

Positively Happy

*Routes to Sustainable
Happiness*

A Six Week Course

Sonja Lyubomirsky & Jaime Kurtz



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Happiness

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by Sonja Lyubomirsky and

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Positive Acorn

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Table of Contents

Week One: A Crash Course in Happiness	5
Week Two: Person-Intervention Fit, Gratitude, and Optimism	25
Week Three: Comparing Yourself to Others is Bad, Helping Them is Good	47
Week Four: Coping, Flow, and Savouring	65
Week Five: Taking Care of Your Body, Spirit, and Motivation	84
Week Six: More Information on Making these Activities Work for You	98
Appendix: Additional Exercises	109
About the Authors	134

Week One: A Crash Course in Happiness

Welcome to our *Positively Happy* class! It's clear that almost everyone wants to be happier. And as you may know, the media and Western culture in general bombard us with flashy and often convincing messages on how to achieve this goal, making it easy to believe that happiness can be found at the mall, at the gym, or at the beach. Meanwhile, depression rates have soared, the divorce rate has increased, and perhaps more than ever, people are in search of ways to improve their sense of well-being. But how do we know what *really* works? In this course, you will be presented with the latest scientific findings on what promotes and sustains happiness. This week we will give you a crash course in happiness, bringing you up to speed on the latest scientific research on the topic. In later weeks, we will discuss twelve specific techniques, tell you why these techniques work, and help you find strategies or activities that will suit you, your clients, colleagues, or students. And we will tell you practical ways to implement this advice in a variety of settings and walks of life. The material we will present draws heavily upon Sonja Lyubomirsky's book, *The How of Happiness*, which is listed in the Further Reading section.

If you are anything like many of the people we have met over the years, you might be a little skeptical about the idea of becoming happier. Rest assured that while we do, indeed, believe that increased positive emotion is possible, we are interested in promoting more than mere "enjoyment." Happiness, as we will see later on, is associated with more engagement, better health, better relationships, and many other desirable outcomes. So please keep in mind that the techniques presented in this course are not just about feeling good but also about being more successful and living a more rewarding life at work and at home.

What Is Happiness?

When psychologists talk about happiness or subjective well-being, they mean the experience of frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and a sense that life is good and worthwhile. Happiness can be thought of as an umbrella term that includes low-intensity positive emotions (e.g., tranquility), high-intensity positive emotions (joy, euphoria), and everything in between. Importantly, people differ in how happy they tend to be, on average.

Who Is Happy?

The strategies we are going to teach you have been informed by a wealth of research on the ways that happy people think and behave. One of the strongest predictors of happiness is the quality of a person's interpersonal relationships. Happy people report strong social support, and they spend time and effort nurturing and maintaining their relationships. They also report engaging in prosocial behavior (essentially, going out of their way for others) and expressing gratitude. They find life meaningful and are committed to their goals. They are optimistic about their futures, they do physical exercise, and they try to live in the moment. Happy people are not Pollyannaish or out of touch with reality. In fact, they have stress in their lives (as people who "put themselves out there" tend to be highly engaged with others and with life in general!). They may have even faced traumas and crises. But, they possess the ability to cope with what life throws them.

1.1 Reflection

Do you have any reservations about the goal of becoming a happier person? Do you have any reservations about advising others on how to become happier? Feel free to write your answers here:

Why Be Happy?

Before we begin, we will attempt to answer some preliminary questions that might be running through your head right now. First, you might be wondering if it's a good thing to be happier. Sure, it might *feel* good to be happy, but aren't very happy people unmotivated to improve their lives, or unsympathetic to the plights of others, or simply selfish and self-absorbed? And isn't your level of happiness pretty hard to change? These are common misperceptions that have been debunked by numerous psychological investigations.

First, happiness carries a number of benefits.¹ Happy individuals have more friends, more satisfying social interactions, and a lower likelihood of divorce. This is not surprising. Happy people are simply more fun to be around. And in terms of physical and mental health, happy people have stronger immune systems, cope more effectively with stress, and, most remarkably, even live longer. A striking finding comes from a longitudinal study of nuns. Researchers obtained brief 180 autobiographical accounts from a sample of women just before entering the convent (so, in their early 20's or so). They analyzed the autobiographies for frequency of positive emotions and found that the nuns who had expressed the most positivity *over fifty years earlier* were more likely to still be alive in their 80s and 90s. Specifically, 90% of the happiest quartile of nuns was still alive at age 85, compared to 34% of the least happy quartile. At age 94, 54% of the happiest and 11% of the least happy were still alive.

1.2 Reflection

Consider these results. Is it surprising to you that happiness would promote longevity? Why or why not?

Consider the reasons why happiness might promote longevity. What explanations can you come up with? (Keep in mind the fact that these nuns all had similar lifestyles, did similar types of work, had similar amounts of stress and similar diets, etc).

A likely explanation for this finding is that the happy nuns were able to ward off the negative psychosomatic effects of stress and negativity. Suzanne Segerstrom and her colleagues have found that happier, more optimistic students experienced fewer health problems during stressful times (such as final exams) than their less happy, more pessimistic counterparts. Happy people simply cope better with the hand that life deals them.

In addition to being healthier and more socially adept, happy people are also more creative. In work that has especially strong relevance to the workplace, psychologist Alice Isen's work shows that, when people are put in a positive mood, they come up with relatively more creative solutions to problems and are more likely to think "outside the box." For example, happy people are better able to come up with novel uses for common objects, like paperclips. Why is this? Well, from an evolutionary perspective, happiness may serve as a signal that the environment poses no immediate threats and therefore you are safe to explore. Happiness, according to this idea, encourages interest and exploration of one's environment.

Negative moods, on the other hand, signal that something in the environment is awry and is in need of addressing, thereby encouraging a "battle station" mode of thinking. As such, studies that put people in sad moods have found that they are much more problem-focused and by-the-book in their thinking. This sort of mindset is certainly conducive to certain tasks, like, say, doing your taxes or solving math problems. But for a task that requires coming up with novel, creative solutions to problems, a happy mood is certainly preferable. This is just one reason to promote happiness in the workplace.

Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build theory² of positive emotion convincingly suggests that positive emotions (like happiness, joy, interest, pride, etc.) are vitally important for creating and maintaining much of what brings success in life, such as social relationships and productive work. According to this theory (and building off of Isen's work from above), positive moods open us up to new ways of thinking, they encourage our exploration of the world, and promote a sense of curiosity about new ideas and about other people. As a result, positive emotions build important resources. Central to this theory is the idea of the "upward spiral," in which positive emotion begets more and more positive emotion. For example, if you feel happy, you might be more open to the idea of, say, taking a class on a topic of interest. In this class, you find yourself excited to be learning new things, and you also make some new friends. This creates even more positive emotion that might propel you toward greater exploration and

interest in the world and others, creating more positive emotion, and so on and so on. In this way, positive emotions don't just feel good in the moment. They create and sustain experiences that are conducive to even more positive emotion. Keep this idea of the upward spiral in mind as we discuss specific positive interventions.

In sum, happiness doesn't merely "feel good." It carries a wide variety of benefits for the individual, as well as for families, workplaces, and communities. Hopefully you are convinced (if you weren't already!) that increasing happiness is a worthwhile aim. Now, how do you do it? Next, we will present you with information on how to actually make yourself a happier person for the long-term.

1.3 Exercise: Why it's not Obvious

If you're like most of us, you have some theories about how you might increase your happiness. Take a moment and list five things that you think would make you happier.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

1.4 Reflection

Now, reflect on the sorts of things you were thinking about while making this list. Were you envisioning large, global changes, such as moving to a big city or getting married? Or were the changes smaller, like getting more exercise or spending more time with friends?

A large, empty white rectangular area with rounded corners, intended for reflection. It is framed by a thick grey border.

When we aren't happy, or aren't as happy as we thought we might be in a given circumstance, we have a pervasive tendency to chalk it up to an external source. If you spend your discretionary income on a new stereo system, and that stereo system doesn't make you as happy as you'd expected, you tell yourself that it wasn't so great after all. When romantic relationships lose their initial spark, we attribute this to some qualities of the relationship or of our partner. Seldom do we realize that our own emotional or affective system is designed to work against us by removing the novelty and excitement from an experience over time. Indeed, one of the stumbling blocks to lasting happiness is our own lack of knowledge of the workings of this system.

Affective forecasting is the term used by researchers Dan Gilbert and Tim Wilson, and it refers to the process of predicting how you are going to feel in a future situation.³ When you think about it, most if not all decisions we make – big and small – are based on some sort of prediction of how we think that decision will make us feel. “Should I marry Steve?” “Should I go to the beach or the mountains for vacation this year?” “Should I order the chocolate or the strawberry ice cream?” And research shows that we're not always so good at forecasting our feelings accurately.

1.5 Reflection

To illustrate, think about a time when you made an inaccurate affective forecast about your future. Why do you think you were so wrong? Did you learn from the experience and avoid making a similar inaccurate forecast in the future? If yes, why? If no, why not?

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for writing a reflection. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the page.

One pervasive reason for affective forecasting errors is something called the *impact bias*. In short, when predicting future feelings, people overemphasize the impact that a single event will have on them, and they underestimate the impact of other things that are going on in their lives. A study by Tim Wilson and his colleagues found that college students significantly overestimated how much (and for how long) their mood would be affected if their college football team won or lost a game. They thought they would be much happier (if their team won) or much sadder (if their team lost) than they actually were, and they expected these feelings to persist for much longer than they actually did. However, if they were asked to write a prospective diary about all that their post-game lives would contain, such as classes, socializing, and post-game parties, this tendency to overestimate was significantly reduced, because they were less likely to see the game and its aftermath as occurring in a vacuum.

A second reason for affective forecasting errors is the pernicious process of hedonic adaptation.⁴ We tend to forget that many events lose their emotional impact with the passage of time. If you are predicting that a new high-definition TV will make you happy, you are probably forgetting that the TV will quickly stop bringing you pleasure. More than that, HD-TV will naturally become your new standard for television. Watching traditional TV screens won't satisfy you like it once did, and it will take *even more* to make you happy when you watch. This illustrates the concept of the hedonic treadmill, and it provides a major hurdle in the quest to achieve lasting happiness. Remember this idea: We will revisit it later when we talk about how to implement happiness-increasing strategies.

In sum, our self-knowledge is limited, and these limitations make it difficult to truly know what will make us happy! Affective forecasting research suggests that the route to true happiness is not at all obvious. However, a casual browsing of the self-help section of your local bookstore will show you that there are a lot of people out there who think they know what will make you happy, and often the advice seems obvious and trite. For example, *The Secret* was a recent sensation and international bestseller. The book's advice could be distilled into a single notion – the “law of attraction,” in which we can manifest or attract whatever our heart desires, from Prada bags to husbands.

What is the problem with advice like this? After all, if it makes people feel good about themselves and their prospects, what's the harm? For one, it is often based on the idiosyncratic tastes, temperaments, and anecdotal experience of the authors or just a few people. As you will see, journal writing, going to church every week, or training for a marathon might very well work for you or for me, but when

generalizing to the broader population, scientific research is needed, and it is essential to consider what works for whom. The happiness-boosting techniques we are going to present to you have all been subjected to empirical scrutiny. They have been tested on large numbers of people (generally college undergraduates and online community samples, but also older adults and people in clinical settings). They often employ the methodology of the longitudinal positive intervention, in which participants incorporate various cognitive strategies and behavioral changes into their daily lives, with the goal of increasing happiness and promoting optimal functioning over a longer period of time than the traditional laboratory setting allows.

How Happy Are You?

One of the most valuable things to come out of the field of positive psychology is the number of reliable measures of complex concepts like gratitude, mindfulness, inspiration, and – yes – happiness. In past decades, researchers attempted to measure happiness with one-item questions like, “Taken all things together, how would you say things are these days?” Although these sorts of questions did detect interesting differences among different people and different groups, they were extremely simple, not very reliable, and very open to diverse interpretations. Although the measurement of happiness is inherently subjective (indeed, happiness and “subjective well-being” are often used interchangeably), recent researchers have created measures that are more useful and informative than some of the early, more rudimentary measures. These scales can be used with a wide variety of clients to get a general sense of their well-being and natural positivity.

1.6 Exercise: Assessing Happiness

Here is one of the most commonly-used measures of happiness, the Subjective Happiness Scale. Take a minute and complete this scale.

Subjective Happiness Scale

For each of the following statements and/or questions, please circle the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you (take careful note of the labels of each scale item)

1. In general, I consider myself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not a very happy person						a very happy person

2. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
less happy						more happy

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						a great deal

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a great deal						not at all

Scoring the Subjective Happiness Scale

Add up the four numbers that you circled and divide by 4.

Your score should range from 1 (very unhappy) to 7 (very happy). For the sake of comparison, the average score on this scale ranges from 4.5 to 5.5. College students score on the lower end of this range; older people score on the higher end. So, take this difference into account when determining where you fall. But don't worry *so* much about how you compare to the average. The take-home message here is that you can use the strategies in this course to raise your happiness above this number! But is this really feasible, or, is trying to become lastingly happier like trying to be taller: impossible?

Can You Become Happier?

Admittedly, some researchers have taken a rather pessimistic stance, viewing happiness as an inherent trait that's difficult if not impossible to truly alter. Recent years have seen an explosion in research in behavioral genetics. This groundbreaking field has begun to provide insight into the seemingly unanswerable nature vs. nurture question. For example, if you are an extraverted person, is it because you inherited a genetic predisposition to be extraverted? Or did you simply have a lot of role models for extraversion as you were growing up? In other words, are you extraverted because of your genes or because of your environment? And how on earth could we ever know?

Researchers use the method of twin studies to help determine answers to questions such as these. As you may know, identical twins share 100% of their genetic material. So, any differences between them – in appearance, lifestyle, personality, and preferences – are due to influences in their environment. Of course, because the vast majority of twins are reared in the same home, they also tend to share a very similar environment. Rare as it may be, researchers at the University of Minnesota have found a number of identical twins who had been separated at birth and reared in different families, oftentimes in different parts of the country. They have studied these twins for years, and the twins have provided psychologists with a goldmine of information on the heritability of numerous traits. For example, two men, separated at birth were reunited at age 39 and discovered a shocking number of similarities in their lives. They had both married women named Linda, divorced them, and married women named Betty. They smoked the same cigarettes, owned similar cars, bit their fingernails, and both had dogs named Toy. And, for our purposes, they were similarly happy. In other words, knowing the happiness of one of a twin pair allows you to predict the happiness of the other twin fairly accurately, even if those twins had been raised thousands of miles apart!⁵

At first glance, this seems rather disheartening and suggests that your happiness level isn't under your control at all. But this is not the case. Happiness researchers tend to think of everyone as having a happiness "set point" or baseline that is only about 50% genetically determined. Body weight provides a useful analogy. Some people don't seem to have to work to stay slim. They eat what they want and don't exercise, and their weight seems to magically hover at a healthy number. Others are frustrated by the fact that they have to be incredibly careful about their diet and exercise in order to remain at a healthy weight. More likely than not, these people have very different genetically-determined set points for weight. The first person's weight naturally gravitates to a lower number than the second. However,

as the billion-dollar diet and fitness industries constantly remind us, intentional behaviors can be adopted to control one's weight. The same goes for happiness. Some of us are naturally happier than others, but everyone can work to rise above their set point and make themselves happier.

Recall that about 50% of your level of happiness is genetically determined. Another portion is determined by your life circumstances. Examples include your demographics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity), personal experiences (e.g., past traumas and triumphs), life status variables (e.g., marital status, education level, health, and income), your physical appearance, and the physical setting where you live. If you were to sit down and write a very brief autobiography, it would probably contain a lot of information about your life circumstances. You still have about 50% of your happiness yet to be determined.

1.7 Reflection

Think back to the things you listed earlier with respect to what would make you happy. Did anything on your happiness-increasing list qualify as a change in your life circumstances (rather than experiences or activities)?

If so, more likely than not, *you are wrong*. Changes in life circumstances only account for about 10% of your happiness! This seems surprising, but think about it for a while. Imagine that you wished you lived in a warmer climate. Why do you think this would make you happier? Are you envisioning lots of opportunities to experience nature and beauty? If so, remember the concept of hedonic adaptation. The ocean breezes and beautiful sunsets might make you happy at first, but gradually, these things would fall into the background of your emotional life, and you won't pay attention to and enjoy them like you once did. Research has confirmed this. David Schkade and Daniel Kahneman surveyed a number of college students in both Southern California and the Midwest, and asked them how happy they were, and also asked them to imagine how happy a "person like them" would be living in the other location. They found that Californians and Midwesterners were about equally happy, but both groups *predicted* that Californians were happier than Midwesterners, presumably because they were giving too much weight to the impact of climate.

Did you mention above that more money might make you happier? If so, you are certainly not alone! Money has long been thought of as a proxy for happiness – by regular folks and policy makers alike. But there is much research to suggest that, once your basic needs are met, money doesn't predict happiness well at all! Why might this be? Well, recall the work on affective forecasting. Because we aren't good at knowing what makes us happy, we often spend our money on bigger houses, nicer cars, designer clothes, and gadgets that are all prone to hedonic adaptation. These things might bring an initial boost in happiness, but it doesn't last. A second reason is that we tend to compare ourselves to others, and unless you are a corporate CEO (who may not be all that happy, anyway), there will always be someone around with a nicer office, bigger house, or better toys. Your standards will go up as you acquire more goods and compare yourself to people who are better off. Such is the nature of the hedonic treadmill.

