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# The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want

## By: Sonja Lyubomirsky

**Introduction**

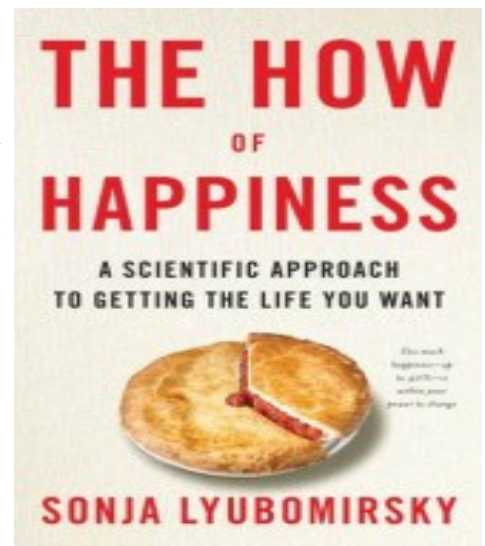
Sonja Lyubomirsky's *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* is a book that offers readers a life-changing opportunity to truly take hold of the happiness in their lives, all while using a disciplined, scientific approach.

The book assists school administrators in finding a way to achieve long-

lasting happiness while working in a high-stress environment.

Lyubomirsky discusses several concepts of happiness, including attaining real happiness for a long period of time, activities which can support happiness, and some secrets to practicing

happiness in a sustainable manner.



graphic.

<https://www.amazon.com/How-Happiness-Approach-Getting-Life-ebook/dp/B0010Og27W>

**About the Author**

Photo Credit: Dana Patrick

Sonja Lyubomirsky is Ivy League educated, having received her B.A. from Harvard University, then going on to receive her Ph.D in social psychology from Stanford University. She is currently a professor at the University of California, Riverside in the department of psychology. Lyubomirsky has received several awards, including the 2002 Templeton Positive Psychology Prize and a multiyear grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.

<http://drsonja.net/about-sonja/>

# Chapter 1: Is it Possible to Become Happier?

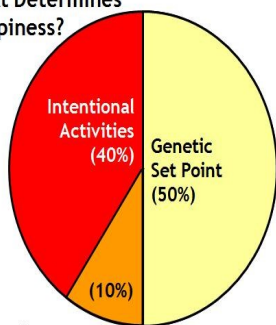
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<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/articles/13-quotes-on-happiness-to-get-you-through-the-january-blues/>

*“It means that all of us could be happier if we scrutinized carefully what precise behaviors and thoughts very happy people naturally and habitually engage in” (p.22)*

What Determines Happiness?



<http://www.edbatista.com/2009/02/happiness.html>

## A Program for Lasting Happiness

54% of American adults identify themselves as “moderately mentally healthy”, which indicates that over half of the population is fearful to commit to saying they are, in fact, happy. People are constantly searching for more in the areas of happiness, meaning, love,

and employment.

One initial simple task, such as writing down three good things that happened in a day, can improve one’s mental well-being drastically.

The first step to happiness is the admittance of a need to be happier.

Happiness cannot be found, rather it must be created and modified to continue the feeling of happiness.

This book outlines a program for effective and sustainable happiness.

## Discovering the Real Keys to Happiness

What we think makes us happy does usually make us happy, but only for a short period of time. Lasting happiness is not attained through wealth, fame, or from momentary positive events.

Researchers found that people have a remarkably stable level of happiness throughout their lives and positive changes have minimal effects on peoples’ lives.

Happiness is 50% genetic, referred to as a set point. An additional 10% refers to circumstances, such as location, wealth, support, and relationships. The final 40% is linked to our behavior.

## What Do Happy People Do?

- ◇ Spend large quantities of time maintaining important relationships
- ◇ Gracious for things they already have
- ◇ Helpful towards people in their lives
- ◇ Optimistic whenever given the choice
- ◇ Live in the present
- ◇ Focus on physical well-being
- ◇ Keep long-term goals and try to attain them
- ◇ Demonstrate resilience when confronted with crises.

