
**the
happiness
advantage
shawn achor**

a book summary compiled by Catherine Marriott

the happiness advantage

a book summary of the
seven principles of
happiness and success

introduction

Positive Psychology

- 1. Social networks provide the highest level of prescription for success and happiness.**
- 2. Our current belief is that ‘Happiness is the reward you get when you are successful’. Research shows that we become more successful when we are happier and more positive.**
- 3. Our brains are hard wired for best performance when they are positive and happy, not when we are despondent or negative.**

the growth of positive psychology

In 1998, psychologist, Martin Seligman chose to move away from the traditional approach of focusing on “what is broken” to focussing on “what was working. Thus positive psychology was born.

This book summary covers seven principles of success and achievement that form the core of what has been defined as “the happiness advantage”.

These principles can help people overcome obstacles, spot more opportunities, become more efficient and conquer ambitious goals.

This is not just about painting on a happy face, or denying our problems, but making real changes that can improve our well being for the long term.

principle one

Positive Brains

- 1. Happiness is the joy we feel and is expressed through positive emotions.**
- 2. Positive emotions are the chief engine of happiness.**
- 3. There are 10 positive emotions: joy, gratitude, serenity, awe, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration and love.**
- 4. There are three components to happiness, pleasure from physical sensations, active engagement in work or useful play, deeper meaning through a connection to something that is bigger than us.**

positive brains have a biological advantage

When we are happier, we are smarter and more motivated and therefore more likely to work towards our goals. Happiness shouldn't be a distant reward. Success orbits around happiness – not the other way around.

This finding may require some of us to retrain our brains to capitalise on positivity.

Happiness has no single meaning – it is relevant to the person experiencing the feeling, therefore happiness is known as subjective well being. The best judge of how happy you are is you. Scientists use self-report metrics to measure happiness. Happiness can be described as a positive mood in the present and a positive outlook for the future.

Happiness contributes to a better physical health, less illness and stress and also to a longer life. Negative emotions narrow our range of thoughts and actions that is useful in times of extreme stress such as in prehistoric times.

Happiness has an evolutionary process. Known as the 'broaden and build theory', the happier you are, the more thoughtful, creative and open to new ideas you are. Thinking of something that makes you happy before problem solving has been shown to increase your ability on exams, tests and other problem solving tasks.

The broadening effect is biological. Dopamine and serotonin, the happiness biochemicals of our bodies actively dial up the learning centres of our brains, help organise information and retrieve it faster, make new neurons and ensure we are more skilled at complex analysis. Our mood can change our visual cortex. Positive emotions expand our peripheral vision.

This is why smart companies cultivate positive working environments to prime them for creativity or innovation. "Fun is the secret of Virgin's success"

Priming the brain with positive thoughts leads individuals to higher performance than those who were more neutral or negative.

Research has shown that happiness can lead to more creativity and better outcomes. Even the smallest shots of happiness (such as a gift of candy) can give someone a competitive edge on a test.

Under times of duress, when nerves are high, focusing on negative outcomes is more likely to drive mistakes. Known as the “undoing effect” and proven through research, it is much better to find 1-2 activities to focus on that can bring a smile and turn on the happiness advantage to reduce stress and boost positivity.

Happiness is not just a mood it is a work ethic. We have control over our emotional wellbeing. Happiness lies in the momentary blips of happiness that pepper our life everyday.” Barbara Frederickson, Positive Psychologist founder.

There are many actions you can take on a daily basis to improve your happiness on a daily basis that will over time permanently raise your happiness base line.

1. **Meditation** – helps to grow the left prefrontal cortex and is a powerful way to increase happiness. Just five minutes per day can help. Calm and contentment and heightened awareness. Meditation can permanently rewire the brain to lower stress and improve immune function,
2. **Focus on a positive future event.** Thinking about something positive in the future such as going to see a new movie, will create a moment of happiness as the anticipation lights up pleasure centers in the brain much the same as the actual event will.
3. **Commit conscious acts of kindness** - Altruism helps enhance our mental health. Pick one small activity a day and try to practice 5 days a week. Needs to be deliberate and conscious to get the best benefit.
4. **Infuse positively in our surroundings** – Our physical environment has much impact over our wellbeing. You can use pictures of loved ones, make time to go outside, and reduce your exposure to TV especially violent TV. The less negative TV we watch, the happier we are.