In sum, changing your life circumstances is not likely to increase your happiness in a sustainable way. This is actually good news, if you think about how much time, money, and effort it would take to change many of these circumstances. One of the most surprising things about research on happiness is the discovery that lasting changes are much easier to achieve and are yours for the taking. Next week, we will begin talking about what makes up the remaining 40% of your level of happiness.

Review of Main Points from Week 1

- Happiness is widely beneficial, being associated with better relationships, health, and productivity, as well as more creativity.
- Positive emotions create an upward spiral that beget more positive emotions.
- It is possible to measure happiness.
- When predicting future feelings, people overemphasize the impact that a single event will have on them, and underestimate the impact of other factors.
- Because part of your happiness hinges on your intentional activities, it is possible to raise your happiness.

Looking Ahead

Over the next weeks, we will present you with a variety of tried-and-true techniques that you can use to increase how happy you are. We will discuss the research behind these techniques and provide you with clear instructions for how to apply them in your life and the lives of others. Take a few moments and reflect on why you decided to take this course. What would you like to get out of it? Do you have any lingering reservations about it?

Reading for Week 1

Foreword, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2: Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin Press.

In this week's reading, Sonja Lyubomirsky lays out the foundation for what you need to know before embarking on a program to make yourself, your clients, your employees, your colleagues, or your family members happier. In the Foreword, she argues that it's essential that the advice we get about any positive intervention program is supported by science, and that we shouldn't worry if some of this advice sounds corny or trite. In Chapter 1, she introduces the "40% solution," which is so critical to this course – the theory that up to about 40% of happiness is in our power to control. Be sure to read carefully the description and rationale behind this theory – what it really means and why. Finally, Chapter 2 is lengthy but very important. It discusses three myths about finding happiness: 1) Happiness must be "found"; 2) happiness lies in changing our circumstances; and

3) you either have happiness or you don't. The rest of the chapter delves into detail about the three determinants of happiness specified by the 40% solution – life circumstances (10%; e.g., what is the role of materialism or beauty in happiness), the happiness set point (50%; e.g., what can the depression gene and electrodes teach us about our potential for happiness), and intentional activities (40%; what this course is all about).

Additional Reading

1. Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*, 803-855.
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4. Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Napa Scollon, C. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: Revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, *61*, 305-314
5. Lykken, D., & Tellegen, A. (1996). Happiness is a stochastic phenomenon. *Psychological Science*, *7*, 186-189.

Further Reading

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Week 2: Person-intervention Fit, Gratitude and Optimism

Last week you learned some background information on why it is difficult to improve your level of happiness. For one thing, like height and weight, happiness is partially determined by genetics. Also, research on affective forecasting has shown that people often are poor judges of what will make them happy, and tend to focus on changing things that won't bring them lasting happiness for any length of time. Often, these changes have to do with life circumstances like physical appearance, wealth, or geographic location.

This all sounds rather pessimistic, doesn't it? Well, that pessimism pretty much ends right now. Recall that 50% of our happiness is genetically determined, and approximately 10% is due to circumstances. That leaves a whopping 40% essentially up to us!¹

From here on out, we are going to present you with activities and strategies you can employ that work within that 40% to create real and sustainable changes in your happiness level. These techniques have been tested scientifically and have been shown to be quite effective when practiced regularly and intentionally. Best of all, they cost nothing and are much easier than trying to change the broader circumstances of your life. As you'll soon learn, these techniques will focus on the way you think about and approach your everyday life – your relationships, your work, and so on.

As you read, you will be asked to consider how the techniques apply to your own life, but you should also approach learning about each exercise with the goal of applying it in a broader way. Specifically, consider how you can employ these strategies to make your clients, patients, students, or employees happier, healthier, and more productive.

Happiness Should Not Be Your Exclusive Goal

Before we delve into the specific strategies, a few caveats are in order. First off, happiness should not be pursued as a singular goal in and of itself. As Nathaniel Hawthorne eloquently put it, "Happiness is as a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but which if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you." When people have the overt, conscious goal of making themselves

happier, it sometimes backfires. Psychologist Jonathan Schooler and his colleagues created this mindset in research participants by instructing people to try and feel as happy as they possibly could while listening to an ambiguous piece of music. This actually led to a *decrease* in momentary happy mood, relative to those who were *not* asked to try to be happy.

Constantly assessing and monitoring happiness levels can also be counterproductive, as the same researchers found in a study of people on New Year's Eve in 1999, a night in which people went to great lengths and expenses to create a fun-filled night of happiness. It seemed that the harder they tried and the more they consciously thought about how happy they were, the more disappointing the evening turned out to be. Indeed, there is some anecdotal evidence that big events that carry a huge expectation of happiness (high school prom, wedding days) can be disappointing, because people pressure themselves to be extremely happy. Therefore, it is important to remember that happiness is very often the *byproduct* of an enjoyable experience, but it should not be a deliberate goal that preoccupies you on a daily basis. So, try to avoid constantly assessing how happy you are and whether or not the activities are producing the desired effect. Checking in with yourself from time to time is fine. Doing it constantly, on the other hand, is not going to be very useful. When advising others of these activities, you might mention that they often make people feel happier, but you may not want to overemphasize this point, or to encourage people to excessively monitor their effect.

It's Not As Obvious As It May Seem

A second caveat: You may initially think of some of these strategies as hokey, sentimental, or just plain obvious. We will attempt to dispel these ideas as we go along, but generally speaking, we ask you to bear in mind a few things. Self-help books might have been prescribing you to, say, "count your blessings" for decades, but only recently did psychologists subject this and other techniques to empirical investigation. Moreover, although these strategies might *seem* obvious (or even trite), many people do *not* practice them in their daily lives and continue to be notoriously unhappy and unfulfilled. As an example, take a moment and think about all your friends, family members, and co-workers. Despite the fact that "counting your blessings" is known to be a powerful tool for appreciating life and becoming happier, how many of them sit down on a daily basis and actually write down the many things for which they are grateful? It turns out that there is a gap between what we know will be good for us, and what we actually choose to do.

The Importance of Fit

In the words of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “A joyful life is an individual creation that cannot be copied from a recipe.” There is evidence that if a strategy simply feels wrong to you, it’s not going to be successful. Rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach, it is critical that the strategies fit your particular lifestyle, belief system, and personality for them to be effective.² You will notice that when we describe the specific strategies below and in the weeks to come, you will often be asked to try them out in a brief activity. This is largely because it’s easier to understand these strategies and how they work if you relate them to yourself. But before you really apply it in your everyday life, recognize that if a strategy is a poor fit for you, or you think it will be a poor fit for a client, doing it will feel forced, inauthentic, or strange, which is surely not conducive to happiness!

If your goal is to work positive interventions into a therapy setting or an organization, it is critical to bear in mind this idea of fit. In a therapy setting, or in a smaller company, it may be possible to tailor these strategies to fit a client’s needs, strengths, and goals. In a larger organization, perhaps the best approach is to inform people of the different strategies we will discuss here and let them choose their own. Using the concept of person-intervention fit as a guiding principle will make your use of positive psychology techniques more sophisticated and effective.

2.1 Activity

Below is a test developed to determine person-activity fit. Set aside some time and complete this task, or use it to help your clients, colleagues, and so on to find what will best suit them.

INSTRUCTIONS: Consider each of the following 12 happiness activities. Reflect on what it would be like to do it *every week* for an extended period of time. Then rate each activity by writing the appropriate number (1 to 7) next to the terms NATURAL, ENJOY, VALUE, GUILTY, and SITUATION.

People do things for many different reasons. Please *rate why you might keep doing this activity*, in terms of each of the following reasons. Use this scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all			somewhat			very much

- NATURAL:** I'll keep doing this activity because it will feel "natural" to me and I'll be able to stick with it.
- ENJOY:** I'll keep doing this activity because I will enjoy doing it; I'll find it to be interesting and challenging.
- VALUE:** I'll keep doing this activity because I will value and identify with doing it; I'll do it freely even when it's not enjoyable.
- GUILTY:** I'll keep doing this activity because I would feel ashamed, guilty, or anxious if I don't do it; I'll force myself.
- SITUATION:** I'll keep doing this activity because somebody else will want me to, or because my situation will force me to.

- (1) Expressing gratitude: Counting your blessings for what you have (either to a close other or privately, through contemplation or journaling) or conveying your gratitude and appreciation to one or more individuals whom you've never properly thanked.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (2) Cultivating optimism: Keeping a journal in which you imagine and write about the best possible future for yourself, or practicing to look at the bright side of every situation.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (3) Avoiding overthinking and social comparison: Using strategies (such as distraction) to cut down on how often you dwell on your problems and compare yourself to others.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (4) Practicing acts of kindness: Doing good things for others, whether friends or strangers, either directly or anonymously, either spontaneously or planned.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (5) Nurturing relationships: Picking a relationship in need of strengthening, and investing time and energy in healing, cultivating, affirming, and enjoying it.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (6) Doing more activities that truly engage you: Increasing the number of experiences at home and work in which you "lose" yourself, which are challenging and absorbing (i.e., "flow" experiences).

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (7) Savoring life's joys: Paying close attention, taking delight, and replaying life's momentary pleasures and wonders – through thinking, writing, drawing, or sharing with another.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (8) Committing to your goals: Picking one, two, or three significant goals that are meaningful to you and devoting time and effort to pursuing them.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (9) Developing strategies for coping: Practicing ways to endure or surmount a recent stress, hardship, or trauma.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (10) Learning to forgive: Keeping a journal or writing a letter in which you work on letting go of anger and resentment towards one or more individuals who have hurt or wronged you.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (11) Practicing religion and spirituality: Becoming more involved in your church, temple, or mosque, or reading and pondering spiritually-themed books.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

- (12) Taking care of your body: Engaging in physical activity, meditating, and smiling and laughing.

___NATURAL ___ENJOY ___VALUE ___GUILTY ___SITUATION

This measure gives you an introduction to the twelve happiness-increasing strategies you'll learn about, and should also give you some indication of which of the strategies discussed today and in the weeks to come will be a good fit for you. However, you should read and think about all the strategies proposed, because we believe they offer insight into the process of turning the objective conditions of life into happiness. Moreover, although a strategy might not be a good fit for *you*, you might see it working for your students, colleagues, or other people in your life. You can use this assessment to ensure a good person-intervention fit for your clients as well.

The first three positive intervention strategies involve changing the way you think about or construe your life. These three strategies are expressing gratitude, cultivating optimism, and avoiding overthinking and social comparison.

Strategy # 1: Cultivate a Sense of Gratitude

If you have even a passing familiarity with positive psychology, you have likely come across the gratitude intervention before. Although this is, arguably, the best known and most widely used of all positive interventions, many people do not fully understand why expressing gratitude boosts happiness or are not familiar with the underlying research. We will give you a more detailed look at gratitude so that you can use this intervention more effectively. Before we begin, take a moment and complete the following:

2.2 Activity

Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree nor disagree	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree

- ___ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- ___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
- ___ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.
- ___ 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
- ___ 5. As I get older, I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.
- ___ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

Note that items 3 and 6 are "reverse scored," so you would subtract the score you gave yourself from 8 before considering this score as an indication of your sense of gratitude.

This is a measure of dispositional gratitude. Some people naturally go through life and see much to value and be thankful for. For others, this does not come as naturally. But fortunately, there is reason to believe that most everyone can increase his or her experience of gratitude. How did you score?

Gratitude may seem like a broad and nebulous concept. Researcher and writer Robert Emmons calls it “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life.” So, yes, it is somewhat broad and, therefore, it can be pursued and expressed in a variety of ways.

2.3 A Gratitude Exercise

Take a moment now, and list five things in your life that you are grateful for. These can be small or large.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Did this exercise come easily to you? Why or why not? If any of the things you listed were other people, would you feel comfortable expressing your gratitude to them in person? Why or why not?

Simple as this exercise may seem, its effectiveness has been demonstrated in several experiments. Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough instructed students to list five things for which they were grateful, once a week for ten weeks in a row. Responses included things like “my friends,” “my good health,” and “the Rolling Stones.” These participants were compared with control groups who were asked either to list five daily hassles or to list five major events that had happened to them. Those who expressed gratitude felt happier and more satisfied and hopeful about their lives. Also, they reported fewer negative physical symptoms like headaches, coughing, and nausea. They also spent more time exercising! Another study found that this activity was also effective for adults suffering from neuromuscular disease and in a lot of pain.

Sonja Lyubomirsky and Ken Sheldon conducted several studies in which college students were told to keep a sort of “gratitude journal” with the following instructions: “There are many things in our lives, large and small, that we might be grateful about.⁴ Think back over the events of the past week and write down on the lines below up to five things that happened for which you are grateful or thankful.” Participants were told to do this activity either just once a week, or three times a week, over the course of six weeks. As predicted, this activity effectively boosted levels of appreciation for various aspects of life. Also, compared to a control group, those expressing gratitude experienced an increase in happiness over the six-week study, but only those who expressed gratitude once a week. Doing the activity three times a week did not bring any benefits! Why might this be? The authors believe that doing the activity three times a week was essentially overkill. It might have stopped being fresh and exciting, and may have begun to feel like a chore. Also, these people might have begun finding it more and more difficult to generate things for which they felt truly thankful (perhaps especially if they scored low on the gratitude scale you saw above), which may have had a negative impact on their mood. As we will discuss later, this finding has implications for how best to implement happiness-increasing activities. But these findings certainly suggest that the old adage “count your blessings” is right on target.

The practice of writing gratitude letters is also quite effective. A study by Lyubomirsky and her colleagues found that doing this for 15 minutes once a week over the course of 8 weeks produced boosts in happiness that were still apparent as long as 9 months after the study was over. And if the thought of delivering a gratitude letter to someone is nerve-wracking, take heart. Participants were happier even if they didn’t deliver the letters. Just the act of focusing on the positive qualities of the people in your life is beneficial. However, Marty Seligman

and his colleagues instructed their participants to pay a gratitude visit to someone they had never properly thanked, and read them their gratitude letter. As a result, relative to a control group, these participants reported increases in their happiness that persisted for a full month. However, it is clear that some people would not be comfortable with this activity! This is a vivid example of the importance of fit.

Why Does It Work?

Think back to the list you created above. Because of the importance of fit, you might not have found this activity to be particularly effective or natural for you. But you should still be able to come up with some explanations for why expressing gratitude – whether in journals or letters or some other way – is an effective happiness booster for many people. Why do you think it works?

First, this activity inhibits the process of hedonic adaptation we described last week. Think for a moment about the pleasant but constant things you encounter in your daily life, such as a beautiful tree outside your window, a helpful co-worker, your favorite local restaurant, or your best friend. Essentially, gratitude may bring these things and people that we have adapted to and fail to appreciate back into the forefront of our attention. For example, both of us live in Southern California, where it is sunny and warm nearly every day. Having come from the east coast, this was a source of great joy at first. However, because it was constant, it gradually became something that we didn't really notice and appreciate. Effortfully expressing gratitude for the beautiful sunny weather helps remind us of how lucky we are to live here. Along these lines, expressing gratitude puts you "in the moment" and encourages the process Fred Bryant and Joseph Veroff call "savouring" (more on savouring to come!). Gratitude can also make you evaluate your life – and yourself – more favorably. It makes you feel good about the choices you've made and where you've come in life. In the social realm, expressing gratitude for other people (either to yourself or directly to them) helps you appreciate them more. If you are appreciative of others, you might be more inclined to seek people out, which you will learn, is a happiness booster in itself. You will also be more willing to "pay it forward" by doing prosocial behavior.

Gratitude can also foster a reappraisal of ambiguous or even negative events by encouraging you to "look at the bright side." For example, the mother of two toddlers recently reported the benefits of the grateful mindset:

"I can see how happy it makes the kids when I reply with a genuine, 'Thank you so much!' and how much happier I feel when they express thanks for something too. So I have been trying to concentrate on truly feeling thanks when I say it. And

if there is nothing readily apparent in a particular moment to feel thankful for (i.e., “Gee, thank you for giving me that half-chewed banana”), I try to find something to be grateful for (i.e., “I am so grateful you gave the banana to me instead of mashing it in between the couch cushions”). I find that trying to keep a more positive and grateful perspective helps a lot as a stay-at-home mom of a 3 year-old and 2 year-old.”

In this way, gratitude can help people cope with what life throws their way, ranging from minor events like the one above to true traumas and tragedies. In fact, the upside of serious illness is often an increased appreciation of loved ones and of life itself. This “attitude of gratitude” serves as an effective coping mechanism for many people who are facing adversity – whether large or small. When my (Sonja Lyubomirsky’s) daughter was three months old, an older woman approached me while I was struggling with the stroller. “Your baby is so beautiful,” she said. “Appreciate this age; it goes by so fast!” At the time I was feeling totally besieged and sleep-deprived and, to be honest, didn’t much appreciate her glib intrusion, but it had a powerful effect. Taking time to feel grateful for this small child allowed me to step outside the dreariness of my long days caring for her and to savour the magic of the small moment I shared with my baby.

