

# The Hedonic Treadmill



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**T**he Hedonic Treadmill theory claims that people each have a personal level of happiness to which they return after events render them briefly more or less happy; just as we return to our usual weight after a diet or a period of gluttony and dissipation. One famous study found that quadriplegic accident victims are only slightly less happy than major lottery winners one year after their accident or win. This is an important insight with practical implications for you. The acquisitions and

achievements on which we misplace our hopes of future happiness are ephemeral. In fact, most satisfaction comes in the form of anticipation before attainments are realized, and the rest comes during a short period of appreciation thereafter. Both of these satisfactions are often abbreviated further by the unfortunate perception that nonchalance is cool. *“Sure, I have all this fabulous stuff, but you can see from my expression that I am really quite bored with it all.”* Nonchalance can be overcome once it has been recognized as the anesthetic that it is.

The lesson of the hedonic treadmill is not that attainment is pointless, but rather that attainment must be continuous if it is to shift our set point of happiness. Our relentless mistake is to presume that the satisfaction of some particular attainment will be lasting. The solution is to systematically disrupt our own stability on an ongoing basis, so that our happiness can be spiked anew just as we are acclimating to our last caper. If you get the rhythm right, this is like skipping along the crest of the waves rather than bobbing up and down like a cork. Trust me. Call me.

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