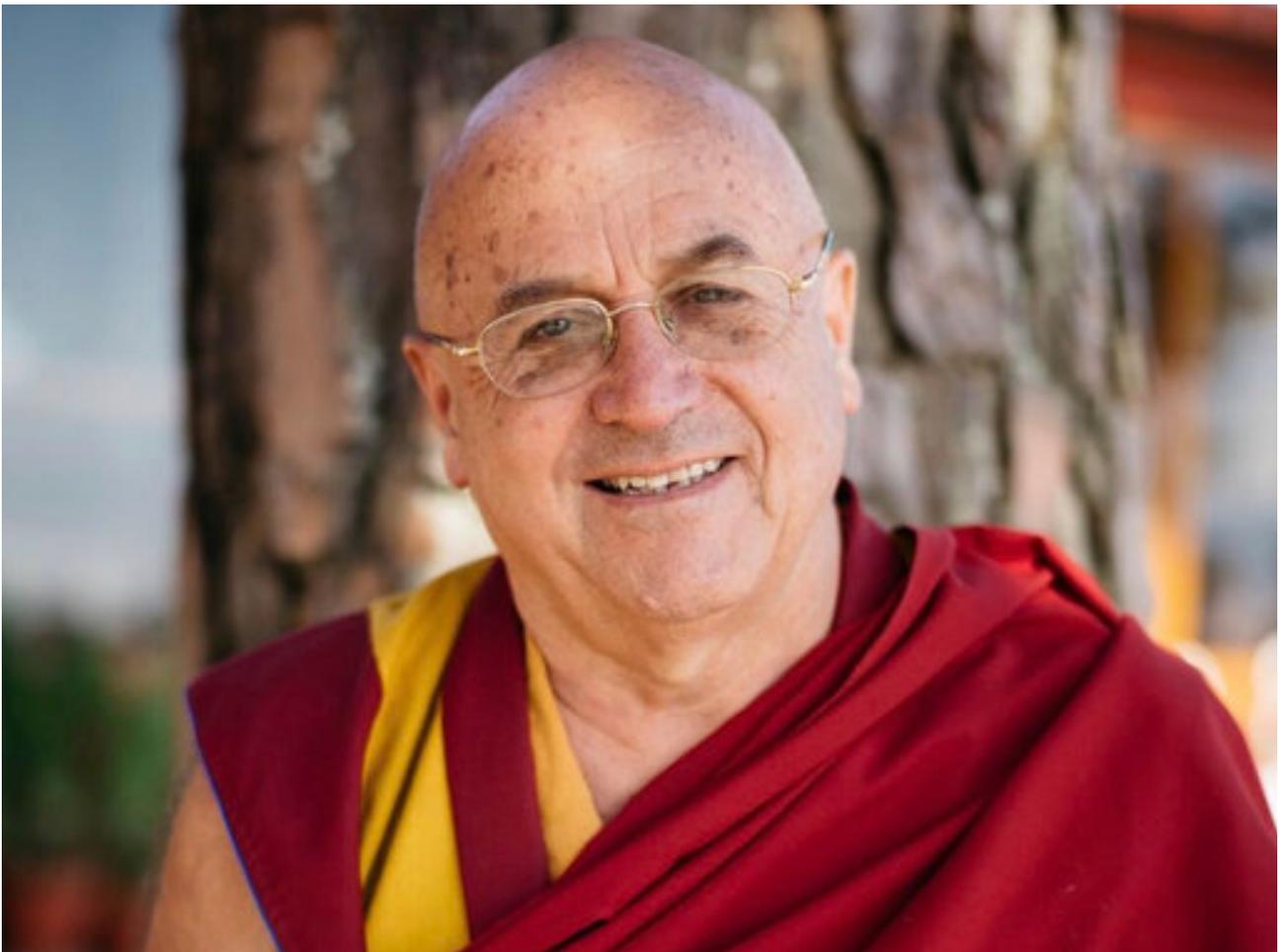


# 12-week Happiness Challenge

[Whatispersonaldevelopment.org](http://Whatispersonaldevelopment.org)



## WEEK 1 — Why Am I Not Happy With My Life?



If you ever thought, “why am I not happy with my life” this series of article on happiness should help you.

In this series of articles, I’ll discuss several of the reasons most of us aren’t as happy as we could be. I’ll also delve into what we can do about it. You’ll see how your brain tricks you.

You may not agree with all the points I’ll be making. However, I hope you’ll feel at least a tiny bit happier after you finish this series.

At the end of each article, I’ll give some straight forward exercises to help you practice what you learn in the article. Now, let’s get started!

### **Your brain is not designed for happiness**

Why am I not happy with my life?

One of the answer to that question has to do with the way your brain operates.

The first thing you must understand about happiness is that you brain is not designed for it. It’s almost like your brain tricks you out of your happiness.

Your brain is designed to ensure your survival, and that's the reason you're here today. Your brain makes sure that you feel good after you eat, drink, have sex, or do something that feels safe. That way, you won't die from hunger, thirst, or putting yourself in danger, and you'll be likely to pass on your genes. Aside from that, however, your brain won't help with your happiness unless you train it to.

These days, the way your brain is wired has become largely obsolete. People no longer have to risk their lives for food and water on a daily basis, and saber-toothed tigers aren't lurking at every corner. Yet, your brain constantly scans your environment for potential threats.

As such, your brain is wired to focus on the negative. Have you noticed how just one negative comment about your work can outweigh the hundreds of positive comments you've received?

That's probably because of the way your brain functions. Anything that can lead to being ostracized or rejected is perceived as a threat.

As silly as this may seem today, it was actually very important for the bulk of human history. In the past, being expelled from one's community could mean exposure to the elements, decreased ability to successfully hunt, and, ultimately, death.

Nowadays, death isn't such a huge threat. It's rare to be expelled from one's community, and it wouldn't be a death sentence if it were to happen.

Even so, our brains are still looking for potential threats and the possibility of rejection. It's as if the brain has learned to redirect its focus from major threats to minor ones. Anything that carries even the remote possibility of rejection is often perceived as a threat.

You can test this out for yourself. Take a look at your negative emotions and fears. You'll notice that many of them have to do with fear of rejection and the desire to belong.

Your boss criticizes your work? Fear instantly kicks in. On a subconscious level you begin to think the worst. What if you get fired and can't find another job? If that happens, your spouse and kids will likely leave you and you'll eventually become homeless. Sooner than later you'll die on the streets and no one will remember your existence. Pretty scary, isn't it?

Yet, in reality, most of the things we worry about will never happen. As Mark Twain said, "I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened." The media, politicians, and marketers love to play on our fears because it makes us more vulnerable and easier to manipulate. Fear sells, not rational arguments.

Did you know that people buy more products after seeing negative news than they would have otherwise? It's crazy, but true! No wonder we're inundated with bad news and all things fear-inducing.

So next time you catch yourself thinking, why am I not happy with my life, remember that your brain can often trick you into focusing on the negative while there are a millions of positive things we can focus on.

## **The importance of conditioning your mind**

Fortunately, though our brain tricks you into focusing on what could go wrong, we have the power to condition our minds to experience more positive emotions. We can stop being enslaved by our fears. After all, most of us are living in relatively safe environments and have a myriad of things to be grateful for. Why should we waste our time and energy on a negative mindset?

Some people would argue that it's unhealthy to continually see the glass as half-full. Yet I don't believe seeing it as half-empty is a better alternative.

Conditioning your mind to experience more positive emotions doesn't mean losing touch with reality. It doesn't mean that you live in denial of what's happening right in front of you. It just means that, after properly assessing the situation, you choose to stop worrying about it. You refuse to let your brain tricks you.

As you'll see in the next article, we're addicted to worrying, which causes a lot of unnecessary stress in our lives. As such, it's important that we learn to focus on the positive side of things rather than dwelling on negative. This is crucial to increasing our happiness. Fortunately, it can be done through daily conditioning.

Personally, I condition my mind each morning as part of my morning ritual. I spend time focusing on everything I'm grateful for. I listen to gratitude meditation while stretching and meditate for 25 minutes, among other things.

It took time to get results, but thanks to this regular mental conditioning, I almost always wake up feeling great. I actually think that conditioning my mind in the evening would allow me to wake up even happier.

