

How to be happy in Panama

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

Saturday, 10 July 2010 20:37 - Last Updated Saturday, 10 July 2010 21:46

I have met a lot of people since coming to Panama in 2007. Some are bitter and angry. Others seem to be having the times of their lives.

I am reflecting today on why that is. What is the difference? What is the secret to being happy in Panama?



I initially chalked up their unhappiness to being AAA personalities who suffered in Panama due to the endless delays, lackadaisical work attitudes, and poor

customer service which is seemingly endemic in Panama. Could that be it?

I hate to generalize, but compared to customer service in Jamaica, Panamanians are race-car drivers.

I have experienced equally poor work habits with contractors in my former home town of Picton, Ontario. We had experiences of electricians never returning

phone calls, contractors taking deposits and never showing up, etc. That it exists in other places, even back home does not excuse poor service or bad work

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ethics - but Panamanians hardly have an exclusive on the trait.

So why are some people so upset?

I have decided it has to do with expectations. I often say the most dangerous thing about Panama is the expectations people bring of what it will/should be like.

Panama does not follow British or BNA Act law. You are guilty until you prove your innocence. The guy who pays the most wins the case with some judges.

Many cops and government officials can be bribed.

There is also a cultural difference that seems to drive some people around the bend. Panamanians will say yes when they mean no - because they don't want

to disappoint anyone. So they will say the job will be done tomorrow when they know it is impossible. Are they lying? They say what they hope will happen,

and what they think you want to hear. Is this frustrating? Sure. Absolutely. But is it enough to ruin your day? To make you miserable?

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The other thing I noticed is that the people rushing around, hustling, obsessed with making a buck are the most unhappy.

Those people that are doing what they love to do seem to be the most happy.

Rich is a relative term - if you are doing something that you would do even if you never got paid for it, you are rich beyond your wildest dreams.

NOT having enough money can make you very unhappy - but that is not the case with most of the people I am talking about here.

A few years ago I wrote a series of murder mystery plays that centered around a guy who was obsessed with making money. I was based on the Simon and

Garfunkle song 'Richard Cory' about a rich man who seemingly had everything, yet he went home and put a bullet through his head.

After I wrote the trilogy, I met the character in real life - it was a very bizarre experience - for both of us. He was the human embodiment of the character - and

to make matters worse they shared the same, somewhat unusual first name - Conrad. He even had his lawyer look over the script. I had never met, nor heard

of this man until a year after I wrote the plays.

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Conrad told me an even more bizarre story. He had previously worked for a dot com company that went public. His boss, the founder, made \$127 million on his

own shares alone, but was restricted from selling them for three years. His dream was to own a winery. He put an offer of \$125 million on a winery in Napa

Valley, California. In the ensuing three years, the stock value declined and he only had \$110 million - he could not buy the winery. He became increasingly

despondent. His staff suggested he take a vacation. He did. He went home and killed himself. How much is enough?

Why did you come to Panama? You can make a lot of money doing a lot of things - but is it worth the price? What are you missing while you are gathering your

fortunes?

I came to Panama to get a way from Canadian winters and to write. I am doing it - every day. My wife wanted to paint - and she just finished the most

spectacular canvas of he life so far - she painted the entire inside of our new pool in an underwater mural.

We decided we both like metal sculpture, so we bought a welder and hired an artist to teach us how to weld. We start on Monday. I verified today that the

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clinic in Coronado does have a burn unit and experience in electrocution, so we are good to go.

The point is - do what you love and you will be rich beyond your wildest dreams. Get involved, get out and do something - make new friends, learn something

new, stretch your mind and yourself - and you will find what many people have found - Panama is not perfect - nowhere is - but it's pretty good.

My mother-in-law has a philosophy about self-image and happiness that we can all learn from. She advises us to find our fan club - people who like us and

think we are great - and spend more time with them. Limit your time with 'Negative Nellie's', the naysayers, and people who put you down. You can't save

them. Misery really does like company - so don't be a partner.

There is a joke about expats in Panama - they are either WANTED - or unwanted. That may have been true ten years ago, but a new breed of expat has

moved to Panama - people who made a positive choice to make a change in their lives - and they are doing it.

Find those people and leave the 'Miserable Marvin's' to themselves.

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Stay healthy, and happy my friends,

Roberto