

From Sivers...

How much of what you do is for now, and how much is to please the future you?

The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future.

- More than just predicting the future. I.e. Dogs predicting a human walking thru the door when it opens (nexting)

The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real, and it is this ability that allows us to **think about the future**. The human brain is an "anticipation machine" and "making future" is the most important thing it does.

Fear, worry, and anxiety have useful roles to play in our lives. We motivate by dramatizing the unpleasant consequences of misbehaviors by imagining the unpleasant tomorrows.

If we lose our ability to control things, we become unhappy, helpless, hopeless, and depressed.

People often act as though they can **control the uncontrollable**. People bet more money on games of chance when their opponents seem incompetent than competent - as though they believed they could control the random drawing of cards from a deck and thus take advantage of a weak opponent. People feel more certain that they will win a lottery if they can control the number on their ticket, and they feel more confident that they will win a dice toss if they can throw the dice themselves, etc. All of these are absolutely absurd if they believed they had no control over an uncontrollable event.

Memory highly unreliable

- Can't store the full description of things, just how it made us feel
- The smell of the rose is unressurectable. But if we know it was good and sweet and then we know to stop and smell the next one

Lauri and Reba, conjoined twins

- If they receive a cake and evaluate their happiness. They say "8". But isn't their 8 and our 8 fundamentally different?
- For them, birthday cake is as good as it gets. Might be 4.5 for us
- And if they never know the thrill of a cartwheel, then WE will never know the feeling of having someone by your side forever

Language Squishing Hypothesis: The theory that people have different ranges of emotions: a 10/10 on someone's happiness scale might be a 5/10 on the scale of someone else who has experienced greater happiness and satisfaction

Experience Stretching Hypothesis: Once you experience more and better things, is it harder and harder to please oneself? Example: When you get your first, old Toyota Camry you're THRILLED! Then you get rich and driving in a BMW hardly does it for you anymore. Does it mean that you truly weren't happy in the Camry? No, it doesn't. But once you've experienced better things it's harder to please oneself.

- *We often say of others who claim to be happy despite circumstances that we believe should preclude it that "they only think they're happy because they don't know what they're missing." Okay, sure, but that's the point. Not knowing what we're missing can mean that we are truly happy under circumstances that would not allow us to be happy once we have experienced the missing thing. It does not mean that those who don't know what they're missing are less happy than those who have it...*

Once we have an experience, we cannot simply set it aside and see the world as we would have seen it had the experience never happened.

Ex: jury cannot disregard the prosecutor's snide remarks.

- To say an experience that once brought me pleasure no longer does? A man given a drink of water in the desert may rate his happiness at that moment as an 8/8. A year later, that same drink might make him feel no better than a 2/8. Are we to believe he was wrong about how happy he was in the desert, or that a sip of water can be a source of ecstasy or a source of moisture depending on one's experiential background?

Our brain offers us an interpretation of the way things are. Because those interpretations are usually so good, we do not realize that we are seeing an interpretation. Instead, we feel as though we are sitting comfortably inside our heads, looking out through the clear glass windshield of our eyes, watching the world as it really is. We forget that our brains are talented forgers, weaving a tapestry of memory and perception whose detail is so compelling that its inauthenticity is rarely detected. The mistake we make when we unthinkingly accept the validity of our memories and perceptions is the same mistake we make when we imagine our futures.

When we try to ignore our current gloomy state and make a forecast about how we will feel tomorrow, we find it's a lot like trying to imagine the taste of marshmallow while chewing liver. It's only natural that we should imagine the future and then consider how doing so makes us feel, but because our brains are hell-bent on responding to current events, we mistakenly conclude that we will feel tomorrow as we feel today.

Volunteers in a no-variety group were more satisfied than volunteers in the variety group. Variety made people less happy, not more.

Wonderful things are especially wonderful the first time they happen, but their wonderfulness wanes with repetition. (Think about the first time your love said "I love you", versus the 100th time.)

Time and variety are two ways to avoid habituation, and if you have one, then you don't need the other.

- When episodes are sufficiently separated in time, variety is not only unnecessary, it can actually be costly.

People prefer to have a job that pays \$30k, then \$40k, then \$50k - rather than a job that earns \$60k, then \$50k, then \$40k, even though the latter would earn more money.

- We don't think in absolute dollars. We think of relative dollars. (We would drive across town to save \$50 on a \$100 radio, but not to save \$50 on a \$100,000 car.)
- If you ask someone to pay an unrealistically large cost ("could you commit to coming to our rally every weekend this summer?") before asking them to pay a smaller amount ("ok then could you at least contribute \$20?") - they're much more likely to agree to pay the small cost after having contemplated the large one, in part because doing so makes the small cost seem so bearable.
- People are more likely to purchase a vacation package that has been marked down from \$600 to \$500 than an identical package that costs \$400 that was on sale the previous day for \$300. We end up preferring bad deals that have become decent deals to great deals that were once amazing deals.
- People don't like to buy the most expensive item in a category, so retailers can improve their sales by stocking a few very expensive items that no one actually buys (a \$500 bottle of champagne)

that makes less expensive items seem like a bargain by comparison (a \$60 champagne). Realestate people often bring clients to shitholes first, so that the ordinary house feels like a miracle in comparison.

- People given the opportunity to bid on a dictionary that was in perfect condition and had 10,000 words. They bid \$24. Others given the opportunity to bid on a dictionary with a torn cover but 20,000 words. They bid \$20. When a different group was able to compare them side-by-side, they bid \$19 for the small intact dictionary and \$27 for the large torn dictionary. People care about an attribute (# of words) only when it is brought to their attention by side-by-side comparison.

What do all these facts about **comparison** mean for our ability to imagine future feelings?

- (a) - value is determined by the comparison of one thing to another
- (b) - there is more than one kind of comparison we can make in any given instance
- (c) - we may value something more highly when we make one kind of comparison than when we make a different kind of comparison.

If we want to predict how something will make us feel in the future, we must consider the kind of comparison we will be making in the future, and not the kind of comparison we happen to be making in the present.

When we start shopping for a new pair of sunglasses, we compare the cool new ones in the store with the old outdated ones on our nose. But a few days after buying the new ones, we stop comparing them with the old pair and the delight that the comparison produced is gone.

"Presentism": judging historical figures by contemporary standards. Condemning Thomas Jefferson for keeping slaves or Sigmund Freud

for patronizing women is like arresting someone today for having driven without a seat belt in 1923