Putting It Into Practice

Gratitude is a broad concept, and it is not surprising that there are a variety of ways to express it. If this activity is a good fit for you, consider one of the following approaches:

Start a Gratitude Journal. Choose a time of day when you have several minutes to “step outside” your life and thoughtfully reflect. It could be first thing in the morning, during lunch, or before bedtime. Think of three to five things for which you are currently grateful. These can range from minor events (the coworker who always smiles at you first thing in the morning, or the fact that your spouse took out the trash) to qualities of your life more broadly (your good health, a particular talent you have, or the positive qualities of your best friend). Do this task once a week to start. You may find that you would like to do it a little more often than that, and that is fine. The key is to tailor the activity to suit you best.

Having said that, research does show that people can get bored or tired of doing the exact same activity over and over, so our advice is to add some variety to the ways in which you express your gratitude. Some days, you may choose simply to list a few of your so-called “blessings.” Other days, you may want to expand on

them and write about *why* you are grateful for them. You could vary the domain – one day writing about gratitude for people, the next day writing about gratitude for nature, and so on.

Write a Gratitude Letter. Sometimes, you may prefer to actually tell someone how grateful you are to have him or her in your life, or thank him or her for something more specific. Marty Seligman advises that you think of a person to whom you feel grateful but have never properly thanked. This could be a family member, friend, teacher, coach, co-worker, and so on. Write a letter to that person, describing in detail what he or she has done for you. Although you do not need to deliver the letter to reap the benefits of this activity, try to do so if you are comfortable.

Using Gratitude at Work: Although we have mostly discussed gratitude in a general sense, it is easy to see how appreciation can be useful at work. Gallup author Tom Rath reports one poll that showed that 65% of Americans said they received no recognition for good work during the prior year. We have heard similar complaints from our colleagues in organizations in India, Japan, and the UK. Clearly, appreciation can be used strategically by supervisors to boost employee morale. In addition to an appreciative managerial style, coaches can also use gratitude effectively with their clients. When coaches use the skill of “acknowledgment” – recognizing some core positive trait or behavior in a client – the results are often powerful. Appreciating the best qualities in those with whom we work can help give them a boost, motivating them to persevere even when times get tough. Looking for the best in our clients and co-workers has the added benefit of helping us be more favorably disposed toward them, making working together easier and more enjoyable.

Strategy #2: Cultivate Optimism

Much like counting your blessings, “the power of positive thinking” is yet another apparent platitude. But the effectiveness of an optimistic mindset – essentially, interpreting life events in a positive way – has been established in numerous studies.

2.4 Activity

Below is a common measure of dispositional optimism. Take a moment and complete this measure. Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think "most people" would answer.

1	2	3	4	5
I agree a lot	I agree a little	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree a little	I disagree a lot

- ___ 1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
- ___ 2. It's easy for me to relax.
- ___ 3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
- ___ 4. I'm always optimistic about my future.
- ___ 5. I enjoy my friends a lot.
- ___ 6. It's important for me to keep busy.
- ___ 7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
- ___ 8. I don't get upset too easily.
- ___ 9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
- ___ 10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Items 2, 5, and 6 are filler items. Ignore these while scoring. For items 3, 7 and 9, you need to subtract the score you gave yourself from 6. That is, if you scored yourself a 2, you would calculate $6 - 2 = 4$, and your actual score would be 4. When you have re-calculated these, look at how you score on items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10, which assess optimism. Do you appear to be high on optimism? Why do you think optimism promotes happiness? Provide a specific example of when you explained a life event in a positive way. Do you think you are an optimist or a pessimist? Why?

Do you think that optimism is a form of self-deception? Why or why not?

To encourage optimistic thinking, Laura King created the “best possible selves” activity, in which participants imagine that their life has gone as well as possible in a variety of important domains.⁵ For example, you might think of your life in ten years and visualize having a house in the country, a supportive spouse, two children, and a fulfilling career as a journalist. You might state more specific goals too, like having completed a marathon or publishing in a particular magazine. Importantly, this activity is not asking you to describe your fantasy life. It should be positive but also attainable and realistic. Also, it is important that you aren’t comparing your current self to some idealized version of yourself that you are falling short of – not surprisingly, doing this is likely to backfire and make you feel worse. Be sure to project into the future when doing this exercise!

2.5 Activity

Take a few minutes now and write a very brief description of your best possible self as you see it ten years from now.



Laura King has found that spending 20 minutes a day doing a more in-depth version of this activity created a significant increase in mood compared to a control group. Ken Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky adapted this activity in a longitudinal design and found that, when done regularly over four weeks, it also led to a significant increase in mood as compared to a control group who wrote about aspects of their daily lives.

Why Does It Work?

Why does the best possible selves activity increase happiness? First, it encourages optimism and self-esteem, because you are imagining achieving your most cherished future goals. Imagining achieving these longer-term goals also mobilizes you to successfully cope with minor setbacks that may arise along the way. Also, it makes you take stock of and solidify your values and your goals. As psychologist James Pennebaker suggests, the act of physically writing down your dreams for the future helps you logically structure the story, whereas simply thinking about your future life in your head may trigger a more nebulous, unstructured flow of ideas.⁶ When your ideal future is laid out with a sense of coherence, the steps you need to take to achieve it may appear to be clearer and under your control. Also, this exercise may help you if you are trying to make a difficult life decision.

2.6 Reflection

Return to the brief version of this exercise that you did above. Was this a good “fit” for you? Did it help you structure and prioritize what you want in life? Is yes, why? If no, why not?

Putting It Into Practice

Set aside 20 minutes, once a week, and sit down to think about your best possible self. “Think about your best possible self” means that you imagine yourself in the future, after everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realization of your life dreams, and of your own best potentials. Write a detailed description of what your life might be like. Focus on aspects of both your personal and your professional life and vary the domains you consider each week, such as your social life, your career goals, your hobbies, and your health.

A variation on the best possible selves activity involves identifying your long-term goals and breaking them down into smaller, concrete, achievable goals. This should make your goals seem more attainable and may very well motivate you to persist.

Using it at work: The best possible selves exercise can be an effective tool for professional development because it encourages people to take stock of their potential and motivates them to work toward it. You can use this exercise as part of the hiring process, employee placement, or quarterly reviews. Feel free to play with this exercise, making it fit your needs and those of your clients. For example, consider tailoring this exercise to make it domain specific. Imagine, if you will, variations with titles like “best possible manager” or “best possible coach.”

Review of Main Points from Week 2

- Happiness can be increased for the long-term by making relatively small changes in thinking and behavior.
- It is important to find an activity that feels authentic to you and fits with your personality, strengths, values, schedule, and so on.
- Expressing gratitude can be a powerful tool for increasing happiness, and is useful in the workplace as well.
- Cultivating optimism is realistic and effective, and can be done through the best possible selves exercise.

Looking Ahead

Next week, we will continue presenting strategies that effectively increase happiness. Specifically, we will discuss 1) avoiding overthinking and social comparison, 2) practicing acts of kindness, and 3) nurturing social relationships.

Reading for Week 2

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 (pp. 88-111): Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin Press.

Chapter 3 discusses how we all can find activities and strategies that fit our interests, our values, and our needs. The ideas that shape this chapter are unique to the self-help and happiness literature. Although the notion of person-intervention fit might seem obvious, it is rarely if ever discussed by self-help/self-improvement gurus. This may explain why some people are turned off by exhortations to “count their blessings” or to “try to be more forgiving for a change,” or why they sometimes find their happiness-increasing efforts not working. It’s because those strategies may not fit them very well. The first two parts of Chapter 4 discuss in detail (like the following chapters you will read) the first two happiness strategies described in this course – expressing gratitude and cultivating optimism. Be sure to take note of the handful of practical strategies provided in each of these sections – for example, how to keep the expression of gratitude fresh (e.g., create a gratitude collage, only count your blessings after a particular trigger or hardship, do it with a friend, etc.) and how to practice

optimism via twists on the best possible selves strategy (e.g., identifying long-range goals and breaking them up into subgoals).

Additional Reading

1. Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 111-131.
2. Silberman, J. (2007). Positive intervention self-selection: Developing models of what works for whom. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 2*, 70-77.
3. Emmons, R. A. & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessing versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 377-389.
4. Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*, 73-82.
5. King, L. A. (2001). The health benefits of writing about life goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 798-807.
6. Pennebaker, J. W., & Graybeal, A. (2001). Patterns of natural language use: Disclosure, personality, and social integration. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 10*, 90-93

Further Reading

- Emmons, R. A. (2007). *Thanks!: How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). *Opening up*. New York: Morrow.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1991). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Free Press.

Week 3: Comparing Yourself to Others is Bad, Helping Them is Good

Last week, we discussed how important it is to make sure that a given positive intervention is a good fit for the person using it. We also introduced two strategies for increasing happiness and quality of life: expressing gratitude and cultivating optimism. This week, we are going to present the third cognitive strategy – avoiding rumination – as well as presenting two social strategies – committing acts of kindness and cultivating relationships.

Strategy #3: Avoid Rumination and Social Comparison

This activity counteracts two particularly insidious stumbling blocks to happiness – rumination and social comparison.

There is much evidence to suggest that overthinking, or rumination, not only prevents happiness, but is also a characteristic of depression.¹ Rumination is a pattern of thought that involves thinking about issues or problems but not really coming up with any solution or course of action. More common in women, it can often lead us to blow things out of proportion or make sweeping, negative generalizations about ourselves, the future, or life in general, which makes us feel worse and encourages more rumination. Remember our discussion of the upward spiral of positive emotions? Well, rumination or overthinking can be thought of as part of a *downward* spiral.

3.1 ACTIVITY

Are you a ruminative thinker, especially when you're distressed? Fill out this questionnaire to find out. When you respond to the questions, consider that all of us think and do many different things when we feel sad, down, or blue. Then read each of the items below and indicate whether you *never*, *sometimes*, *often* or *always* think or do each one when you feel distressed or depressed. Try to indicate what you generally do, not what you think you should do.

1	2	3	4
almost	sometimes	often	almost
never			always

- ___ 1. think about how alone you feel
- ___ 2. think about your feelings of fatigue and achiness
- ___ 3. think about how hard it is to concentrate
- ___ 4. think about how passive and unmotivated you feel
- ___ 5. analyze recent events to try to understand why you are depressed
- ___ 6. think about how you don't seem to feel anything anymore
- ___ 7. think "Why can't I get going?"
- ___ 8. think "Why do I always react this way?"
- ___ 9. go away by yourself and think about why you feel this way
- ___ 10. write down what you are thinking about and analyze it
- ___ 11. think about a recent situation, wishing it had gone better
- ___ 12. think "Why can't I handle things better?"
- ___ 13. think about how sad you feel
- ___ 14. think about all your shortcomings, failings, faults, mistakes
- ___ 15. think about how you don't feel up to doing anything
- ___ 16. try to understand yourself by focusing on your depressed feelings
- ___ 17. analyze your personality to try to understand why you are depressed
- ___ 18. go someplace alone to think about your feelings
- ___ 19. think about how angry you are
- ___ 20. think back to other times you have felt depressed
- ___ 21. listen to sad music

Did you tend to agree with these "ruminative thinking" items? Why is this not conducive to happiness? Can you think of a time in your life when you ruminated or overthought something? Why did you do it? Did it help the situation?

So, why *do* people ruminate on or overthink certain issues? Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, who has conducted much research on dysphoric rumination, suggests that people think they gain insight from thinking this way, and they possess personality traits that are conducive to it, such as perfectionism and neuroticism. Unfortunately, this thought pattern runs counter to the goals of happiness and effective problem solving and coping.

Sonja Lyubomirsky and her students found empirical support for the downside of overthinking. They provided their participants with either positive or negative personal feedback, and then asked them to do a word completion task, where they were faced with word stems like

D U _ _

_ _ S E R

and asked them to fill in the blanks to create a word. Those who were provided with the negative feedback were more likely to fill in the blanks with negative words like DUMB and LOSER rather than more benign words like DUSK and RISER. Importantly, this was only true of people who were dispositionally unhappy. The happy participants were more likely to let the negative feedback roll off their backs rather than ruminating on it and using it to evaluate themselves.

Outside of the lab, Susan-Nolen Hoeksema found that ruminative thinking predicted the onset of major depression in a sample of adults who have lost family members to terminal illness. The same pattern held in San Francisco residents following the 1989 earthquake. Of course, situations like these and many others require *some* degree of analysis and reflection. However, it is important to remember that the ultimate goal is successful coping and problem solving. The downward spiral of rumination encourages just the opposite.

Comparing yourself to others can be thought of as a specific type of overthinking. It must be said that it is natural and, unless you live in a cave, difficult to avoid. While watching David Beckham score a goal off a corner kick might inspire the aspiring footballer, social comparisons often run counter to the goal of being happy. Surprisingly, this is true for both upward (when you compare yourself to someone better off than you) and downward (when you compare yourself to someone worse off than you) types of social comparisons. How can this be true? While it makes perfect sense to think that constantly comparing your skills and achievements to the more talented and successful would cause envy, distress, and

diminished self-esteem, why would it also be detrimental to see yourself as better off than others? Well, for one, it might lead to a sense of guilt, or it might create psychological distance between you and the objects of your comparison. After all, seeing yourself as prettier, smarter, and richer than your peers doesn't exactly create the strong social bonds that are conducive to true happiness. Moreover, social comparisons remove a sense of agency from you and places control of your perceived self-worth onto others. Someone will always be better than you at *something*. If your happiness is based on maintaining a precarious position at the top, you will be easily dethroned when someone better than you comes along.

Research has shown that happy and unhappy people use social comparison information in different ways, and in ways that you might not expect. Sonja Lyubomirsky and Lee Ross created an experiment in which participants were solving anagram puzzles with a stranger, in such a way that it was very obvious who was solving them faster.² Unbeknownst to the participant, the stranger was actually a confederate of the researchers, who was instructed to solve the anagrams either a good deal faster or slower than the actual participant. The question was, how did this make the participant feel? Put yourself in the role of a participant in this study now. You might imagine feeling quite good about yourself as you saw that you were consistently faster at this task than your peer was, while being slower than your peer might not feel so great. But it's not that simple. Happy and unhappy people responded very differently to social comparison information. Happy people simply did not use the information, whereas unhappy people did. Most notably, unhappy people were sad, anxious, and frustrated when the confederate outperformed them, while happy people were much less bothered.

Putting It Into Practice

If this is something you think you need to work on, there are several techniques you can employ. These may seem easier said than done, but do persist! First, simply stop overthinking! When you catch yourself wondering why you lost a client, your date hasn't called you, why you got a C on an exam, or whether you remembered to turn the kitchen light off, recognize that your rumination cycle is beginning, and that it is unlikely to be productive. Go do something else. Call a friend. Open a book. Go to the gym. Focus on the clients you have. Although this may seem like treating the "symptoms" rather than the "cure," it can help begin to break this negative thought pattern by getting you absorbed in other, more rewarding activities. Additional benefit should come from realizing that when you *don't* overthink, the result isn't actually all that bad. This should help you learn that, by and large, overthinking really isn't very beneficial after all.

On the other hand, some problems really do need addressing. If you truly feel the need to mull over something, set aside a limited period of time – when you are *not* feeling particularly down or anxious – to sit down and write out your thoughts. (Writing encourages structuring your ideas, whereas thinking is much more unstructured and therefore more likely to snowball.) Or call a trusted friend and talk the issue out with him or her. Focus on problem solving. If you are upset by a low grade on a test or an unfavorable performance review, think about how you might improve next time and construct a plan of action, rather than merely venting your feelings of inadequacy. When your allotted time is up, simply do not allow yourself to reflect on the issue at length again! (This topic will come up again when we discuss techniques for effective coping.)

Finally, you could gain perspective by looking at the big picture. Ask yourself, “Will this *really* matter a year from now?” Chances are, the answer is no! Or try to consider your problem in the context of space and time. When my (Sonja Lyubomirsky’s) son went through an astronomy phase, I was surprised how serene and unruffled I felt every time I read him a book about galaxies, stars, or planets. How can I stress over my carpooling situation when the farthest galaxy is thirteen billion light-years away? When the universe is expanding! It seems magical that this knowledge would have such power, but it does.

Using it at work: Rumination over poor performance and social comparison with co-workers and competitors are pandemic in the workplace. Fortunately, the same helpful strategies listed above are as useful in the board room as they are in the living room. As a coach or manager, you can help clients steer their thoughts away from negative self-appraisals by giving them new opportunities for success, refocusing their attention, or placing structured time limits on introspection. You can also help to role model quality thinking habits by avoiding discussing comparative salaries, bonuses, and benefits. Educators can re-direct their pupils’ attention by celebrating and emphasizing group, rather than individual, successes.

Strategy #4: Practicing Acts of Kindness

3.2 Reflection

Reflect on a time when you were truly kind to someone or went out of your way for someone. This could be something small or something large. It can be something you did through organized volunteer work, or something you did completely on your own. Describe what you did, how the other person reacted, and how you felt. How long did your feelings last?

