

The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor (Crown Business, 2010); review/summary by Steve Gladis, Ph.D., December 2011.

Overview: Early on, we're taught to get an education, find a job, work hard, be successful, and we'll find happiness. Turns out, like so many things, science and research say just the reverse. Figure out what makes you happy, pursue it, and you'll find happiness, and a good living to boot. Shawn Achor, a researcher and teacher himself, has pulled together the research of some of my favorite people – Martin Seligman, Carol Dweck, Tal Ben-Shahar – and many others into an enjoyable, powerful text which posits that intentionally investing in what makes us happy might just be the most important investment we make in our lives. He offers seven (7) principles to help us do just that. Principle #1: The Happiness Advantage – How Happiness Gives Your Brain and Your Organization the Competitive Edge; Principle #2: The Fulcrum and the Lever – Changing Your Performance by Changing Your Mindset; Principle #3: The Tetris Effect – Training Your Brain to Capitalize on Possibility; Principle #4: Falling Up – Capitalizing on the Downs to Create Upward Momentum; Principle #5: The Zorro Circle – How Limiting Your Focus to Small, Manageable Goals Can Expand Your Sphere of Power; Principle #6: The 20-Second Rule – How to Turn Bad Habits into Good Ones by Minimizing Barriers to Change; and, Principle #7: Social Investment – Why Social Support is Your Single Greatest Asset. This book is VERY important for employees, teams, leaders and companies to read. *Send a copy to someone you care about.*

1. Introduction: Turning the Switch from Depression to Happiness

- a. A 2004 study at Harvard found 4 of 5 students suffered from depression during the school year. Only 45% of workers are happy at their jobs. And depression is 10 times today what it was in 1960. For years, most research was focused on diagnosing illnesses that create depression and unhappiness. In 1988 the ratio of negative to positive psychological studies was 17-1.
- b. Medical School Syndrome – You get what you concentrate on. First-year med students study symptoms of many diseases, and many are convinced they've come down with those symptoms/diseases!
- c. That same year (1998) Martin Seligman (U. of Penn.) became the head of the American Psychological Association and strategically shifted the organization toward investigating "positive psychology." In 2006, Tal Ben-Shahar and Shawn Achor (the author), both professors at Harvard, developed a course on happiness, and nearly 1 in 6 students registered for it...the largest in the school's history. These most privileged of students sought – needed – to find simple happiness.

- d. Researchers did a “meta analysis” (a study of over 200 studies) on about 275,000 people and found that happiness affects every part of our lives for the better, including work, family, friendship, health, energy...you name it. People need to focus on the positive to protect themselves, especially those in certain professions. Consider auditors and lawyers – who are taught to look for flaws all day long. The toll is significant: Lawyers have three times more depression than other professions and law students suffer from dangerous levels of depression. Good news is that people can and do change at EVERY age. Neuroplasticity is the study of how flexible our brains are. For example, blind people’s fingers become more sensitive as does their sense of hearing. In effect, they see and feel with their re-routed brain.
 - e. The author found 7 positive patterns of success: The Happiness Advantage, The Fulcrum and the Lever, The Tetris Effect, Falling Up, The Zorro Circle, The 20-Second Rule, and Social Investment.
2. Principle #1. The Happiness Advantage: How Happiness Gives Your Brain – and Your Organization – The Competitive Edge
- a. We used to think that happiness “orbited” around success but found the opposite is true. Get happy and watch success happen. Martin Seligman (U. of Penn.) analyzed happiness in terms of three components: Pleasure, Engagement, and Meaning (watch him explain this on Ted.com). Simple pleasures of life are only part of the story. Positive emotions are at the core of happiness. Scholar Barbara Frederickson (UNC) identified the ten most common positive emotions: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. Many studies demonstrate that happy workers are more productive, get higher performance ratings, take less sick time, and so on. And happy CEOs create a happier climate that fosters happier, more productive employees. In short happiness causes success, not the other way around.
 - b. The Nun Study: In a now famous longitudinal study of 180 Catholic nuns (all born before 1917) who were asked to write their bios when they originally entered the convent, amazing results emerged. Over five decades later, researchers coded and analyzed their bios to search for positive indicators in the text. They discovered the “happier” bios led to nuns who lived, on average, 10 years longer than their less happy sisters.
 - c. Elements of happiness: Scientists have proven that we can improve our happiness set point by doing the following – having purpose and meaning in life, looking for opportunities, developing optimism and a gratitude

mentality, and having strong social relationships. Some ways to make that happen:

- i. Meditate: Even just 5 minutes a day helps – though most, like me, prefer 20 minutes – breathe in and out deeply and notice how the oxygen calms your mind.
 - ii. Spend Money – not on objects but on experiences. Go to a great movie rather than buy a gadget. Spend it on a memorable vacation rather than buying a new gizmo.
 - iii. Find Something to Look Forward to: Planning to do something you love in the future creates about the same joy and happiness as that of actually doing it.
 - iv. Commit Conscious Acts of Kindness: Commit random and deliberate acts of kindness and watch your happiness mount. Try to do 5 acts of deliberate kindness a week for good results.
 - v. Exercise Signature Strengths: Figure out what your strengths are and try to use them every day and watch happiness mount and depression decline.
 - vi. Exercise and fill your life with positivity – regular exercise can stave off depression. Also, keeping things around you that give you positive energy has the same effect. I keep a gratitude journal in my medicine cabinet and write down 5 things I'm grateful for each day. Makes a difference in my mindset.
3. Principle #2. The Fulcrum and the Lever: Changing Your Performance by Changing Your Mindset
- a. With a big enough lever, you can lift most anything. Just remember the seesaw in the schoolyard.
 - b. The “fulcrum” of your mindset allows you to lift yourself into happiness.
 - c. An experiment with 75-year old men on a retreat for a week: They were asked to act as if they were 20 years younger. All surroundings, even their own ID's, were of 20 years ago. Results: Almost every measurement (strength, eyesight, posture and flexibility) increased.
 - d. Mindset: Placebos are 55-60% as effective as codeine and aspirin for controlling pain. The poison ivy experiment: Blindfolded and highly allergic people were told that a leaf was poison ivy and then their arms were rubbed with the leaf. While the leaf was *not* poison ivy, ALL 13 test subjects broke out in a rash.
 - e. Your mindset creates your world: Rather than be bored at a meeting, recast it into a “what can I learn” meeting. Reframe work, turn it into play

and the world changes. Simply believing in our abilities changes our mindset and happiness. Identifying with our profession, not stereotypes of gender or ethnicity, can improve results. And identifying with the best of our profession or our highest attributes changes who we become.

- f. Carol Dweck at Stanford found that people have either a fixed or growth mindset. Those with a growth mindset do better in school and in the future. When you believe that things will get better, you work harder and they do! It's like the children's story about the little engine that could.
 - g. Anne Wrzesniewski from Yale discovered that we have three mindsets about work: Job, Career, and a Calling. People with "Job" mindsets see it as work...plain and simple. "Career" folks see work as an opportunity to advance and succeed. But, those with a "Calling" mindset see work as something that draws on their personal strengths, contributes to the greater good, and is a purpose in and of itself. Reminding people about the meaning of their work moves them from being workers to stakeholders. Don't ever forget this one if you want to maximize engagement and profit.
 - h. "Priming" people prepares them for success. In studies, maids who were reminded of the physical workout they get while cleaning lost more weight than other maids not similarly "primed." Students reminded or "primed" about their intelligence do much better on tests. In one experiment, teachers were told that certain students were exceptional (but these students were actually average). At the end of the year, those average students tested off the charts as exceptional. The Pygmalion Effect is our belief in another person's potential and actually helps make that potential become reality.
 - i. Cultivate a positive (growth) mindset and watch your world change!
4. Principle #3. The Tetris Effect: Training Your Brain to Capitalize on Possibility
- a. Tetris gamers start to "see" the world around them like Tetris shapes. Our mind shapes how we see the world. Scanning the world for threats or negative impacts creates a worldview that screens out positives and creates a "negative" mindset...undercuts creativity, motivation, and goal accomplishment – thus keeping us from our potential.
 - b. A person's "cognitive pattern" has real effects. For example, accountants and lawyers constantly look for errors...problems. Their days are filled with audits or trial defenses. And it affects their relationships...like looking for C's, not A's, on their kids' report cards. It also affects them personally.