5. **Exercise enhances mood and motivation** and helps us to get in the flow and can be just as helpful as antidepressants. Exercise provides more long lasting impact by reducing stress and anxiety and improving a sense of mastery.

6. **Use money to do things not get things.** Money can buy happiness when you spend it on memorable events or activities especially with other people. Money spent on activities gives us longer lasting pleasure.

7. **Exercise a ‘signature’ strength’** – to find your signature strengths complete the survey on viasurvey.org. Each time you exercise a strength you can get a boost of happiness.

8. **Other personally tailored happiness activity.**

Happiness is strongly linked to performance at work. Frequent recognition and encouragement is the easiest way to boost productivity. Research shows that productivity improves by 31%. Sacrificing positivity in the name of time management actually slows us down.

The data couldn’t be clearer that keeping staff happier delivers higher returns. Make an effort to adopt a more positive tone and facial expression with your colleagues.

The Lasada line, a mathematical ratio that shows that three positive comments are required to fend off the impact of one negative comment. This is known as the Lasada line. To increase productivity need to rise above the Lasada line to around 6 to 1,

principle two

Its How You See The World That Counts

- 1. Our mindset isn't fixed but is constantly in flux.**
- 2. External circumstances contribute to about only 10% of our happiness.**
- 3. By changing the way we perceive our work and ourselves we can dramatically improve our outcomes.**

Adjust your fulcrum to look at how you view the world

How we experience the world is based upon the meaning that we give to things and events. If we want to improve our experiences we can change our mindset or meaning that we give to things and thus improve our outlook.

While we cannot change reality, we can use our brains to change how we process the world and therefore how we react to it. This is not about turning a blind eye but seeing things differently, so we can rise above them with different emotions and reactions.

Archimedes – “Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum point and I will move the entire world.” We can use to the analogy of the fulcrum and the lever to determine how things are balanced in our lives and break it down into two parts.

1. The fulcrum is our mindset or the meaning we give to things, and is the power to generate change.
2. The length of our lever is our belief in how much possibility we have.

In practical terms this means that we don't need to try to hard to generate results. Instead the more we move our mindset, or fulcrum, the more power we can extract from our lever.

The power of our mindset to determine our reality is far greater than what we think, because our reality is far more malleable than what we think. Research has shown that beliefs drive aging. E.g. as we age we believe our cognition and intelligence decline however, this doesn't have to be so.

What feels like the blink of an eye to some can feel like an eternity to others. We know that those people who are engaged have a sense that time is shorter. This shows that mindset doesn't change how we feel but can change our objective results.

Beliefs can be strong enough to create biological effects. Placebos are 50-60% as effective due to a change in mindset.

The placebo effect can be explained by the expectancy theory. The expectancy theory says that our brains are wired to focus on what is going to happen next. Expectations can be just as real as those that happen in the real world. Research shows that the same neurons actually fire that lead to a host of consequences even though the real life event may not have happened. This is easy to explain when we examine how angry or upset we can be about imagined events that haven't even happened.

The mental construction of our daily activities, more than the activity itself defines our reality. Therefore beliefs can change concrete outcomes. How much more efficient and happy could you be if you changed the way you viewed your day? Ask yourself "how can I use my relative experience to my advantage?" By using your positive mindset to gain control of time itself.

You can use your own creativity to learn to do things more positively. E.g. if you believe that painting that fence is an extremely unpleasant activity, than this is what it will be when you go to pick up the paintbrush. Instead if you can make a game of it, or give yourself a reward at the end or create some other positive experience than your experience of painting the fence will be completely different.

By altering the fulcrum, i.e. the meaning of what you are doing – you can change your view of your world. Effectively this means choosing not to focus on the ends but focusing on the means instead.

You can also apply this principle to leisure and free time. E.g. if you define leisure time as nonproductive, than can easily miss the joy of what this represents on a daily basis.

To apply this principle successfully, you have to do more than go through the motions. You actively have change the meaning you attach to things (mindset) otherwise you won't be able to get the full benefits.

