



# THE 12 HABITS OF HAPPY PEOPLE

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# Introduction

## ***Happiness and science. Did you know that the two are in a relationship?***

*Up until recently it's been on the "hush-hush," you know, the low-key down-low. But it's time we talk openly about it. They're an all-star team together – think Michael Jordan and Scotty Pippen with 6 rings in the '90s. Foul line dunks and Phil Jackson coaching.*

*Something amazing has been happening in the last 10 years.*

*It's called the positive psychology movement. The world's leading psychologists say that psychology can be used not only to treat mental illness, but also to make normal life more fulfilling. That's where you and I come in. Let's start things off by blowing your mind. Here goes...*

# How happiness works

In the 20th century, from 1900-2000, for every 100 articles published on the negative side of psychology (illnesses like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, etc. . .) there was approximately ONE article published on the positive side (things like gratitude, exercise, optimism, etc.) That's a pretty twisted tie.

If you're like me, you think it's pretty amazing that modern technology is now able to \*scientifically\* tell what makes people happy.

I used to think that happiness was some far off, elusive destination to be reached only when the sun, moon, and Martha Stewart's sleeping patterns were in sync. Finding out the things that are proven to make us happy, and then doing them and *feeling* the results, is one of the most valuable things I've ever experienced.

Here's how happiness works. Research done involving identical twins separated at birth shows that about 50% of our happiness is determined by our genetics. We're pretty much born with a "happiness set-point" and regardless of what external circumstances are going on, in the long run, if unchecked, we'll return to that level of happiness.

Now this is where most people (including myself at one point) take a wrong turn:

They spend most of their time chasing the \*things\* that they've been brainwashed to believe will bring them happiness. But, science shows that the \*things\* you have in life only bring about 10% of your happiness. The things like what kinda car you drive, how much money you have in the bank, and what your job title is all fit into this category. For the most part, you can think of this 10% as "external circumstances."

The warm fuzzy feeling that those things initially bring will diminish... kinda like cookie-dough ice-cream. The first taste is a euphoric explosion of enzymes tangoing with your taste buds. But by the time you're on spoon six – it's nothing new.

So that leaves us with a big fat chunk of 40% left to address. These are our \*behavioral\* tendencies which we have direct control over. And *this* my friend, ***this is how we have the power to make change... RIGHT NOW!***

# <sup>1</sup>Expressing gratitude

**When you appreciate what you have, what you have appreciates in value.** Kinda cool right? So basically, being grateful for the goodness that is already evident in your life will bring you a deeper sense of happiness. And that's without having to go out and buy anything. It makes sense. We're going to have a hard time ever being happy if we aren't thankful for what we already have.

*“Self-actualizing people have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have become to others.”* - **Abraham Maslow** (founder of humanistic psychology)

An easy way to implement this happiness habit is by keeping a gratitude log. When you wake up in the morning, jot down a couple of things that you're grateful for that day. It could be anything from your freedom, to your health, to your family, to the food you eat.

Another amazingly powerful thing to do is spontaneously call someone and thank them for something that they did for you. Although it may have been a recent act of kindness, it could potentially also have happened 10 years ago at your cousin Lisa's wedding. Your call – it's a powerful one!

# <sup>2</sup>Cultivating optimism

**Winners have the ability to manufacture their own optimism.** No matter what the situation, the successful diva is the chick who will always find a way to put an optimistic spin on it. She knows “failure” only as an opportunity to grow and learn a new lesson from life. People who think optimistically see the world as a place packed with endless opportunities, \*especially\* in trying times.

*“Between the optimist and the pessimist, the difference is droll.*

*The optimist sees the doughnut; the pessimist the hole!”*

**Oscar Wilde** (19th century Irish poet)

We know that the thoughts we think repeatedly are the ones that shape our reality. So when you train your mind to expect the best, you get the best results in return.

One way you can implement this habit today is by starting a “Best-Selves Diary.” Spend a couple of minutes each day visualizing what your life would look like in a year, or 5 years, or 20 years, if everything from now until then went \*perfectly\*. Then write down what your day would look like, how you would feel, what you would have accomplished, etc...

I personally love to cultivate optimism by spending a couple of minutes each night, while I’m lying down in bed, visualizing what my \*ideal\* day will be tomorrow. I imagine waking up and having a powerful meditation, followed by a creative journaling session, and then spewing out a series of rock-star writings. I also think about all the interactions I’ll have that day and visualize what the best possible outcome is. I picture myself bringing love, playfulness, insight, and growth to every interaction I have. I like to spend 2 minutes doing the same when I wake up in the morning before I open my eyes.