If you want to increase your overall happiness, cultivating gratitude on a daily basis is probably the best thing you can do. I really can't stress enough how important that habit is. Your brain can trick you into dwelling on negative, but you can trick your mind to focus on the positive.

Focusing on the positive side of things means that instead of thinking, "why am I not happy with my life?", you ask yourself, "what am I grateful for right now"?

## **Exercise – Cultivating gratitude**

This week's exercise is very simple. Take just 2-3 minutes each morning to think about what you're grateful for. Choose one of the following exercises:

- Ask yourself what you're grateful for today
- Write down at least 3 things you're grateful for in your journal or on a piece of paper.
- Listen to gratitude meditations or videos on the subject to increase feelings of gratefulness

Experiencing gratitude is a skill that requires time and practice. Don't worry if you struggle to feel it at first. As you consciously focus on things you're grateful for, your mind will subconsciously begin to focus on them automatically. You'll then start appreciating the little things in life, and may even find yourself with more things to be grateful for.

I challenge you to do one of these exercises every day for the next 7 days? Are you up to the task? Let me know in the comments section below.

## WEEK 2 — How to Combat Anxiety and Eliminate Problems



In the second article of the happiness series, we're going to discuss how you can combat anxiety and eliminate many problems in your life by using an old method borrowed from the Stoics.

*“Let me show you how much time we waste in worrying about the wrong problems. Here is a reliable estimate of things people worry about: Things that never happen 40%, things that are over and past and that can never be changed by all the worry in the world 30%, needless worries about our health 12%, petty miscellaneous worries 10%, really, legitimate worries 8%. In short, 92% of the average person worries take a valuable time, cause painful stress even mental anguish, and are absolutely unnecessary.” – Earl Nightingale*

Are you a chronic worrier? Do you waste precious time and energy worrying about what may happen in the future?

What if I lost my job? What if I don't find the right one? What if I never meet the right guy/girl? Are these the kind of thoughts that run through your head? If so, don't "worry". You're not alone. Most of us spend way too much time worrying.

In this article, I'm going to share how you can combat anxiety and eliminate many of your problems by sorting out your worries.

## **Combat anxiety by sorting out your worries**

*For every ailment under the sun,  
There is a remedy, or there is none;  
If there be one, try to find it  
If there be none, never mind it.  
-Mother Goose*

Happiness is not so much the absence of problems as it is the avoidance of creating illusory ones. If you wonder how to combat anxiety and eliminate most of your problems, you have to realize first that we often worry about things from the past that we can do nothing about. We worry about things that could (but probably won't) happen in the future.

In general, we worry about things we have absolutely no control over. This creates unnecessary suffering and generates a lot of stress. Yes, it's as insane as it sounds!

To avoid worrying and enjoy a happier life, it's important that we learn to sort out our worries very carefully so that we can eliminate illusory problems and better combat anxiety.

There are three types of worries:

1. Things we have absolute control over
2. Things we have some kind of control over
3. Things we have no control over

### **1. Things we have absolute control over**

Things you have total control over include the goals you set for yourself, the actions you take, and how you react to any given situation.

You don't have absolute control over the outcome of a tennis match you're playing, but you do have control over how much you practice. You also have control over your attitude during the game.

Will you get pissed off and give up because you lose the first set, or will you stay focused and get through the match? The choice is yours, because you have total control over it.

### **2. Things we have some kind of control over**

To continue with our earlier example, the outcome of the tennis match is something you have some kind of control over. You can practice as often as possible, which will increase your likelihood of winning.

Of course, it doesn't provide any sort of guarantee. You may get injured or your opponent may play exceptionally well that day. In this situation, you only have a certain amount of control. You have to focus on what you can control before and during the game rather than on winning, which is something you can't completely control.

We all like to win, but there's no reason for regret if you do your best. When you give it your all, you can feel good about yourself even if you lose.

Separating the things you have limited control over from the things you have absolute control over, can help you combat anxiety and eliminate some of your problems, or at least, mitigate them.

### **3. Things we have no control over**

Unfortunately, there are many things we have no control over in life. Trying to control these things is pure insanity, and a guaranteed recipe for unhappiness. That's not the right way to combat anxiety.

It's our responsibility to see things we have no control over for what they are. Of course, that's not what most people do. The majority of people get angry about what happens to them and dwell on it for days, weeks, months, or even years.

You can certainly do that, but, if you really care about your well-being, why would you? Because we have the tendency to try to control everything, it's imperative that we learn to place things in the following 3 categories: what we can control, what we can somewhat control, and what we can't control.

That's probably the best way to combat anxiety and it will eliminate many problems that fall into the last two categories.

While it sounds simple on paper, combatting your anxiety this way requires a lot of discipline. It must be practiced until you reach a point where you can shrug off worries about that which you can't control.

A normal reaction to an unpleasant situation should be, "What can I do about it? Nothing? Okay then. Next!"

To better combat anxiety, ask yourself if you can do something about a particular situation before you start worrying. You should also ask yourself if worry is actually helping you, and if there's anything you gain from it. If the answer is "no", then there's no point in fretting.

Now, let me give you some examples of situations you have no control of:

- Having your wallet stolen with no way to get it back
- Losing all the data on your computer with no way to retrieve it

Let's say someone does steal your wallet and you lose your cash, driver's license, credit card, and so on. What will you do about it? How would worrying help you? It won't do anything for you besides increase your chance of having a heart attack. That's not how you want to combat anxiety.

The question you want to ask yourself is this: What do I do next? Whatever it is, go do it. The faster you take action, the less time you'll have to worry about what just happened to you.

As for the data loss scenario, it happened to me about a month ago. I may have been able to get my data back, but it would have taken 3 months and cost \$1,500. And even then, there would have been no guarantee that anything would be recovered.

When I realized my computer was broken, I decided upon how much I was willing to pay to recover the data. Since the quote I was given exceeded that amount, I decided not to do it.

At that point, I knew I wouldn't be able to get my data back. Knowing that pushed me to get over the situation, as there was nothing I could do to change it. As a result, I immediately began rewriting drafts of the two books I lost. I didn't waste a week or more crying about it.

Fortunately, I'm now almost done rewriting the books. I also learned my lesson: Always back up your work! I combatted anxiety by sorting my worries and realize their was nothing I could do about it. That's how I like to eliminate problems.

A friend of mine who is also a blogger and writer told me that he would probably consider suicide if the same thing had happened to him. Hopefully, he was joking. He relayed this in the following email:

*Oh no, so sorry to hear that Thibaut. Can you not recover off the hard drive? I really hope you can. That's one of my worst nightmares. I once lost a blogpost and I was distraught. Think I'd be suicidal if I lost a book.*

As you can see, you can overcome worries in seemingly uncontrollable situations, it just takes some work. Some people may say that it's perfectly normal to worry, but I would argue against that.

Worrying about something you can do anything about isn't normal. It's actually just crazy-making. I hate worrying, and the last thing I want to do is to freak out over things I can't do anything about.

Does that mean I'm a living Buddha? Unfortunately, no. Far from it. I worry like anyone else, but I keep in mind that, to paraphrase Mark Twain, most of the things I'm worrying about will never happen. And when they happen, I ask myself what I can do about it. If there's nothing to be done for it, I move on.

## **Worrying gives the illusion of control**

Most of us are addicted to worrying. For some reason, we believe that worrying gives us control over a situation, but that's just an illusion.

We have to get into the habit of sorting out our worries, as that is the only way to overcome them. As we categorize our worries, we'll begin to realize that most of them are useless.

Yes, I know. You want to believe that your worries are legit. That's how you probably try to combat anxiety. But if your worries aren't legit, then what was the point of wasting so much time and energy on them?

That may be another reason we're so attached to our worries. It's like staying at a job you hate because you've already invested years of hard work into it. Or staying in a relationship that doesn't work because you've been in it for years.

No one wants to feel like they've wasted their time, and we can make some pretty unhealthy decisions to avoid that feeling. It's important to realize that the time we've "lost" is just a sunk cost. Fortunately, zero-base thinking can help you deal with situations like this. If you could go back in time to when you were offered the job, would you take it? Knowing what you know now, would you accept the offer?

