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[Teaching May Be the Secret to a Good Life](http://thegallupblog.gallup.com/2013/03/teaching-may-be-secret-to-good-life.html)

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Imagine what life would be like if we started choosing our jobs based on the wellbeing they provide us. According to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, a career in teaching may be the secret to the good life. Never mind the media reports that make teaching in America look like a horrible job, it may be one of the best careers for a person’s wellbeing.

Out of 14 major career categories, teachers are No. 2 in overall wellbeing, trailing only physicians.  Teachers have high wellbeing because they rate their lives highly and are in great emotional health, which are two key subcomponents of wellbeing. In those two categories, teachers also rank No. 2, beating out professional workers, nurses, business owners, and managers and executives, among others.

With more than half of U.S. teachers set to retire in the next decade, it’s estimated that we will need roughly 2 million new teachers in this timeframe. Our country desperately needs to build a talent pipeline large enough to fill these positions. We have 10 years to get 2 million young people excited about teaching. Importantly, the case for a career in teaching is now even stronger.

Gallup and Healthways define wellbeing as all of the things that are important to how we think about and experience our lives. Contrary to what many think, it is not simply a measure of health and wealth. In fact, Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman and Princeton economist Angus Deaton have found that [happiness does not increase with annual income after reaching the $75,000 mark](http://blogs.wsj.com/wealth/2010/09/07/the-perfect-salary-for-happiness-75000-a-year/). Unfortunately, most young people today don’t seem to understand this. When asked why they want to go to college, an all-time high of nearly 75% of incoming freshmen in 2012 said “to be able to make more money,” according to UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute.

A career in teaching may not rank high in the minds of most college students, especially those seeking big salaries. But all that may soon change if young people realize the real secret to a good life.

Teachers beat out investment bankers, consultants, accountants, engineers, sales professionals, and entrepreneurs on how they rate their lives overall. When thinking about their life on a scale of 0-10 -- with 0 being the worst possible life and 10 being the best possible life, teachers rate their lives higher than all other professions surveyed, except physicians. Further, teachers are No. 3 among the professions surveyed in terms of saying they get to “use their strengths and do what they do best every day.”

Teachers are also a happy bunch. They are the most likely of all professions to say they “smiled or laughed a lot yesterday,” and the most likely to report experiencing “happiness” and “enjoyment” yesterday. What’s more, teachers rank No. 2 in saying they “learn or do something new” each day. These findings are both stunning and inspiring. If asked, it is doubtful many of us would have guessed that teachers were on the top of the wellbeing hill. At a time when America is struggling to evolve its K12 and higher education systems to better adapt to teaching 21st century skills, utilizing technology, and competing on a global playing field, there is nothing more critical to that effort than great teachers. And that starts with getting the most talented young people into the teaching profession.

Great teachers, as each of us can personally attest to, can change the trajectory of an individual student’s life and career. In large numbers, teachers can ultimately change the trajectory of human development, too. It is very likely that the lofty mission and purpose of teaching has something to do with teachers’ high overall wellbeing. They have jobs that -- although incredibly challenging -- allow them to reap incredible rewards in the form of young people realizing their potential, overcoming hurdles, and achieving goals and dreams. They get to see these results in tangible ways almost every single day. And, though teachers certainly don’t top the scale in annual income, they do enjoy stable salaries and benefits relative to the number of days worked per year.

Armed with these new findings about teacher wellbeing, it is time to launch our generation’s “man on the moon” campaign in America. This time it’s not a race to the moon, but a race far beyond -- to the limitless frontier of human potential. Our ambition should be to put a great teacher in every classroom. These data now point, not only to the societal benefits of teaching, but also the personal benefits for teachers themselves. And if we can turn this into a renewed sense of respect and admiration for teaching as a profession, we will undoubtedly send a shockwave of excitement and energy about teaching throughout the youth of America.

The only obstacle in our way, however, may be the workplace in schools themselves. Despite enjoying top marks in overall wellbeing, teachers rank toward the bottom (eighth out of 14) of the professions surveyed on one very important element of wellbeing: work environment. They rank sixth in saying their “supervisor treats me more like a partner than a boss.” And they are dead-last -- 14th, behind coal miners and truck drivers -- in saying their “supervisor always creates an environment that is trusting and open.” They are also dead-last in saying they were “treated with respect all day yesterday,” and experience the second-highest stress level across all occupations. And according to Gallup’s workplace engagement surveys, 31% of teachers are “engaged,” which ranks sixth overall behind farmers and fishermen, nurses, physicians, managers, and business owners. We *have* to fix this.

Clearly, these are important issues for school leaders to address in the workplace in order for teachers to reach their full potential. And it is absolutely critical to improve workplace engagement for teachers, because their engagement is the No. 1 predictor and driver of student engagement.

The positive news is we *can* fix this. It’s about finding better school leaders -- principals and superintendents. Great principals and superintendents, like great managers in any kind of organization, drive workplace engagement. And right now we have far too few great school leaders.

The education world is facing transformational forces and challenges that are unprecedented in its history. And in the middle of all the chaos, there is a very simple solution. That solution is people. Specifically, we need as many talented teachers and school leaders as we can get. It doesn’t matter how much money or technology or policy we throw at it, none of that will move the dial of school performance sufficiently, except for building the greatest teacher and principal talent machine the world has ever seen.

Calling all young Americans with teaching and leadership talent! Your time is now. You’ve never been as needed or more important -- and a life of high wellbeing is awaiting you in return.

For more details on these findings and survey methods, read [U.S. Teachers Love Their Lives, but Struggle in the Workplace](http://www.gallup.com/poll/161516/teachers-love-lives-struggle-workplace.aspx) on Gallup.com.

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