

The Habits of Happy People

Twelve Important Life Lessons

*Make Them A Part of
Your Life and Start Experiencing
Greater Happiness*

Author: Thomas J. Slominski, M.A.



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Preface

How often do you want to experience happiness in your life—once a day, ten times a day, thirty times a day? How many hours each day do you want to feel joy, hope, love, confidence, excitement, or vitality? In this book you will learn that *you* are in complete control of how much happiness you experience each day of your life. You will learn that you are in control of the feelings you experience.

The information in this book will teach you how to create the feelings you want to experience each and every day of your life.

Most of us reach adulthood with specific beliefs and attitudes firmly in place. The problem is that many of us don't understand how these beliefs and attitudes affect our moods and feelings or even how these beliefs and attitudes became part of us. Some people fall apart emotionally if they are not appreciated or treated with respect. Others live by rules that cause them emotional pain and suffering. For example, they believe: If people don't like me there must be something wrong with me.

This book will help you examine your beliefs and attitudes to determine if you need to change them. This book will also examine the beliefs and attitudes of happy people so you can compare your beliefs and attitudes with the beliefs and attitudes of happy people. You will also learn how you can experience positive emotions regardless of the events or circumstances in your life. And you will learn how happy people maintain positive

thoughts and feelings even when bad things happen to them.

This is not to say that if you decide to challenge and then change your current way of thinking you won't ever feel angry, frustrated, or depressed again. What I mean is that if you adopt the habits of happy people, you won't experience negative emotions for long periods of time. And, once you learn to think and behave like happy people do, failed relationships, financial loss, major mistakes at work, or rejection from friends and coworkers will not stop you from *experiencing happiness and becoming content with your life*.

It is critical you understand that you cannot experience happiness until you have replaced your negative emotions (anger, guilt, fear) with positive emotions (joy, contentment, excitement). This book will explore the process and steps necessary to do this so that negative emotions no longer control your life. You will also learn that it is very important to spend time thinking about what you can control and what you are responsible for. The clearer this becomes to you the better position you will be in to experience happiness in your life.

Note: It is important that you read the Introduction in this book before you delve into the twelve habits of happy people as it lays the foundation for the information that follows. You can, however, read the chapters on the twelve habits of happy people in any order you choose. Each chapter ends with self-reflection questions that you may use to meditate upon and apply the principles discussed to your life's circumstances and situations.

Introduction

This book is based on the following premises:

- Your beliefs influence how you feel, think, and act throughout your life.
- It is possible to control the feelings you experience by developing specific thoughts.

Beliefs

A *belief* is a feeling of certainty about something. For example, if you believe a certain food prevents cancer, you will probably consume that food on a regular basis. If you have a choice to purchase this food item or another food not believed to prevent cancer, you will select the food item you believe will prevent cancer assuming you can afford this food. Your **behavior** (purchasing the food thought to prevent cancer) was influenced by your **belief** (this food will protect me from getting cancer).

Likewise, if you believe a specific car manufacturer produces the most reliable and safest car, you will purchase a car from this car manufacturer the next time you purchase a vehicle. The **behavior** (purchasing a specific car) is influenced by the **belief** (this car manufacturer makes the most reliable and safest car).

And so it is with everything you do as an adult. You behave in specific ways because of the beliefs you accept to be true. You don't talk to certain individuals because you believe they are rude. You feel guilty when people are sad

or depressed because you believe it is your responsibility to make people happy. You hold back and don't do something you really want to do because you believe you aren't capable of doing it, or because you don't believe you deserve it, or because you believe someone will disapprove of your actions.

In this book I will help you examine your beliefs so that you can determine if they are good or bad for you and if the beliefs you hold to be true are based on fact or false information.

Values

A value is something that is important to you. Your values also influence your behavior, and your values are related to your beliefs. For example, if you value money you will devote a lot of time to activities that will help you earn more money. If you value security, you will put your valuables in a safe deposit box, or you will refrain from buying on credit, or you will install an alarm system in your home. Someone who values freedom will fight to the death to preserve it.

Below is a list of values many people feel strongly about. Each individual, however, would rank these values in a different order of priority. This is important to keep in mind when you begin to examine your beliefs.