Knowing what you now know, would you start dating the person you're in an unhealthy relationship with?

These are two very difficult questions that require a great deal of courage to answer. If the answer is "no", however, what sense does it make to continue doing what you're doing?

Coming back to your worries: Knowing what you now know about them, do you still want to continue worrying as much as you have in the past? Hopefully, your answer is no.

## Exercise – Sort out your worries

Your exercise this week is to sort your worries on paper. Follow the 5 steps below:

1. Get a pen and a piece of paper.
2. Create the following three columns: “Worries”, “Level of control”, and “Next Action”.
3. Write down all the things you’re currently worrying about (include both short and long-term worries).
4. Write down whether you have, “absolute control”, “some control”, or “no control” of each worry.
5. Write down what, if anything, you can do about each worry.

For each of your worries, remember to ask yourself these important questions:

- What can I do about it?
- How does worrying help me here?

To further help you, I’ve created a simple file. You can download the pdf version [here](#) or the word version [here](#)

So how about you? What do you worry about, and what do you think life would be like if you could worry less? Let me know in the comments section below!

## WEEK 3 — What's your personal definition of happiness and success?

*I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer. – Jim Carrey*



So you've finally made it. You have money, power, and prestige. Better still, everyone around you is impressed by your success.

Yet, you don't feel happy. That's probably how many successful people feel right now. That may even be how you feel right now. That's probably because you haven't come up with your personal definition of happiness and success.

These days, "success" is one of the most overused words. The internet is littered with articles and books that go something like this:

- *10 Things Successful People Do That You Don't*
- *How to Be Successful in Life*
- *101 Ways to Achieve Success*

But what does it even mean to be successful? What is your personal definition of happiness and success? What is happiness to YOU?

Before you continue reading, I'd like you to answer this simple question: What is happiness to you? Unfortunately, many people spend their lives working towards success only to find that "making it" doesn't make them any happier. What a waste of time! That's the last thing I want you to experience.

## **What's your personal definition of happiness and success?**

In today's society, there's a widespread definition of success that goes largely unchallenged. Have you ever read an article on success in which the author defined the meaning of success before telling you how to attain it? That's pretty rare.

When I talk about success, I always start by defining what I mean by it. I don't want my readers to get the wrong idea.

Success means different things to different people. Your personal definition of success is likely different from mine. For some people, success might mean working for a well-known company and making 6-figures a year. That's what would make them truly happy.

I once met someone who wanted to work for a big corporation. He seemed to be genuinely excited about it, yet I couldn't personally understand why anybody would want that kind of job. It seemed like such a loss of freedom to me. As you can see, not everybody has the same goals or personal definitions of success!

My personal definition of success is pretty simple: If you're happy, then you're successful. That's it. What's the point of making tons of money or gaining status and influence if you aren't even happy? It would be ridiculous!

Have you ever considered that your favorite entertainer might be less fulfilled than you are? Yes. It's extremely possible, if not probable. If people knew how many so-called successful people were unhappy they wouldn't be so eager to follow in their footsteps.

Instead of looking at celebrities and feeling bad about yourself for your lack of success, why not assume that you're happier than many of them? How would that make you feel? Wouldn't that make you more successful than they are?

If you don't take the time to come up with your personal definition of happiness and success, you may end up wasting a lot of time doing things that you shouldn't be doing in the first place. What is happiness and success to you?

## **Society doesn't care about your happiness**

I've got some bad news for you: society doesn't care about your happiness.

Society was never designed to make people happy. It's designed to ensure that we live in harmony and don't kill each other. Okay, I have to admit, that certainly plays a role in the happiness we experience each day. I won't deny that. But it's still not society's job to make us happy. We can't expect that. Society is a bit like our brains, its purpose is to keep us alive. It doesn't go very far beyond that.

Many things that society expects us to do aren't necessarily in our best interest. You're expected to go to school, get good grades, find a job, get married, buy a house, have kids, retire, and die. Do you think the agenda here is to make you happy? None of these things will make you happy in and of themselves.

I don't understand, I did everything right. I did well in school, I have a great career, I'm married with kids, and everybody keeps telling me how successful I am. So why am I still unhappy?

How often have you heard someone say something like this? People often refuse to take it seriously because they don't understand how these things could fail to make a person happy.

The reason "success" leaves so many people unhappy is very simple: they started out with incorrect assumptions. They mistakenly believed that society's rules were in place to make them happy. This belief led them to give their power away to society itself. In essence, they fell for a lie.

Happiness is an inside job and it's a huge mistake to believe that something or someone else should make you happy.

If they had taken the time to come up with their personal definition of happiness and success, they could have avoided such situations.

Does this mean you should quit your job, avoid getting married, or decide not to have kids?  
No. It just means that you shouldn't expect these things to make you happy on their own. Nor should you expect happiness to be a permanent state when you do achieve it. Even those who are generally happy don't feel that way all the time. That's just not how our minds are wired.  
What is happiness to you?

Are you clear on your personal definition of happiness? If being successful means being happy, you need to know the answer to this question. Don't worry about what should make you happy according to society (or anyone else, for that matter). Think only about your own standards.

So, stop asking yourself how you can become more successful or make more money. Instead, ask yourself how you can experience more joy and happiness in your everyday life. That would be a much more powerful question to ask yourself.

Success and happiness aren't as complicated as we may think. Most truths in life are simple. So simple, in fact, that they can be easily overlooked.

### **Exercise – What do you need to be happy?**

Your exercise this week is to write down your personal definition of happiness (and success) until you become crystal clear about it. Be as specific as you can.

Rather than writing down everything you need to be happy, try the opposite approach and work your way up. Ask yourself this:

**If I could choose only one thing that would make me happy, what would it be? If I could choose one more thing besides that, what would it be?** And so on and so forth.

So grab a pen and paper and jot down what makes you happy. Knowing your personal definition of happiness will help you take the right decisions and maximize your chances to live a happy life. In the next article, we'll go into more detail about the misconceptions people have regarding happiness. I think you'll find it enlightening. In the meantime, let me know how your happiness exercise goes in the comments section! I'd like to know what your personal definition of happiness and success is.

What is happiness to you?

## WEEK 4 — The Psychology Behind Happiness



Are you one of those people who believes that you don't need to read books about happiness because it's something that comes naturally? What if it doesn't? What if knowing the science behind happiness could allow you to live a happier life?

This week we're going to talk about the science behind happiness. Sadly, happiness is one of the most important things in life, but few people understand the psychology behind happiness. Even fewer people take the time to study it.

Many people assume that we naturally know what makes us happy. Is this true? Well, it may have been hundreds of thousands of years ago, before civilization came along and we began to use our brains for mental masturbation. These days, I'd venture to say we don't automatically know what makes us genuinely happy. Thus, understanding the psychology behind happiness has become essential for our well-being.

If the knowledge of what makes us happy were inherent, it would have to exist in a world where we aren't conditioned by society regarding how to think and behave. Unfortunately, that world just doesn't exist.

In truth, society has hijacked the definition of happiness by manipulating our brain's use of dopamine. As a result, many people end up confusing happiness with other things. They chase happiness but never seem to catch it.

If you can seem to catch happiness, don't worry, in this article we'll explain the psychology behind happiness so that you can start reclaiming your happiness.

## **How dopamine is making you unhappy**

Okay, let's talk about dopamine. Dopamine is the high that you get when you gamble, have sex, or eat great food. It's what makes you check your Facebook newsfeed 100 times a day. It's also what makes you feel great each time someone leaves you a nice comment or likes your stuff on social media.

Let's explain briefly what dopamine is and what purpose it serves. Dopamine is the center of pleasure and was originally designed to ensure that we look for food so that we don't die and search for a mate so that we can reproduce. Without dopamine, our species would likely be extinct by now. It's a pretty good thing, right?

Well, yes and no. In today's world, this reward system is, in many cases, obsolete. We don't need to act each time our brain releases dopamine. We don't need to constantly check our Facebook newsfeed just because it gives us a pleasurable shot of dopamine.

Today's society is selling a version of happiness that's making you unhappy. We've become addicted to dopamine largely because of marketers who are skilled at exploiting the way it interacts with our brains. We receive multiple shots of dopamine throughout the day and we love it. But is that happiness?