## Happiness Comparisons

It can be very difficult to avoid comparisons with other people when considering one's own happiness. Everyone knows one person who is truly happy, and most are jealous of that person.

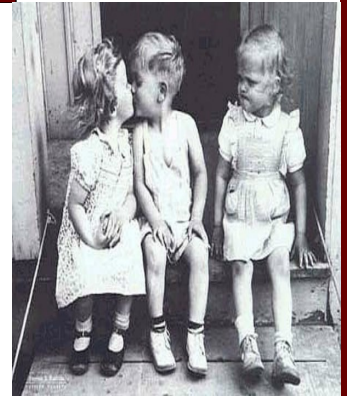
Whenever a happy person is in the same situa-

tions or predicaments that you are, they still seem happy and optimistic, and this feeling can drag a person down emotionally.

At the same time, many people know at least one very pessimistic and unhappy person. These

people are consistently unable to allow any positives to enter their lives. They emphasize the negatives in life. As a result, these people are often lonely.

We are simultaneously jealous of some people, and unenvious of others.



<http://www.fatherjames.org/2015/09/19/the-envy-trap-2/>

## Limits of Life Circumstances

People who fall into believing the myth of happiness being a product of a change in life circumstance tend to focus on if and when their life will change, then they will be happy. As was stated

previously, life circumstances only account for 10% of happiness.

In fact, those who aspire for changes in life circumstances, such as future wealth, actually end up with a higher chance

of having a mental disorder and of being dissatisfied with their lives.

Two issues that arise are growing aspirations, and social comparisons. Both, when fulfilled, offer temporary happiness.

*“Human beings adapt to favorable changes in wealth, housing, and possessions, to being beautiful or being surrounded by beauty, to good health, and even to marriage” (p.52)*

## The Happiness Set Point

The fallacy around the happiness set point is that we are born happy or unhappy, but Lyubomirsky disagrees.

Our genes do provide us with our set point, but they do not dictate our

experiences and our behavior at all times. The reactions people have to circumstances can allow genetic predispositions to take over, or *not* to take over.

Lyubomirsky suggests

that people figure out what their set point is, then do something about it.

There is a 40% piece of the happiness puzzle in each person's control, regardless of set point.



<http://www.genesandhealth.org/genes-your-health/genes-made-easy>



<http://projectmanagementhacks.com/strategic-project-management/>

*“In other words, where there is a good fit, you will try harder and feel right about what you’re doing.” (p.77)*



<http://www.mencapliverpool.org.uk/liverpool-carers-centre-activities-january-to-march-2015/>

### Three Ways That Strategies Can Fit

One can struggle to experience happiness through activities if the activities are not suited to the person. Lyubomirsky encourages people to find a strategy that fits their needs.

The first is to fix the source of unhappiness.

One should find out what makes them unhappy, and find an activity that teaches them the opposite.

The second is to play to strengths. Some people may find happiness by excelling even more in areas where they have

already demonstrated significant strength.

The third is to find activities that complement one’s lifestyle. Some may not benefit from religious activities, and some may find that meditation does not fit their needs, for example.

### Person-Activity Fit Diagnostic

It is important for anyone seeking happiness to realize that although some of the steps may seem unnecessary, they are integral steps to reaching a goal of happiness.

Lyubomirsky developed

her own person-activity fit diagnostic people can use to see which activities they should pursue. The more honest and truthful a person is with the diagnostic, the more success they will find in

pursuing the program. If the activities do not fit the person attempting them, they will not create happiness for themselves.

The diagnostic offers four activities to try.

### P.S. More Options and Final Words

The reason there are twelve activities is because there had to be enough to accommodate every person as well as remain scientific-based approaches.

People are not asked to

overwhelm themselves with this program, but rather to find a set of activities that works well for them, and continue to do those activities on a regular basis before continuing to try other activities.