There is empirical evidence to suggest that, despite how aggravating or inconvenient it can be to drive a friend to the airport or volunteer on weekends, these sorts of prosocial activities are very effective at increasing happiness. In one study, college students were asked to do acts of kindness for several weeks. Participants were free to choose their own activities, which included such things as doing a roommate's dishes, helping a classmate with homework, or holding the door open for a stranger. Notably, the researchers varied the *frequency* with which these activities were to be done – either three or nine times each week. They also manipulated *variety* of the deeds; telling participants either to vary them or to do the same act over and over for a whole week.

We already told you of the benefits of prosocial behavior, but think for a moment about the specifics. Do you think that participants got the bigger boost from doing kind acts frequently or less frequently? And is it better to vary the activities, or do the same ones over and over?

It's not so obvious, is it? But the researchers found that the frequency of doing kind acts did not impact happiness, but the variety did. Specifically, those who were asked to perform a range of kind acts showed a noticeable increase in happiness, even a month after the study ended. Those who did *not* vary the types of acts they were doing actually showed a slight *decrease* in well-being at one point in the study, only to rebound to their original baseline by the end.

Why might this be? Well, here it is again – hedonic adaptation. People might have gotten used to the activity, and the heartfelt “thank you” they received after, say, holding the door for the thirtieth consecutive stranger became predictable and much less gratifying than it had been at first. The act itself may have come to seem rote or like a chore. It ceased to challenge people or teach them something new about themselves or about others. On the other hand, doing a variety of activities, such as holding the door, taking your roommate to the airport, or making cookies for friends, elicits different responses from people, demand a variety of skills from you, and is more likely to remain fresh and interesting.

3.3 Activity

This week, take some time out and do the following activity:

First, reflect on how often you engage in prosocial activities or acts of kindness as compared to pleasurable ones. How do you feel after each type of activity?

Sometime this week, engage in one act of *kindness* and one act of *pleasure*, and answer the following:

What were the two activities you engaged in?

What were the specific differences in each type of activity?

What type of emotions did you feel during each type of activity?

How long did the generally positive emotions experienced during each type of activity remain with you afterward?

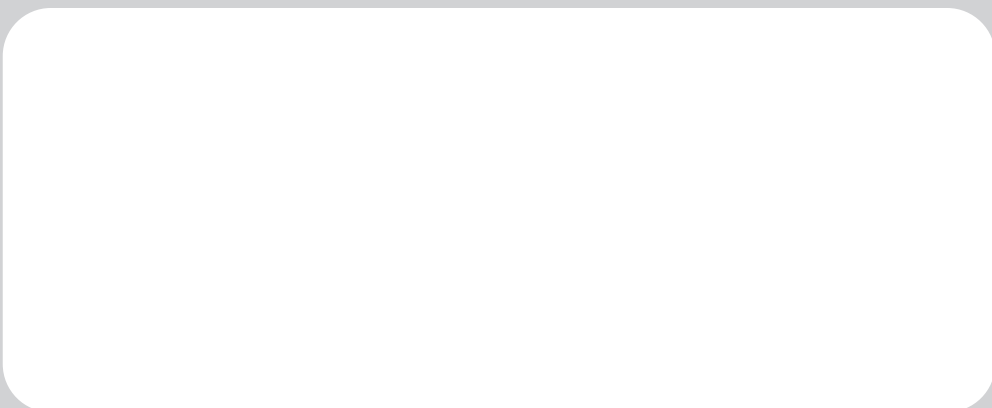
3.4 Reflection: Why Does It Work?

Kindness activities are effective in promoting happiness for several important reasons. Take a moment and see if you can come up with three.

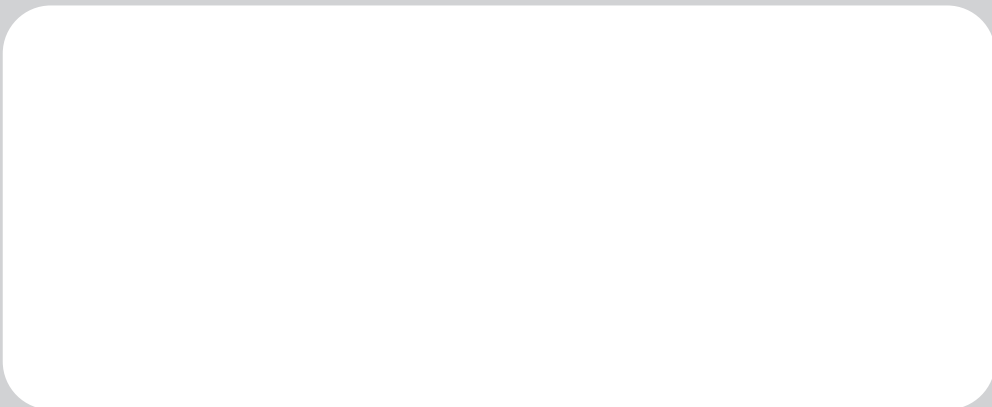
1.



2.



3.



“Helping others” is, of course, a broad term, and the specific benefits it brings to both you and to your beneficiary are going to depend in part on the nature of the deed. As such, there are several ways in which prosocial behavior can lead to increased happiness. Going out of your way for others is conducive to happiness because it changes your self-image. You come to see yourself as helpful, generous, kind, and capable. This is especially true if you are capitalizing on your personal strengths and talents as you do it. For example, an effective leader might find heading up a charitable organization especially gratifying, while a good organizer might be equally content by doing the organization’s books. You may also become more socially engaged and connected to your community as a result of volunteer work, seeing yourself as an active, caring agent for change rather than someone who knows little about the people around her. On a more interpersonal level, sometimes you see the effects of your generosity – for example, you may receive a grateful smile or see someone’s life improve as a result of your help. More than this, there is evidence that relationships are strengthened during acts of kindness, and this goes beyond the tit-for-tat sense of reciprocity that is sometimes felt when one person helps another.

Being the recipient of a kind act, or even witnessing the kindness of others can also have a positive effect. I (Jaime Kurtz) experienced this recently when I was running a half marathon about three hours from home. After the race, I’d realized that I’d lost my car key somewhere along the course. I was alone and my cell phone was, of course, locked in my car. I was exhausted and frustrated and just wanted to get out of this situation! I sheepishly approached a group of about ten women, some of whom had also run in the race, and asked them to use a cell phone. They all immediately offered their phones to me so I could call for help and then asked me what was wrong. I told them about my car key and we all had a good laugh. They invited me to join their post-run tailgating party, and I immediately went from being on the verge of tears to feeling supported and happy! The women gave me a big glass of champagne and we spent time talking and laughing and getting to know each other until roadside assistance came to help me. I took one of the champagne corks as a memento and every time I see it, I feel happy and optimistic about the goodness of people. Sara Algoe, a social psychologist who studies the interpersonal benefits of gratitude, has found evidence for the benefits of being the recipient of a kind act: in addition to simply feeling good, oftentimes people are motivated to “pay it forward” and do something nice for someone else.

Putting It Into Practice

In our daily lives, we all perform acts of kindness for others, sometimes without even knowing it. Examples include smiling at a stranger on the street, donating blood, helping a friend with homework, visiting an elderly relative, or writing a thank-you letter.

Perform *five* acts of kindness each week and vary them as much as you need or want. We advise that you choose one day during the week (e.g., a Monday or a Saturday) in which to do all five kind acts. The acts do not need to be for the same person, and the act may or may not be similar to the acts listed above.

You may want to keep a “kindness journal” in which you write down the details of these activities at the end of the day in which you did them. Describe exactly what you did, who benefited from your kind act, and – if applicable – their reaction. Also, make a note of how you felt before, during, and after each act.

Using it at work: Although the language of “counting kindnesses” is certainly not corporate speak, it is a virtue that is universally recognized as desirable. Being kind does not simply mean volunteering at a charity or helping a stranger. Kindness is easily possible at work. Consider the example of reaching out to a new hire to help her feel more included or bringing a small gift to a helpful co-worker. The truth is, the workday –whether in a school, a consultancy, or a large company –offers chances for kindnesses large and small every single day. Seizing these opportunities will leave you and your colleagues feeling better, and provide an example that will help make kindness part of the organizational culture.

Using Money to Facilitate Prosocial Behavior

Remember how we told you that money doesn’t lead to happiness? Well, this was a bit of an oversimplification. A recent study by Liz Dunn and her colleagues found that it’s *how* you spend your money that matters.³ They assessed the happiness of a sample of people who’d received a financial windfall (a profit-sharing bonus), and simply asked them what they’d spent the money on. They found that the amount of money people received did not predict happiness. But the *way* they spent the money did. Specifically, spending the money *on other people* (donating to charity, or spending the money on a friend) predicted increased happiness 6-8 weeks after receiving the money, and the more of the bonus they’d spent on others, the happier they were.

Of course, it’s possible that the people who spent their money on others were naturally more prosocial to begin with, a quality that might make them

predisposed to being happier. So, the researchers conducted a follow-up study, in which undergraduates were *randomly assigned* to spend a small amount of money (either \$5 or \$20) that was provided to them by experimenters on either themselves or on others. They received the money in the morning and were told to spend it sometime that day. The researchers found that people who spent their money on others were significantly happier at the end of the day than those who spent money on themselves, regardless of whether they'd received \$5 or \$20. These findings are highly suggestive. First, they support the idea that changes in happiness can be obtained by very small means (just spending \$5 to, say, treat a friend to coffee or help feed expired parking meters). Secondly, people don't seem to realize how beneficial this might be. A second set of participants in this study reported that spending money on themselves would make them happier than spending it on others, which was pretty much completely backwards. In short, then, people seem to overlook the benefits of prosocial spending. But the take-home message is clear: Money can buy happiness if you spend it right. Lead author of this paper, Liz Dunn, has taken her own advice and shares the following personal anecdote:

As I was working on my research on the emotional benefits of generosity last fall, I started thinking about what to get my relatives for Christmas. Rather than the usual material gift, I decided to get each of them a gift certificate to a really cool website called Donors Choose. On this website, teachers post requests for special supplies for their classroom to allow them to enrich their students' learning (often with art or music related activities). With my gift certificate, my relatives could then go online and look through the projects and choose which one to fund. So, I was basically giving my relatives the gift of giving. And they loved it. I've never gotten such a great response to any gift I've ever given my family members – even when I've spent hours combing the mall for the perfect gift.

So, consider spending some of your discretionary income on other people! The next section will provide one reason why this might be inclined to bring you happiness.

Strategy #5: Nurturing Social Relationships

If your goal is to be happy, the importance of social relationships cannot be overstated. Happier people consistently report having more friends and good social support, and they are also more likely to have a romantic partner.⁴ Of course, the relationship between happiness and social relationships is most definitely bidirectional. Happier people tend to be more extraverted and are generally more fun to be around, qualities that will certainly promote relationships. However, there is also much evidence that the reverse is true: Quality relationships promote happiness, and that by fostering social connections and intimacy, we can become happier people.

Why Does It Work?

Our need to belong is rooted in Darwin's theory of evolution. Humans and animals would not have been able to survive and reproduce if we hadn't been willing and able to look out for each other. Maintaining strong ties to your ingroup promotes basic survival, and according to Roy Baumeister and others, feeling accepted by and belonging to a group is a fundamental human need.

Also, social support is vitally important. As anyone who has moved to a new city or country can attest, not having people to rely on for simple favors or for emotional support is extremely trying. Other people serve as a buffer in times of trouble, they help us make sense of and understand life events, they share their advice and expertise, and they help us celebrate our triumphs. In addition (and as strange as this may sound), we don't adapt to other people in the same way that we adapt to, say, a funky new cell phone or new convertible. Unlike material possessions, people are dynamic and unpredictable. Our relationships with them constantly evolve, making them much less prone to hedonic adaptation.

Putting it into Practice: Colleagues

The people who share your space while you are on the clock can greatly affect your happiness. Toxic individuals – those people who are constantly angry or incessantly complaining – tend to drag down morale for everyone. Colleagues who are engaged and enthusiastic, on the other hand, can be inspiring (except, perhaps, first thing Monday morning). You can take charge of the social climate by attending to your relationships at work. Although it is easy to criticize others, try keeping a mental tally of the things you like about your co-workers. For those people who seem very different, try to appreciate the strengths they bring to work that might be different from your own, and how that diversity contributes to a more productive office. You can probably think of people you know who are

diligent about attending to their relationships – people who regularly send thank you cards, who check-in with colleagues with whom they haven't spoken in awhile, and who frequently offer to lend a hand. Try these strategies out for yourself, and watch how navigating the social terrain of the workplace becomes easier and more rewarding.

Putting It Into Practice: Friendships

Happy people tend to have at least three people that they consider good friends. Like any good relationship, friendships take time and effort to create and maintain. If you'd like to work on the quality of your friendships, consider the following pieces of advice. First, make time for others and show an active interest in them. Being a good listener is a wonderful but highly undervalued trait. Try to foster this ability. Also, consider the importance of honest self-disclosure. It sends someone the message that you trust him or her. It motivates the other person to reciprocate. It feels good to understand and be understood. Of course, some people find it difficult to share a lot about themselves, especially early in a relationship. This is alright. You can implement this strategy at the pace that feels right for you. Finally, as clichéd as it sounds, to have a friend, you need to be a friend! Be positive, supportive, and loyal. Let your friends know that you are grateful to have them in your life.

Putting It Into Practice: Romantic Relationships

Although one can live a full and happy life without being in a romantic relationship, most research suggests that married people are happier than single, divorced, or widowed ones. Also, the vast majority of people will marry at some point in their lives. While the strategies for cultivating friendships certainly apply here as well, we have further advice for managing romantic relationships.

First, make time for your partner. Of course, this is often easier said than done, but it is critical to maintaining healthy relationships. Take at least 15 minutes each day, turn off the TV, and really talk about your thoughts and feelings, or just share a funny story about what happened that day. The important thing is to share your reality as it exists outside of the home.

A second strategy involves how you and your partner capitalize on each other's good fortune. When your partner shares a story of success with you, are you genuinely happy and enthusiastic, or are you uninterested, dismissive, or threatened? Research by Shelly Gable has found that it is essential to be positive and supportive of a partner's triumphs if your goal is to have a close, trusting relationship. Think about your own relationship and how you share and receive good news from your partner.

On the flipside, you may find it necessary to work on how the two of you deal with negative experiences and emotions. Conflict is inevitable in a relationship where people share children, a home, and financial responsibilities. Goals conflict, parenting styles differ, one person finds it impossible to remember to put the toilet seat down. Addressing these issues in a healthy and open way is essential for a lasting, happy relationship.

Some strategies for strengthening your relationships can be done on your own. Take time to really think about the positive qualities of your partner. Whereas people are much less prone to hedonic adaptation than are material possessions, it is still easy to start taking your loved ones for granted when they are fairly constant, stable presences in your life. Make a list of qualities that you especially value in your partner. Recreate your first date or the day you first said, "I love you," and think of all the feelings and thoughts you had about the person then.

Along these lines, another way to recreate the initial spark you felt when you first met your partner is suggested by recent research from social psychologist Art Aron's lab. He advises spending time doing a new or different sort of activity with your partner. Challenging, exciting activities, such as hiking a new trail or cooking an exotic meal stimulate structures in the brain that are related to novelty, thereby recreating that wonderful sense of excitement that you felt with your partner in the initial stages of your relationship, which may not be felt as frequently anymore.

Review of Main Points from Week 3

- Social comparison removes a sense of personal agency.
- Rumination is unstructured, and can therefore easily get out of control.
- Both social comparison and rumination are associated with less happiness.
- Practicing acts of kindness can improve your happiness.
- Cultivating your relationships can promote important gains at work and at home.

Looking Ahead

Next week we will present four strategies. Two of them relate to ways of effectively dealing with negative life events – developing good coping mechanisms and learning to forgive. The other two, increasing savouring and finding flow, suggest specific ways to derive more pleasure out of momentary experience.

Reading for Week 3

Chapter 4 (pp. 112-124) and Chapter 5: Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin Press.

The last section of Chapter 4 – on avoiding overthinking – offers several prescriptions from Susan Nolen-Hoeksema’s book, *Women Who Think Too Much*. We urge you to consider these shrewd recommendations, which can be summed up into three parts: break free (e.g., distract, write in a journal, or even shout “Stop!”), move to higher ground (e.g., write every possible solution to your biggest current problem), and avoid future traps (e.g., list places, times, and people that tend to trigger your overthinking and avoid them like the plague). Sonja Lyubomirsky begins Chapter 5 by quoting a well-known social psychologist: “Relationships constitute the single most important factor responsible for the survival of homo sapiens.” This chapter tells you why. Pay heed to this chapter’s descriptions of the ways that doing kind acts for others can increase happiness for both them and you, as well as how to avoid situations when kindness can actually be harmful. For example, full-time caregivers of chronically ill or disabled loved ones are at high risk for depression; in addition, “forced” kindness, such that can sometimes occur in work settings, can lead to resentment and the sense that you are being taken advantage of. Next, Sonja

Lyubomirsky presents several practical ways that we all can invest and nurture our relationships with co-workers, clients, employers, employees, friends, and spouses. One of these ways is to capitalize on – or take delight in – someone else's good fortune. How did you react the last time that a colleague shared his or her latest distinction or promotion with you? Read this chapter to find out whether what you did was optimal, and why.