Dopamine can create real addictions. Research conducted at Tulane University showed that, when given permission to self-stimulate their pleasure center, participants did it an average of 40 times per minute. They chose the stimulation of their pleasure center over food! even refusing to eat when hungry.

Lee Seung Seop is an extreme case of these. He died in 2005 at just 28 after playing the game StarCraft for 58 hours straight with very little food or water and no sleep. It was concluded that the cause of death was heart failure induced by exhaustion and dehydration.

It's easy to understand why marketers constantly look for innovative ways to stimulate our pleasure center. They want us to become addicted to their product. This isn't particularly healthy. But it doesn't matter to them, as long as we buy what they're selling.

Sugar is a great example of this. Sugar can be an addictive substance, and our bodies aren't used to it due to how recently it became available. Sugar's addictive properties are part of the reason why it's so prevalent in most of the food and beverages you find in the supermarket.

Unfortunately, if you want to decrease or remove sugar from your diet, you have to cook your own meals, or at least avoid processed food.

## **Society is designed to please your ego**

Society has manipulated your ego, which is another way in which it hijacks your happiness. This phenomenon can be clearly seen with branding. I'm not going to get too deep into what the ego is right now, as it's not the main point of the article. If you'd like to know more about it, you can learn more about it in my article [What is the Ego?](#)

In the context of this article, the ego is a tool of marketers. The last thing companies want you to realize is that you don't need most of the things they're trying to sell you on. They must make you believe that you need them.

How? By triggering your emotions and manipulating your ego. They make you feel that purchasing their product means you're important, smart, and part of a special group. You're not like everybody else, are you? No! You're much more than that. YOU are special. Unique.

Today's overconsumption matches the workings of our ego surprisingly well. Guess what? One of the main characteristics of the ego is that it's never satisfied. Your ego makes you feel as if you never have enough, and it always wants more. Does that remind you of something? Perhaps it reminds you of some of the commercials that tell you that you need more of whatever you have or must upgrade to the latest version.

Yes, our need for more, more, more manifests itself as overconsumption. In my opinion, this is the reason capitalism has been the dominant economic system for so many years. It aligns perfectly with the wants and needs of the ego: more, more, and more! But guess what? Buying more stuff isn't going to bring you lasting happiness, peace, or fulfillment.

I was shocked when I heard that, in the United States, lack of credit cards or loans has a negative impact on your credit score. You need to be in debt to be able to borrow more money. I couldn't believe it. It encourages everyone to play the game of "more", and gets many people into debt that they can't repay.

## **External events have little impact on your happiness**

A big misconception is that you can buy happiness. It's not what we find out when we look at the psychology behind happiness. Let me share a great study with you that will likely change the way you see happiness. This study, which was done on lottery winners and paraplegics, was very eye-opening for me.

The study, conducted in 1978, evaluated how winning the lottery and becoming a paraplegic influence happiness:

The study found that, a year after the event, both groups were just as happy as they were beforehand. Yes, just as happy (or unhappy)! You can find more about it by watching Dan Gilbert's Ted Talk, The Surprising Science of Happiness here

Most of us tend to believe that we'll be happy once we've "made it", But, as this study on happiness shows, that's simply not true.

No matter what happens to us, we revert back to our predetermined level of happiness once we adapt to the new event. That's how our minds work, and why you should know the psychology behind happiness.

Does that mean that we can't be happier than we are right now? No. What it means is that, in the long run, external events have very little impact on our level of happiness.

In fact, according to Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of The How of Happiness, 50% of our happiness is determined by genetics, 40% by internal factors, and just 10% by external factors. These external factors include such things as whether we're single or married, rich or poor, and things of that nature.

Only 10% of our happiness is linked to external factors! That's probably way less than you thought. The bottom line is this: Your attitude towards life is what influences your happiness, not what happens to you. Now that you better understand the psychology behind happiness, what are you going to do to live a happier life?

In the next article, we'll discuss further the psychology behind happiness and see what you can do to influence the 40% of your happiness that you do have control over. Stay tuned!

## **Exercise – How addicted are you?**

This week, let's leverage your new understanding of the psychology behind happiness to increase your level of happiness. This week's challenge involves the following:

- **Looking at the effects of dopamine on your life.** Look for situations in which you feel an impulse to do something potentially addictive. It could be the urge to spend hours upon hours playing video games, watching TV, checking Facebook, or going through your emails. Start noticing the craving. When you do, you'll realize how addicted you are to these things.
- **Go on a cleanse.** Select one thing you're particularly addicted to. Then, go a full day (or at least half a day) without engaging in that activity. This could mean refusing to check your social media accounts, avoiding the television, or refraining from playing video games.

## WEEK 5 — The Recipe for Happiness: Making It a Priority



Would you abandon everything you have in exchange for the recipe for happiness?

Unfortunately, we often spend time chasing things that don't make us fundamentally happy. It could be material things or a job promotion. Or perhaps we dream of retiring early to live happily ever after, to name just a few possibilities.

However, have you considered that these things may not be the ideal recipe for happiness and may end making you unhappy instead?

Will moving into a bigger house or having a flashier car contribute to a significant increase in your level of happiness? Is it worth sacrificing time with your family to get that promotion?

It's important to realize that whenever you buy something, you're exchanging a chunk of your life (your time) for that thing. It's a trade-off. The question is: Is that particular thing worth trading hours of your precious time?

For example, is getting into debt to buy a Porsche a good strategy to maximize your happiness?

That's up to you to decide. Before you do that, try calculating how many hours of work you're trading for it. Would you trade an entire year of work for it? Would that be worth it? Remember that you can never get more time. Everything you buy is part of your life that you willingly give away. When you start looking at things you buy in terms of the amount of time exchanged for them, you'll start questioning some of your purchases.

Personally, I consider my time to be the most valuable asset that I have. That's probably one of the reasons I don't buy many things. I know that the more I buy, the less control I have over my life. The worst part is getting into debt, which is rarely worth it. In my opinion, there aren't many things that are worth trading a big chunk of our lives for. In a sense, I could say that my recipe for happiness is to buy less things.

## **What is your recipe for happiness?**

What do you do to make yourself happy? Are the choices you're making maximizing your happiness? We've already seen that society and big companies aren't here to make us happy. We've also seen that it is the nature of our ego to always want more. Of course, all of these things tend to work against our happiness.

What about you? Do you take your happiness seriously, or do you buy into society's definition of success and happiness without questioning it?

Happiness isn't necessarily complicated. It doesn't require doing extraordinary things. Rather, it may require you to stop doing some of the things you're currently doing and to stop buying things you don't need.

## **Exercise – what makes you happy?**

This week we're going to do a very simple exercise.

I'd like you to come up with your own recipe for happiness by answering the following question: what makes me happy? I'm not talking about the regular shot of dopamine you get from playing video games, gambling, or checking Facebook. I'm not talking about the excitement you get by drinking with your buddies during the weekend, either. I'm talking about what makes you feel at peace and brings you a lasting sense of fulfillment.

A friend of mine once said that drinking beer was the only thing that made him happy. If the only thing you're looking forward is drinking beer on Friday night, that's not genuine happiness. It's just escapism! Temporary relief from a boring and depressing life. It's important to think about what brings you true happiness.

## WEEK 6 — The Key to Happiness is Ditching “One Day I Will...”



Complete the following sentence: I'll be happy when \_\_\_\_\_.

What came to mind? But why wait to be happy?

The key to happiness is not the perfect spouse, tons of money in the bank account, and perfect health. The conditions you attach to happiness make it hard to achieve. You decide upon things that will make you happy, and won't allow yourself to experience happiness until you have them. Unsurprisingly, you spend most of your time in a state of unhappiness. So yes, I'm here to tell you that one of your biggest problems is that your standard for happiness is too high.

- I won't be happy until I reach 8% body fat.
- I won't be happy until I get that promotion.
- I won't be happy until I find the right partner.
- I won't be happy until I lose 20 pounds.

The real key to happiness is to lower that standards. The truth is, we don't need much to be happy. Do you have food on the table each day and a roof over your head? If so, you already have everything you need to be happy. As Tony Robbins says, we must learn to trade expectation for

appreciation. It seems that even Robbins, who is an extremely high achiever, realized that the key to happiness is appreciating what he already had rather than always wanting more.