Freedom	Good Health	Security
Passion	Family	Education
Self-Reliance	Faith (Religion)	Financial Security
Respect	Love	Achievement
Creativity	Peace of Mind	Gratitude
Joy	Companionship	Low-Stress Environment
Leadership	Compassion	Forgiveness
Perfection	Tolerance	Loyalty

Imagine that you made plans to attend a concert with your significant other on Friday night. Friday morning, your boss asks if you can work late to finish a project. He explains that there are other employees who can do the job, so it's okay if you choose not to work late. He only wanted to give you the first chance. If you value financial security more than family, what would you do? Chances are you'd agree to work late.

Your values influence your behavior and how you feel. If you decide to attend the concert instead of working late, you might experience anxiety over the possibility of your choice affecting your job (financial) security. You might be preoccupied and not have a good time. If this is the case, you might ask yourself: Is it more important, at least once and a while, for me to spend time with my family rather than pleasing my boss? By asking questions like this you can challenge your beliefs and values.

The information in this book will help you determine if your current beliefs and values are helping or preventing you from experiencing happiness in your life.

For now, you should remember:

Change your beliefs and the ranking of your values and you can change your feelings.

Beliefs Influence Feelings

As I stated earlier, most people think that the events and circumstances in their lives influence the feelings they experience. A man is fired from his job and gets depressed and becomes an alcoholic. A woman is diagnosed with cancer becomes angry and refuses to discuss possible treatments. It seems that the loss of a job and the diagnosis of cancer are

the events that caused these negative feelings and behaviors. Please consider another explanation for these reactions and feelings.

Consider that the *meaning* given to these events and circumstances is what caused the feelings, not the events and circumstances. A different man who is fired from his job may feel relief. Another woman who is diagnosed with cancer may feel challenged. **The point I will make throughout this book is that the meaning you give to the events and circumstances that occur throughout your life determines your feelings, and the meaning you give to these events and circumstances is based on your beliefs and values.**

The following model describes the process of how feelings influence behavior:

Event Occurs
Meaning Given to the Event
Feeling(s) Experienced
Behavior Demonstrated

The man who became depressed when he was fired from his job and then became an alcoholic gave a specific meaning to the event based on his beliefs. The meaning he gave to this event could have been based on the following beliefs: “It’s all over now! I’ll never find another job. I’m never going to be able to pay my bills. It’s hopeless.” These thoughts, based on his beliefs about what would happen in the future, caused the negative feelings he experienced. What if his thoughts were: “I’ll find a way. I’m capable of doing something else. I’m resilient. This job loss is only temporary and will lead to better things.” It is likely that, with these thoughts, this man would have experienced positive feelings, perhaps confidence

and hope, instead of depression and may not have turned to drinking to escape his depression.

To summarize: the **event** (job loss) triggered **beliefs/thoughts** (I'll never find another job.), which created the **feeling** (depression), which led to specific **behavior** (excessive drinking).

In the example of the woman diagnosed with cancer, she most likely experienced anger due to thoughts like: "Why me? Why didn't my doctor catch this sooner? My life is ruined. It's over for me. There's no hope now. I'll never get to do the things I really wanted to do." What if her thoughts were: "I'm going to focus on getting better. I will make some changes in my life and take the time to do what is important to me. I know I can beat this cancer." Do you think she would have experienced a different set of feelings and behaved differently than the woman who was angry?

To summarize: the **event** (diagnosed with cancer) triggered **beliefs/thoughts** (Why me? It's hopeless.), which created the **feeling** (anger), which caused the **behavior** (refusal to discuss treatments).

Can you think of other times when two people have had the same or similar experiences and yet reacted in very different ways? The reason this can happen is that each person gives a different meaning to the experience.

As we examine the habits of happy people, it will be important to look at the meanings they give to the events and circumstances they encounter. Your feelings are an indicator of your mental health, which is why it's important to recognize and accept them. Accepting negative feelings does not mean that you endorse them. You just need to accept them, then start thinking about how these feelings

came about and why these feelings are controlling your life.