At this point, readers are asked to skip ahead to the area of the book where their fit diagnostic sent them to. For the sake of this summary, all strategies will be covered.

## Happiness Activity No. 1: Expressing Gratitude

One can begin expressing their gratitude by acknowledging their life circumstances, and realizing they are not as bad as they could be.

Gratitude assists people with moving on from loss, allows a person to be thankful for the bless-

ings they have in their lives, and to consider themselves lucky that no matter how bad things seem, they are not the worst they could be.

Some suggestions for those who have a best fit for gratitude are as follows:

- Start a gratitude journal outlining what you are grateful for once a week or so.

- Take time to reflect on what you are grateful for.

- Discuss your gratitude to someone directly (phone, letter, or face-to-face)



<http://doctormurray.com/the-importance-of-teaching-gratitude-and-building-self-esteem-in-children-and-adults/>

## Happiness Activity No. 2: Cultivating Optimism

Optimism is the next step in gratitude, as while gratitude provides reflection on the past and present, optimism predicts more happiness in the future.

A proven optimism strat-

egy is to think of your best possible self, what you imagine yourself to be if you could. Essentially, it is picturing everything you wish you were. This gives people more drive to realize

those dreams they have articulated.

Another strategy is to write down the events or thoughts that are pessimistic and analyze them with an optimistic lens.

*“So, optimism is not only thought like ‘I will get there’ but about exactly how it will be accomplished”*

*(p.103)*

## Happiness Activity No. 3: Avoiding Overthinking and Social Comparison

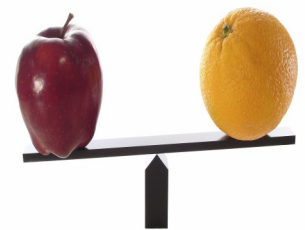
Overthinking is to focus inward and analyze events, things people say, and other problems in an effort to make sense. Social comparison is self-explanatory, as people compare themselves to other people in their so-

cial networks. The strategy to resist overthinking and comparisons involves several steps.

Step 1 is to stop overthinking by distracting yourself, using a “stop” signal, set aside

30 minutes a day to overthink, talk to somebody, or write it down.

Once you’ve stopped, you can solve the problems, avoid triggers, and look at the big picture.



<http://renaissanceranch.net/uncategorized/recovering-comparisons/>



<http://familyanimalmedicine.com/pay-it-forward.html>

*“Of course, as everybody knows, love has its ups and downs; nonetheless, most identify it as one of the chief things that makes them happy.” (p.140)*



<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/love-versus-lust>

## Happiness Activity No. 4: Practicing Acts of Kindness

Helping others helps the helper to gain a more positive sense of self-identity. It also induces an influx of positive social consequences into the helper’s life, as people will be more willing to help someone who is already helpful.

Try to think of something new and special as an act of kindness, rather than the typical actions you already undertake regularly.

Do not make a singular act of kindness a routine, or else the benefits of the act will begin to wear

off.

Keep in mind that a good act can create a sequence of good acts from others.

Be cautious not to be selfish in this strategy, the goal is still to help others. If you over-help, you could wear yourself out and be unhappy.

## Happiness Activity No. 5: Nurturing Social Relationships

Happy people thrive in their relationships with others. Humans have a need to belong in a social group, even in referring to the evolution of humans.

One of the major benefits

from social groups is the support they offer when times are difficult.

Social relationships such as marriages and children, are life-long goals so they are not considered to be life circum-

stances.

Oddly enough, love is a very strong indicator of a strong social relationship. Imagine the relationship of a mother and her daughter. Love is a live-long goal for them.

## Strategies for Investing in Relationships

Make time for the people you have relationships with. Successful relationships involve people who spend large quantities of time together talking and expressing gratitude to one another.

Communicate love and affection for the other person, which seems obvious, but make a point to ensure that it happens.

Take time to celebrate the successes of others. Respond with enthusi-

asm to increase intimacy with your partner.