# 3 Avoiding over-thinking and social comparison

**Comparing yourself to someone else can be poisonous.** If we're "better" than the person that we're comparing ourselves to, it gives us an unhealthy sense of superiority. Our ego inflates – KABOOM - our inner Kanye West comes out!

If we're "worse" than the person that we're comparing ourselves to, we usually discredit the hard work that we've done and dismiss all the progress that we've made. What I've found is that the majority of the time, this type of social comparison doesn't stem from a healthy place.

If you feel called to compare yourself to something, compare yourself to an older version of yourself.

*"Envy is ignorance. Imitation is suicide."* – **Ralph Waldo Emerson**  
(19th century American philosopher)

I've made this mistake a lot in my life – I'd see some successful person and do everything I could to become them. But while learning about \*how\* they've become successful is super powerful, trying to \*be\* them is kryptonite.

I'll never be able to be a sexier Brad Pitt than Brad Pitt is, but I can learn what he did to make himself so attractive. It makes a lot more sense (and life a lot easier) to strive to ***be a first class version of yourself*** rather than a second class version of someone else. If you catch yourself compulsively comparing and thinking about these kinds of things, break the habit!

I've found out the hard way that over-thinking while your mind is in a negative state is TOXIC! It's like adding fuel to the "screw yourself over" fire.

The best thing you can do is stop thinking – completely! Go for a walk, sing a song, work-out, get a massage, take a power-nap, watch a funny movie, or play with your poodle named Peaches – anything to get your mind to shut up!

# <sup>4</sup>Practicing acts of kindness

**Performing an act of kindness releases serotonin in your brain.** (Serotonin is a substance that has TREMENDOUS health benefits, including making us feel more blissful.) Selflessly helping someone is a super powerful way to feel good inside.

What's even cooler about this kindness kick is that not only will you feel better, so will people WATCHING the act of kindness. How extraordinary is that? Bystanders will be blessed with a release of serotonin just by watching what's going on.

A side note is that the job of most anti-depressants is to release more serotonin. Move over Pfizer, kindness is kicking ass and taking names.

*“Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love.”* - **Lao Tzu** (mystic philosopher of ancient China)

I love this one! Both big and small acts of kindness are equally amazing. You can imagine how good it feels to come through for someone and save their day. But at the same time, I love doing little things for people like opening the door to the bank and letting them in first.

Another fun one is, sometimes when I make eye contact with a complete stranger, instead of holding an intense stare, I'll break into a really big smile! It totally takes them by surprise. Compliments in elevators are nice gestures too and a good way to kill the awkward “iPhone/Blackberry moment.”

## <sup>5</sup>Nurturing social relationships

**The happiest people on the planet are the ones who have deep meaningful relationships.**

Did you know studies show that people's mortality rates are DOUBLED when they're lonely? WHOA!

There's a warm fuzzy feeling that comes from having an active circle of good friends who you can share your experiences with. We feel connected and a part of something more meaningful than our "lonesome" existence.

*"Stay with friends who support you in these. Talk with them about sacred texts, and how you are doing, and how they are doing, and keep your practices together."* – Rumi (13th century Persian poet)

Ah yes, what good is all the success in the world if we don't have anyone to share it with?!

One way that you can nurture social relationships is by taking a *sincere* interest in what people are going through in their lives.

Schedule some time to talk with friends about what they're up to. Share some things that are meaningful to you as well. A cup of tea during the day, meeting up for lunch, going out with them on nights or weekends - all of that is great stuff.

Another thing you can do is this... When you're dealing with people at work, instead of rushing into whatever the reason for the interaction is, genuinely ask the person you're working with something about themselves.

Sometimes you'll be shocked as to what you can find out about someone... "You toured with Kiss for 6 years in the '70s?! What!?!"

# 6 Developing strategies for coping

**How you respond to the “craptastic” moments is what shapes your character.** Sometimes shit happens – it’s inevitable. Forest Gump knows the dealio. It can be hard to come up with creative solutions in the moment when manure is making its way up toward the fan. It helps to have healthy strategies for coping pre-rehearsed, on-call, and in your arsenal at your disposal.