As we explore the process of how you experience your feelings, we will focus on your thoughts. You will learn that positive thoughts create positive feelings and that negative thoughts create negative feelings. You will be encouraged to pay close attention to your thoughts, since your feelings are dependent on these thoughts. You will be asked to listen to your thoughts just before you experience an emotion. You will learn that these “thought flashes” (I can’t. It’s too hard. He’s a jerk. I can do it. I can learn this. I’m resilient.) control your feelings. Once you understand this process, you will be on your way to experiencing more joy and happiness in your life.

Before we examine some important definitions and list the habits of happy people, I want to remind you that you have complete control over how you feel and to stop blaming others for how you feel. The sooner you stop blaming others for how you feel and take full responsibility for your feelings and actions, the quicker you will begin to experience happiness. Also, if you want to change the way you are feeling, you will need to change the meaning you associate with the events and circumstances in your life.

Important Definitions

Belief: a feeling of certainty about something.

Cognition: thinking, reasoning, and the process of drawing conclusions.

Depression: a feeling of hopelessness, where nothing seems to matter any more.

Happiness: a life dominated by hope, joy, excitement, love, and peace of mind.

Negative Emotions: feelings like anger, fear and guilt that make a person feel unhappy and out of control.

Peace of mind: a life without negative emotions.

Positive Emotions: absence of anger, fear and guilt.

Rules: what a person thinks must happen before he/she can experience positive emotions.

Self-Esteem: how much a person likes him/herself.

Unhappiness: a life controlled by anger, fear, or guilt.

Values: ideas or objects that are very important to someone.

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Habit Number One

Happy People Get Concerned, But They Do Not Worry Excessively

Happy people encounter challenges and setbacks like everyone else. They lose jobs, make mistakes, fail at relationships, get sick, and have financial problems. How is it that happy people spend little time worrying about these events? Before I answer this question let's review the definition of *worry*. Worry is sustained anxiety related to a fear that something bad will occur. For example, a mother is continually anxious when she believes her son is using drugs. A man is constantly on edge when he thinks his job is in jeopardy. A young woman is anxious when she believes the man she loves is having an affair. A teenager experiences frequent episodes of anxiety because her brother was diagnosed with cancer and she thinks she will get it too. A father is upset that his son is failing in school.

If we could get inside the head of the mother whose son is taking drugs, we would probably hear things that suggest negative outcomes: "Our family will be shamed. What will people think? My child's life is ruined. I should have paid more attention. It's probably too late now." With thoughts like these, it would be difficult for the mother to feel anything but anxiety.

Whenever you are preoccupied with what someone else thinks, whenever you lose hope, whenever you blame yourself, or whenever you blame a third party for

a problem, negative emotions will dominate and control your life.

If we could get inside the head of the man who may lose his job, we would probably hear him saying things like: “I’ll never find another job that pays as much as this one. I should have worked harder. How will I ever pay my bills? My father was right about me, I’ll never amount to anything.”

Thoughts of hopelessness and despair (I can’t do anything about it.) **will only lead to feelings of anxiety and a life of unhappiness.**

If we could listen to the young woman’s thoughts, we would probably hear statements like: “I’ll never find anyone else. I’m too fat. I’m not funny enough. It’s my fault. If he dumps me, watch out! It’s payback time!” These thoughts show that the woman has little self-confidence and will experience anger and other negative emotions if her husband doesn’t change his behavior.

The teenager who fears she will get cancer is probably having thoughts like: “I’m too young to die. No one will be there to take care of my family. I won’t be able to endure the pain. Why is it always me? Life isn’t fair.”

Thoughts focused on death, pain, and a lack of confidence in others to carry on will cause anxiety.

The father whose son is failing in school probably thinks: “I should have done more with him when he was younger. He has no future. It’s too late. He’ll never change.” The father sees his son as a failure and blames himself for this imagined negative outcome.

In the above scenarios, it’s obvious that these people are not happy people. Let’s return to our question: How is it that a happy person would spend little time worrying about

these situations? How could someone experience joy and peace of mind when faced with these challenges?

As I said earlier, worry results from a fear that something harmful is about to happen. How does a happy person choose not to dwell on the harm that could result from negative events and circumstances? What kind of meaning does a happy person give to these events to avoid being influenced and controlled by negative emotions and fearful thoughts?

