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If modern life is so wonderful, why do we feel so unhappy? In the following article, the author suggests that though living standards have improved, we, rather than feeling content, never become completely satisfied with what we have achieved. This is because we always find ourselves with new and higher expectations. To meet these expectations and solve the new problems that arise, new strategies should be adopted.

HOW COULD ANYTHING THAT FEELS SO BAD BE SO GOOD?

Richard E. Farson

Maybe it is time to adopt a new strategy in trying to figure out why life today is so difficult, and what can be done about it. Assume that not only are things often not what they seem, they may be just the opposite of what they seem. When it comes to human affairs, everything is paradoxical. People are discontented these days, for example, not because things are worse than ever, but because things are better than ever. Take marriage. In California there are about six divorces for every ten marriages -- even higher in some of the better communities. One must admit that a good deal of discontent is reflected in those statistics. But the explanation so frequently offered -- that the institution of marriage is in a state of collapse -- simply does not hold. Marriage has never been more popular and desirable than it is now. So appealing in fact, that even those who are in the process of divorce can scarcely wait for the law to allow them to marry again. The problem is that people have

never before entered marriage with the high expectations they now hold. Throughout history, the family has been a vital unit for survival, starting as a defense system for physical survival, and gradually becoming a unit for economic survival. Now, of course, the family has become a physical and economic liability rather than an asset. Having met, as a society, the basic survival and security needs, people simply don't need each other anymore to fight Indians or spin yarn -- or wash dishes or repair electrical plugs for that matter. The bonds of marriage and family life are no longer functional, but affectional. People used to come to love each other because they needed each other. Now it's just the other way around. They need each other because they love each other. Listening to the complaints of those recently divorced, one seldom hears of brutality and desertion, but usually something like, "We just don't communicate very well", "The educational differences between us were simply too great to overcome", "I felt trapped in the relationship", "He won't let me be me", "We don't have much in common anymore". These complaints are interesting, because they reflect high-order discontent resulting from the failure of marriage to meet the great expectations held for it. Couples now expect -- and demand -- communication and understanding, shared values and goals, intellectual companionship, great moments of intimacy. By and large, marriage today actually does deliver such moments, but as a result couples have gone on to burden the relationship with even greater demands. To some extent it has been the success of marriage that has created the discontent. The same appears to be true in the

civil rights movement. The gains that have been made have led not to satisfaction but to increased tension and dissatisfaction, particularly among those benefiting from such gains. The discontent is higher in the North than in the South, higher in cities than in rural areas. The disturbing paradox of social change is that improvement brings the need for more improvement in constantly accelerating demands. So, compared to what used to be, society is way ahead. compared to what might be, it is way behind. Society is enabled to feel that conditions are rotten, because they are actually so good. Another problem is that everything is temporary, nothing lasts. We have grown up with the idea that in order to develop personal security we need stability, roots, consistency, and familiarity. Yet we live in a world which in every respect is continually changing. Whether we are talking about sky-scrapers or family life, scientific facts or religious values, all are highly temporary and becoming even more so. If one were to plot a curve showing the incidence of invention throughout the history of man, one would see that change is not just increasing but actually accelerating. Changes are coming faster and faster -- in a sense change has become a way of life. The only people who will live successfully in tomorrows world are those who can accept and enjoy temporary systems. People are also troubled because of the new participative mood that exists today. Its a do-it-yourself society. every layman wants to get into the act. Emersons "do your own thing" has become the clich é of the times. People no longer accept being passive members. They now want to be active changers. This participative phenomenon can be seen in

every part of contemporary life -- on campus, in the church, in the mass media, in the arts, in business and industry, on ghetto streets, in the family. The problem is that modern man seems unable to redesign his institution fast enough to accommodate the new demands, the new intelligence, the new abilities of segments of society which, heretofore, have not been taken seriously.

Consequently, people are frightened by the black revolution, paralyzed by student activism, and now face what may be even more devastating -- the women's rebellion. Society simply has not had these kinds of problems before, and to meet them it will have to adopt strategies for their solution that are as new, and as different, and as paradoxical as are the problems themselves. Instead of trying to reduce the discontent felt, try to raise the level or quality of the discontent. Perhaps the most that can be hoped for is to have high-order discontent in today's society, discontent about things that really matter. Rather than evaluating programs in terms of how happy they make people, how satisfied those people become, programs must be evaluated in terms of the quality of the discontent they engender. For example, if a consultant wants to assess whether or not an organization is healthy, he doesn't ask, "Is there an absence of complaints?" but rather, "What kinds of complaints are there?" Instead of trying to make gradual changes in small increments, make big changes. After all, big changes are relatively easier to make than are small ones. Some people assume that the way to bring about improvement is to make the change small enough so that nobody will notice it. This approach has never worked, and one can't help but

wonder why such thinking continues. Everyone knows how to resist small changes. they do it all the time. If, however, the change is big enough, resistance cant be mobilized against it. Management can make a sweeping organizational change, but just let a manager try to change someones desk from here to there, and see the great difficulty he encounters. All change is resisted, so the question is how can the changes be made big enough so that they have a chance of succeeding? Buckminster Fuller has said that instead of reforms society needs new forms. e.g., in order to reduce traffic accidents, improve automobiles and highways instead of trying to improve drives. The same concept should be applied to human relations. There is a need to think in terms of social architecture, and to provide arrangements among people that evoke what they really want to see in themselves. Mankind takes great pains with physical architecture, and is beginning to concern itself with the design of systems in which the human being is a component. But most of these designs are only for safety, efficiency, or productivity. System designs are not made to affect those aspects of life people care most about such as family life, romance, and esthetic experiences. Social technology as well as physical technology need to be applied in making human arrangements that will transcend anything mankind has yet experienced. People need not be victimized by their environments. they can be fulfilled by them. The great frontier today is the exploration of the human potential mans seemingly limitless ability to adapt, to grow, to invent his own destiny. There is much to learn, but we already know this: the future need not happen to us. we

can make it happen. New Words strategy n. the art of planning action that lead to gaining a goal or victory paradox n. a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement that is or may be true. a person or situation exhibiting apparently contradictory characteristics 似非而是, 自相矛盾 paradoxical a. of or having the nature of a paradox discontented a. dissatisfied and restlessly unhappy statistics n. facts and figures gathered together for information or on a particular subject 统计 (资料) institution n. an established custom, law or relationship in a society or community 风俗, 制度, 惯例 popular a. enjoyed, accepted or liked by many people desirable a. worthy of being desired liability n. sth. for which one is responsible, esp. by law. sth. that limits one's activities or freedom 责任, 义务; 不利条件 liable a. responsible under the law asset n. sth. that is useful or valuable. (pl.) the property of a person, company, etc. 宝贵的东西, 资产 any more ad. (used in negative sentences) any longer yarn n. a long continuous thread, as of wool or cotton, use in making cloth, mats, etc. electrical a. concerned with or using electricity plug n. a device at the end of an electrical cord that fits into an electrical socket to make an electrical connection 插头 bond n. sth. that binds or unites 联结物; 联系 functional a. made for or concerned with practical use only 功能的 function n. normal use. duty or work 功能 affectional a. relating to or implying affections 感情的 affection n. gentle, lasting love, like that of a parent for a child. fondness desertion n. (an example of) the act of leaving one's duty, family, etc. 抛弃, 遗弃 overcome vt. fight successfully against. defeat order n. kind, sort, type intimacy n. a close and affectionate

personal relationship. familiarity intimate a. dissatisfaction n. lack of satisfaction. displeasure 100Test 下载频道开通，各类考试题目直接下载。详细请访问 www.100test.com