of many of the other aspects of quality of life, especially positive emotions.
- **M: Meaning:** How well our work and other endeavors connect with a "greater purpose" contributes enormously to our self esteem and confidence to continue our efforts. The opposite is a feeling that we are wasting our time on trivial tasks that do not contribute to a greater cause. A sense of meaning is often easier to come by if what we do connects with addressing the needs of a community we care about.
- **A: Accomplishment:** A sense of accomplishment is closely tied to how well we feel we are able to complete our "to do" lists. But it can also include the simple positive emotion that comes from completing an already-solved problem like a sudoku puzzle, or level of a video game.
- **H: Health:** Not referenced in the original list, but worth including here, is the quality of our physical well-being, including how much pain we're in, how much mobility we have, and how much we can do physically. According to Gallup's research on global well being, the quality of our sleep plays a critical role in overall quality of life - if we aren't getting enough good rest, we are far more likely to be emotionally overwhelmed or otherwise less productive.

Explore how your mind makes choices. We make many choices every day that affect our quality of life, but most of our routines (how we start our day, what we choose to eat) and standard reactions (eating when we're anxious, cursing at other drivers if they frustrate us) are made on autopilot. Analytical thinking and planning is required to measurably change any of our autopilot habits (how we choose our food) or response patterns (how we respond to frustration while driving).

Triggering cognitive thinking in time to make better choices is a fundamental skill. For example, if you can feel your emotions starting to take over, you have a limited time window in which you can ask yourself strategic questions and make better choices about what you say or do next.

Describe your ideal quality of life with those aspects as categories. What habits do you wish you had? How do you wish you could respond in challenging situations? What would a perfect day include and what would it exclude? Take five minutes now to write up short wish lists with what you'd want in each category.

- Start a gratitude journal or a 'satisfaction index' in your diary as a useful way to keep track of your goals. Make a short list of what you are grateful for in your life within these categories. Regularly quantify your current status within each of the categories/aspects by asking yourself: where are the smallest and biggest gaps?
- Research to help you on your journey. There is a wide range of online sources as well as formal coaching and educational courses. Ask yourself - what have you done in the past to help reduce those gaps? What have others done?
- Brainstorm your list of specific goals that, if successfully completed, would help you close those quality of life gaps.

Convert your goals into SMART goals: SMART is a helpful guideline to be able to make your goals easier to see through. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

- Experiment with options for making progress on those goals. What triggers or prompts will help you remember to follow through on your intentions? Consider focusing on the easiest to complete quickly ^[5] to get momentum going on your use of these steps to improving your life.

Collaborate with others in your experiments. If you want to change a frequent daily habit, like eating healthier or exercising, partnering with people around you makes it easier to succeed. This becomes critical if their behaviors affect yours and vice versa - work together to design experiments you can try together.

- For example, one of the easiest ways to eat healthier at home is to reduce the availability of unhealthy food in the home. The choice comes earlier - when food is being purchased - if you're at a grocery store, you can reduce the temptations of unhealthy food by sticking to the perimeter aisles unless there's something you need down one of the center aisles.

Evaluate the results of your experiments. Consider using a daily journal to capture your intentions for the day in the first part of the morning, then reviewing and reflecting on the results at the end of the day, and capturing those ideas which can be used to improve results the 'next time around'. If you're collaborating with a partner, make time to review results together. As you fall asleep and drift into an alpha state of consciousness, you may find your mind more capable of epiphanies on how to approach your goals in more productive ways.

Plan for productive failure. Experimenting with change doesn't mean you have to stick with everything you do. Figuring out what doesn't work is a huge part of figuring out what does work.

TIPS

- An alternative end-of-day routine is **RPM**: Reflect, Plan, Meditate:
 - **Reflect** upon your day and the individual outcomes, then capture adjustments and realizations in your journal.
 - **Plan** for tomorrow. Planning the day before allows your mind to sift through your plans during sleep and to internalize the plans so that you are more fully 'on board' as you execute the plan the following day.
 - **Meditate.** Shift your focus back to the results for the current day. This will put those considerations foremost before you head to bed.
 - If you make a routine of doing the RPMs at night, you might find that you have better results each day and in life.

5.3 SOCIAL RELAXATION: There are different methods and techniques to achieve a relaxed body and mind. There are several relaxation methods like guided imagery, progressive relaxation, self-hypnosis, deep breathing exercises, and biofeedback.

All of them have similar goal and that is to produce consciously the natural relaxation response of the body, characterized by slow breathing, feeling of well-being and calmness, and to lower blood pressure.

Autogenic Training

This method is focused on physical sensation of your heartbeat or breathing and picture the body as heavy, relaxed or warm. It teaches the body to respond to verbal commands. Its main goal is to reduce stress and achieve deep relaxation.

Biofeedback

The biofeedback-assisted relaxation makes use of electronic devices to guide you on producing relaxation response consciously. It is oftentimes used to relieve the conditions which are worsened or caused by stress.

Breath or deep breathing exercises

To relax through this method, you will slow your breathing consciously and then focus on taking deep and regular breaths.

Progressive relaxation

It is also referred to as progressive muscle relaxation or Jacobson's progressive relaxation. Here, you are going to focus on relaxing and tightening every group muscle. It is usually combined with breathing exercises and guided imagery.

Self-hypnosis

Self-hypnosis makes you produce relaxation response with nonverbal cue or phrase. It can be used to relieve pain (labor, tension headaches, or minor surgeries) including treatment of irritable bowel syndrome and anxiety.

Guided imagery

You are focused on the pleasant images to replace any stressful or negative feelings and get relaxed. It is directed by the practitioner or you by descriptions or storytelling which is designed to suggest some mental images or visualization. Relaxation methods may work in different ways. In contrast to stress response, the relaxation response on the other hand may:

- Lower blood pressure
- Slow the heart rate
- Decrease the levels of stress hormones and oxygen consumption

Since relaxation is entirely the opposite of stress or anxiety, the theory is voluntarily making relaxation response by the regular use of relaxation methods that can counteract the negative effects of stress. The body and mind practices are sometimes considered as relaxation methods or techniques. If you want to get more information about these techniques and practices, you may refer to different sources which tackle relaxation and everything about it. It will help you a lot to live life enthusiastically and be able to manage anxiety and stress.