Most happy people live by certain core values and beliefs. They see the world in a positive way. They:

- Consider happiness to be a choice.
- Take full responsibility for their feelings.
- Believe they control what happens in their lives (excluding accidents and natural disasters).
- Believe their lives have value.
- Believe they can make a difference.
- Look for important lessons when they make mistakes.
- Understand how easy it is for people to lose hope and to feel inadequate.
- Challenge their beliefs.
- Ask questions that force them to examine their current way of thinking.
- Understand that material things are important but not the most important thing in life.
- Do not feel responsible for making other adults happy.

Let us now examine how happy people might respond to the scenarios described earlier.

Loss of a Job

If a happy person lost his job, through layoffs or firing, one of the first things he would ask himself is: What must I do to make sure I have enough income to pay my bills? Filing for unemployment would be a priority. Then he would consider how he wanted to spend the next chapter of his life. He would try to find a job that suited his interests and talents. If he couldn't find a job that paid enough to cover his bills, he would take any job on a temporary basis, to have income while looking for a job more suited to his skills. Happy people understand that it is important to work in an area they enjoy.

A happy person would also use this event as a time for reflection. He would think about how often things happen that he cannot control. Even though he was a loyal worker he could not prevent the decision that resulted in his losing his job. This would help him understand that he cannot control how other people think and act regardless of his efforts. This realization helps happy people understand why life changes often, and it reminds them of what they can and cannot control. **Happy people know that only they can give meaning to the events they experience and whatever meaning they give to these events will determine the feelings they experience.** Again, they would remind themselves that only they have control of the thoughts that determine their feelings. Then they would choose to believe that this job loss was an opportunity to find even greater happiness in their life. They would start looking for the options and opportunities in front of them.

When happy people face the possibility of a lower standard of living, they accept this event without anger or resentment by reminding themselves that although material

possessions provide comfort and enjoyment, they are not a lasting source of happiness. This enables them to accept a life without certain amenities. Maybe they will have to move into a smaller home or sell one of their cars. Perhaps they could not afford to dine out as often or take an annual vacation. Of course, if these comforts became affordable in the future, that would be fine. Happy people like to enjoy life.

Child on Drugs or Alcohol

It can be devastating to realize that your child is using or is addicted to alcohol or other drugs. Even happy people would worry briefly about their child's behavior and how this will affect their child's future. But, before too long, happy people would use this news as a wake-up call to analyze how much time they actually spent with their child. How often do they talk with their child? What examples are they setting for their child? What immediate course of action needs to be taken?

First and foremost, a happy adult knows that children (of all ages) need:

- Firm but gentle guidance
- Unconditional love
- Encouragement
- Hope
- Trust

Happy adults also understand that children must reach the point where they:

- Take responsibility for their actions.
- Feel in control of what they do.

With these beliefs in place, happy people would initiate



a plan of action. This plan might include talking in depth with the child about her drug use, seeking professional help, admitting past parenting mistakes and asking for forgiveness, and making phone calls to determine who their child has been spending time with. Happy people would then resolve to never give up on their child even if the child chooses to pursue harmful behavior.

A happy person would also make attempts to spend more time with their child. At first, the child might reject the offer, but a happy person will back off, then try again another time. The child's rejection would not discourage a happy person. Happy people understand that love, encouragement, and hope are the best weapons to battle a troubled life.

Knowing that it takes time to heal emotional wounds, happy adults would be comfortable giving their child time to think. Happy adults would have faith that their child would choose happiness over sadness. If professional counseling were needed, a happy adult would be open to it. And, during this process of struggle and emotional growth, happy people would avoid using the following expressions

when interacting with their child:

- What's the matter with you?
- Do you know how stupid you are acting?
- Keep doing that and you'll die!
- You think you're really something, don't you?
- Go ahead. Keep taking drugs (or drinking) and see what happens.
- If you don't stop this, we don't want you in the house anymore.
- You are a disgrace to the family.

Happy adults would continue with their lives, while providing love, care, and guidance to their child. They understand that doing these things can influence their child to choose good over evil. They also understand that doing these things is no guarantee their child will not suffer because of making bad decisions. Happy adults are able to separate their decisions from those of their child and so do not take responsibility for the decisions made by their child. This is indeed difficult to do, but happy people find a way to do this by the thoughts they choose to dwell on. If their child did make a bad decision and was suffering because of it, a happy adult would think things like:

- I need to be there without judging.
- I need to tell her I still love her.
- I need to remind her that mistakes can be overcome if a commitment is made to change.
- I need to tell her I will be there for her if she wants to talk.