The second part of this principle is the lever of possibility. *This is your view of your own ability. The more you believe you will succeed, the more likely you are to succeed.*

A specific and concerted focus on your strengths during times of stress or difficulties, can significantly affect upon your results. Focus on what you are good at during times of stress.

You can leverage intelligence by believing you can improve your talents. Those with a growth mindset recognise that people may differ; everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

Those with a fixed mindset tend to underachieve while those with a growth mindset continue to move up in their achievements.

Motivation comes when we believe there will be a positive payoff if we work harder. There are three work orientations

1. Job – These people who see their work as a chore and their paycheck as the reward and look forward to time away from job
2. Career – These people work to advance and succeed and believe that they invest in themselves to get ahead.
3. Calling – People who see work as a calling, view it as means in itself. Work gives them meaning and purpose. They typically work harder and longer and are more likely to get ahead.

It doesn't matter what type of work you do be it a janitor through to a doctor, everyone can view their work as a calling by defining enough value to others in what they do.

"Job crafting" is adjusting one's mindset to improve your sense of how you see the world. E.g. a school janitor may believe his cleaning tasks contribute to a cleaner and healthier learning environment for the children. It is possible to rewrite any job description and link the tasks back to supporting one's own personal goals and values.

The more likely we see how work is linked to our personal goals, the more likely we can gain happiness through our time spent in work.

To see the true value of what you are doing chose a task that seems meaningless and ask, "What is the purpose of this task". Write down the answer. Ask yourself

“what does this result lead to?” Keep going until you get a result that’s meaningful to you. E.g. Tidying a desk can be redefined as creating an empty space to be more creative. You can also view things from the impact you have on others lives, what you learnt? What you taught others?

We know that a few choice words can alter a person’s mindset and their accomplishments. So if mindset can affect performance, imagine the power we have to influence others around us. What we expect from other people manifests itself in the words and body language that we choose to use. The best managers and leaders see themselves as an opportunity to prime their employees for best results.

The Pygmalion effect or Rosenthal effect refers to the phenomenon in which the greater the expectation placed upon people, the better they perform. Our expectations of others come out through nonverbal means, even if they are not voiced.

As leaders go, so go the employees. Success can come from not just who is on your team, but by how you leverage your team. Do I believe my team can be successful? How am I communicating this to my team?

So how do we know what is our true potential? How do push the boundaries of possibilities as far as you can go? When we believe we can do more, we can do more. Stop thinking of the world as fixed, the reality is that everything can be changed.

principle 3

Wire Your Brain To See The Opportunities

- 1. Your brain acts on patterns that you rehearse, this is the way that our brains are programmed.**
- 2. Often the things that will make us successful are what we don't pay attention to.**
- 3. Consistently grateful people are more energetic, emotionally intelligent, successful, forgiving and are less likely to be depressed or lonely.**

the tetrus effect

The tetrus effect is the notion that you can retrain your brain to spot patterns of possibility to look for opportunity and move your brain away from negativity & circles.

The "tetrus effect" stems from a normal physical process. Our brains create a "cognitive after image" that happens when images are burned onto our visual field. E.g. playing hour after hour of tetrus changes the wiring of the brain, creating new pathways that can warp the way that reality is viewed. E.g. people who play violent video games tend to compulsively act at the same act in real life. The tetrus effect is a metaphor for how we imprint our brains and therefore the way we see the world around us.

It is easy to see the bad patterns of other people, we all know someone who is stuck in patterns of behaving badly, *it is much more difficult to spot and stop running the patterns in ourselves.*

The tetrus effect occurs because our brains have got really good at scanning and seeing the negative. Society encourages this type of training, beginning in the classroom, where critical analysis is what we are taught.

Sometimes being stuck in seeing the negative and seeing what needs to be fixed might be appropriate for the work environment. However, if you can't see the positives or opportunities, that you limit yourself, increase susceptible to stress and lower your own motivation.

If your brain is wired to look for mistakes and you spend 8-9 hours per day, this habit can spill over into other areas of our lives. Tax auditors and lawyers are especially susceptible to this condition. Critical analysis teaches us to look for flaws in arguments and train people to be critical rather than accepting. This sort of analysis causes people to overestimate the problems in their world.

