

Misery or Happiness

Which Will You Choose?

By Tish Vincent

“Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

—Abraham Lincoln

Chloe Madanes is one of the originators of strategic family therapy. She has written seven books on improving relationships and is well-respected in the field of individual and family therapy.¹ She wrote an article for the November/December issue of *Psychotherapy Networker* titled “The 14 Habits of Highly Miserable People.”² Below are the 14 habits she identified:

- (1) Be afraid, be very afraid of economic loss.
- (2) Practice sustained boredom.
- (3) Give yourself a negative identity.
- (4) Pick fights.
- (5) Attribute bad intentions.
- (6) Whatever you do, do it only for personal gain.
- (7) Avoid gratitude.
- (8) Imagine the worst.
- (9) Blame your parents.
- (10) Don't enjoy life's pleasures.
- (11) Ruminates.
- (12) Glorify or vilify the past.
- (13) Find a romantic partner to reform.
- (14) Be critical.³

Madanes' article has a tongue-in-cheek quality, and if you link to it online, you'll see she has been chastised by some people for not taking depression or anxiety seriously. With decades of practicing therapy under my belt, I recognize that Madanes is prodding people to take a proactive stance in their mood management and to learn to

relate to others with grace and affection rather than criticism and judgment.

In all matters great and small, we can translate the list of 14 habits of miserable people into the 14 habits of happy people:

- (1) Trust that your economic situation will improve.
- (2) Be interested in hobbies, other people, and current events.
- (3) Develop a positive identity.
- (4) See possible resolution in every conflict.
- (5) Attribute good intentions.
- (6) Be altruistic; recognize the joy of doing service, within reason.
- (7) Be grateful.
- (8) Imagine the best and believe it is possible.
- (9) Take responsibility for yourself and your choices.
- (10) Enjoy life's pleasures, even seemingly simple ones like clean sheets, freshly baked cookies, and the smiles of others.
- (11) Discipline your mind to stay in the here and now.
- (12) Accept the past and that it cannot be changed.
- (13) Respect your romantic partner's right to be who they are.
- (14) Accept other people's choices.

As the holidays approach and another year beckons, we can choose happiness or misery. Those who choose happiness seem to have things go their way more often than not. Even if things are careening off track like a runaway train, those who choose happiness have positive experiences and see the potential in setbacks.

On behalf of the staff at the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, I wish you a happy New Year and hope you choose happiness as often as you can in 2014. ■



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ENDNOTES

1. See Psychology Today, *Experts: Chloe Madanes* <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/chloe-madanes>> (accessed December 12, 2013).
2. Madanes, *The 14 Habits of Highly Miserable People*, *Psychotherapy Networker*, November/December 2013, p 42.
3. *Id.*

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