So instead of expecting more, why not start appreciating what you already have in your life?

## **The “One Day I Will” Myth**

Overly high standards aren't the only issue here. Unrealistic expectations regarding the future are also a problem. The “one day I will” myth puts a huge wedge between you and your happiness.

- One day, I'll get married and be happy.
- One day, I'll retire and be happy.
- One day, I'll open that restaurant and it's going to be great.

Another key to happiness is to drop the “One Day I will” type of thinking. Here's the issue with this line of thinking: If you're not happy right now, what makes you think you'll be happy once you get what you want? Sure, you may experience a jolt of happiness for a few days, a few weeks, or even a few months. Eventually, however, you'll go back to your previous level of happiness. Do you remember the experiment with the lottery winners and paraplegics we mentioned in the Psychology Behind Happiness?

The thing you think will make you happy generally doesn't bring as much fulfillment as you think it will. If you're unhappy now, there's a high chance that you won't be happy in the future, either. As such, it's a much better idea to work at being happy on a daily basis. It sure beats hoping you'll be happy one day when a certain thing comes to pass. What if it never happens? Are you going to be miserable for the rest of your life?

Does this mean you should have low standards and zero ambition?. Of course not! Look at Tony Robbins. It just means that you need to balance having high standards and wanting more with appreciating what you already have. The level of happiness you experience shouldn't be determined by whether or not you meet your standards.

Of course, striking this balance can be very tricky and requires some practice. However, the next section should help make it a little easier.

## **Appreciating the little things in life**

How often do you take time to smell the roses? Chances are, you take most things in life for granted. This tendency makes the struggle to be happy even more difficult. Here are some examples of things many of us take for granted:

- We take our health for granted, but those who are dying would give anything for one more month, week, or day.

- We take our food for granted while millions of people are dying (literally!) for something to eat.
- We take electricity for granted. It wasn't long ago that this wonderful technology was completely inaccessible!
- We take our families for granted, yet we've give anything to have another day with loved ones who have passed.

The tendency to take things for granted isn't completely your fault. In fact, it's largely due to the way your brain is designed. Your brain is fantastic at adapting to new things, which is both a blessing and a curse.

It's definitely a blessing when some terrible happens to you. It's the reason the people who became paraplegic were able to return to their previous levels of happiness after a few months. As bad as it was, they adapted to a new situation.

It was, however, a curse for the lottery winners. They probably thought that having millions of dollars in their bank accounts was the key to happiness. They already envisioned themselves having their dream life and being happy for the rest of their life. But that's more or less impossible with how our brains are wired. No matter how amazing something may be, your brain will eventually get used to it, and the initial happiness it gives you will begin to fade.

The key to experience more happiness in your day-to-day life, is to retrain your mind to focus on your blessings. After all, the things you have today could be gone tomorrow. Who knows?

You may take our health for granted, but remember that you could get sick at any time. How many people are here today and gone tomorrow? Did you know that 150,000 people die each day?

Do you realize that everything around you was created by other people? Every building you visit, every chair you sit on, every product you purchase...these are all the fruits of someone else's labor. Even the trees in the park were planted by others. Aren't you lucky that these people chose to put their time and effort into these amazing things?

What about the insane number of services you have access to? You take airplanes for granted and complain when your flight is delayed. Yet you should be amazed that there's a metal tube that can fly you around the globe in just a few hours. There was a time when it would have taken you months or even years to go to the other side of the globe (and it would very likely have cost you your life!).

You take the Internet for granted and complain if it's too slow. Yet you should be amazed at the amount of free information you can access, all thanks to other people's hard work.

Taking things for granted often creates a sense of entitlement. Doesn't that seem a little misplaced to you? Shouldn't we feel lucky for all the things we have instead? And isn't that the key to happiness? We have access to so many things at little to no cost these days that it's almost too good to be true. When it comes to being alive, what better time than now?

## **Exercise - Redefine your standards for happiness**

This week I'd like you to redefine your standards for happiness by answering the following questions:

1. What are my current standards for happiness? We all have certain things we believe we need to be happy. However, we're often unaware of what these things are. Take some time to figure out your standard. It could be having a partner, getting a promotion, or losing weight, for instance.
2. What is your "one day I will" event? Thinking that you're going to be happy once you achieve your goal is mostly, if not completely, a myth. Look at your "one day I will" and ask yourself whether you genuinely need it to be happy.
3. What are your new standards for happiness? Lower your standards for happiness. What is the least you need to be happy? Is your answer true, or can you further lower your new standards

So why not take a piece of paper, answer these 3 questions and start redesigning your standard for happiness? Because if not now, then when will you be happy? The key to happiness lies in your hand so make sure you use it.

## WEEK 7 — Finding Happiness by Knowing Yourself



How well do you really know yourself? Is it possible that you inflict yourself unnecessary suffering by living a life that is misaligned with who you really are? Finding happiness requires that you know yourself well.

### **Finding happiness starts by knowing yourself**

While we'd like to think we know ourselves, we often miss important pieces of the puzzle. Each individual is different and nobody else can tell us how we should behave, what goal we should pursue or who we should marry. Finding happiness is truly an inside job.

To make it even more difficult, society shapes our expectations and somewhat dictates what we "should" do to be happy. The whole plan seems to be already laid for us.

Do you want to be happy? Go to school, get good grades, find a stable job in a prestigious company and get married. Voila! Now you should be happy. But what if you're not? What if finding happiness requires that you take a different path?

Or, we're told that we should party during the weekend. If you don't, something must be wrong with us. We must be depressed for sure.

I remember one day when I was working at a convenient store in Japan, two colleagues were discussing about marriage and how such and such should hurry up and marry to "become

happy” (literally in Japanese). I always found this expression strange. It sounds like a perfect example of social conditioning to me. Is her happiness really depending on whether she gets married or not? Can't she be happy unless she gets married? Will she be finding happiness once she gets married? I doubt so.

To enjoy yourself more it is essential that you know yourself. What it means concretely is that you must know exactly what matters to you and be aware of your personality traits such as whether you're an introvert or an extrovert. Finding happiness start by knowing yourself at a deeper level.  
Finding happiness by knowing your core values

What matters the most to you? Is it freedom, passion, connection, family or security?

The important decisions you take in life will be dictated by your [core values](#). If you don't know your core values, but simply act in accordance with society's expectation, you'll end up making the wrong decisions and will struggle to reach deeper levels of fulfillment. You may end up feeling something is not quite right while unable to pinpoint what it is.

For instance, if one of your core values is security, you'll be happy having a secure 9 to 5 job in a large company. Now, if your most important value is freedom, you'll be unlikely to find happiness in such an environment.

Similarly, if you value connection and need to be around people most of the time, being a researcher spending his whole day in his laboratory might not be the ideal situation. However, if you enjoy your own company that may actually be quite enjoyable.

I would like to encourage you to spend time to reflect on your core value. For more in-depth explanation check out my article on core value [here](#). It will help you create your list of core values.  
Finding happiness by knowing your personality

Are you an introvert or an extrovert? Do you know what that means and what the implications are? While everybody has a least some vague idea of what introversion and extroversion are, many people don't understand at a deeper level what the concrete implications are. That's especially true for introverts who struggle to find their place in a world that, in many regards, seems to have been designed for extroverts.

Introversions and extroversion are important personality traits, but you'll also find many other personality types. One of the most famous personality test is probably the MBIT which features 12 different types. Make sure you know what your personality type is. It will help you design a life that is aligned with your personality. (you can take a free test [here](#))

I'd like to spend some time discussing about extroversion and introversion as I think it's an important topic to know about. (For more on introversion read [Everything You Ever Needed to Know About Introverts: A Comprehensive Guide](#))

First, let's give a clear definition of what introversion and extroversion are. What distinguishes introverts from extroverts is the way they create and consume energy. Extroverts need a lot of stimulation from the outer world. Without it, they start losing energy and begin to feel bored, lonely, or tired.

Introverts need less stimulation from the outer world and time spent in social situations will deplete their energy, forcing them to withdraw and spend time alone in order to rejuvenate themselves.

It's crucial for introverts to understand that being introverted is NOT the same as being shy.