Additional Reading

1. Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1991). Responses to depression and their effects on the duration of depressive episodes. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 100*, 569-582.
2. Lyubomirsky, S. & Ross, L. (1997). Hedonic consequences of social comparison: A contrast of happy and unhappy people. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 1141-1157.
3. Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B, Norton, M. L. (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness, *Science, 319*, 1687-1688
4. Myers, D. (1999). Close relationships and the quality of life. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (p. 376-393). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Further Reading

Baumeister, R. F. & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 497-529.

Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1999). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2003). *Women who think too much: How to break free of overthinking and reclaim your life*. New York: Henry Holt.

Piliavin, J. A. (2003). Doing well by doing good: Benefits for the benefactor. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Mid Course Assessment

Please reflect on the interventions you have learned about thus far.

1. Choose one activity that you think would be effective for you. Why do you think this? Design a detailed plan for applying this in your own life.
2. Choose one activity that you can suggest for someone else. Why do you think it would be effective? For whom would this activity NOT be effective. Explain your rationale.

Week 4: Coping, Flow, and Savouring

Last week, we discussed a number of happiness interventions related to the social aspects of life. We are all, fundamentally, social creatures and so it should come as no surprise that the people around us factor heavily into our happiness. Being kind to others, broadly defined, can be a good way to boost mood, just as cultivating good social relationships is important to a sense of personal fulfillment. We also discussed the psychological downsides of rumination and social comparison and presented strategies for overcoming these maladaptive habits.

Strategy #6: Developing Strategies for Coping

Living a rich, engaging life is impossible without opening yourself up to loss, stress, failure, and trauma, and it is vital to be able to deal with what life throws your way. Psychologists call this process coping, and it involves managing stress and negative emotions (“emotion-focused coping”), as well as figuring out the appropriate course of action for dealing with particular challenges (“problem-focused coping”). Perhaps not surprisingly, women tend to be more adept at emotion-focused coping, whereas men are better at problem-focused coping. As such, both sexes benefit more from training in the style of coping they are less skilled at.

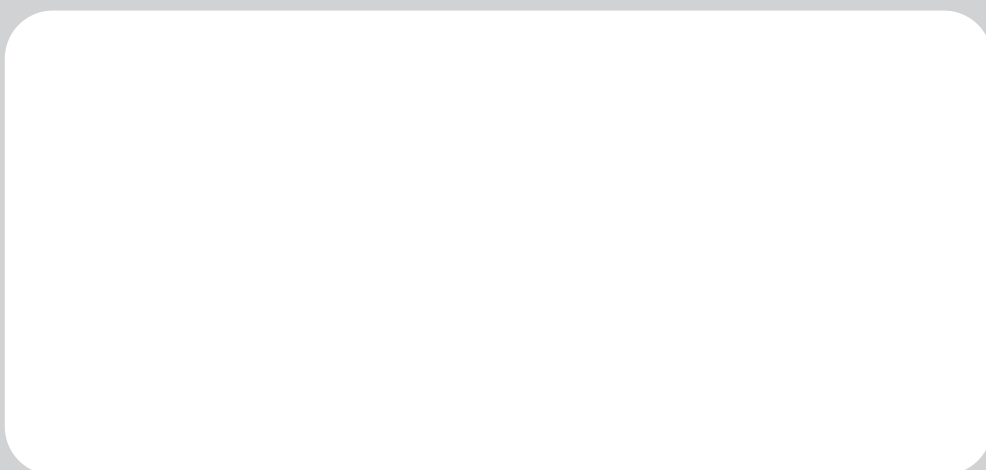
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4.1 Activity

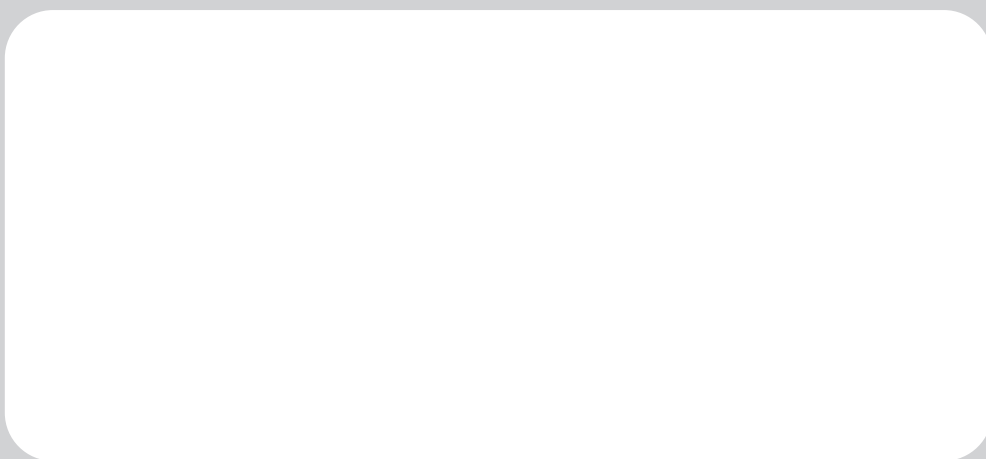
Think of a time in your life when you were faced with a negative life event. How did you manage your emotions?



Was this effective? Why or why not?



Does this qualify as emotion-focused or problem-focused coping? Why?



Possessing effective coping strategies is important for a number of reasons. First, if you feel that you aren't able to deal with negative emotions or stressful events, you may take fewer chances in life. For example, you may be reluctant to propose a new idea to your supervisor for fear of being rejected, perhaps harshly. If you don't feel you're capable of dealing with such rejection, you will be less inclined to take the kinds of risks that can lead to greater success. This is the safe choice, but not the choice you want to make if you want to reap the benefits of growth and challenge.

Many times, the negative events we have to deal with are uncontrollable and/or permanent, like the death of a loved one or a serious illness, making emotion-focused coping skills particularly important. These skills may include distracting yourself from the issue or trying to recognize the benefit of the experience. As one breast cancer survivor remarked,

"I gladly open my doors and let life sweep in. Now, I take the time to feel within, to listen within, and to respond from within. I am grateful for these new doors, which have blessed me with so many opportunities to give and receive gifts of joy, inspiration, encouragement, and creativity. I find life very exciting, meaningful, full of hope, and funny. I wonder, would I have found this if I had not gone through my cancer experience?"

Indeed, many people report seeing "the silver lining" in trauma, which includes increased social support, a new sense of efficacy and self-worth, and a heightened sense of appreciation of everyday life. These benefits do not come without a huge cost, of course. But trauma often does come with an upside, particularly if the victim possesses the solid resources needed to manage their negative emotions.¹

Putting It Into Practice

If you are undergoing a negative life event, or if you are plagued by thoughts of something that happened long ago, you may benefit from James Pennebaker's expressive writing exercise, which has been incredibly effective at helping people make sense of negative experiences. Participants in these studies were given a version of the following instructions:

For the next four days, for at least 15 minutes a day, I would like for you to write about your very deepest thoughts and feelings about the most traumatic experience of your entire life. In your writing, I'd really like you to let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. You might tie your topic to your relationships with others, including parents, lovers, friends, or relatives, to your past, present, or future, or to who

you have been, who you would like to be, or who you are now. You may write about the same general issues or experiences on all days of writing or on different traumas each day.

Although Pennebaker's work was borne out of an interest in trauma, it is also appropriate to managing the more minor hassles and setbacks all of us face in daily life. It is easy to imagine variations of the exercise that are suitable to organizational or educational settings. Workers, or students, could use the expressive writing paradigm to address their fears, feelings of failure, social difficulties, or irritations. This activity may be painful at first. After all, we like to be happy and often avoid thinking about negative life events! Also, you may be thinking, "Isn't this a lot like the rumination I was told *not* to do last week?" Actually, although you are focusing on negative events, this writing activity is decidedly different from rumination. Pennebaker's writing activity encourages people to provide a narrative structure to a traumatic event, perhaps seeing it as being part of a larger plan. Also, you are encouraged to reflect on how the experience has changed you and contributed to who you are as a person. In short, it helps you see the benefit in trauma in terms of personal growth, goals, values, and relationships.

A second strategy for coping carries the somewhat intimidating name "coping via thought disputation." Based on the principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy for depression, it suggests the following course of action: 1) Write down the issue you are facing ("I gained five pounds over the holidays"); 2) Write down the negative beliefs that are associated with this issue ("I'm weak-willed and unattractive"); 3) Identify the outcomes of these beliefs ("No one will want to date me," "I don't have the self-control to lose the weight"); 4) Dispute the negative belief...this is the toughest step! ("Five pounds really doesn't make much difference," "I do have self-control and I can lose that weight. I've done it before," "Lots of people gain a little weight around the holidays. And it happened partially because I have so many friends who wanted me to come to their parties!" "It is simply untrue that no one will want to date me!"); and 5) As a result of this positive reinterpretation, you should feel energized, motivated, and optimistic that you can actively fix the problem. Because our thoughts are such a natural part of us, it can be challenging to dispute unhelpful or irrational thinking. It may be helpful to try to view your thoughts, listed in steps one and two above, from another perspective. Try asking yourself, when you get to step four, "What might my best friend tell me if s/he were to read these?" You might also try a common "reframing" strategy, in which you say to yourself, "My point of view is only one way of seeing things. What is another way of looking at this issue?" Finally, you might try making a habit of

“catching yourself in the act” with unhelpful thinking. Try to notice instances in which you think poorly about yourself or some voice inside you prevents you from moving forward or being positive. When you see yourself thinking along these lines, call “time out!” and stop yourself from going down this self-defeating mental path.

If you find yourself lacking vital coping resources, begin building them up by practicing these activities. And, remember the benefit of social support! Don’t underestimate the role of other people in helping us cope. Both of the strategies above can also be done with a trusted friend. You might tell that person about traumas you’ve faced, or talk through your negative thought patterns with him or her.

Strategy #7: Learning to Forgive

“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Despite the ubiquity of this statement, seeking vengeance and harboring grudges are two major stumbling blocks to happiness. But learning to forgive and mentally and emotionally let go of negative thoughts related to a transgression can be tremendously beneficial.² Mahatma Gandhi’s revision to the old adage, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind” seems much more apt.

By forgiveness, we do not mean forgetting or excusing what someone did. Instead, true forgiveness is characterized by a diminished negative reaction to the transgressor. You no longer seek to hurt him or pay him back. This shift may come about through the passage of time (“time heals all wounds”), through reflection or contemplation of the transgressor’s motives or situation at the time of the slight, or through direct contact with the person. The strategies below all take advantage of these forgiveness-triggers (if you will).

Forgiveness might seem like a topic that is out of place in organizational culture or in your work with your clients, but it is actually useful in every domain of life. At work, where there is often a spirit of competition, it can be easy to hold grudges, criticize others, and engage in one-upmanship. Often, however, a lack of forgiveness can lead to strained relationships and a toxic social atmosphere that can interfere with productivity. Taking the time to try to understand your co-workers’ motives, and examining the personal costs of harbouring resentment can help you overcome the trap of the payback mentality and make work far more enjoyable.

Why Does It Work?

Despite often being very difficult to implement, people who forgive tend to be happier and more empathetic and less depressed, hostile, anxious, and neurotic. Why is this? To answer, consider the similarities between harboring resentment and engaging in rumination. Both are negative thought patterns that aren't accompanied by a constructive course of action. Holding grudges generally encourages all sorts of negative thoughts. For instance, you may replay the transgression over and over in your mind. You may think about all the negative ramifications it has created in your life. You may even think about ways you can exact your revenge. Certainly, none of these thought patterns are going to help you move past the event. The liberating sense that forgiveness brings was powerfully articulated by Nelson Mandela, who forgave his jailers after years of imprisonment: "When I walked out of the gate I knew that if I continued to hate these people, I was still in prison."

Putting It Into Practice

If you see yourself being a prisoner of your own inability to forgive, and if you truly do want to forgive someone, consider implementing one or several of the following strategies.

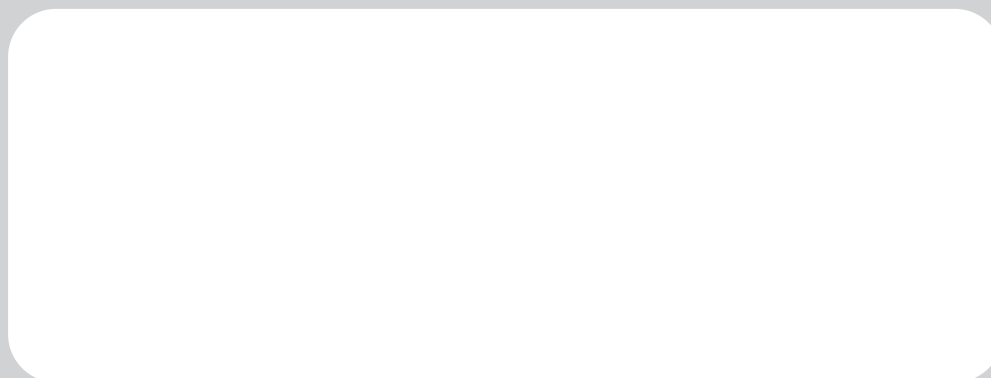
First, consider a particular person for whom you hold feelings of resentment or anger. Try to empathize with this transgressor by imagining him as a person beyond whatever he did to you. Think about what you might like the person to know. What sort of (constructive!) things would you say to the person? (Remember that the goal here is to make yourself feel better, not the other person.) How might you feel as you forgave the person? The effectiveness of this technique was actually empirically tested, and it led a group of people to feel less sadness and anger, less physiological stress, and greater personal control, as compared to a group who was instructed to focus on painful memories.

You might also want to sit down and craft a letter of forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. Again, this exercise is to benefit you, not to benefit your transgressor, so there is no need to actually send this letter. As you write, think about the nature of the person's misdeed. Describe how it made you feel and how it still affects you to this day. This may not be easy for you! If you're having trouble, try the exercise above, do a "warm-up" activity by writing a letter for a lesser offense (this might feel so good that you'll be motivated to return to the more painful one), or simply put the letter away and return to it later. In some cases, you may actually choose to make contact with the person who hurt you. You could actually send your forgiveness letter, or do something more subtle, like be kind to the person. While this is not necessary, it may be important if this is a relationship you truly want to mend.

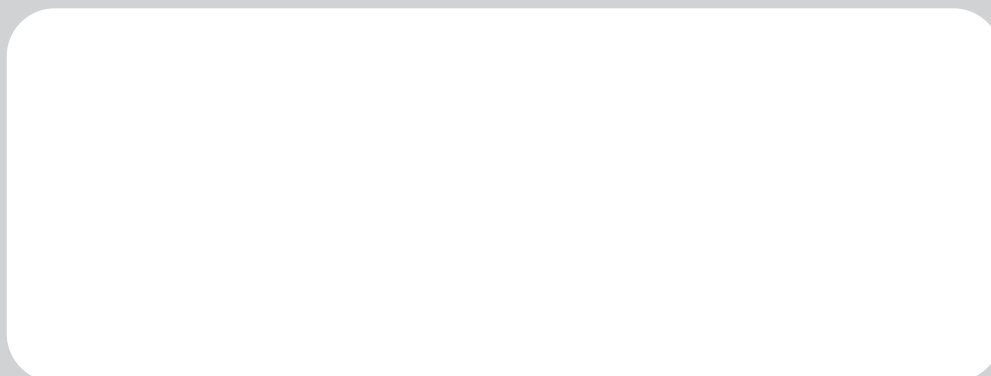
Strategy #8: Increasing Flow Experiences

4.2 Activity

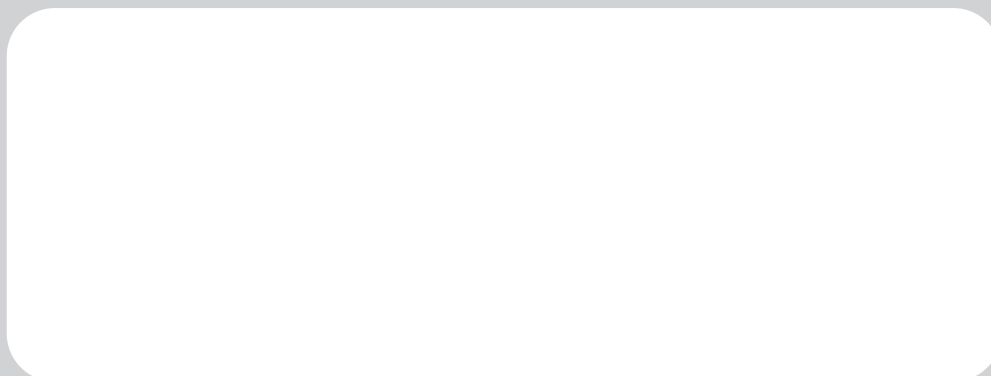
Think about a time in your life in which you were so engaged or absorbed in what you were doing that you lost track of time, and/or lost self-consciousness. Describe the activity.



Why do you think it was so absorbing?



Would you say you felt happy during this experience?