But this situation is not limited to these two professions; faultfinding accountants can easily get stuck in a pattern. Athletes can have a hard time reining in their competitive streak; social workers can apply the patterns of bad behavior they observe to all people. Managers can continue to micromanage their children's lives. People need

to complete their work, but problems arise when individuals cannot compartmentalise. A pessimistic, faultfinding mindset leads to depression, stress, poor physical health and substance abuse.

The tetras effect doesn't need to be maladaptive. We can retrain our brain to be always on the lookout for the good things in life, to have more energy and achieve more success and attain higher levels in life. The first step to applying this principle is to understand how much of what we see is merely a matter of focus. "My experience is what I agree to attend to."

Your brain is a spam filter and it simply can't take in everything at once. It only lets in pertinent information. This filter is like spam blocker that follows certain rules. Scientists report that only about 1 out of every 100 pieces of information dumped into our spam filter is retained. Spam filters in our heads only scan for what they are programmed to find. If your brain is programmed to ignore the positive, than this data will be ignored. We see what we look for and we miss the rest.

Inattentional blindness means we can miss an outstandingly large amount of things. Why when we are looking for something, we can always find it. Before it was always there, but they were not focused on.

Studies have shown that two people can view the same situation and see different things. We may interpret and see things differently but not all ways of seeing are equal.

Imagine a way of seeing that constantly picks up on the positives in every situation – that's the goal of a positive tetras effect. When our brains constantly scan for and focus on the positive, we bring into play three powerful tools, happiness, gratitude and optimism.

Optimism is a condition where your brain focuses more on the positives than the negatives. Optimists set more goals than pessimists and rise above obstacles easier than pessimists. Optimists expect a positive outcome and this expectation makes it more likely that will be successful. Thus expecting positive outcomes makes them more likely to arise.

There is no scientific evidence to support luck, instead a positive outcome is based upon our expectations and our ability to spot and capitalise on opportunities.

Is all a matter of focus. In a negative tetras effect you will not be able to see the opportunities. In a positive tetras effect, you will see opportunities all around you.

Getting stuck in a positive tetras effect takes practice. Make a daily list of the good things in your life and your job. A decade of study proves that this will bring feelings of accomplishment and happiness. This practice trains the brain to become more skilled for growth and opportunities. After a week, happiness lifts, after a month, six months, brains significantly improve. Items don't need to be profound only specific.

Take time to write a short journal entry about a positive experience.

As this practice occurs, the benefits of previous principles start to come in affect and positive expressions come more naturally.

Practice is required to build consistency. The key here is to ritualise the task, pick the same time every day, set alerts to remind yourself. As long as you do it on a regular basis.

When you share it with others, you are held more accountable for keeping up with the exercise. This kind of social support greatly increases the chances that the habit will stick.

These exercises work with anyone; children or adults, professionals or stay-at-home mums. It is the consistency that counts.

Can positivity be overdone? Yes, there is a reason why market bubbles occur, as we live above our means or business leaders sugar coat the situation without enough focus on the future. But this answer is not a prescription for pessimism. We need a view of the risks in our world, but research has shown that a reasonable optimist will win every time.

principle four

Find A Way Of Our Failure

- 1. Psychologists claim that best way is to “fail early and often”. We only learn to deal with failure by living through it.**
- 2. Making mistakes can be a powerful way to accelerate learning and increase competitiveness**
- 3. It is our mindset that takes centre stage when it comes to determine how we turn a major negative event into something positive**
- 4. When adversity strikes, there is always a third path upward, your only task is to find it.**

falling up

In the midst of stresses and pain, we can find a mental path out of failures. “Falling up” is a strategy to get yourself up when everything seems going against you.

The human brain is constantly devising and rewriting its maps to find a way to get what we want in life. These maps are vital to succeeding and thriving in business and in the world generally.

All human decisions involve mental mapping. Mental mapping starts with a start point from which a number of paths radiate outwards. The most successful decisions come when we recognise all the paths available to us. Many people miss the most important path of all – the mental path up. When something happens that sets up back, we can take three mental paths

1. Keep circling where we are
2. Move towards further negative consequences
3. Move from a setback to a place where we are even stronger than before. An option that is not easy in challenging times.

When we feel helpless or hopeless we stop believing a path exists. Our ability to find the third path determines if we can rise above failure.