Although there is some correlation between the two, they are two different things. Not all introverts are shy. Conversely, some extroverts are shy, which can be frustrating. If you're a shy extrovert, you want to talk but you can't!

Introverts may make their life harder than it is if they try to behave as extroverts. They may experience shame or guilt for not having a good time during parties or struggling to network effectively. They may lose confidence believing that they aren't interesting. Or they may feel constantly drained if they are forced to spend too much time interacting with other people.

As an introvert, the last thing I want to do is to interact with a large group of people all day long. I would rather spend most of my day writing, reading or working on my computer at home (which is exactly what I do now).

If you're an extrovert, you might crave interaction and be frustrated and unhappy if this fundamental need for human interactions is not properly met.

It is not difficult to imagine then, that certain work environments will be ideal for extroverts, but a nightmare for introverts (and vice-versa). It's only when you know what your needs are, that you can design a life that is aligned with your true nature.

Though there are a lot more that can be said about our personalities, living a life that is aligned both with our core values and our introversion/extroversion will result in a deeper sense of well-being and should be something to strive for.

## **Exercise - Finding happiness**

Finding happiness is an inside job so make the effort to better understand yourself. That way, you'll be able to design a life that is aligned with who you are.

This week I would like you to do two simple exercises that will help you increase your happiness in the future.

1. Write down 5 core values. Take a pen and a piece of paper and brainstorm until you come up with 5 core values that are important to you. You can check my personal list [here](#)
2. Identify one thing you could change in your life to increase your well-being as an introvert/ extrovert. Write down what is one simple thing that you could do to improve your well-being. It might be something very simple like finding more time throughout the day to recharge your battery.

## WEEK 8 — The Benefits of Unconditional Giving

*The secret to living is giving. – Tony Robbins*



When was the last time you gave something unconditionally to someone? How did it make you feel? We've already discussed the fact that getting more stuff doesn't make us happier. In this article we're going to explain why unconditional giving is better than our compulsive desire to get things from people.

### **Why you should stop trying to get**

In today's society, the primary focus seems to be on getting. We're all attempting to get stuff from other people. I'm not just talking about material things here. I'm talking about how hard we try to get people's attention, approval, love, or recognition.

The need to get things comes from our ego. It comes from the idea that we aren't enough and need more to be complete: more recognition, more love, more respect, more money, more stuff. It comes from a place of scarcity and fear. From the idea that there isn't enough for everybody. Because getting comes from a place of scarcity and fear, it can't bring us lasting happiness. No external thing will ever complete us.

## **Was Darwin wrong?**

Darwin said it was survival of the fittest, right? We must compete against each other à la The Hunger Games to survive in a merciless world. But is that the whole story? Is competition the true driving force?

If it is, then why do we feel so good when we engage in random acts of kindness? Why do we like to give money to charity? Why, as this study shows do people report feeling happier when they spend money on others rather than themselves? Why would our brain be designed in such a way to encourage unconditional giving if we were all selfish pricks competing for our survival?

Cooperation has always been crucial to our survival. Seeing the world exclusively through the lens of competition is misleading. Because people believe that they need to get more to be happier and they tend to underestimate the power of unconditional giving. They don't realize how it can positively impact their level of happiness.

It's as if people think that being happy necessitates other people being unhappy. Fortunately, happiness is not a limited resource. And unconditional giving is a great way to spread more happiness in the world. So, why not give more?

## **Are your actions fear-based or love-based?**

Whenever we act, we can choose to operate from a place of fear or a place of love.

When we act out of fear, we're trying to get something. If we're afraid we're not good enough, we try to get the love and approval of others. We might try to make more money so that people will admire and respect us. We buy all sorts of things because we feel incomplete and think that possessions will make us feel whole. Sometimes, we believe people will complete us: we want to get that guy or girl because, if we're with them, we'll finally feel complete. Or so we think. These are all examples of acting from fear and lack.

When we act from a place of love, on the other hand, our focus is on giving. We feel whole, so we can give and share instead of trying so hard to get. Giving makes us happy. We like to give money to charity, and we enjoy helping other people. We want to feel useful and know that we're making a difference in someone else's life. As you can see, unconditional giving is a win-win situation. It makes us happier while positively impacting the lives of other people.

Conversely, getting is a poor strategy when it comes to maximizing our happiness. It doesn't do much to improve society, either.

## **Exercise – Practice unconditional giving**

This week's exercise is pretty straightforward: This week, I invite you to focus on giving. You could, for instance:

- Give something to someone
- Give money to charity
- Do some volunteer work
- Help someone without expecting anything in return

Then, see how it makes you feel. I'd love to hear what impact unconditional giving has on your happiness, so please let me know in the comments section!

## WEEK 9 — Why You Should Stop Being a Consumer and What You Should Do Instead



Do you spend most of your free time watching TV or series on Netflix?

If so, I have just one question for you:

Do you think you're going to lie on your deathbed thinking, "I wish I had spent more time watching TV"?

I doubt so.

There will likely be many things you wish you had done (and being glued to your TV screen won't be one of them).

You probably wished you had spent more start creating things or designing the life that you want rather than being a mindless consumer.

Sadly, in today's society, the main focus is on consuming things. It seems that we can never get enough. We buy a new sports car hoping it's going to make us happy, only to get bored of it a few months later. Or we consume movies or information in excess. The problem is that it never brings us the fulfillment we're seeking.

This never-ending desire to consume is due to a phenomenon called hedonic adaptation. In the beginning, we're excited about getting new things. It makes us feel good for a week, a month, or even several months.

However, we eventually go back to our happiness baseline. Returning to our baseline leads us to buy the next new gadget in hopes of experiencing a new rush of excitement. This strategy is not a sustainable one.

## **The benefits of choosing creation over consumption**

We can experience a more profound sense of fulfillment when we shift our focus from producing to consuming.

As human beings, we love to create. We enjoy using our minds to come up with new ideas, and we need a vehicle through which we can express ourselves.

We're born creators. So it makes sense that we feel unfulfilled when we're forced to spend most of the day at a tedious job with little room for creativity.

But we aren't just creators of art or products; we're also the creators of our own lives. We can create the career we want and design a life of meaning. We have the power to turn the things we imagine into reality.

Unfortunately, most people neglect their creative power. As a result, they feel powerless, stuck at an [unfulfilling 9-to-5 job](#) from which there seems to be no escape. They use little, if any, of their creative power at work and do little more than stare at a TV screen when they return home.

## **Becoming a creator of your life**

Did you know that, according to a [2012 survey](#), Americans watch TV for an average of five hours per day?! Over the course of a lifetime, the average American will have spent the equivalent of sixteen years watching TV.

Now, how much do you think these sixteen years contribute to the average American's happiness? What is it worth?

We can test this out right now. Count the number of hours you spent watching TV, Netflix, or YouTube videos in the past seven days. Then, ask yourself the following:

- Could I have used this time to do something more productive?
- In hindsight, how much happiness did I get from that?
- How do I currently benefit from the time I spent watching TV? Am I better off now than I was seven days ago?

You may now realize that watching TV doesn't bring you as much happiness as you thought. Imagine what you could create if you were to spend even a fraction of the time you spend watching TV doing something more productive. You could spend time learning new skills. You could work on a side business you're excited about, or you could create art, build furniture, or write a book. By allowing you to express your creativity, these activities will provide you with a more profound sense of fulfillment than just watching TV.

While you won't be in this world anymore, what you've created might last for generations. How would you feel about having something to leave to your children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren?

So, if you want to design a fulfilling life, it's crucial to see yourself as a creator rather than a powerless victim of society. Here are some examples of what a creator does:

- A creator shoots videos on YouTube; a consumer watches them.
- A creator writes books; a consumer reads them.
- A creator makes and sells products; a consumer buys them.
- A creator makes art; a consumer buys it.
- A creator knows what they want and proactively sets specific goals to ensure that they get results. A consumer has no concrete goals and merely trudges through life hoping for the best.
- A creator works on their side business before and/or after work, a consumer watches TV or marathons shows on Netflix.
- A creator thinks, "How can I give more?", a consumer thinks, "How can I buy more?"
- A creator builds assets through their creative work; a consumer accumulates debt.
- A creator continuously learns new skills in their spare time; a consumer wastes countless hours doing unproductive things.