Hopefully, you were able to come up with an example of what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (“chick-SENT-me-high”) calls flow.³ The flow state is characterized by extreme absorption and involvement in an activity that is intrinsically rewarding. The jargon term for it is the “merging of action and awareness.” Flow often comes about when an activity is challenging to the point of stretching your abilities, but not so challenging that it produces anxiety. Flow may be experienced in a wide variety of experiences, such as playing sports, drawing, playing the piano, rock climbing, or having a deep conversation. Interestingly, flow experiences are not happy ones in the traditional sense, because happiness requires focusing on yourself and your own affective experience. By contrast, people are often so absorbed when they are in a flow state that they lose self-awareness. However, in retrospect, these activities are recalled as being incredibly enjoyable, and people want to repeat them.

Why Does It Work?

According to Csikszentmihalyi, a good, happy life comes about by spending as much time in flow as possible. Flow activities are done because they are so rewarding and, as anyone who has experienced flow knows, they create a sort of “natural high.” Also, flow experiences are reinforcing. We want to repeat them to recreate the highs they consistently provide. Because these states are characterized by pushing our limits and strengthening our skills, we need to continually add challenge to the activity as our performance improves. Therefore, a byproduct of frequent flow experiences is improved performance in a domain of life that is intrinsically valuable to you. Also, people who have frequent flow experiences experience a rich and rewarding involvement with life. One cannot be passive or complacent in a flow experience. In sum, it is not surprising that Csikszentmihalyi equates flow with the term optimal engagement.

Putting It Into Practice

The beauty of flow is that it can be created in almost anything we do. For example, in high school, I (Jaime Kurtz) had a job as a grocery cashier, a decidedly low-skill, low-challenge activity. I loathed this job. One day, I decided to try to be a more efficient grocery bagger by adding some challenge to the task by upping my “items scanned per minute” (yes, they actually keep track of this). I tried to scan the items faster by quickly looking at each item for the UPC barcode while also figuring out how best to arrange the items in the grocery bags. This made the time pass much faster, partially because I was stretching my minimal grocery-scanning skills (and also, I was too engaged to look at the clock and focus on my misery!).

One interesting point my story illustrates is how the concept of flow can be used diagnostically at work. I hated my job, and this was because there was not enough challenge, and not enough opportunity for me to use my best skills. But once I increased the challenge, being a cashier became far more rewarding. Similarly, when you work with a coaching client or a student, pay attention to whether they complain of being bored or frustrated. If they do, this likely indicates that they either have too little, or too much, challenge relative to their level of skill. This can be a helpful insight in that it can guide your work with them, either pointing to skills development or modifying the work to adjust the level of challenge.

4.3 Reflection

Think of an activity you engage in that you consider a low-skill and low-challenge activity. Reflect on how you might make the activity more challenging by creating flow. During the next couple of days, experiment on how to do so.



What activity did you engage in? What were the qualities of the original situation that made it a non-flow experience for you? How did you make the activity challenging or engaging for you while you were doing it? How could you make it provide even more challenge in the future? Do you think you could use these techniques in other non-flow activities in your life?



Even though “work” sometimes has a negative connotation in our society, Csikszentmihalyi has found that people actually experience more flow at work rather than at leisure. Ideally, most work does involve a certain amount of challenge (and if yours doesn’t, consider the advice above!). One line of research describes work as being a job, a career, or a calling. If you are working where you are because you need the money, if you long for the end of the workday, and if you don’t really have the possibility or desire to advance, you have what researchers call a “job” orientation. For you, work is a necessary evil (for me, the grocery store definitely qualified as a job!). By contrast, a “career” can be thought of as a job with advancement opportunities. It may not be that intrinsically rewarding, but you persist in the hopes of moving up the ladder, achieving more money, power, status, and so on. Finally, people with a “calling” do not work because of money or because they hope to advance. A calling is a job that is rewarding for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end, and is summed up by the statement, “You could say I worked every minute of my life, or you could say with equal justice that I never worked a day.” Not surprisingly, callings tend to have flow built into them. But, it is possible to create flow in jobs and careers as well, to make them more engaging and fulfilling! If you are in the position to help people find more flow in their daily lives, consider building flow into the workplace by adding challenge (while avoiding the negative effects of stress or excessive time pressure).

Also, consider what you do in your off time as well. Large amounts of leisure time didn’t really exist in generations past, and what to do with it is primarily a modern concern. Just as having some money is necessary but not sufficient for happiness, the same goes for leisure time. It’s how you spend it that matters. Csikszentmihalyi believes that it is leisure time that actually poses the biggest challenge for most people. Although the majority of us look forward to the end of the workday, crave the three-day weekend, and fantasize about vacation, we are notoriously bad at using leisure time well, pursuing passive rather than active, engaging activities. Needless to say, it is easier to come home from work and turn on the TV than it is to practice the guitar, go play a pick-up basketball game, or write poetry. So, it is important to bear in mind the benefits of flow when that desire to “veg” takes hold. Transform yours and others’ leisure time through an openness to new and challenging experiences. Take a class on cooking or photography. Learn a foreign language or musical instrument. Hike on a new trail. In short, never stop learning. Best of all, more rewarding leisure time not only has the potential to make you happier, but can also improve your relationships and spill over into more engaging work, creating an upward spiral!

Also, examine what sorts of activities best promote flow for you, and suggest that others do the same. Some of us may not be aware of what does the trick (as evidenced by the seemingly universal grumbling about having to go to work!). Think about particular activities. You might find writing poetry frustrating and uninteresting, but you may love the outdoors. Try to find more flow in outdoor activity. If you like gardening, do it more frequently, or try some other outdoor activity. The key is to engage fully in whatever is rewarding to you.

Activity #9: Savouring Life's Joys

Although both promote happiness, savouring can be thought of as almost the flipside of flow. While a flow state is characterized by absorption that is so deep as to remove you from your own conscious awareness of yourself and your emotions, savouring can be thought of as a process in which you engage in thoughts or behaviors that “generate, intensify, or prolong the enjoyment of positive experience.”⁴ This definition may seem broad, because it is! Savouring can be used to enhance present experience, but one can also savour the past, in the form of nostalgia or reminiscence, as well as the future, in terms of anticipation. For our purposes, we will primarily consider techniques to enhance savouring present experience. As noted by the French writer de la Rochefoucauld (1694), “Happiness does not consist in things themselves but in the relish we have of them.” In other words, relishing, or savouring, is really a key process in which people are able to extract positive emotions from the everyday conditions of their lives.

4.4 Reflection

Look around your environment and take note of one (or more!) things that you often take for granted. Examples include the birds singing, the view outside your window, a favorite painting, the cup of tea you are drinking, or your cat sleeping peacefully nearby. Stop what you are doing and pay as much attention as possible to this thing. List all the pleasant qualities of this experience and the sensory experiences, thoughts, and feelings that are created inside you while you are experiencing it.

Does this make you savour and appreciate it more? If so, how long does the effect last? If this does not help you savour, why not? How can you incorporate savouring techniques into your daily life more often?

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for writing reflections. The box is positioned below the reflection questions and occupies the lower half of the page.

People who are good at savouring tend to be happier and more appreciative. One reason is – again – that savouring often inhibits hedonic adaptation by bringing things that we tend to take for granted into the forefront of our attention. And savouring is one strategy that can be done by everyone. We all have sensory experiences; we all have something worthwhile in our lives. The challenge is attending to it and using it as a source of positive emotion.

Putting It Into Practice

Savouring is not always the easiest activity, as it requires some effortful control of attentional and affective processes. One technique involves luxuriating, or actively attending to your sensory experiences. One study found that people who were instructed to really tune into the experience of eating a piece of chocolate enjoyed it more than those who were distracted when eating (and, dieters take note: people also tend to eat less when they are really savouring their food!). So, pay attention to the complex flavours and textures in your lunchtime salad. Look out your bedroom window and take careful note of the landscaping, or listen to the songs of birds or crickets. On your commute to work, take note of the nature or the architecture that is all around you. Be open to and aware of beauty.

Underlying all of this is the importance of mindfulness, or the ability to fully attend to present experience. Research by Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan has found that those high on this trait (as measured by disagreement with survey items like “It seems as if I’m ‘running on automatic’ without much awareness of what I’m doing” and “I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way”) are more appreciative and happier.⁵ Mindfulness can arise from meditation (discussed later) and other activities that call for focused awareness.

If mindfulness is difficult for you (and with the proliferation of e-mail, cell phones, iPods, and so many other attention-diverting gadgets, who *isn't* it difficult for?), you may consider taking part in activities that help you develop this ability to focus. Also, in the workplace, discourage multitasking and suggest that people turn off their electronics for a short period of time each day, so that they can really spend that time relaxing and clearing their heads for the tasks ahead. When spending time with a friend or significant other, turn off the television, radio, cell phones, and other distractions.

Fred Bryant and Joseph Veroff offer another technique that encourages more proactive (rather than reactive) savouring, which involves taking a sort of “mini-vacation.” Specifically, they suggest taking at least 20 minutes out from each day

and doing something you find enjoyable. This can (and should!) be an everyday activity, like drinking tea, taking a shower, spending time with a friend, or sitting in a garden (the mini-vacation works best if you vary the activity from day to day). Before you get immersed in the activity, try to let go of negative or distracting thoughts, concerns, and responsibilities. Then begin the activity and really try to attend to all aspects of it. Note your sensory experiences, qualities of any savoured objects, and really notice and label your particular emotions. At the end of the 20 minutes, reflect on the activity and how it made you feel. Plan what you'll do the next day (or the next time you arrange to do this, if every day doesn't suit you), and enjoy looking forward to it. Bryant and Veroff have found that activities such as these teach people to actively savour more in their everyday lives. This is another idea that can be implemented in the workplace or in educational settings.

Another savouring strategy involves using a camera to help you zero in on what is beautiful or noteworthy in your environment. Bryant and Veroff suggest the following: 1) Get access to a camera that you know how to use well (so you don't spend time fumbling). 2) Go to a sunny spot in a quiet location, preferably a place that is close to home and familiar to you. If you live in a city, consider a nearby park. 3) Stand still for a period of time and scan your immediate field of vision. 4) Find an object close by, such as a tree, flowerbed, or interesting feature of a building. Examine it as a photographer might. Consider lighting, texture, colour, shape, and so on. 5) Start taking pictures from different angles to demonstrate different perspectives of the object. This is not a photo contest; so just take any photo that is interesting to you (a variation on this is to look at the object and try to compose the *best* picture you can). 6) Find another object and repeat steps 4 and 5. 7) Develop or download the pictures as soon as possible and carefully study them. This activity should help you take note of and appreciate what is beautiful in your everyday surroundings.

Jaime Kurtz suggests a rather counterintuitive technique to get you to more fully appreciate the present: Focus on the fact that your present experience is transient and may be ending soon. About six weeks prior to graduation, a sample of fourth-year undergraduates wrote about several aspects of their college experience. Participants were randomly assigned to think about either the fact that graduation is far ("still about 1/10 of a year away") or that graduation is soon ("only about 1200 hours away"). Interestingly, over two weeks, those who were told that graduation is soon began to maximize their remaining time by doing more college-related activities (e.g., going for a scenic walk on campus, seeking out friends, taking pictures). They also were significantly happier than the other group at a two-week follow-up, possibly because they were reaping the benefits

of increased engagement with and appreciation of college life.

So, if this strategy doesn't seem too morbid to you, think or write about all that is fleeting in your life. If you live in a place where you experience the changing of seasons, tune into this. Think about the fact that your children will only be at their current stage of life for an all-too-brief time. Savour friends and family members that you see infrequently. You may even reflect on the transient nature of life itself, a mindset that life-span developmental psychologist Laura Carstensen has found to motivate people to reprioritize their goals and seek out familiar and valued people and places.

4.5 Reflection

Consider savouring versus flow. Both operate by enhancing momentary experience. How do they differ? Does flow work better for one kind of activity, and savouring for another? Give examples.

Review of Main Points from Week 4

- There are a variety of emotional and process-oriented coping strategies that can increase happiness.
- Forgiveness does not mean excusing behavior; rather, it is about letting go of negative feelings.
- Flow is the absorption that occurs when challenges and skills are well-matched.
- Flow can be used diagnostically at work.
- Savouring is the act of stretching out a positive experience.
- There are a variety of easy-to-use strategies for increasing the experience of savouring.

Looking Ahead

We have three more strategies to present. Next time, you will learn about formulating and committing to your goals, cultivating a sense of religiosity or spirituality, and, finally, taking care of your body by exercising.

Reading for Week 4

Chapter 6 and Chapter 7: Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin Press.

Chapter 6, which discusses coping and forgiveness, includes Sonja Lyubomirsky's favorite graph of all time (see p. 139). This graph illustrates the three potential paths that a person can take after facing a crisis, challenge, or trauma: 1) survival (which involves a permanent decline), 2) recovery (which involves an eventual return to your original state of well-being), and 3) thriving (which involves not only returning to your original state but rising above it; this is a genuine transformation). Which paths have you undertaken, and what do you think are the factors that might lead you (or others you know) to experience a true positive transformation after stress or hardship? The next section discusses what we believe is the hardest happiness-enhancing strategy of all – forgiveness. Take notice of the many ways that this strategy can be accomplished; there are imagination exercises, writing exercises, and role playing exercises, among others. Chapter 7 was Sonja Lyubomirsky's favorite chapter to write – possibly because strategies to include flow and savouring in your life are so much fun to practice. For example, learn how she was able to experience “smart leisure,” “smart work,”

and “superflow,” and, in the section on ways to savour life’s joys, how to make use of reminiscing, celebration, awe, mindfulness, photo albums, and nostalgia.

Additional Reading

1. Tedeschi, R. G. & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*, 1-18.
2. McCullough, M. E. (2001). Forgiveness: Who does it and how do they do it? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 10*, 194-197.
3. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Collins.
4. Bryant, F. B. & Veroff, J. (2007). *Savouring: A new model of positive experience*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
5. Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 822-848.

Further reading

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1998). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People’s relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality, 31*, 21-33.

Week 5: Taking Care of Your Body, Spirit, and Motivation

Last week, we discussed a variety of strategies for becoming happier. These included the mental strategies of coping with negatives and savouring, as well as practices that can identify problems with engagement and increase flow. This week, we will finish our happiness-increasing strategies with a discussion of goals, spirituality, and physical health.

Strategy #10: Committing to Your Goals

Goal pursuit is relevant to most everyone. We all have goals, although they range wildly in scope and complexity. Some folks hope to start a successful business, while others just want to enjoy the weekend. Some people dream of traveling to India, and others plan to increase their volunteerism when they retire. Not only are there as many different goals as there are people, but individuals also differ greatly in their level of motivation and commitment to their goals. Chances are you have goals that you work doggedly to pursue and others to which you only attend occasionally. Goals, whether grandiose or pedestrian, whether passionate or tepid, are vitally important to our happiness.

Nowhere are goals more obvious than in our professional lives. We strive for advancement, growth, and success, however it's defined. We have short-term hopes and long-term plans. In fact, our professional trajectories can be boiled down to one long string of goals, beginning with the choices we made in school, to decisions related to our first job offer, and to every project that has happened since. Whether you are a coach, HR director, or other type of professional, you will likely be familiar with the fact that not all goals are created equally. Popular acronyms – such as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-lined) – suggest that good goals contain a common architecture. They should, for example, be attainable, success should be measurable, and they should have a deadline for achievement. Research in positive psychology has recently contributed important new insights into how to develop and work at effective goals. Before we discuss these in detail, please take a moment to consider your own goals.

5.1 Reflection

Please think about the goals that are currently important to you or have been important in your life recently. "Goals" include intentions, wishes, desires, and motives. List at least one and up to eight of your most significant and meaningful goals below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Why Does It Work?

Why is goal pursuit so conducive to happiness when it often involves such hard work? There are at least five reasons. First, goals give purpose and structure to our lives. As one graduate student remarked,

“Once I decided that I would try to get an academic job, I was more focused and also felt a greater sense of efficacy. Also surprisingly enough, I was truly prepared for any failure (such as not getting a job). Interestingly, when you set a goal, you’re also prepared yourself for not reaching that goal. If you have no goal, you can’t be prepared for anything.”

Second, goals give us a sense of identity and self-esteem. Rather than wandering blindly and aimlessly through life, committed goal pursuit makes us feel capable and in control. Third, goal pursuit can serve as a coping mechanism, giving you something to throw yourself into when one area of your life isn’t going so well. Fourth, having goals helps guide our decisions and master our use of time – namely, to identify higher-order goals (e.g., start your own business), to subdivide them into smaller steps (e.g., do market research, talk to potential partners or investors), and to create a schedule to accomplish them. Finally, striving to achieve your goals may create new social bonds and connections that wouldn’t have existed otherwise. If this list doesn’t convince you of the importance of having goals, we simply advise you to imagine the life of someone who doesn’t have any!

If you see the need to focus on goal pursuit, consider the following pieces of advice. Look back at your list of current goals. Chances are that this simple activity provided you with a little mood boost as you reflected on what you value and strive for. Having said that, there is much research to suggest that certain types of goals are more conducive to happiness than others. Did thinking about some of your goals make you feel happier than others? Why?