- c. Lawyers experience 3.6 times the depression as the rest of workers...it's an occupational hazard. But no one is immune from this "tetris" or cognitive pattern effect. Athletes become "competitive" with their relationships and it changes them, not always for the better. Social workers who see a lot of male-on-female abuse start seeing all men as potential abusers.
 - d. "Selective Perception" is seeing what we're looking for. When we hear a new word or buy a new car, we hear and see the same all around us. Heightened selective perception creates a filter to see the world through. This can be negative if your lens is one of distrust, or it can be positive if based on trust. Two people can look at the same person and construct totally different meanings about that person's words and actions.
 - e. Positive Tetris Effect: Two big ones – Gratitude and Optimism. Psychologist Robert Emmons has studied the power of gratitude for years and found it fundamental to happiness, energy, productivity, etc. People can be trained to be grateful by using a gratitude journal.
 - f. Optimism: Predicts job performance. Optimists set more and higher goals and tend to hit them. Richard Wiseman studied luck and found that if people expect good things to happen to them, they will. Something about how thinking optimistically reframes your brain. Latent opportunity is always there but optimists tap into it...pessimists miss such opportunity a LOT.
 - g. Rose-Tinted glasses: The author suggests rose-tinted glasses that will allow the Big Problems in but will filter out the many little ones, which if we focus on them, will pull us down. Better to see the world as positive, which helps us find even more positivity.
 - h. "In business and in life, the 'reasonable optimist' will win every time."
5. Principle #4. Falling Up: Capitalizing on the Downs to Create Upward Momentum
- a. After-crisis (or adversity) "mental maps." We respond to crisis or adversity in three ways: 1) Neutral Effect: Current state – following a crisis, you end up essentially where you started before the crisis; 2) Negative Effect – you end up much worse off after a crisis – you feel hopeless and helpless; 3) "The Third Path" Positive Effect – you actually rise above the crisis.
 - b. Post-Traumatic Growth – if people experience a trauma subjectively and positively, they can actually grow from it. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" seems to be a scientific truism according to research.

- c. Real stories of Michael Jordan getting cut from his high school team and Walt Disney getting fired from a newspaper for not being creative, along with rafts of stories about Kennedy, Lincoln, etc., demonstrate this phenomenon.
 - d. Learned Helplessness – people see futility and give up/quit forming a mental map of hope, then they close off any capacity to meet the challenge in front of them. This sense of helplessness can spread to other facets of life. So a bad time at work can spread to relationships all around.
 - e. Find the Path Up – crisis creates opportunities to move up. “Counterfactuals” create an alternative to a misfortune – and can help us keep a positive mental map. A job loss looks awful, but not compared to serious illness. Of course, it looks worse when you compare it to gainful employment – but putting things in big-picture perspective helps us find the path up. Explanatory Style: Optimists interpret adversity as temporary and local, and fare better than pessimists, who see adversity as permanent and global. “Falling up” is about using the momentum of the fall down to propel a bounce back up!
6. Principle #5. The Zorro Circle: How Limiting Your Focus to Small, Manageable Goals Can Expand Your Sphere of Power
- a. Zorro learned to become a great swordsman by mastering small circles (small chunks of learning) and then expanding his circles. The old adage applies here: How do you eat an elephant – one bite at a time!
 - b. Feeling in control is a great motivator/driver of success and performance. Mindset is how we interpret the world. The more we believe we have internal say over our world, the greater our achievement and the happier we are. A study of 7,400 people showed 50% higher risk of heart attack in people who felt they had little control over their deadlines.
 - c. Emotional Hijack: Fight between our reactionary (“jerk”) brain and our rational (“thinker”) brain. Our “jerk” brain takes over when fight-flight situation hits. Need to “think, then react.” Easier said than done. Financial losses are processed in same part of the brain as mortal danger.
 - d. Daniel Kahneman (Noble Prize winner) discovered that counter to classical economics, humans do not make rational, but rather emotional economic decisions. We have a deep sense of fairness and when that’s assaulted, we react emotionally, not rationally. Kahneman proves this in his “Ultimatum Game.”
 - e. How to deal with emotional hijack: Write it down or speak with a friend about it. By submitting the situation to language, we automatically defuse