The bottom line is that you're the **creator of your life**, and unless you realize it, you'll get stuck in an endless cycle of consumption that will leave you feeling dead inside. You weren't born to be a consumer; you were born to be a creator! The world is waiting for you to express your creativity. Remember, as you lie on your deathbed you won't wish you spent more time watching TV or series on Netflix. So, reclaim your creative power and design the life you were meant to live.

## **Exercise – Work on a creative project**

This week, I invite you to start working on a creative project.

Is there a creative project you've been putting off? Do you have a book idea in the back of your mind that you've never dared to write? Or maybe you want to start working on a side business you're passionate about.

Spend thirty minutes to sixty minutes a day working on a creative project for a week. For best results, work on it in the morning before going to work. That will enable you to start your day on a positive note. It will also allow you to avoid the temptation to procrastinate after a hard day's work. Before [I quit my job](#) last June, I spent 45 minutes every morning writing books.

Feel free to check out my book [Wake Up Call](#) in which I explain how you can create a daily morning ritual that will support your goals and increase your level of fulfillment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article! If it helped you in any way, feel free to share it with friends, family, or anyone you think will benefit from it. I'd love to know how your creative project goes, so please let me know in the comments section!

## WEEK 10 — Progress is Happiness

*How tall will a tree grow? As tall as it possibly can. You've never heard of a tree growing half as high as it could. No, that is impossible. A tree grows as high as it can, drives down every root it can, produces every leaf it can, extends itself as far as it possibly can. Every life form extends to the max, except human beings. Now why not human beings? Because we're not robots. We've been given the dignity of choice. – Jim Rohn*



Tony Robbins says that progress is happiness. Studies have shown that pursuing a worthy goal can increase happiness.

What about you? Do you have an exciting goal you're moving toward?

Pursuing a worthy goal gives meaning to our lives and increases our level of fulfillment.

If you aren't happy right now, it might be because your current vision isn't compelling enough. It doesn't excite you. It doesn't make you jump out of bed every morning, eager to work on it.

### **Is your vision too small?**

Have you given up on your vision because it's so big that you can't possibly achieve it?

What if the question isn't, "Can I achieve that vision?", but, "How much excitement does it generate when I think about it?"

Here's the problem with a "realistic" goal: It's not inspiring! It doesn't give you the fuel you need to take action. It doesn't move you, it doesn't excite you, and it doesn't stretch your limits. Your vision isn't something to be achieved; it's something that's meant to fuel you and incite growth. It's here to push you out of your comfort zone and turn you into a new person you didn't even know you could become. If your vision doesn't scare you, you're probably thinking too small. If you want to discover what you're truly capable of, you need a genuinely compelling vision. It will challenge you to grow and reconsider what you can do. After all, who knows what you can accomplish in this lifetime?

Would you rather shoot for the stars and reach the moon, or achieve an easy but unsatisfying target? Why not go after that crazy vision you have instead of watering it down?

Don't water it down, just break it down.

Break that colossal vision down into yearly goals, monthly goals, weekly goals, and even daily goals. Then, work on your goals every day while keeping your eyes on your vision.

Use that compelling vision to fuel your passion and desire. Then, take action on it. While you may never achieve even a fraction of your vision, if you keep thinking about it and nurturing it every day, you could very well end up reaching the moon!

## **Are you making progress?**

By focusing exclusively on achieving your goal, you may forget to enjoy the journey buying into the "One Day I Will" myth?

The goal that you believe is going to make you happy most likely won't.

Do you want to work hard every day, forgoing any sense of enjoyment, only to achieve a goal that you soon realize is unfulfilling? Of course not.

Here's the thing: If you can't enjoy the process of achieving your goal, you're probably chasing the wrong one. While any meaningful goal requires sacrifice and hard work, it should also be a source of joy.

For instance, I work twice as many hours per week on my online business than I did at my previous job, but I'm happy that way. There's nothing else I'd rather be doing than what I'm doing now.

Learning and growing can be incredibly enriching. Making steady progress towards a worthy goal is a great way to experience more fulfillment in your life. When you only think in terms of results,

you can easily ignore all the little things you learned along the way and dismiss how much progress you've already made. I'm guilty of that myself.

As the late Earl Nightingale said, "Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal or idea" Do you feel like you're making progress in your life?

In this universe, nothing ever stays the same. Things either grow or decay. The same goes for human beings. When we feel like we're making progress, we feel great about ourselves. When we don't, we feel unhappy and dead inside. Growth can happen in any area of our lives. It could come in our relationships, our careers, our spirituality, or our personal growth in general.

If you're unhappy right now, ask yourself whether you're growing or not. If you're not growing in any area of your life, think of what you could do to experience more growth.

## **Supercharging your vision**

Look at the current vision you have for a specific area of your life. It could be your finances, your relationships, your career, or your personal growth, for example. How can you make that vision so compelling that you can't wait to work on it every day?

### **Exercise - Write down your vision**

Grab a pen and paper and spend five minutes every morning answering these questions:

- What do I want in this area?
- What excites me?
- How would the ideal situation look?

Write your answers down and visualize yourself as if that vision were a reality. Do this for seven days.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article! If it helped you in any way, feel free to share it with friends, family, or anyone you think will benefit from it. I'd love to know how this week's exercise goes, so please let me know in the comments section!

## WEEK 11 — 7 Tips to be Happy from the Happiest Person in The World

*A healthy mind should act like a mirror – faces can be reflected in a glass but none of them stick. Use the same technique with thoughts – let them pass through your mind but don't dwell. – Matthieu Ricard*



Would you like to learn how you can become the happiest person in the world?

Following research conducted by neuroscientist Richard Davidson, a French Tibetan monk by the name of Matthieu Ricard has been called the happiest person in the world (against his will). As part of his research, which involved hundreds of advanced practitioners of meditation, Richard Davidson wired Ricard's skull with 256 sensors.

The results showed that, when meditating on compassion, Ricard's brain produced a level of gamma waves that were, in the words of Davidson, "Never reported before in the neuroscience literature." Gamma waves have a significant link to consciousness, attention, learning, and memory.

In this article, I'd like to share what we can learn from the happiest person in the world and what we can do to increase our level of happiness. Because, as Ricard himself says, happiness is a skill you can, and should, cultivate on a daily basis. Below are 7 tips to be happy from the happiest person in the world.

### **Tips #1 – Be aware of your emotions**

Becoming more aware of your emotions is the first thing you can do to increase your level of happiness. Meditating is a great way to do this. In Ricard's own words, *"You can look at your experience like a fire that burns. If you are aware of anger you are not angry you are aware. Being aware of anxiety is not being anxious it is being aware."*

Jean Claude Van Damme was definitely onto something when he said that we have to be "aware"! The more you can separate yourself from your emotions, the more you can deal with them effectively. As you become less attached to your feelings, they will eventually disappear like clouds passing in the sky. If on the other hand, you continue to focus on them repeatedly, they will gain tremendous power over you as time goes on.

### **Tips #2 Focus on the good**

Your brain is amazing and can do some phenomenal things, but there's one thing it can't do: Focus on two different things at once. You can't, for instance, feel blessed and resentful at the same time. Just try it for yourself.

So, the more you learn to keep your attention on the good things in your life, the more positive emotions you'll experience. A simple rule is that what you focus on will grow. If you focus on everything that's going wrong in your life, you'll feel miserable. Focus on all the things you can be grateful for, and you'll experience more joy and peace of mind.

By learning to focus on positive things every day, you'll rewire your brain to focus on the good stuff.

### **Tips #3 Focus on others**

Stop thinking "me, me, me." Not everything is about you. Continually focusing on how to improve your situation and trying to control everything can be very stressful. In fact, it's a recipe for unhappiness. Ricard explains that rather than focusing on ourselves, we should strive to be benevolent and do good for others. That's what will eventually make us happy. Focus on helping others and contributing won't just have a positive impact on your mental state, it will benefit your body as well.