It is important to focus primarily on goals that are *authentic*, meaning that they fit you well and are truly based on your own tastes and desires rather than on the wishes of your friends, partners, or family members. They should also be *intrinsic*, meaning that they are rewarding in and of themselves, rather than serving as the means to an end.¹ Remember the idea of work as a job, career, or calling? One characteristic of a career is that the work is done as the means to an end (often money or status), whereas people with callings see work as fulfilling deeply-valued intrinsic goals. Also, your goals should be approach-focused as opposed to avoidance-focused. This means that goals in which you actively pursue a desired outcome (e.g., making a new friend, learning to play the piano) are more

rewarding than goals that involve avoiding something negative (e.g., making sure that your boss doesn't get angry with you). People who tend to pursue approach-related goals are happier, healthier, and less anxious than those who largely pursue avoidance-related goals.

Tip: *Often, when we work with clients, we encourage them to design goals and commit to them. However, we sometimes overlook the pitfall of possible "goal conflict." Occasionally, goals are at odds with one another, especially because they can compete for the same pool of resources. It can be helpful to review client goals and discuss instances where potential conflicts may arise.*

Another thing to consider is how immediately achievable your goals are. If, as a first-year master's student, you listed "complete my thesis" as an important goal, consider the fact that this broad, abstract goal, commendable as it may be, will be more reinforcing to you if you break it down into small, more concrete subgoals, like "find a good research advisor," "spend at least five hours a week reading the relevant literature," or "discuss possible research topics with friends once a month." Doing this is beneficial because accomplishing each subgoal will provide reinforcement as you work your way to the larger, ultimate goal of finishing your master's thesis. It also helps you create a clear course of action rather than having a large, abstract goal looming without a concrete plan of how to make it happen.²

5.2 Activity

Take a look back at the list of goals you constructed earlier. For each goal, make note of whether it qualifies as authentic or inauthentic, intrinsic or extrinsic, approach or avoidance-oriented, and concrete (achievable) or abstract. Can you think of ways to reinterpret each goal as authentic, intrinsic, approach-oriented, and concrete?

Strategy #11: Practicing Religion and Spirituality

If you look at images of Buddha, he is often smiling. Although many of us have been brought up with stereotypical notions of religion being associated with guilt, research shows that the truth is a bit closer to those images of Buddha. Religion appears to be associated with greater happiness. Scientifically-minded psychologists may balk at the study of religion or spirituality, but it is difficult to dispute its effectiveness.³ In fact, 47 percent of people who report attending a religious service several times per week report being “very happy.” Only 28 percent of those who attend less than once a month report the same.

Why Does It Work?

As is the case with marriage, it’s hard to really know what drives the relationships between religion and happiness. The relationship is complex, but we can suggest several probable explanations. First, many religions condemn drug and alcohol abuse, so religious people are subsequently probably healthier, and as a result, they feel happier. More interesting, perhaps, is the fact that belonging to a religious organization provides you with social support beyond what you get from your family, friends, coworkers, and so on. When you go to a place of worship, you are likely to be greeted warmly by friends. Also, you may take part in volunteer outreach that is organized by your religious group, thereby reaping some of the benefits of prosocial behavior, which we discussed before.

But these benefits can all be obtained elsewhere, right? Weight loss programs and doctors advocate healthy lifestyles. Bowling leagues and book clubs provide social support. One can volunteer through a secular organization. Does religion do anything *extra*?

5.3 Reflection

Take a moment and consider your own thoughts about religion. You may be a regular participant at religious services, or you may be an atheist. In either case, you likely have some ideas about the potential benefits of religion. What benefits do you think religion offers people that are not available elsewhere? If some of the benefits are obtainable from other groups and programmes, why do so many people opt for religion specifically? Please write any notes here:

Well, yes. In short, belief in a deity, an afterlife, and a system of understanding the origin and purpose of the universe can imbue your life with a sense of broader meaning. Because most major religions invoke some sort of ultimate, transcendent state, having the goal of getting to heaven or achieving nirvana, for instance, gives you a goal that helps give life meaning and structure. You are constantly striving for something. Also, it is a great comfort to know that a benevolent force is looking out for you and loves you unconditionally. This is especially true during trying times. Religious belief helps people make sense of and cope with tragedy.

Some people do not attend church services and do not, for whatever reason, belong to an organized religion, but describe themselves as spiritual nonetheless. Spirituality is defined as a “search for the sacred,” a belief in something larger than oneself. A spiritual search for meaning in the universe is often less formalized than is traditional religion. As such, it often lacks the institutional social support that comes with attending a church, synagogue, or mosque. However, spirituality involves prayer, meditation, or some other form of reflection on life’s mysteries that is beneficial in its own right. Spiritual people, therefore, tend to be happier than the non-spiritual. They also report happier marriages, a greater ability to cope, are healthier, happier, and even live longer!

Putting It Into Practice

This strategy in particular makes clear the importance of fit. You cannot simply decide to become religious or spiritual so that you can become happier. It doesn’t work that way. There is actual research on this, in which people describe their reasons for attending services. The “extrinsically religious” go for the social aspects or because of social pressure, whereas the “intrinsically religious” go because they find it truly rewarding. Not surprisingly, the intrinsically religious are happier than those who simply see going to services as a means to an end.

But if you *do* subscribe to a particular belief system, we will suggest ways to make it play a more prominent role in your life. If you’ve let yourself get too busy or preoccupied to attend services regularly, make this a renewed priority in your life. Or consider getting more involved with your place of worship, perhaps by doing volunteer work. Read (and possibly discuss) books with religious or spiritual themes. And pray. Prayer may make you feel more connected to God and may give you a nonjudgmental, benevolent source for your worries. It quiets the mind. Furthermore, thanking God for all the good things in your life is very similar to expressing gratitude, which, as we know, has its own set of benefits.

One way to practice your spirituality is through meditation. Meditation is so beneficial that it deserves much more space than it is receiving here. People who meditate describe it as “transformative” and it’s no wonder. Studies have shown that frequent meditators experience less stress, greater physical health, more happiness, and even enhanced cognitive abilities. You might wonder if these are the sorts of people who are just predisposed to want to meditate. Aware of this possibility, researchers *randomly assigned* participants to an eight-week program of mindfulness meditation training or to a control group, and they found that the meditation group got happier and less anxious as a result. But more strikingly, their brain activity changed! Specifically, the meditators showed greater activation in the left prefrontal cortex relative to the right, a pattern that is characteristic of happy people.⁴ Although meditation is not easy, if that doesn’t sell you on the benefits of it, we don’t know what will!

There are four basic elements to traditional meditation. First, you will need a quiet place, free of distractions. Second, you need to assume a comfortable, poised position. Sitting is better than lying down. Sit with your spine straight, but you don’t need to do any fancy lotus positions in the early stages. Third, you need an object to focus your attention on. This may be the breath or a neutral sound, word, or mantra. Finally, and most essentially, you need to be able to adopt a passive, relaxed attitude. Let your thoughts come and go freely. The important thing is just to get started. Just try calming the mind and focusing on a single thing for 10 minutes. Some workplaces have begun offering classes on meditation, which appear to be quite beneficial.

There is a lot of much more detailed advice on different techniques of meditation on the Internet. One recommended website on beginning Zen meditation is: <http://www.mkzc.org/beginzen.html>.

Strategy #12: Taking Care of Your Body

A few months ago, I (Jaime Kurtz) achieved a lifelong goal of running a marathon. This involved months of early morning training, being careful about what I was eating and drinking, and dealing with sore shins, a sore back, a sore...well, everything! And then there was the pain and exhaustion of running 26.2 miles on race day. People said things to me like, “I can’t believe you are doing this!” And there were times when I also wondered, “Why *am* I doing this?”

Now, looking back on the marathon and the training process, I have mostly positive memories and I remember the training period as being really happy. In

fact, I can't say I have ever been really happy for any period of time that didn't include physical exercise. And I am not alone. The final strategy we propose is perhaps the most beneficial of all – not only because of the inherent benefits of exercise, but because of the many benefits, as we just learned, of *any* goal pursuit. And – thankfully – one can reap the benefits of physical activity without having to do something as extreme as running a marathon.

Research has convincingly established the effectiveness of exercise.⁵ In one study, for instance, a sample of people over age 50 who were suffering from clinical depression were randomly assigned to one of three groups. One group was instructed to do aerobic exercise (45 minutes, three times a week) for four months, a second group was given the popular antidepressant drug Zoloft, and the third group was given Zoloft *and* told to do aerobic exercise. Surprisingly, all three groups showed improvement at the end of the four months. Their depressive symptoms were reduced, they were happier, and they felt better about themselves. Most strikingly, aerobic exercise was just as effective as Zoloft, and just as effective as a combination of exercise *and* Zoloft (and, of course, cheaper and without the side effects)!

Why Does It Work?

If you exercise at all, even if you just walk your dog around the neighborhood every night, you might have some theories as to why it gives you such a boost in positive mood. Here are some likely possibilities. First, exercise gives you a sense of control over your body and environment. Second, and relatedly, most people who take up exercise (whether it's walking, running, playing tennis, or doing yoga) witness themselves becoming stronger, more fit, and more skilled over time. This sense of progress and growth fosters self-esteem. Third, exercise is a natural way to build goal-directed behavior into your life. Whether your goal is to walk around the block without getting winded, hit a successful backhand in tennis, or run a marathon, working to achieve your goal is – as we know – very conducive to happiness. Exercise is also a good source of flow experiences.

Exercise can also serve as a stress-reliever. It's a great way to take time out from your normal obligations and do something beneficial for yourself. It may also be a healthy distraction from life's troubles. Finally, some forms of exercise (attending an aerobics class, joining a running club or a gym) can foster new social relationships. In short, exercise is rewarding in its own right, but it also contributes to happiness because it is strongly related to many of the strategies we have discussed previously.

Making It Work for You

There is a certain “duh” factor here. The majority of us know how to exercise (and if we don’t, there is a billion-dollar fitness industry out there who is eager to tell us all about it!). But, if the benefits of exercising are so obvious, why aren’t more of us doing it, more of the time? It is easy to think of all sorts of explanations, most of them having to do with our busy schedules and the many demands on our time. The hard truth is, however, that despite a hectic pace of life, most of us make time for the things we really value. The trick with successful exercising is discovering the kind of activity that will work for you and your lifestyle, and actually finding ways to work it into your schedule consistently.

So, think about your particular fitness goals. Do you want to lose weight, gain flexibility, get stronger? Do you like spending time indoors or out? Can you afford to join a gym? Do you feel awkward exercising in front of other people? Do you have children, a demanding job? Do you travel for your work?

Questions like these will help you decide how to best implement an exercise program. Perhaps you have small children and can’t afford to join a gym. Invest in some exercise DVDs that you can do at home, or run around with your kids on a playground. Maybe you have to travel often for work. Try to stay in hotels that have gyms, or scout out trails or nice walking areas in your next destination ahead of time. Bored easily? Lap swimming might not be for you, but playing tennis with a friend might be. In short, don’t choose an exercise plan that doesn’t fit with your personality and lifestyle. Also, consider your current fitness level, and start slowly. Aim for just 15-30 minutes a day to start. You don’t want to get frustrated right away and give up. Hang in there and soon you will start improving and feeling better!

If you already exercise, consider adding more challenge or variation to your routine. Try to run an extra mile, lift heavier weights, stretch deeper into your yoga poses. In the same way that we need to continually add challenge to maintain a state of flow in activities we are getting more skilled at doing, we also need to add challenge to our exercise programs! Jaime recently decided to alternate between running (which she used to do every day) and swimming laps, while Sonja decided to alternate between running (which includes varied routes) and biking. This challenges both of us in a whole new way, and the variation in activities makes us look forward to both more than if we’d be doing only one form of exercise day in and day out.

Finally, try hard to find a way to make exercise part of your daily routine. Pack your gym bag the night before and always have it with you in the car. Make an exercise date with a friend, so you can't back out as easily. Consider exercising first thing in the morning, or schedule exercise into your day as you would any other appointment or meeting. Exercising infrequently is perhaps better than not doing it at all, but to really become healthier and happier, it must become a habit.

Review of Main Points from Week 5

- Goals are vital to happiness because they structure our time, give us meaning, a sense of identity, help us cope with problems, connect us to others, and help guide our decisions.
- "Good goals" are intrinsic, authentic, approach-oriented rather than avoidance-oriented, and are achievable.
- Spirituality is profoundly important to happiness, especially when it promotes mindfulness.
- Physical exercise is an important and effective way to increase happiness. Selecting the right activity, and working it into your schedule can help you make exercise a habit.
- Note: It should be noted that, although we separated them for the sake of clarity, there is considerable overlap between many of these activities. Savouring is effective in part because it promotes optimism and gratitude. Doing acts of kindness can help foster and strengthen social relationships. Physical activity and flow frequently go hand-in-hand with goal pursuit. Choosing one activity often carries the benefits of several others as well.

Looking Ahead

Hopefully, you have already been considering specific ways of applying happiness-increasing strategies. Next week, we will discuss specific techniques for implementation, as suggested by recent research.

Week 5 Reflection

Take a moment to consider the 12 strategies you have learned about and answer the following:

1. Do these strategies seem obvious to you? Which ones are more obvious than others?

2. If they *are* so obvious, why do you think many people are so unhappy, or continue to strive for things or activities that don't bring lasting happiness?

Reading for Week 5

Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 (pp. 227-250): Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin Press.

In this week's reading, Sonja Lyubomirsky begins by discussing the benefits and practical recommendations for committing to your goals (see Chapter 8). You may want to start by flipping to the end (see pp. 225-226) and reading the case study of a Kindergarten teacher, who is a "prodigy" of goal pursuit. Then go back and take note how the rest of the chapter applies to his behavior and attitude towards his work. How can you bring the same habits and attitude to yours? The second part of this week's reading take you on a different course. Religion and spirituality aren't for everyone, but its benefits are incontrovertible. After reading the beginning of Chapter 9, ask yourself why you think religious people are happier and healthier and whether there are any downsides to religion or to spirituality. Do you think that helping your clients find the sacred in their ordinary lives, to pray, or to seek meaning and purpose will aid them in whatever they are pursuing in their lives? Finally, in the section on physical exercise, don't forget to read the part that explains how you can become happier while you sleep!

Additional Reading

1. Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.
2. Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions. *American Psychologist*, 54, 493-503.
3. Myers, D. G. (2000). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American Psychologist*, 55, 56-67.
4. Davidson, R. J., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rosenkranz, M., Muller, D., Santorelli, S. F., et al. (2003). Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65, 564-570
5. Biddle, S. J. H. (2000). Emotion, mood, and physical activity. In S. J. H Biddle, K. R. Fox, & S. H. Boutcher (Eds.), *Physical activity and psychological well-being* (pp. 63-87). London: Routledge.

Further Reading

Emmons, R. A. (2005). Striving for the sacred: Personal goals, life meaning, and religion. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61, 731-745.

Week 6: More Information on Making these Activities Work for You

So, now you know the basic techniques for making yourself and others happier. To refresh your memory, the twelve strategies we presented are 1) expressing gratitude, 2) cultivating optimism, 3) avoiding rumination and social comparison, 4) practicing acts of kindness, 5) nurturing interpersonal relationships, 6) developing coping strategies, 7) learning to forgive, 8) increasing flow, 9) increasing savouring, 10) committing to your goals, 11) practicing religion and spirituality, and 12) exercising.

Let's talk now about *how* best to implement the strategies. Although the twelve strategies may be simple to try for a short duration, it turns out that they are not so easy to sustain for the long haul – that is, for the time that it takes to witness real and sustainable changes in well-being. Have you ever tried a new hobby or self-improvement program (as a New Year's resolution, for example) but have found that “it didn't work” or you lost interest or simply gave up? We bet that your previous attempts (to be happier, to be more successful, to lose weight, etc.) *have* probably worked, just not for long. Why not? That's what this week is all about. We will explain that long-term increases in happiness *can* be attained, but only if you follow some simple but important recommendations. Perhaps you have begun carrying out one or more of the happiness strategies already. Perhaps you have not. In either case, if you understood better *how* and *why* the happiness activities worked, would you be more effective in practicing them? Would you be more likely to persist in engaging in them? Absolutely. Here are the secrets to their success.

The Importance of Fit

The first thing to keep in mind is person-activity fit. Yes, we have talked about this before, but it is so critical to success that it bears repeating yet again. Do not try to do an activity that feels like it doesn't suit your personality or belief system. And do not advise that a client, patient, employee, or student do an activity that feels wrong to them. We're hoping that several strategies jump out at you, or that you were informed by the fit measure that you completed earlier in the course. An activity should feel authentic and in keeping with who are.

You should start with a list of several activities that you're pretty sure will work for you or for others. Perhaps you've already been trying them out in your everyday life. We have a few final – but important – words on how best to make these strategies most effective. Remember, the goal here is long-term, sustainable happiness. In the same way that anyone can stick to a diet for a week, anyone can implement a few of these strategies for a short while. Long-term happiness (and long-term weight loss, for that matter) comes from maintaining the positive behaviors for a long time, to the point where it becomes habitual.

The Importance of Variety and Timing

Let's say that you choose the activity of savouring. Specifically, you live in a beautiful natural setting, perhaps with a mountainous view that you see every day on your drive to work. As is so often the case, you have pretty much adapted to the view that had initially brought you so much pleasure. And so, you decide to employ savouring as one way to derive more happiness from your surroundings. Great! Now...how do you do this? One technique might be to allow some extra time on your commute so that you can stop your car at a lovely vantage point. You turn off all distractions (radio, cell phone, etc) and just look at the mountains. You think about how ancient they must be, how the sunlight hits them in the morning to create an interesting texture, how pine trees dot the hillside. You feel peaceful and fortunate to live near such beauty, and you vow to take note of the mountains again soon.