When soldiers are headed to combat they return either normal or with PTSD, (post-traumatic stress) but they have the opportunity to return with PTG, (post-traumatic growth). Research shows that many dramatic or major events in our life, such as cancer or loss of a limb can spur profound positive growth. This is known as adversarial growth or post-traumatic growth.

“What doesn’t kills us makes us stronger?” In last 25 years this statement has been the study of investigations. Today we can say that great suffering can lead to great positive change across a wide range of experiences.

Those who benefit from PTG, have greater compassion, increased spirituality, personal strength, self-confidence and greater intimacy. Optimism, acceptance and coping mechanisms that include dealing with the problem head on are also important.

It is not the event itself but the subjective experience of the event that defines what we make out of what has happened. Hence we can use adversity to find the path forward. It is not that everything happens for the best but that we make the best of everything that happens. Early failure is often the fuel for the very ideas that make record profits, allow us reinvent ways to doing things and redefine industry. “Only those that dare to fail greatly – can achieve greatly.”

Therefore smart companies acknowledge mistakes and learn from them. The third path gets hidden and is not easy to spot. In a crisis we forget that another path is available. We get frozen with fear, stuck in the mental present and lose the ability to see a positive future.

A common human phenomenon is learned helplessness. In this scenario we believe nothing we can do to avoid future consequences. When life delivers us a shock we respond by simply giving up.

Economic whiplash is when we are hijacked by stress and despair. The 2008 GFC instilled a form of learned helplessness. A belief in the futility of making an effort. So when we eliminate upward options and our ability to search for them, we end up undermining our ability to tackle the challenge at hand.

When we feel helpless in one area of life, this can spread to other areas of our life. We believe that one dead-end leads to all dead ends. This is the definition of pessimism and depression. Learned helplessness is endemic in prisons. Prisoners have simply have stopped looking to turn negatives into positives.

However, we can use a crisis as catalyst and companies can use recessions to propel them to greater success. A company can slim down its operations or they can discover new ways of doing things that they should have been doing already. Recession can be an invaluable driver to find better, more effective ways of doing things. Those managers who lay low and wait for things to pass are taking the wrong approach.

When faced with obstacles, succumbing to helplessness keeps us down on the mat. Instead you can use these strategies to find a way to the third path.

Change your counter fact to a positive one. By inventing a counter fact our brains create to make sense of what happened. Choosing a positive counter fact sets up ourselves for the whole host of positive advantages.

Change your explanatory style. How we choose to explain the nature of past events has a crucial affect our success. If we are optimistic we describe them as local and temporary. I.e. it's not that bad and it will get better. Those with a pessimistic style see them as global and permanent, hence they sink into helplessness. Explanatory style is a key predictor of future success, athletic performance and how well you recover from an operation.

Learn you're ABCDs. Albert Ellis developed a model that is consistent with the way we conceptualize our beliefs and emotions. He called his model the A-B-C-D or rational-emotive model.

A = Activating Situation: this is event we are unable to change.

B = Belief system: What you tell yourself about the event (your self-talk) Your beliefs and expectations of others. The 'why' of the event. Is it unsolvable, an opportunity for a growth, only a part of our life? Helplessness and inaction can lead to negative consequences.

C = Consequence: How you feel about the event based on your self-talk.

D = Dispute: Your belief is nothing more than a belief. Examine your beliefs and expectations. Are they unrealistic or irrational? You can externalise this voice and ask what is the evidence for this belief? Would we let a friend get away with this thinking? Is it as bad as we are making it out to be? Adversity never affects us for as long as we think or hit as hard as what we think it will. Our fear of the consequences is worse than the consequence itself. Human psyche is very resilient.

Success is about more than simple resilience, success is about capitilising on setbacks to become even more motivated, more successful and happier.

principle 5

Start Small And Then Expand

- 1. The Zorro circle is your circle of mastery.**
- 2. By starting small and mastering small tasks, you can expand outwards.**
- 3. This is how we can achieve our most ambitious goals**

the zorro circle

This principle says that by limiting your focus to small manageable goals you can increase your success. When we feel ourselves getting overwhelmed our rationale brains get hijacked by emotions. This is the time when we can focus on small manageable actions to restore a sense of calm.