Learn to manage conflicts by treating your relationship like a friendship.

Finally, respect each other’s dreams and desires.

## Happiness Activity No. 6: Developing Strategies for Coping

The first type of coping is problem-focused coping, where the person tries to fix their problems by making a plan, talking to someone, etc.

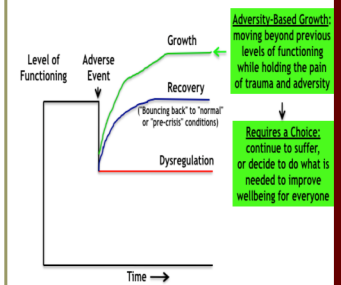
The second type of coping is emotion-focused coping, which is when the person has no control

of the situation and must change their negative emotions into positive emotions.

Men are encouraged to learn emotional-focused coping strategies, where women are encouraged to learn problem-focused coping strategies.

After a traumatic incident, people are actually able to rise above it and begin to thrive (see diagram to the right).

Social support can also assist people to find meaning within their traumatic situations.



Adapted from S. Joseph, What Doesn't Kill Us (pp. 99)

<http://sustainableunh.unh.edu/blog/2016/07/resilience-beyond-disaster-recovery>

## Specific Strategies for Coping

People are invited to cope by trying to find meaning through creative writing. For this writing strategy, consistency is key. Benefits should arise if done several times a week for at least

fifteen minutes each time. Conversely, one could write a journal, or even have the journal be supported by someone else.

Disputing your negative thoughts is the final strat-

egy. Write down the adversity, identify the negative beliefs, recognize the consequences or results, dispute the belief by thinking of reasons why, and energize yourself and lift your spirits.

*“To challenge your automatic negative thoughts, you need to take the role of a detective, hunting for evidence that might disconfirm your initial hunches” (p.168)*

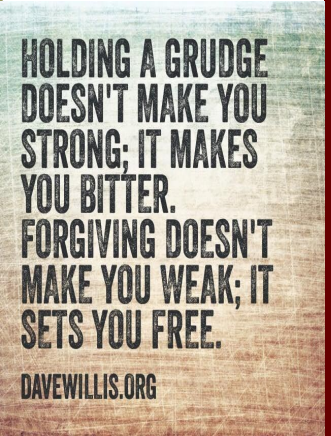
## Happiness Activity No. 7: Learning to Forgive

Forgiveness involves a resistance to revenge and avoidance, and rather a contemplation of the event or issue in question. Forgiving does not mean condoning, excusing or even restoring the relationship with the oth-

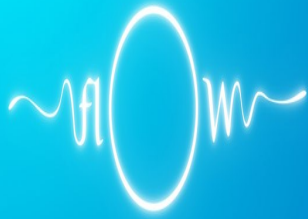
er person. Forgiveness is for yourself, not the other person.

To help kick start forgiveness, think of a time you were forgiven and reflect upon it. Imagine feeling empathy for the

other person and what forgiving them would feel like for you. Write a letter of forgiveness, but do not send it, practice empathizing daily, imagine an apology from the other person.



<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/forgiveness/?lp=true>



<http://thatgamecompany.com/games/flow/>

*“Don’t go through life wearing blinders to everything that is touching, beautiful, virtuous, and magnificent.”*  
(p.197)



<http://spreadgoodvibesnh.com/blog/savor-the-flavor/>

## Happiness Activity No. 8: Increasing Flow Experiences

Flow is considered to be living in the present. It is when people become enthralled with the activity they are currently pursuing. The right balance between something that is too hard and too easy.

Flow allows us to feel as though we are truly an

important part of our own lives, it increases our enjoyment levels, it allows us to feel a sense of control, and we have higher self-esteem.

Pay attention to your flow activities, it will increase your enjoyment. Be open to new experi-

ences, and keep trying to learn new things.

Our best flow activities may, unknowingly, happen at work. Get to know your flow activities, including micro flow activities, which help pass the time.

