4. The Happy Personality

If external events don’t determine happiness, is happiness a trait? The answer seems to be yes. In a study of identical twins, Lykken and Tellegen (1996) found that one twin’s happiness was the best predictor of the other twin’s happiness. This finding suggests that happiness has a strong genetic component. In fact, there is even evidence that chimpanzees display heritable differences in happiness (A. Weiss, King, & Enns, 2002). In general, happy people tend to be high in extraversion, low in neuroticism, and very agreeable (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). This doesn’t mean, however, that happiness exists apart from life circumstances. Instead, people inclined toward happiness behave in ways that promote ongoing feelings of happiness (Headey & Wearing, 1989). First, they make “happy lifestyle choices.” For example, they are more apt to get married and stay married; spend time with friends; and take care of themselves by eating a healthy diet, exercising, and sleeping a proper amount (Lucas et al., 2003; Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993; Seidlitz & Diener, 1993). Happy people also tend to be religious, involved in their community, and inclined to serve others rather than thinking only of themselves (Myers, 2000). Third, people with a happy disposition interpret events in positive ways (Brief, Butcher, George, & Link, 1993; Lyubomirsky, 2001). In colloquial terms, they are optimistic and easygoing, and they don’t sweat the small stuff. Finally, people with a happy disposition focus on the good rather than the bad. They tend to remember more positive than negative events in their lives, and they base their judgments of life satisfaction on the positive ones (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, & Suh, 2002; Seidlitz & Diener, 1993; Updegraff, Gable, & Taylor, 2004). In effect, they count their blessings and are grateful for what they have (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

B. Personal Growth and Fulfillment

Happiness is not the only thing people want out of life (L. A. King & Napa, 1998; Ryff, 1989). People also aspire to fulfill their potential and to develop a sense of