

My Recipe for Happiness

Given my roles leading a company and representing the industry, people are often curious about my personal life. Many ask me, "You must be incredibly busy. Do you ever have time for yourself?" With frequent domestic and international business trips and countless decisions to make each day, they wonder when I ever get a chance to rest. Sometimes, people even say, "With the life you have, you must be happy, right?"

Those words once prompted me to ask myself: *Am I happy with my life? And what am I doing to be happy?*

Surprisingly, the answer I arrived at was quite simple: I need to take care of myself first. How can I truly be there for others if I am not there for myself? And how can I ask others to do well if I am not standing firmly on my own two feet? I am also a mother raising a child. I believe that when a mother is happy, that happiness naturally reaches her child as well.

One day, I was in the middle of a packed management strategy briefing when a notification sounded on my phone. I have a personal rule that, no matter how busy I am, I never ignore a message from my child, so I immediately checked it. On the screen was a photo my daughter had sent of our dog, Mochi. A message quickly followed.

"Mom, isn't Mochi cute? By the way, can you send me 30,000 won? I need it for something."

I could not help but laugh. I found it amusing how she began with a cute photo and then casually slipped in a request for some spending money. Even in the middle of the most hectic day, unexpected little moments of joy from your child can make you put everything else aside, if only for a moment.

The mental well-being of a CEO is not merely a personal matter. A leader's expression, a single word, or a decision can have a considerable impact on an organization. That is why I have developed a few principles for protecting my own well-being. They are nothing grand: I try not to compare myself with others, and whenever there is something to laugh about, I laugh out loud.

People sometimes ask me, "Is there anyone you envy? You seem to have everything anyone could want."

Of course there is. In fact, there are many.

I admire people who sing beautifully, ballerinas who dance with effortless grace, and artists who can draw and paint wonderfully. I take notice of fellow CEOs who have a gift for turning complicated problems into simple solutions. Sometimes, I even envy people who simply know how to enjoy a delicious meal.

What I try not to do, however, is turn that admiration into a comparison with myself. The moment we begin measuring ourselves against others, our attention shifts from what we have to what we lack. Few things are more foolish than creating our own reasons to be unhappy.

Life is finite. There is barely enough time to spend with the people we love. That is why I often imagine the life I would like to be living ten or even fifteen years from now. Rather than asking what more I should have, I picture who I want to be with and what kind of life I want us to share. I also try to have these conversations not only with my family, but with our employees, members of the association, and the many people I love and cherish.

Perhaps there is some grand secret to happiness. But the answer I have found is surprisingly modest: take care of myself first, resist comparing myself with others, laugh freely, and spend time with the people I love.

Perhaps happiness is simply the process of protecting these small things, one by one.

That is also why I sat down at my keyboard to write this column. I wanted to share these thoughts with my readers. I believe happiness is not a destination we suddenly arrive at one day. It is the sum of the small choices we make—and choose to cherish—today.