*“Opposition is a natural part of life. Just as we develop our physical muscles through overcoming opposition - such as lifting weights - we develop our character muscles by overcoming challenges and adversity.”* – **Stephen Covey** (author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*)

When stuff starts to heat up, one of the first things I do is exchange a big belly breath with the universe. That may be the single most effective thing you can do to cope with any situation. BREATHE!

It’s also great to become conscious of your physiology - straighten your back and ground your feet flat on the floor. So much out of our mental energy is directly dictated by our physical being. Take a couple more of those deep breaths.

Another thing that can help tremendously is to take in the other person’s perspective and compassionately imagine what it feels like to be them. That’s a HUGE one.

Also, If you have a favorite song, or YouTube video, or person to talk to – use it! Embrace the positive emotion that comes from these things to get your mind off of what’s going on.

Has something been reoccurring that really pisses you off every time it happens? Think about the best way to respond to it, *before it happens again*. This is golden. Bling Blouw!

# 7 Learning to forgive

**Harboring feelings of hatred is horrible for your wellbeing.** You see, your mind doesn't know the difference between past and present emotion. When you "hate" someone, and you're continuously thinking about it, those negative emotions are eating away at your immune system. You put yourself in a state of suckerism (technical term) and it stays with you throughout your day.

*"When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free."*

- **Catherine Ponder** (American minister and inspiration author)

In order to create our ideal futures, we need to be able to forgive our pasts. If we stay in the past, our minds will grow old and bitter.

We've gotta' focus on what we want from life and not what we don't, because ultimately, what we continuously focus on is what we'll get.

It helps to keep in mind that when you forgive someone, you are really doing \*yourself\* the favor, not them.

# <sup>8</sup>Increasing flow experiences

**Flow is a state in which it feels like time stands still.** It's when you're so focused on what you're doing that *you become one with the task*. Action and awareness are merged. You're not hungry, sleepy, or emotional. You're completely engaged in the activity that you're doing. Nothing is distracting you or competing for your focus.

*“Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person's capacity to act.”* – **Tal Ben-Shahar** (professor of positive psychology at Harvard University)

Flow comes from an equal balance between the difficulty of what you're doing, and how skilled you are at doing it.

If you're over-skilled, the task will be boring. If you're under-skilled, you'll become anxious and stressed. But when you find the delicate balance between the challenge and your ability, you'll enter a state of flow.

# 'Savoring life's joys

**Deep happiness cannot exist without slowing down to enjoy the joy.** It is easy in a world of wild stimuli and omnipresent movement to forget to embrace life's enjoyable experiences. When we neglect to appreciate, we rob the moment of its magic.

It is the simple things in life that can be the most rewarding if we remember to fully experience them.

*"He who distinguishes the true savor of his food can never be a glutton; he who does not cannot be otherwise."* - **Henry David Thoreau** (19th century American philosopher)

A great way place to start savoring life's joy is with food. When you sit down to eat, you can start by reminding yourself how fortunate you are for having the food in front of you. Yes, bless it, thank it, and then eat it.

When you take a bite, put the fork down and focus of chewing and tasting the flavor of the food. See if you can take 40 chews before you swallow. Wait until you've completely swallowed the food in your mouth before you put another piece of it onto your fork and into your mouth.

Of course, there's an infinite amount of things that you can choose to savor. The trees, the bees, the grass, some ass... Chilling with friends... Coming home to a warm home... Being able to look up information in a split second (that up until recently could have taken weeks to find...) - you pick!

# <sup>10</sup>Committing to your goals

**Being wholeheartedly dedicated to doing something comes fully-equipped with an inflexible force.** Magical things start happening when we commit ourselves to doing \*whatever it takes\* to get somewhere. When you're fully committed to doing something, you have no choice but to do that thing. Counter-intuitively, having no option – where you *can't* change your mind – subconsciously makes humans happier because they know part of their purpose.

*“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.”* – **William Murray** (19th century Scottish writer)

I love, love, love this one. Did I mention I love this one? There's something so ridiculously extraordinary about being committed to doing something. You can feel the difference in saying “I'm going to *try* to live a life I love” and “I'm fully *committed* to living a life I love.”

Did you know that in 1879, Thomas Edison committed to having an electric light-bulb by the last day of the year? This was despite the fact that all of his previous attempts had failed. On December 31st, 1879, there was light!

Or how about John F. Kennedy? In 1962, he declared to the world that the USA would have a man on the moon by the end of the decade. This was despite the fact that some of the metals needed to complete the journey hadn't even been invented yet. Ask Neil Armstrong if he remembers what happened on July 20, 1969!