#### **Tips #4 – Stop chasing pleasure**

Stop chasing pleasure and excitement thinking they're going to make you happy. Neither of these things can last forever. They're sensations that depend on circumstances. They come and go. Things can go from pleasurable to neutral and neutral to unpleasant. As such, pleasure will not bring you lasting fulfillment in life. Happiness, on the other hand, pervades all your emotional states (including sadness, according to Ricard). Happiness is a way of being that allows you to better deal with the ups and downs of life. It's a form of inner strength.

#### **Tips #5 – Stop comparing yourself to others**

Ricard calls comparison the "killer of happiness." Have you ever felt jealous, sad, or even depressed after looking at other people's Facebook timelines? They all seem to have such great lives. And, of course, everyone looks happy in the photos they post.

However, most of this is an illusion. Everyone tries to present the best version of themselves on social media, but that doesn't mean that they feel fulfilled. They may, in fact, feel quite the opposite. We could even argue that the unhappier we are, the more we feel the need to impress our friends on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

When you compare yourself to others, you tend to look at their best side while dismissing their weaknesses and problems. Even worse, you look at the very best of multiple people at once. It should come as no surprise that you're unhappy. After all, the way you look at other people is tremendously biased and unfair to yourself.

Bear in mind that people who seem to have a perfect life could very well be depressed. They could be chronically ill, miserable at work, or victims of domestic violence. So, why would you want to compare yourself to others and assume they have a better life than you when you have no idea if this is true? Why not consider the possibility that your levels of happiness might be equal to theirs? Life is not a competition in which you have to keep score of who among your peers has it best. Many people put on masks and pretend to be happy when deep down they're miserable.

#### **Tips #6 – Don't let anything own you**

Often the things you own end up owning you. Things are a distraction that prevents you from looking within. Ricard has said that material things hinder one's ability to flourish. Most of your possessions aren't making you any happier. You may experience a rush of excitement when you buy something new, but it eventually wears off (sometimes very quickly!). Then, you have to buy something new and repeat the cycle all over again. It never ends. It's a rigged game that fails to fulfill you while leaving you empty inside.

Let's talk about lottery winners for a moment. You would expect people who win the lottery to be happy since their financial woes are gone, they have plenty of freedom, and they're now in a position to buy whatever they want.

But as surprising as it may sound, research shows that, within six months of winning the lottery, these people report that they aren't any happier than they were before. If material things don't make us happy, why should we work so hard to buy more stuff?

## **Tips #7 – Reduce your ego**

*“People think a strong ego is a strength. Strong ego is ultimate vulnerability. You are so preoccupied with that strong ego, you can't sleep anymore.” – Matthieu Ricard*

Reducing your ego is a fantastic way to increase your happiness. When you detach from your ego, you become happier and less defensive. As a result, you begin to care less about praise and criticism. The strong identity you once held so dear becomes increasingly less relevant. You realize that the criticisms of others can't change the essence of who or what you are. The pain you experience is here only because you cling to a specific idea of yourself and take it too damn seriously. When people make fun of you, why not laugh at yourself as well? Why not shrug it off?

## **How to become happier**

Ricard describes happiness as a skill that you can develop. Though it's true that some people are naturally happier than others, we all have ample room to increase our level of happiness. As with any skill, however, happiness requires practice.

Ricard recommends we start by focusing on happy thoughts every day. When we experience feelings of happiness, they're usually fleeting. Something happens, or another subject pops up, and we quickly lose our happy feelings. Thus, it's essential that we develop the habit of concentrating on happy thoughts and maintaining them for extended periods of time. You can start by thinking happy thoughts for 10 to 15 minutes every day. Your mental state will improve after just a couple of weeks, and you'll start feeling better.

Scientific research has shown that 20 minutes of meditation each day can make people happier. Practice long enough, and you can become the happiest person on earth!

## **Practical Exercise**

Take five to 10 minutes each morning to sit down and focus on positive thoughts. Visualize whatever makes you happy and do your best to maintain that feeling. You can use relaxing music to help you. Don't worry if you can't do it well, just do your best and keep practicing for two weeks.

Then, let me know how it goes in the comments section!

## WEEK 12 — Taking Responsibility for Your Happiness

*“I love living life. I’m happy.” – Nick Vujicic*

*“I was always laughing. We were lying on the floor with my son, and he saw me laughing. How can a child not laugh when the mother laughs.” – Alice Herz Sommer*



Do you feel you’re just not a happy person? Do you believe that the challenges you’re facing right now prevent you from being genuinely happy?

I get it. We all wish we could be as happy as Nick and Alice. They seem to have it easy, don’t they? Meanwhile, you and I are struggling.

But, is that the whole story? What if I told you that Nick Vujicic, who has said “I love living life” was born without arms and legs?

As crazy as it sounds, that’s the real story. As a young kid, Nick, who was born without arms and legs, was convinced that he would never be happy. He would probably never get a job and, for sure, would never get married. “What kind of husband would I be if I can’t even hold my wife’s hand?” was a question he asked himself.

Fast forward to the present, and Nick is now a happily married father of two. He's also a very well-known public speaker who inspired millions of people around the world to live life without limits. If Nick were born with arms and legs, would he have been that happy? We could argue that he wouldn't.

Nick's story teaches us that what determines our happiness is not what happens to us, but what we do about it. In other words, it's our attitude towards life that dictates how happy we are. Our external environment doesn't have the power to dictate our happiness unless we let it. Happiness, like anything else, is something for which we must take responsibility. No amount of wealth and fame will ever make up for lack of internal peace and a sense of well-being.

What if I told you that Alice is talking about her experience in a WWII concentration camp?

She had all the reasons in the world to be unhappy. She was in a concentration camp with little to no food to eat. She must have witnessed countless of people dying around her, and she could have been next on the list. During her interview with Tony Robbins, however, she reported that she was happy despite such terrible conditions. How is that even possible?

Maybe it's because she had a strong sense of purpose. She had a child to take care of, and she was also a pianist who could bring a little bit of joy to others in the camp when she was asked to play. Alice also had a positive attitude towards life, always looking for good things. She has said that she learned to be thankful for everything, knows about the bad but looks at the good, and views everything as a present.

Author Dan Butler identified nine characteristics shared by people who lived to be 100. One of them was having a strong purpose. In his book, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, David J. Schwartz tells the story of Mrs. D, who survived cancer for 20 years mainly because she had a strong desire to see her son graduate from college. He believed that goals are the best medicine ever invented. Victor Frank also stressed the importance of meaning, and how people who were able to give meaning to their experience in a concentration camp were the most likely to survive.

To sum it up, happiness is not something that's out there; it's something that we create through our outlook on life and the meaning we give to it. That's why it's so important that we learn to cultivate happiness every day by focusing on the positive things and expressing gratitude for what we already have. Expecting to be happy one day in the future is not an effective strategy.

Why postpone our happiness and make it dependent on external factors we can't control? Aren't we better off taking full responsibility for our happiness?

## **Exercise – Use reframing to increase your happiness**

This week, let's see how you can take more responsibility for your happiness. After all, happiness is an inside job.

Identify one thing or situation that currently frustrates you. Now, think of how you can reframe that situation by giving it a different meaning that will empower you. Do this for a week. I'd love to find out how it goes, so let me know in the comments section!

# THANK YOU SO MUCH!

I hope you enjoyed this 12-week Happiness Challenge and that you've increased your happiness and well-being even just a tiny bit.

Let me wish you all the best with your future endeavors. I'm very much looking forward to hearing from you on my website.

If you have any questions send me an email at [thibaut.meurisse@gmail.com](mailto:thibaut.meurisse@gmail.com)

- Click [here](#) to connect with me on my Facebook page.
- Click [here](#) to follow me on YouTube.
- Click [here](#) to check out my author page.

Thanks a lot!

Thibaut Meurisse

Founder of [Whatispersonadevelopment.org](http://Whatispersonadevelopment.org)



## Books by the author:

Goal Setting: The Ultimate Guide to Achieving Goals That Truly Excite You

The One Goal: Master the Art of Goal Setting, Win Your Inner Battles, and Achieve Exceptional Results

Habits That Stick: The Ultimate Guide to Building Powerful Habits That Stick Once And For All

Productivity Beast: An Unconventional Guide to Getting Things Done

Wake Up Call: How to Take Control of Your Morning and Transform Your Life

The Thriving Introvert: Embrace the Gift of Introversion and Live the Life You Were Meant to Live