it. Then separate things you can and can't control. Finally, attack things you can control – one bite at a time. Coaching uses this principle very well. Start the long journey with the first step.

- f. Avoid reaching for the stars – rather go one step at a time. Choosing manageable but challenging goals seems to work best. Once those goals are complete, expand to the next level, and so on.
 - g. Bottom Line: “Small successes can add up to major accomplishments. All it takes is drawing the first [Zorro] circle in the sand.”
7. Principle #6. The 20-Second Rule: How to Turn Bad Habits into Good Ones by Minimizing Barriers to Change
- a. “Common sense is not common action.” Though doctors know better, over 44% of them are overweight. It's not enough to know something, but we have to DO it as well.
 - b. Bundle of Habits: William James, father of modern psychology, said, “we are ‘mere bundles of habit...’” We all have a series of habits or routines in our lives. Our bedtime or morning routines might serve as examples. And that cuts both ways: Our habits keep us doing things both good and bad.
 - c. The trick is to interrupt our path and not just rely on willpower. Will power is a limited fount. If we go to it too often, we wear it out. On the other hand, unconscious habit taps into a huge reservoir of energy to sustain real change.
 - d. Passive leisure activities like trolling Facebook or watching TV are good for about 30 minutes...then apathy or “psychic entropy” sets in. However, “active leisure” like biking, sports, and games help us be 2.5 times happier when engaged than in a passive activity.
 - e. The 20-Second Rule: Put things in your path, not out of ready access. Even an extra 20 seconds of hunting for something can impede your progress. So make it harder to find bad habits (like food) and easier to find good habits (like your running shoes). Also creating barriers can make a big difference. If you often stop at an ice cream shop, take a different route home...that one is autobiographical!
8. Principle #7. Social Investment: Why Social Support is Your Single Greatest Asset
- a. The Harvard Men Study: Researchers followed 268 men (all Harvard graduates) since the late 1930's for 70+ years and looked at what distinguished the happiest and most successful from the rest. The chief researcher offered one word that made the difference: Love! The findings led to the simple, powerful fact that our social relationships with other

people matter more than anything else in the world! It's that simple. In fact, happiness predicted career achievement and income. The deeper and wider our "communities" of friends, colleagues at work, relatives, and others, the more resilient, productive, and happy we are. The need for social support is as vital as water and air to our surviving and thriving in a productive, happy world. For example, heart attack victims with social support are three times more likely to survive. Talk about an insurance policy.

- b. Socially bonded employees work harder, have greater focus, can endure more, and are immune to turmoil. The positively interactive social group acts like a team turbo-booster. The more employees interact socially, the more energy teams and individuals have. MIT researchers studied a large population of IBM employees and found that the more socially connected ones performed better.
 - c. Vertical Couple: The most important work /social connection is between boss and employee (I'm guessing also the client-consultant relationship). Daniel Goleman calls this relationship the "vertical couple." This basic unit of the organization makes the difference in whether an employee is happy, engaged, and productive. It should be called the vital couple!
 - d. Investing in social capital at work – introduce people around to each other. Ask "what's on the other side of your business card? What are you known for? Being a catalyst, the get it done guy, the inspirer, etc?" Send a "thank you" email to someone at work every day. Keep a gratitude journal. After a month it will become a positive habit...visible and infectious.
9. Conclusion: Happiness starts in the brain, radiates throughout the person, jumps the track to another person, then to a group, a community, and beyond. It's infectious because of "mirror neurons" that compel us to copy others, especially people we're deeply connected to, love, or who are authority figures. While the investments in happiness can be small, the dividends of happiness are enormous.