I write my biggest commitment (my purpose) down every morning after I wake up.

One piece of wisdom that I'll offer you here is this: When you get all excited about committing to something, focus on being consistent with it and not intense about it. Resist the urge to blast off face first into a new project, task, or goal. You'll probably be super stoked to get your groove going, and in turn, you may burn out pretty quickly.

Commit to things for the long term. I'm not committed to living an extraordinary month – I'm committed to living an extraordinary life!

# <sup>11</sup>Practicing religion & spirituality

**When we practice religion and spirituality, we recognize that life is bigger than us.**

We surrender the silly idea that we are the mightiest thing ever. It enables us to connect to the source of all creation and embrace a connectedness with everything that exists.

*“The spiritual force transcends all. I feel this great creative and spiritual force within me that is greater than faith, greater than ambition, greater than confidence, greater than determination, greater than vision. It is all these combined.”* – **Bruce Lee** (20th century Chinese martial arts philosopher)

Some of the most accomplished people feel that they are here doing the work they are “called to do.” Some take it a step further and feel as if they aren’t doing work at all, but are \*being used\* as an instrument for a higher power to operate.

Whether or not you believe in “God” as popular culture and ancient scripture depicts her, this is an enormously powerful paradigm to have.

Meditation is one of the most powerful ways in which you can step your spirituality game up today. Sitting quietly for a couple of minutes and focusing on your breathing has been shown scientifically to have TREMENDOUS benefits on your mind, body, and soul.

I committed to meditating every day about a year ago and haven’t missed a day since. I can’t speak highly enough about the transformation it has helped bring me through - your turn!

# <sup>12</sup>Taking care of your body

**Taking care of your body is crucial to being the happiest person you can be.** If you don't have your physical energy in good shape, then your mental energy (your focus), your emotional energy (your feelings), and your spiritual energy (your purpose) will all be negatively affected.

*“Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it.” – Plato* (classic Greek philosopher)

Did you know that studies conducted on people who were clinically depressed showed that consistent exercise raises happiness levels just as much as Zoloft? (Karate chop to all the pill poppers' throats!)

Not only that, but here's the double whammy... Six months later, the people who participated in exercise were less likely to relapse because they had a higher sense of accomplishment since they made the change in their life themselves. Profound findings indeed.

One easy thing you can start doing is taking 30 minute walks. You can wake up earlier and take them then... You can go out during your lunch break... Or you can even do them in the evening.

If you committed to spending just 1% of your time to exercising, you'd be in great shape. In actuality, exercising 1% of your time equals about 5 separate 20 minute workouts throughout the week.

# Conclusion

**I've known about the above for quite some time now, so, has it made me happier?** Hell yeah! But here's the poopier scooper: "just" knowing about it won't do a damn thing for you. You've gotta' actually create rituals in your life around this knowledge and make them non-negotiable. It's as essential to daily life as eating, showering, and breathing.

Happiness is a skill... a practice.... a muscle...

The more time you spend consciously working it out, the more jacked up you'll be about life. If you start slacking and skipping sessions at the happiness gym, you'll shortly after shrink in size.

The above topics are all tackled by Sonja Lyubomirsky in her book called "The How of Happiness." Here's something really cool that Sonja says:

*"Pick your \*favorite\* happiness habit from the list and just focus on that \*single\* one. Not the one that you think you should do, but instead, the one that you want to do!"*

So pick one. Just one. Any one. And commit to consciously and deliberately practicing it for 3 weeks. (Research shows it takes 21 days to develop a habit.)

Spend a minimum of 10 minutes a day focusing on it and feel the full effects of how happiness works. At the end of the 3 weeks, if you feel like starting to implement another happiness habit, go for it!

Happiness, like mastery, is about the journey. Sure there are ups and downs but those pass, and in the long run, you're only gonna be as happy as you're committed to being.

One of the most effective and meaningful ways to consistently live from a place of happiness is to live life "on purpose." Finding and living your purpose brings the type of happiness that emanates from your core no matter how somber a situation can seem.

I've spent the last several years of my life learning as much as I can about living on purpose. In the upcoming weeks, I'm going to send you some of the most valuable information that I've discovered during my quest. In the meantime, you can start applying some of the happiness habits from above right now. It's an awesome (and by awesome, I mean scientifically proven) way to increase your happiness today.

On purpose, *Jacob*

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