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6-1-2006

Don't let society define your true happiness

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Kimbrough, Carla, "Don't let society define your true happiness" (2006). *Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass Communications.* Paper 45.
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QUILL TOOLBOX
CAREER

Don't let society define your true happiness

Commentary by

CARLA KIMBROUGH-ROBINSON

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BUY THE BOOK

"A Life in Balance: Nourishing the Four Roots of True Happiness," $21.95, published by AMACOM, American Management Association.

What is your measure of success?

Is it the amount of money in your checking or savings account? The square footage of your home? The number of awards you've won for a job well done?

Maybe it's landing at one of the nation's most prestigious newspapers or networks, or the pursuit of the Pulitzer that captures your heart. Or perhaps it's the satisfaction of hearing from a reader, viewer or listener who called to let you know your work made a difference.

For many journalists, it's not the size of their home or their bank accounts. (I can hear a resounding, "I wish!"). It's more likely the thrill of a job well done or the pleasure of making a difference.

In parts of our society, that fulfillment may not be found on such simple terms. The latest car, the biggest house, the largest bonus and bank account float the boat of some. Their satisfaction and happiness are tied to material riches and other societal labels of success.

No doubt, some have learned to balance their material success with the joy of giving back and satisfaction of living a fulfilled life. The fortunate few discover they're on a never-ending journey to the land of the latest, biggest, largest and best. The fortunate stop and ask themselves questions such as: Is this worth it? Am I happy? Am I living my purpose?

Kathleen Hall became one of the fortunate few. She lived a life filled with all the trappings of success: She had snagged a corner office in the tallest buildings in Atlanta and New York. She enjoyed marvelous vacations, wore fabulous clothes and had a beautiful family. Life is beautiful, right?

One day, as she was following her same routine, she took the World Trade Center elevator up to her office. But this ride was different: Her chest was tight, she had trouble breathing, she thought she was having a heart attack. After escaping the elevator, she clung to the wall and didn't move for three hours. The diagnosis from a security guard: a panic attack.

The panic attacks continued, and insomnia decided to join the party, too. A short time later, Hall decided to quit her job, bought a farm and commenced her search to define happiness. She writes about what she learned in her book *A Life in Balance: Nourishing the Four Roots of True Happiness.*

After studying with great spiritual leaders and discovering the relationships between mind, body and spirit and personal and professional fulfillment, Hall discovered the "four roots of true happiness." They are serenity, exercise, love and food.

Serenity: Hall recommends gaining calm and well-being in your life through meditation and other techniques. The dangers of stress — hypertension, infertility, insomnia and chronic pain — must be recognized and dealt with.

Exercise: A gift to your mind, body and soul is how Hall describes exercise. That's quite a different perspective on what many dread. Exercise restores health and produces energy and keeps your body aligned.

Love: Intimacy and community help people experience meaning and purpose. This is not bad news for singles, as intimacy can be achieved through friendships that allow you to be vulnerable and reveal your true self.

Food: Hall goes beyond defining food simply as something to eat. While she shares the benefits of certain foods and offers solutions for battling obesity, Hall uses the broadest term of "nourishment" to refer to feeding our senses — sight, sound, smell and touch.

Hall also offers 25 tips for life balance. Here are a few that might be good reminders for journalists who often operate in fast-paced, high-stress environments:

- Reduce your stress daily through meditation, yoga and deep breathing at least five to 10 minutes twice daily.
- Exercise at least 20 minutes three times a week.
- Laugh as often as possible.
- Pray, for prayer brings healing.
- Celebrate your successes in life.

Hall's book gives readers food for thought, researched information and recommendations on how to achieve true happiness.

The bottom line: Success should be a personal thing, not one defined by societal labels. For you, success certainly might be receiving a call from someone who says you made the difference, or it may be snagging the recognition through countless awards.

Ultimately, the size of your bank account should not be the only measure of your success. (I can hear a collective sigh of relief from journalists.) Success is defined by the people you touch in what you do on and off the job.

Taking time to ask yourself a series of questions may change your path in life. Here are a few to ponder:

- What is success?
- What is happiness?
- Am I happy?
- If yes, what brought me to this place, and how can I preserve or expand it?
- If no, what is preventing me from enjoying life, and what do I need to do to change that?
- If I died next week, would I leave unfinished business or unfulfilled dreams?
- Have I touched the life of another in a significant way?
- Would anyone attend my funeral, and what would they say after I was gone?

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