

Missing Tile Syndrome



Today's post focuses on a concept introduced by author Dennis Prager in his book, "Happiness is a Serious Problem." I highly recommend this book as a concise and extremely informative book on the often elusive subject of happiness. Dennis presents a number of life-changing philosophies in his book, but one of the best is the concept of the "missing tile syndrome."

Imagine this Scenario...

Imagine that you are in a dentist's office having your teeth cleaned and are thus focused on the ceiling above you. As you glance around the room, you notice that one of the ceiling tiles is missing. Although the majority of the ceiling is pristine and perfect, you would likely be transfixed upon that one missing tile for the remainder of your visit.

As human beings, we have a tendency to focus on what is *missing* instead of on what is *present*. That is fine for ceilings, as they *can* be perfect. The danger is when we apply the same focus and filter to our lives...

Even if we have a wonderful and full life, there are always areas which we feel can be better. The positive side of this is that we continue to focus upon learning and growing and bettering our life circumstances. The downside is that we may end up obsessing on that which is missing to such an extent that it detracts from our happiness.

Examples of "Missing Tiles"

A few examples will help to illustrate this point... I had a friend who struggled with infertility issues a number of years ago. She lamented to me that everywhere she went, all she saw were pregnant women and babies. I also knew a divorced woman who would venture out on the weekends, only to notice couples kissing and holding hands all around her. These two women were so completely focused on what they *didn't have*, a baby or a partner; they felt as if they were the *only* ones in their respective positions.

I can think of a few personal instances of "missing tile syndrome" in my life. I mentioned my obsession with straight, sleek hair in a previous post. I used to feel that every woman I saw had beautiful, frizz-free hair and that I was the only one around who struggled with managing coarse, frizzy locks. Similarly, I have often lamented my thick hips and thighs and felt they were out of proportion with the rest of my body. When I would be out and about, all I would see would be slim-hipped women with model slim legs.

Focus and Gratitude...

Of course, not all women are pregnant, not everyone is coupled up, and not all women have sleek hair or slim thighs. However, when one is suffering from "missing tile syndrome," the focus is only upon

what is **lacking**, not on what is **present**. When we focus on what's wrong instead of what's right in our lives, we are generally less happy as a result.

As I've mentioned previously, gratitude is one of the primary keys to happiness and well-being. If we look for what's **right** in our lives, we will surely find a number of things to celebrate. Similarly, if we look for what's **wrong**, we will be guaranteed to find those missing tiles.

Dealing with "Missing Tile Syndrome"

Awareness of "missing tile syndrome" is a first and powerful step, but Dennis Prager offers some additional suggestions for how to effectively deal with this problem. He suggests that you do one of the following things in regards to your missing tile:

1. Get It

If you determine that your "missing tile" is absolutely essential to your happiness, you can find a way to get that which is missing in your life. For example, if my friend with the infertility issue was unable to have a child of her own (*fortunately for her, she was finally able to get pregnant...*), she could have chosen to adopt a child. Although her initial desire was to give birth to a child, adopting a child would have given her what she dearly wanted, a child to love and to raise.

2. Forget It

Although this option may not seem feasible, it is a viable solution in certain cases. There are some missing tiles which cannot be gotten. Dennis Prager wrote about sharing custody of his son with his ex-wife following his divorce. Whereas he had previously gotten to spend each and every day with his child, that was no longer the case after his marriage ended. He found himself seriously missing his son when they were apart, but he couldn't change the fact that they now spent less time together. Consequently, he had to dismiss the desire to be with his son all the time and instead focus on making their time together as enjoyable as possible. When they were apart, Dennis would keep busy doing other things he enjoyed and he gradually came to accept the new situation.

3. Replace It

Sometimes, we are not able to get the **exact** things we want in life, but we can discover a viable replacement with which we can be satisfied. A somewhat trivial example may concern a man who is fixated on buying a new Porsche but doesn't have the money to make such a purchase. This man may choose to either buy a used Porsche in good condition or he may end up purchasing a domestic sports car at a lower price.

A more serious example of replacing a missing tile may involve a woman who wanted to be an Olympic gymnast but never made it to the upper echelons of competition. This woman may choose to open her own gymnastics studio or become a coach to young children. By doing one of these things, she can still pursue her great passion for the sport even though her initial goal was not reached.

Personal Conclusions

Let's get back to the personal examples which I mentioned above. After my trauma following my recent attempt to obtain straight and sleek hair (*see the post "Perspective and Appreciation"*), I have decided that I need to forget about getting this missing tile. I am choosing to accept the reality of my hair and to be grateful for what I have. If I find myself feeling sad about the hair which I do not have, I will focus on the aspects of my appearance with which I **am** satisfied. I will reflect upon my positive qualities and be grateful for those blessings instead of thinking about the "missing tile" of perfect hair.

The same is true for my thighs. I have done all I am willing to do to make them slim and muscular. I work out regularly and I eat well, but my thighs have not assumed the desired shape. Since I am unwilling to pursue liposuction or extreme diet or exercise measures, I feel I need to forget the "tile" of perfect thighs. I choose to focus on the fact that my legs are strong and effectively carry me through life. I also choose clothing which puts less emphasis on my thighs and more emphasis on the body parts which I more readily embrace.

Self-acceptance and gratitude are key in terms of dealing with "missing tile syndrome." Be grateful for your blessings in life and put your focus there. Work on accepting yourself and your life as they are, and stop lamenting your supposed "flaws" to the detriment of your happiness and inner peace. Although I know these topics will continue to surface as I proceed with my "healing project," I will close with the ever famous and always powerful Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.

May we all live in peace and serenity and embrace our life challenges with courage and wisdom!