Wellbeing—The Five Essential Elements



By Tom Rath and Jim Harter Gallup Press, 2010 ISBN: 978-1-59562-040-8 240 Pages

Review by Leland R. Beaumont

Many definitions of wisdom focus on judgment and actions that increase wellbeing. With wellbeing central to the concept of wisdom, it becomes important to know what it is and how it can be improved.

Authors Tom Rath and Jim Harter marshaled the considerable resources of the Gallup organization to identify the elements of wellbeing. They began by defining wellbeing as *all the things that are important to how we think about and experience our lives.* They then used carefully constructed survey methods to gather data from more than 350,000 adults in 150 countries, representing 98% of the world's adult population.

Their findings are grouped into these five distinct statistical factors that describe important aspects of our lives that we can do something about:

- Career or occupational Wellbeing: how people occupy their time during the day and whether it is fulfilling. Do you like what you do each day?
- Social Wellbeing: the quality of relationships in people's lives
- **Financial Wellbeing:** the degree of financial security people have
- Physical Wellbeing: the extent to which people can do what they want to free of pain
- Community Wellbeing: the extent to which people feel safe and are involved in giving to their community

For each of these five areas, they describe the detailed research findings followed by three actionable recommendations for improving your wellbeing in that area.

Their research highlights the importance of balance; while a majority of people are doing well in at least one of these five areas, only 7% are thriving in all five. They also stress the importance of finding short-term incentives that are consistent with our long-term objectives.

These results are remarkable because they are so unremarkable. Your grandmother may have given you similar advice, and that is good news! Absent from the list are the extremist ideologies used to justify so many wars. Trendy fashions, religious fundamentalism, and Joe Camel did not make the list.

The main text is quite short; however the book includes several informative and data-rich appendices.

The book purchase includes an access code to unlock an on-line program including the *wellbeing finder* and *daily tracker* intended to measure and help manage your wellbeing. These tools can help identify conditions that limit or contribute to your own wellbeing, and suggest changes that can increase your wellbeing.

This book takes one more step towards establishing a broadly accepted standard for assessing and achieving wellbeing. It takes a scientific approach to discovering what humans value most and helps bring us toward a consensus on this essential issue.