Happy adults believe in the power of love and forgiveness and, even when things are going badly, expect something good to happen.

Worrying About Cancer

Happy people understand they could get cancer. They realize the changes that the disease could cause in their bodies and the consequences of chemotherapy and radiation. They also know they could die from cancer.

A happy person accepts the worst possible outcome and then does everything in his/her power to prevent it from happening. They make improvements in their lifestyle, including: positive thinking, eating healthier foods, and getting plenty of exercise and sufficient rest. They work on improving their relationships with the people they love since they know it is never too early or late to communicate love, acceptance, and understanding. Happy people also concentrate on doing things they enjoy because they know they might not get a second chance. Basically, they stop thinking about the cancer and concentrate on living.

Happy people believe:

- I can make a difference, so I need to start doing it today.
- To some degree I have control over my health.
- I'm capable of dealing with anything.
- Every minute I'm alive is a gift.
- I need to tell the people close to me how much I care about them.
- Positive thoughts are powerful weapons against disease.

Child Failing in School

A happy adult is sensitive to the fact that children need encouragement, acceptance, and successful experiences in order to develop self-confidence. Therefore, happy adults:

- Are interested in their child's homework and suggest ways to make studying easier.
- Praise their child for making an effort to improve.
- Remind their child that effort is necessary to accomplish anything.
- Structure the day so there is quiet time devoted to studying.
- Encourage their child to invite friends over to study, then order pizza or bake cookies for them as a reward.

A happy adult knows to:

- Be patient with children.
- Stay away from “why” questions (Why don't you study harder? Why do you give up so easily? Why don't you listen better in school?).
- Point out an earlier success and communicate the belief that it can happen again.
- Expect the child to become discouraged and frustrated.
- Refrain from arguing.
- Share some of their personal failures and explain how they overcame them.
- Express what they believe the child is good at.
- Explain that perfection is not necessary for success.

Happy adults remind themselves that although they can influence how their child will act, they cannot control their child's actions. They realize that the best chance for a positive outcome is to communicate confidence, acceptance, love, and encouragement.

Being Rejected

The thought of someone not liking you or rejecting you can threaten your self-esteem and make it difficult for you to be successful in other areas of your life. Happy people have learned they can't be everything to everyone and they can't please everyone all of the time. Happy people also understand that not everyone is a perfect match, and it is good to find this out before major commitments are made.

Rejections are viewed as opportunities to find a better situation. Happy people believe they will be better off without the person who has rejected them.

Happy people believe:

- I'll find a mate. It's just a matter of time.
- I'll find someone who accepts and supports me.
- Sometimes it's important to be alone because it reminds me how strong I can be and that happiness comes from within.
- If I don't find someone to share my life with, I'll make my own life.



In Review

Worry does not dominate happy people's lives because they have learned that fears related to possible negative outcomes will always exist. Because of this awareness, they formulate plans of action to prevent the worst from happening. If the worst possible outcome occurs, they accept the reality and deal with it as best they can. Happy people are prepared to take action. And, taking action is what prevents worry from dominating their lives.

If you review the examples, you will see that happy people take some kind of action to keep worry out of their minds. Happy people know that lack of action is their own worst enemy because it gives worry a chance to control their lives.

To stop worrying you must:

1. Identify what it is you are worrying about and write it down.
2. Be willing to accept the worst possible outcome if it happens.
3. Decide what needs to be done to prevent the worst possible outcome from occurring.
4. Take action to prevent the worst thing from occurring.
5. Expect better things to happen.

Self-Reflection Questions:

1. Is there a current situation in your life that is causing you sleepless nights or troubled thoughts during the day? If yes, have you identified your fear associated with this situation?
2. Are you blaming yourself for this situation?
3. Is the fear of what others will think paralyzing you from taking action?
4. Are you willing to accept an outcome for this situation that is contrary to your deepest desire and yet do whatever is in your power to prevent that undesired outcome?