When Don Diego to Alejandro (Zorro) was taught the art of the sword fighting, his trainer drew a small circle in the dust. That circle was his 'world', until he had mastered his art within that boundary. When that happened, his trainer drew a larger circle and made sure he had mastered that space, before he was allowed to step outside the new circle. The circles grew larger until Zorro was a master sword fighter within a whole room.

When we become overwhelmed, our feelings of control and mastery are the first things to go. Regaining the feeling of control is critical to performance. The belief that we are masters of our fate is a strong driver of well-being and performance.

Those people who feel they have high levels of control at the office report more job satisfaction and higher levels of productivity that flows on to other aspects of life. They also have lower levels of stress.

Two types of focus

- Internal Locus of Control – we hold the belief that our behavior can make a difference.
- External locus of control – we have higher sense of what others are doing and a low sense of our own contribution. People with this locus of control are more likely to blame the environment, and or luck on their results.

When we feel in control, we suffer from less stress. Not feeling in control affects our physical health. Research has shown that not being control can increase the risk of heart disease by up to 50%.

How we respond to a certain stressful situation is driven by how our brains are wired. Within each of us is a very old part of our brain that controls our emotions. When we let our emotions rule us the amygdala is in control and this drives our ancestral flight or fight response.

Modern man has a prefrontal cortex, the largest part of our brain that contains our ability to be intelligent and drives rational thinking and planning. When we think before we react, we allow our prefrontal cortex to override the amygdala.

However, when our amygdala is in control our productivity and decision-making skills plummet. The less rational the process, the more likely the actions are likely to be negative responses. When our brain hits the panic button, reason goes out the window as does our pockets and careers.

To regain control begins with self-awareness. The next step is to identify how you are feeling and put it into words. Verbalising the stress and identifying which aspects you have control over and which you don't, helps put you back into control. Then identify one small goal that can be quickly accomplished. By concentrating your efforts on what you can do, we can remind ourselves that our actions can and do lead to success and then we can then expand outwards.

We are often faced with unreasonable expectations, however, when our goals are unrealisable, we can end up stuck on the wrong activities or actions and ultimately failure. It is much easier for us to sink into overwhelm.

Reality TV is teaching us that makeovers can be achieved within a short space of time. Reaching for the stars can be a recipe for disaster at least unless you have small manageable goals to achieve along the way.

The key is to set a large challenging goal and then to set more realistic short-term goals.

By establishing small Zorro circles of manageable success and then working outwards, you can gain significant control and results and achieve results beyond any consideration.

principle 6

Set Up Small Practices That Support Success

- 1. It is possible to sustain lasting change through making small energy adjustments to replace bad habits.**
- 2. “Activation energy” is the initial spark needed to capitalise on an action.**
- 3. By reducing the amount of activation energy that it takes to get started in a certain activity, you can make it easier for yourself to overcome the path of least resistance. The strategy itself is universally applicable.**
- 4. The more we can lower or eliminate the activation energy, the more we enhance or jumpstart positive change.**

the twenty-second rule

This principle looks at how to turn to bad habits into good ones by minimising the barriers to change.

Many of us are the living embodiment of the saying ‘common sense is not common action’. Knowledge is only part of the equation, without action, knowledge is virtually useless. How can we make change easier when we are mostly a bundle of habits?

William James, ‘Humans are biologically prone to habit.’ Because habits are so automatic we rarely stop to think about the role that they play in our lives. Habits are second nature to all of us.

Given our natural tendency to act out of habit wouldn’t it be easier if we turned each desired action into a habit, so that it comes automatically without effort? What if we made our nervous system our ally rather than our enemy?

A tendency to act only becomes ingrained in us in proportion to the amount of times the action is consistently repeated. Repeated actions on a consistent basis build more neural pathways and redirect our brain cells to be wired in that way. I.e. cells that fire together, wire together. Thus over time our brain changes in response to regular practice.

“You can’t teach an old new tricks” is now proven incorrect. We have the power to create new habits regardless of age. Instead it is “daily strokes of effort” and “practice makes perfect” that apply to making long lasting changes.