While this savouring technique will make you feel good the first time you do it, doing it over and over again is likely to get tiresome. Yes, the process of hedonic adaptation works for these happiness-increasing activities as well! So, it is critical that you vary your routine so it remains fresh and doesn't become routine or chore-like. Using the same example, you can savour your mountainous view in other ways. You can stop at other spots on your morning commute to get a different perspective. You can admire the mountains at different times of day, when the light is making them look slightly different. You could bring your friends and family members along with you to share the view, and perhaps you can savour it together (thereby also reaping the benefits of social connectedness!). You could "get to know" the mountains better by going on a weekend hike. You might even read up on local geology to get a better appreciation for all the natural forces that were at work for millions of years to give you the view you enjoy (hopefully!) every day.

Another question relates to just how often you should do your chosen activities in order to reap the benefits. In our "bigger is better" society, there is certainly a

tendency to go overboard with things like this, and there is really no need. In fact, it might just backfire. If you recall, one study found that counting blessings once a week led to greater happiness on average, but doing it three times a week did not, probably because the activity got boring and lost its luster, and possibly because some people began finding it difficult to come up with so many things for which they were truly grateful. That doesn't feel so good!

We can't really provide you with a hard-and-fast rule on how frequently you should do your chosen activities. It is largely up to you – your schedule, your preferences, your personality. Experiment with timing. Try doing it once a week, and increase the frequency if it feels right to do so. The activity should feel intrinsically rewarding, not at all like a monotonous chore. After you do it, you should feel good, and not in the sense of “‘Whew, I can check ‘happiness-increasing exercise’ off of my to-do list now.” You should feel refreshed, renewed, and in a good mood. If you don't, you need to consider diminishing the frequency and also alter the ways you do the activity. If you'll pardon a dieting analogy, a person can lose a little weight by eating steamed chicken and broccoli for dinner each night, but maintaining long-term weight loss is going to be difficult because this food is going to get boring really fast. But eating chicken and broccoli just once or twice a week, or adding spices or some other vegetables into the mix is going to keep this food interesting longer, which is much more likely to lead to success.

You might think about the ways that different activities complement different situations. For instance, if two activities that fit you are exercise and optimism, think about when they will benefit you most. Exercise might really take the edge off a stressful day. Plan to go for a jog in the evening. You might have to give a big presentation at work. Before the presentation, try to envision it going as well as possible. By considering timing in this way, these tools should be especially beneficial to you. When advising others on how to implement these strategies, suggest that they come up with a specific plan for how and when they will do the activity, with the understanding that it may need to be altered.

The Importance of Social Support (once again!)

It is difficult to make any lasting changes in your life without the backing of friends and family. Tell them about your plans to implement these strategies. You don't need to make a big deal out of it. Instead, when a friend invites you out for a burger, suggest a walk instead. If you tend to ruminate, ask a trusted friend or significant other to help you break the cycle. There is evidence that people are much more likely to comply with medical treatment, stick to their New Year's resolutions, and lose weight when they report feeling a strong sense of support

from loved ones. You may also consider finding a “buddy” who is also interested in becoming a happier person, and discuss ways in which you might work together to implement your respective strategies successfully. In the same way that social support is instrumental for success for alcoholics (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous), the overweight (e.g., Weight Watchers), and anyone contemplating long-term life changes, it will also help your efforts here as well.

6.1 Exercise: Staying Committed and Making It a Habit

Think about your greatest successes in life. List three of them below.

Chances are, they did not come easily but instead required true effort and dedication. Becoming lastingly happier is no different. These strategies may seem easy, but in order for them to have the desired effect, they need to be done with committed effort. Longitudinal studies on happiness interventions have found that the activities are only effective for people who persist at them. Such is the case with any “treatment,” be it medication or physical therapy. When you stop taking the medication or following the treatment program, it stops working. Find an activity that fits you, find a way to vary it, time it appropriately, and keep at it!

The good news is, over time doing these activities is going to start feeling more automatic for you. You won’t need to remind yourself to, say, exercise, pray, or avoid social comparisons. It will become part of who you are and what you do each day. It will have become a habit. Now, this is not the same thing as the activity becoming boring or routine, as we discussed above. To say something is habitual is just to say that it doesn’t feel like something foreign that you are trying to work into the routine of your day. You don’t have to make the decision to engage in habitual behavior. You just do it. Hopefully, you will be able to make your happiness-increasing activities habitual while still keeping them fresh and exciting each time you do them.

Applications for Couples

Implicit in all of this is the fact these strategies will improve your interpersonal relationships, simply because if you are happier, you will positively impact those around you. If you’d like to apply the strategies a little more directly to, say, romantic relationships, consider involving your partner directly in your application of these strategies. Play tennis or jog together. Tell your partner why you are grateful for him or her. Savour a delicious dinner together, and discuss your sensory experience. Share your goals and discuss how you plan to see them realized. Attend a religious service together. Many of these strategies (possibly except for flow and meditation) are very amenable to this kind of shared practice.

Applications for Depression and Anxiety

Many of the strategies we’ve described would fit nicely into a treatment program for clinical depressive and anxiety disorders. Actually, a few of them (avoid overthinking, developing strategies for coping) have been inspired by cognitive-behavioral therapy typically used to treat these problems. In addition, savouring, expressing gratitude and cultivating optimism may help break the cycle of negative, ruminative thoughts and worries that are so characteristic of depression and anxiety and gradually help people think more positively. Getting depressed and anxious people to focus on goal-oriented behavior towards which they can

make clear progress may give them a needed boost in self-efficacy and self-worth. Recall that physical exercise was as effective as the antidepressant Zoloft in the study mentioned previously. Doing acts of kindness may decrease self-focused rumination or irrational worry as the depressed or anxious person actively thinks about others.

Although few positive psychological studies have been conducted with anxious individuals, in a recent study, Marty Seligman and colleagues tested the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy (PPT) among people with depressive symptoms.¹ This type of therapy is designed to go beyond just treating depressive symptoms, by focusing on increasing positive emotion, meaning in life, and engagement. Specific activities were assigned to patients, and they were similar to those we have presented here: expressing gratitude, telling stories about what they do well and their personal strengths, thinking about future opportunities, donating their time to some prosocial activity, and trying to savour pleasurable activities. A sample of mild-to-moderately depressed people was randomly assigned to treatment-as-usual (TAU), TAU plus antidepressant medication, or to PPT. The researchers found that, at a one-year follow-up, depression rates had decreased the most for the PPT group. Although this study is preliminary, it is highly suggestive: Incorporating positive interventions into a therapeutic setting gets patients to appraise their lives as positive, encourages rewarding social interactions, and increases perceived meaning in life. In short, it carries a good deal of benefit (and without the side effects of antidepressants), and elements of it could be easily incorporated into a traditional treatment approach.

Applications for the Workplace

Recall that happy people are more productive and creative in the workplace. Therefore, it is certainly in the best interest of managers to promote the happiness of their employees. The Gallup Organization has compiled a set of preconditions for satisfying workplaces and happy employees, and these include a sense of belonging or connectedness to the organization, a sense that one's work is meaningful, frequent challenge or flow, and encouragement from colleagues and supervisors. These factors are highly predictive of happiness, of a desire to remain in one's current job, and of productivity.²

Consider how you might apply these strategies in the workplace. For example, set up the preconditions for flow. Create social opportunities that foster relationships between employees. Reinforce workers for their efforts, reminding them of the larger purpose of what they are doing. Consider reimbursing employees for gym memberships to promote better health.

Many organizations have caught wind of this idea. Google, which constantly tops lists of “the best places to work,” creates high worker satisfaction by focusing on fun and innovation. Employees feel highly valued and well-being is encouraged, with a workplace that provides paid maternity and paternity leave, onsite yoga, massages, and music rooms, the ability to bring pets to work, running trails, tuition reimbursement, tasty and healthy cafeteria food, and the list goes on and on. The result is employees who are happy, creative, and productive.

Additional Reading

1. Seligman, M. E. P., Rashid, T., & Parks, A. C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American Psychologist, 61*, 774-788.
2. Diener, E. & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of well-being. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 5*, 1-31.

Further Reading

Seligman, M. E. P., & Peterson, C. (2003). Positive clinical psychology. In L. G. Aspinwall & U. M. Staudinger (Eds.), *A psychology of human strengths: Fundamental questions and future directions for a positive psychology* (pp. 305-317). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

6.2 Summing Up: Final Reflections

You have learned a lot in the past six weeks and you should feel prepared to apply this research successfully in your personal life and in your work. Take a moment and reflect back over the course.

What did you learn that was most surprising?

What did you learn that was most useful?

Did this course change the way you think about the nature of happiness?

Looking back, looking ahead

At the beginning of this course, we promised to describe and illustrate for you twelve different scientifically-supported strategies for increasing happiness. We hope we have succeeded in presenting this fascinating and critically important material in a clear and engaging manner, and in inspiring you to begin practicing our recommendations (via our many reflections, activities, and examples) to apply them in your work and life. What a journey you have embarked upon! We sincerely hope that you have enjoyed taking this course as much as we enjoyed developing and writing it. Take a few minutes now to recall your learning objectives from the first week and to consider how much and how well you have accomplished them. Kudos to those of you who have achieved all your objectives! And to those of you who haven't or have moved on to new goals and subgoals, remember that the field of positive psychology is incredibly dynamic – constantly growing, changing, and evolving. We urge you to continue taking courses, to regularly surf the internet for news, articles, and relevant positive psychology websites, and to make an effort to attend conferences in your area of interest.

Final Course Assignment

This is a fairly new and innovative field and the information we presented you has the potential to make tremendous improvements in people's lives. To that end, we would like you to design a *specific* plan for how you can implement positive interventions in your workplace, in a therapy or coaching setting, in a school, for specific clients, or in whatever way you think is most useful. Because our goal is to help you formulate a specific applied intervention, please be as detailed and practical as possible. Consider the following: How will you tailor your program to meet individuals' needs? Would you assess their progress? If so, how? What rationale would you use in proposing such a program, particularly to those who may be reluctant to implement the tenets and findings of positive psychology? What would be your goal in implementing such a program?

Appendix: Additional Exercises and Reflections

Because we want you to get the most out of these positive interventions, and to have the opportunity to be able to apply them to the world of work, we are including a variety of additional exercises and reflections.

Activity #1

We have discussed twelve specific activities that can enhance happiness. Perhaps, however, there are other promising paths to happiness and fulfillment at work that are not listed here. While we chose to focus on those happiness increasing strategies that have received empirical support, it is entirely possible that there are other effective strategies that have not yet been examined. Look at the horizons of your own life and try to identify what some candidate strategies might be. When you consider your work life, what behaviors, thoughts, or interactions do you think people engage in that are the most rewarding. Over the next week, pay careful attention to yourself and others at work. When are you and your co-workers upbeat and engaged? What is happening? What is not happening? See if you can identify potentially effective strategies over the coming week. Go ahead and create your own list of possible strategies here.



Reflection #1

Think about a typical work week for you. How many of these twelve strategies are you already using? You may not have always thought of them in terms of these labels or in association with happiness, but chances are you are currently practicing some of them. Which ones come naturally to you? How effective are they? When do you tend to employ them? Are there some you do not feel like using?

Reflection #2

Consider an upcoming interaction at work. Perhaps it is a quarterly review, a meeting with a new client, or facilitating a training. How can you employ one or more of the twelve strategies to make it more fulfilling for yourself and boost the moods of the people with whom you are interacting? Draw up a concrete plan.

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for writing a concrete plan. The box is positioned below the text and occupies most of the lower half of the page.

Reflection # 3

Think about the various domains of your life: work, home, and leisure (to carve it up broadly). Now think of the twelve interventions that we have described. Are some of the interventions, in your opinion, more suited to one or the other of these domains? We have already talked about intervention-person fit, but another way of considering fit is in terms of intervention-situation fit. Describe why you think some of the twelve interventions are more appropriate to work while others are more useful in your marriage? Where is there overlap between domains? What might happen if you used one strategy in an ill-suited domain?

Exercise # 1

Workday Exercise

For this exercise, you will consider what you did and how you felt during your work day *yesterday*. First, you'll need to reconstruct what your work day was like from the beginning to the end. Where were you, who was with you, what did you do and experience? The best way to do this is to break it down into *episodes*. An *episode should last at least 20 minutes but not more than 2 hours*. Basically, a new episode begins when there is a significant change, like in what you're doing or who you're with, or where you are, or because something happened that changed your mood.

For each episode, please write down the approximate time on the clock when each episode began and when it ended. Try to remember the episode in detail, and write a label of a few words that will remind you of exactly what was going on and what you felt (for example, "meeting with client", or "reading e-mail").

There is room for 8 episodes for each part of yesterday's work day, but you probably won't need that many.

Yesterday Morning

(from starting work until just before break or lunch)

	Time it began	Time it ended	Your label for this episode
1 st Morning Episode			
2 nd Morning Episode			
3 rd Morning Episode			
4 th Morning Episode			
5 th Morning Episode			
6 th Morning Episode			
7 th Morning Episode			
8 th Morning Episode			

Now look over this page once again. Is there an episode that you would want to break up into two parts? If so, make a note of that before moving on.

Yesterday Afternoon

(from lunch/break to end of work)

	Time it began	Time it ended	Your label for this episode
1 st Afternoon Episode			
2 nd Afternoon Episode			
3 rd Afternoon Episode			
4 th Afternoon Episode			
5 th Afternoon Episode			
6 th Afternoon Episode			
7 th Afternoon Episode			
8 th Afternoon Episode			

Please look over this page once again. Is there an episode that you would want to break up into two parts? If so, make a note of that before moving on.

First Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *first* episode you noted, after you started work. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Second Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *second* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly		
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Third Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *third* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Fourth Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *fourth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly		
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Fifth Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *fifth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Sixth Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *sixth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly		
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Seventh Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *seventh* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

- co-workers
 customers, students, clients
 boss/supervisor
 other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Eighth Morning Episode

Now please look at your list of "Morning" episodes and select the *eighth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

First Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *first* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Second Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *first* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Third Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *third* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Fourth Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *fourth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Fifth Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *fifth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly		
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Sixth Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *sixth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly		
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Seventh Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *seventh* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Eighth Afternoon Episode

Now please look at your list of "Afternoon" episodes and select the *eighth* episode you noted. Before answering the questions below take a minute to *re-live this episode* in detail - everything you were doing, the people you were with and what your feelings were.

Where were you? (your office, co-worker's office, conference room, etc.)

Were you alone? no yes

Were you talking with anyone? (check one) no one person more than one

If you were talking with or interacting with anyone, was it (check all that apply):

co-workers

customers, students, clients

boss/supervisor

other people not listed (specify) _____

What were you doing? (Please specify briefly but in a way that will jog your memory next time you read it.)

How did you feel during this episode?

Please rate each feeling on the scale given. A 0 means that you did not experience that feeling at all. A 6 means that you experienced that feeling very strongly. Please circle the number between 0 and 6 that best describes how you felt.

	Not at all				Very strongly			
Impatient for it to end	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Competent/Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tense /Stressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Depressed/Blue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Interested/Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Affectionate/Friendly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Calm/Relaxed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Irritated/Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Tired	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
In flow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

Reflection

After you've completed all of yesterday's episodes, you are ready to reflect on your workday. Has doing this exercise given you any insights about exactly what it is about your work that makes you happy and fulfilled (e.g., offers you flow, feelings of competence, interest, etc.) and what doesn't. When you're feeling your best, who are you with? What exactly are you doing? What time of day is it? How can you modify your workday and your activities in the future to make your work more rewarding and to help you flourish?

Positively Happy

Routes to Sustainable Happiness

About the Authors

Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside. She received her B.A., summa cum laude, from Harvard University (1989) and her Ph.D. in Social/Personality Psychology from Stanford University (1994). Lyubomirsky currently teaches courses in social psychology and positive psychology and serves as graduate advisor. Her teaching and mentoring of students have been recognized with the Faculty of the Year and Faculty Mentor of the Year Awards. In 2002, Lyubomirsky's research was recognized with a Templeton Positive Psychology Prize. Currently, she is an associate editor of *The Journal of Positive Psychology* and (with co-PI Ken Sheldon) holds a 5-year million-dollar grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct research on the possibility of permanently increasing happiness. Her research has been written up in hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, and she has appeared in multiple TV shows, radio shows, and feature documentaries in North America, Asia, and Europe. Her book, *The How of Happiness*, released in January, 2008, has been translated into 15 languages.

Dr. Jaime Kurtz is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at James Madison University in Virginia. She received her B.A. from Millersville University of Pennsylvania and her Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, where her dissertation research on savoring and happiness was funded by a National Research Service Award from NIMH. She has published her research in *Psychological Science*, the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, among others. Dr. Kurtz formerly served as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology at Pomona College. She has created and taught a seminar on the psychology of happiness, and is the recipient of the University of Virginia Psychology Department's Distinguished Teaching Fellowship, the Graduate Teaching Award, and the Rebecca Boone Teaching Award.



Positive Acorn

