

What makes people really happy? This is the question Professor Csikszentmihályi has devoted his life's work to. In the interview he tells us how it all happened.

„Happiness Is a Flow“

Never considered changing your name, Professor Csikszentmihályi?

Oh yes! Many times! But to me this would have felt like cutting off the last connection to my roots. My two sons Mark and Christopher, both born in the United States, also have this name.

- Hungarian?

Yes, my parents are Hungarian born. And there is a little village in Transsylvania that has this name, located in the area where Count Dracula is said to come from. But he is not a relative of mine!

- Is any American able to pronounce Csikszentmihályi correctly -- „chick-sent-me-high-ee“?

No! They don't even manage to pronounce Schwarzenegger correctly! Who, by the way, has also chosen not to change his name. So they call me Csik. Or simply „Doctor C“.

- Do you feel being American or European in your heart?

When I am in America I feel like a European, when I am here with you in Europe I feel like an American. I think in English, I calculate in Italian--I have graduated from the Torquato Tasso Grammar School in Rome. And as for the beautiful things--those I say in Hungarian.

- And you are an expert for just these beautiful things of life: leading researcher on happiness, „Thinker of the Year 2000“, best-seller author...

I did not know about all that in advance! But I won't argue. And it makes me proud that my book „Flow“ is still number one on the best-seller lists in some countries of the world, 14 years after having been published. It was translated into 19 languages.

- Is „Flow“ a formula for happiness?

„Flow“ describes the state in which anybody is all wrapped up in what they are doing. In utmost concentration, inspired and spontaneous, they do exactly what their talents are, and thus enter a state of trance. They live in the very here and now and forget everything around them. During my studies I always got the same answer when I interviewed people--may it be weavers from the Borneo highlands, meditating monks in Tibet or managers in New York: They all stated that in this „Flow“ things run with ease, like on their own, people feel like being carried by a current...

- When did you first experience such a moment?

That was in the middle of the war. My family and I had caught the last train out of Budapest--then the German soldiers blew up the railway station. We arrived at Vienna and found shelter in the Hungarian embassy. Bombs were falling down, and I remember very well that the Venetian crystal chandelier burst into a thousand pieces. I felt great fear. At that time I found out that only playing chess would make me forget all the threatening things for some time.

- At that time you were ten years old and probably had not yet explored happiness.

No, but that's exactly what I noticed later in my students at Chicago University, where I taught art. When they were painting they forgot about themselves, moved as if they were possessed by something inside them. Thus I gradually learned more about „Flow“ as the optimal and truly fulfilling human experience.

- Is everybody able to reach this state of happiness?

It is not difficult, but not that easy, either. The fundamental requirement is that you enjoy doing what you do. Anybody saying „I **have to** work“ or „I **have to** play piano now“ will not experience „Flow“... „Flow“ requires motivation, and passion.

- Contrary to the German word „*Glück*“ there is no word for this in English, you talk about „happiness“, but that is not the same.

It is not the same indeed! „*Glück*“ is something like good luck, that happens to you. But „happiness“, being happy, does not happen to you, does not come from the outside, you have to grasp it yourself.

- In Vienna they say: Happiness is like a birdie...

Yes, but this birdie --I like the German word „*Vogel*“--has to be invited and tamed, otherwise it might not pass at all or it flies right off again. And it would be foolish to wait for it to stop by for your entire life. This is like waiting for the first prize in lottery. The probability for it to be obtained is almost zero.

- Where and when is Professor Csikszentmihályi happy?

When I compare scientific findings, when I end up matching different things. When I walk into our garden and pick some fresh oranges from the tree. When I see that my sons have also become happy in their lives.

- And geniuses, too?

We are no geniuses, just professors--all three of us. Mark teaches Chinese at the University of Wisconsin, Christopher designs robots at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. And I teach at the Peter F. Drucker Graduate School for Management.

- Does the „Flow“ formula apply to companies, too?

Absolutely. The employer owes his staff not only their salaries but also the opportunity to obtain enjoyment and satisfaction at their workplaces. If the aim is merely to maximize profit the company will not be fortunate either.

- You are 70 years old: Do you still have any dreams?

Oh yes. I dream of giving psychology a new image. Away from the neuroses and psychoses towards the question: What is a positive, cheerful, good life?

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Leading Researcher on Happiness

For 30 years the University of Chicago was the institution where the Hungarian emigrant, US American, and „Thinker of the Year 2000“ lectured as professor of the Department of Psychology. Today he teaches at the Peter F. Drucker Graduate School for Management at

Claremont, California. Csikszentmihályi is considered the worldwide foremost researcher on answering the question what makes people happy, content, and satisfied.

The basis for his sensational discovery of the „Flow Effect“ was a study of the 90 most creative people of the world. In his book „Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience“ he evolves the thesis that taking part actively and consciously in the process of evolution is the most important requirement for a fulfilled life.

His most popular book „Flow“, published in 1990, became an international best-seller and was translated into 19 languages.

Mihályi Csikszentmihályi is one of eleven participants of the „Waldzell Meeting“ in Melk Abbey, during which the world’s brightest heads were engaged in a two-day dialog on the meaning of life.