Will power is not the way. The more we attempt to stay strong, the harder we eventually fall. Trying to change by relying on willpower alone will inevitably lead to failure. That’s because the more we use willpower, the more worn out our willpower gets.

Trying to use willpower decreases our ability to perform in other areas of our life. Willpower or self control uses up mental fuel. When we face a steady stream of tasks in our day that exhaust our willpower, we become tired or exhausted as the day progresses. No wonder that at the end of the day we are prone to giving in to our most

comfortable habits. This can keep us locked in our habits over a lifetime such as flicking on the TV or failing to prepare a nutritious meal.

Inactivity is simply the easiest option. We don't enjoy it as much as what we think we do. Because we have no leisure boss we find it difficult to muster the energy to kick-start the activities we want to do in our free time. We are drawn powerfully and magnetically to those things that are easy and simple.

However, passive leisure doesn't offer the same rewards as other types of leisure. Passive leisure is only enjoyable for about 30 minutes, and it starts sapping our energy. Active leisure enhances our sense of enjoyment and creates a more long-lasting sense of pleasure and happiness.

"Activation energy" is the initial spark needed to capitalise on an action. It is the energy needed to get going e.g. to get your bike out of the shed and go bike riding. Or the energy needed to call up your friends and arrange to go out to the museum. Unfortunately human nature takes us down the path of least resistance. 'Opt out marketing' takes advantage of the path of least resistance as do phone companies. Default options are everywhere shaping our choices and our lives. The path of least resistance breeds procrastination and undercuts productivity.

By reducing the amount of activation energy that it takes to get started in a certain activity, you can make it easier for yourself to overcome the path of least resistance. The strategy itself is universally applicable.

The more we can lower or eliminate the activation energy, the more we enhance or jumpstart positive change. E.g. if you want to go to the gym in the morning why not make it easier and sleep in your gym clothes!

The reverse also applies when we put barriers in the way of our bad habits as a way to help eliminate them. E.g. leaving credit cards at home, hiding the remote control's batteries to stop watching TV. Or preparing healthy snacks in advance, so they are quick and easy to grab.

At work, you can set your path of least resistance to increase your productivity by reducing distractions. Turn off email alerts, set quiet times and try not to get dragged into office conversations.

Too much choice can also sap our resources. Every innocuous choice depletes our mental will power and self control especially first thing in the morning when all we may really need to do is to "Just get our shoes on"

One way to reduce choice is to set and follow rules in advance. This is called making 'second order decisions' as they are decisions about when to make decisions.

Barry Schwarz in *The Paradox of Choice* says that setting rules in advance can eliminate stress and uncertainty in our lives. Rules save us energy and we are less likely to succumb in the moment.

"It's all in the shoes. Without putting strategies into action, they remain useless. The key to their use is to implement habits that pay dividends, with daily practice, to put your desired actions in the path of least resistance. Even by as little as 20 seconds. The first step metaphorically is just to get your shoes on.

principle 7

Friends And Networks Are Your Best Way To Happiness

- 1. We need to invest in friends and family members to propel us forward.**
- 2. A social network can reduce anxiety and give us vital support in times of need.**

social investment

This principle covers one of the most important strategies for happiness and success and is even more important in times of stress.

Research on happiness and successful lives have found that love is the core and that our relationships with other people matter more than anything else in the world.

When we have a community of people to support us, we multiple our emotional, physical resources. We are able to bounce back, achieve more and generally be more successful.

Research shows that the happiest 10% among us have one characteristic that distinguishes them from others. The strength of social relationships and social support has a far greater indicator happiness than another factor with a 0.7 correlation.

The ability to survive and thrive with social investment is not just in our heads, but is innately wired into our bodies. As we engage in social relationships the hormone, oxytocin is released into our blood stream. The more social support we have the greater this hormone exists in our body, reducing blood pressure, and risk of other diseases.

Therefore a lack of social connections can be as deadly as other diseases such as high blood pressure.

We can achieve impressive feats of resilience and extend the length of our lives when we have support networks. Research has shown that people with cancer and heart attacks live longer when they have a social support network around them. So hold onto your raft mates - not just the raft and you will stay afloat.

Unfortunately some of us have the misguided urge to turn inward, which begins long before we start to deal with the problems in our lives.