## Happiness Activity No. 9: Savoring Life’s Joys

Taking time to savor the past, present, and future can result in very high levels of consistent happiness. Memories quickly fade, so it takes a concerted effort to keep them fresh.

Learn how to enjoy the mundane and repetitive tasks of each and every day. Try to make two meaningless events meaningful per day. Reminisce with family and friends whenever

given the chance. Situate yourself in the memory you are savoring, or play instant replays in your head. Share successes and good news, and be open to experiencing beauty and excellence.

## More Savoring Activities

As is taught in most religions, be mindful. This means to clear the mind and live in the current state. Some people may meditate in order to acquire the mindfulness they desire.

Enjoy the use of your senses. Breathe deeply the fresh air after a rain-storm, enjoy a massage, or listen to your favorite song.

Create a savoring photo album, and refer to it fre-

quently. Try to take pictures only to increase the already high level of happiness, not for future reminiscing.

Be careful to not live exclusively in the moment, for your own safety.



## Six Benefits of Committed Goal Pursuit

1. A sense of purpose and control over our lives.
2. Self-confidence and feeling more efficient. People will also feel motivated and elated when they complete sub goals.
3. Opportunities to experience more structure and responsibility. People will feel more accountable to their schedules.
4. Time management. People will put aside time to complete their goals.
5. Support through traumatic times. Goal commitment can ease the pain on a traumatic experience.
6. Increasing social connections.



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dont-delay/201001/overcoming-procrastination-four-potential-problems-during-goal-pursuit>

*“In sum, the priorities that we place on our goals change with time, but no matter what the substance of the goals, one certainty remains across every age: Pursuing goals brings greater happiness than abandoning them.”*

(p. 213)

## What Kinds of Goals Should You Pursue?

People may choose to pursue an intrinsic goal, one which they have chosen themselves and benefits them first and foremost. Intrinsic goals should require persistence, be pleasurable,

and could include social connections as well.

All goals should be authentic, yours and not someone else’s. Goals should approach something rather than avoid something. Choose goals

that are appropriate, and fit your life circumstances. Keep in mind that circumstances can be adapted to, which experiences, activities and opportunities can be fulfilling.

## Recommendations for Committed Goal Pursuit

First, consider your most significant goals. Then cross reference them with the types of goals mentioned in the previous section to ensure they are appropriate goals to help achieve happiness.

Choose to own your goals, find deeper meaning if necessary. At the same time, be passionate about your commitment. Use positive self-talk, telling yourself you can do the things you are setting out to do. Keep in

mind that the goal may change over time, so be flexible. Always remain intrinsically motivated, rather than extrinsically.

Finally, break down your goal into sub goals, or baby steps.



<https://connectpsychology.com/blog/2015/12/22/professor-richard-koestner-shares-his-knowledge-about-the-why-how-and-with-whom-of-goal-pursuit>



<https://theyaoundereport.wordpress.com/2016/12/29/the-east-and-west-of-religion-a-paradox-of-faith/>

*“But has anyone told you—indeed, guaranteed you—that regular physical activity will make you happier? I swear by it.” (p.250)*



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/happiness-kyle-morgan>

## Happiness Activity No. 11: Practicing Religion and Spirituality

One major benefit from practicing religion is the benefit of social networking. As previously mentioned, social connections are a genuine source of happiness. Those who attend religious services feel a strong sense of identity. There are moral factors

attached to religion that promote happiness in people as well, such as forgiveness.

People with an intense sense of spirituality learn to relish in the moment, similar to Chapter 7.

One way to practice religion and spirituality are

to seek meaning and purpose in the teachings of your religion.

Make a point to pray for a period of time each day, a prayer of gratitude is especially helpful, as in Chapter 4. Finally, try to find the spiritual benefits of daily life.

## Happiness Activity No. 12: Taking Care of Your Body (Meditation and Physical Activity)

Meditation has been shown to have multiple positive effects on people, including moral maturity and mental health. Physiological rest is another attribute of meditation, which supports the

body.