Each of us has choices when we faced with adversity. The road to success doesn't have to be travelled alone. We are better equipped to handle challenges when we pool our resources with others, or even use others to decrease our stress levels.

We don't have to exist in a vacuum, research has shown that social bonds not only predict happiness but also occupational success, and income. This runs counter to the deeply held ethic of individualism in our western society.

Having people we can count on for support in the office or even just to share stories can increase learning and results.

Social connections also provide motivation and work friendships are seen as the most important. Studies show that face-to-face meetings lead people to be more engaged and generate more energy. Even brief encounters can form high quality connections, can fuel openness and lead to measurable results.

Smart organisations invest in social capital as this leads to a payoff in the long run. Programs such as an employee support foundation can build respect and increase employee motivation and engagement.

The boss – employee relationship, called the vertical couple is the single most important social bond you can have at work. This determines your daily productivity and the length of time people stay in their jobs. When this relationship is strong, companies reap the rewards. When 10 million employees were asked, the statement “my supervisor cares about me.” Those that agreed, were more productive, more loyal. Therefore the best managers go out of their way to ensure that their staff feel cared for.

All it takes to improve performance is to prioritise relationships, however, far too few leaders put in the time to forge strong bonds. All it takes is a commitment to frequent and positive social interaction. However, too many managers have the view that work is for work, not friendship, yet the result is that they undermine their companies investment and their own.

Eye contact sends a signal to the brain that shows empathy and rapport. Small investments in learning about colleagues every day can pay off dividends. An important part of maintaining an emotional bond is being physical present. Sharing upbeat news, multiplies the benefits of the positive event.

Building strong social capital doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone, however you do need to have mutual respect and authenticity.

Socialisation is better done in an organic method than a forced one and the more physical spaces available to publicly commune the better.

Even if we have a desire to go it alone, positive psychology knows better, holding onto others is our best advantage to find our way out of the maze.

final word

The ripple effect

Using all seven principals together begins to create a ripple the outwards.

All change begins at the individual level, but by making these changes in ourselves we can affect those around us.

The more you practice the exercises in the program, the more you cement the habits for the long haul. And makes it easier to capitalise on other principles

The principles are intertwined and the effects of one principle become the trigger for another.

The more we capitalise ourselves, the more we can affect the lives around us and the more we ripple outwards.

Our behavior is contagious but it doesn't just impact immediate people but those who are within three degrees of separation. This influence adds up. There are 1000 people within three degrees of most of us. So if we make improvements in our own life, we can improve the lives of 1000 people around us.

Smiles are contagious and it is almost impossible not to smile back when someone smiles at you. Something goes in our brain that we are not even aware of.

We all respond involuntary to smiles, as in our brains we have mirror neurons, specialised brain cells that can sense and mimic the physical sensations of another person. Mirror neurons can be used in video games to improve athletic skills.

Mirroring is not exclusive to physical sensations but also to our emotions. Our brains are constantly processing the feelings of around us. The inflexion in people's voice, the stoop of their shoulders. We can process the information from another person's face in just 33 milliseconds and it can take that long for other peoples emotions to just as quickly prime us to feel the same.

Smiling tricks your brain into thinking you are happy. This is the basis of the recommendation. "fake it to you make it".

Segal Barsae showed through research, that one positive team member can affect the attitudes and performance of those around them. The more genuinely expressive someone is, the more likely emotions are likely to spread. The stronger your social connections, the more you can influence.

When you spend time with close friends your brain's cells are mirroring one another. This builds rapport and the brains work as one. So by modeling the type of mindset that fuels high performance, we are instilling these same effects in our friends and loved ones. Eye contact tells our mirror neurons to fire and is the basis for all rapport.

Leading by example is not an empty mantra instead it can be the most effective leadership tool to generate sustainable increases in performance.

Every big wave starts small. A single butterfly flapping its wings can create a hurricane around the world. This is known as the 'butterfly effect'. Each of us could be that butterfly. We can never really know the true extent of our potential as the ripple effect shows that there are no limits to our individual contribution. The more you profit, the more others around will profit.

Success revolves around happiness not the other way around. This is more revolutionary that we ever could have imagined. If we adopt these principles and practices, it is not just our own success that we can create, but we can bring success to our teams and organisations and everyone around us.