The key to meditation is to focus on breathing. Start with five minutes, and set a goal for twenty minutes.

Physical activity works

as an immediate happiness booster. Try to get at least thirty minutes of exercise per day, and schedule it in so that you don't skip it due to lack of importance.

## Happiness Activity No. 12 (Cont'd): Acting Like a Happy Person

Your facial expressions actually provide feedback to your brain telling you how to feel. We can decide whether we want to be joyful or irritated. As people age and they acquire wrinkles on their faces, science suggests

that happier people will have happier looking faces, while unhappy people will have angry looking faces.

Smiling is more friendly and welcoming, which promotes more frequent

and enjoyable social interactions. Laughter also releases beneficial hormones, even only when laughter is anticipated. Fake smile if you need to, because smiling gives a boost to your happiness.

## The First and Second How: Positive Emotion and Optimal Timing and Variety

If a person were to follow the twelve activities outlined in this book, they would feel positive emotions frequently. The goal of using these activities is not simply to feel good, but to create positive boosts consistently, all while maintaining a happy outlook. Happi-

ness is attained when there are more than fleeting moments of happiness, but rather a happier way of thinking and seeing the world.

Timing is everything. Certain activities may work better for different circumstances, and the

only way to know the appropriate timing is to experiment.

Taking another look at your activities every few months will keep a variety in the activities so that they do not get stale.



<https://techtalk.gfi.com/in-the-tech-industry-timing-is-everything/>

## The Third and Fourth How: Social Support and Motivation, Effort, and Commitment

Sharing with and confiding in others can alleviate stress and help reassure people. Group support can also assist people in seeing that they are not alone in their negative situations. Behavior-

al change is very difficult to sustain without support from members of your social network.

Committing to a program takes the resolve to begin, learning what needs to happen, putting

in effort, and committing long-term to the goal.

Try to avoid making excuses such as being too busy. Happiness is a perspective and does not always take exorbitant amounts of time.

*“Renew your commitment every day. Not only the strategy, but the very act of recommitment will become easier and more automatic with time.” (p.277)*

## The Fifth How: Habit, and Conclusion

With time, these activities will eventually become habitual and will require less work to maintain. Repetition and practice are surefire ways to form habits. Activities such as weight loss programs work better over

time because they form habits rather than immediate results, which are difficult to maintain.

Overall, the goal for readers of this book is to establish new, healthy, happiness promoting

habits. Eventually people who use this program appropriately will no longer have to *try* to be happy or optimistic, they simply *will* be. We can all achieve and maintain positive change in our lives.



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-right-habits-lay-foundation-your-long-term-success-vishal-kataria>

## Critical Evaluation

**EADM 826  
PROFESSORS BOB  
BAYLES AND KEITH  
WALKER**

Spencer Knowles  
University of Saskatchewan  
September 11, 2017

School administrators are busy people, and they are also leaders of many other busy people. The stresses of the education field can negatively affect even the happiest of people. As human resource leaders, principals should be in a happy state of mind so that they can deal with the issues that arise, and also to set a positive example for their employees.

The program outlined in *The How of Happiness* by Sonja Lyubomirsky is a sustainable, actionable program that principals should be practicing on a daily basis to put them in a happy state of mind. The happiness of the principal could supply the teachers and students of the school with a positive role model of happiness in a trickle down effect.

A critique I have of this book is that although the activities are broken into smaller sets, the overall task of becoming more happy through a twelve step program seems quite daunting.

I would recommend this book to anyone trying to build and maintain healthy relationships, and more happiness in their lives.

## Discussion Questions

1. Are you a happy person? Articulate the reasons why you either are or are not happy.
2. How would you benefit from being a happier person in your personal life? In your work life?
3. Which, if any, aspects of happiness outlined in this book do you feel you could use in your life the most?
4. How would you implement a happiness program in your life? What would be your first step?

## References

Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want..* New York, NY: Penguin Books.