

THE HAPPINESS ADVANTAGE

SHAWN ACHOR

ACTION PLAN GUIDE

Key Points:

- Happiness is the precursor to greater success, not merely the result.
- Happiness raises every business and educational outcome from productivity to sales to intelligence.
- Your brain is designed to perform better at positive than at negative, neutral or stressed.
- Happiness seems elusive because every time you have a success, your brain changes the goalpost of what success looks like.
- If you train your brain to be more positive in the present, you can raise your success rates significantly.



OBSERVATIONS

Write down a list of things for which you may be using the wrong formula (e.g. I'll be happy when work is over, when I lose 10 pounds, when I hit my sales target, when I finish this project)

I'll be happy when: _____
I'll be happy when: _____
I'll be happy when: _____



METHOD

List three things that you could do at work or at home to raise your level of happiness in the present.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



EXPERIMENT

For the next three days do one of those things, intentionally trying to reverse the formula. Observe like a scientist, what was the effect upon your energy levels afterward. Record your findings below.

Key Points:

- The brain can perceive large goals as overwhelming, limiting forward progress.
- Our brain needs to record a “win” in order to maintain the belief that behavior matters.
- By breaking a large project into manageable steps, the brain utilizes an immediate feedback loop to record a “win.” This is called the Zorro Circle.

ACTION

Pick a large goal you wish to accomplish. Determine a circle of influence, or a step toward that goal, at which you know you can be successful. Once you achieve this success, expand the circle slowly.

EXAMPLE

Goal: marathon.

Zorro Circle: put on running shoes every day at 4 pm.

Once you do that for a few days, try to increase the circle to walking or running for 5 minutes.

Goal: clean inbox.

Zorro Circle: respond to every email after 2 pm today.

Then slowly work backwards to 1:30, 1, etc.



My Goal is: _____

First, I will: _____

Then, I will: _____

Then, I will: _____

Key Points:

- A certain amount of activation energy is necessary to create a change.
- We procrastinate because our brains magnify how much energy we need to start the task.
- If you increase the activation energy by about 20 seconds, you tilt the path of least resistance away from negative habits.
- If you decrease the activation energy by 20 seconds, you dramatically increase your ability to start and keep a positive habit.



OBSERVATIONS

Pick a positive habit you think could make an impact upon your happiness or performance.

The habit I would like to develop is: _____.



METHOD

Figure out one way to make it easier to start or remember to start (e.g. put a pen on your journal, or your gym clothes next to your bed).
Change the environment to lower the activation energy.

I am going to raise/lower my activation energy by doing the following:



EXPERIMENT

Print out the provided habit grid and write in your selected habit. Keep track of your progress on the habit grid for 21 days. See if there are ways you can increase the activation energy on things which are keeping you from your positive habit. (i.e. if you are watching TV instead of meditating, "lose" your remote.)



SHAWN ACHOR'S GUIDE TO DAILY HABITS

William James, one of the fathers of modern psychology, said that it takes 21 days to create a habit. Choose an action that you would like to make a habit and then track your progress on the grid below. For every day that you perform the action, put a check mark in the box. The closer you get to the 21st day, the easier the action should become.

"Every good that is worth possessing must be paid for in strokes of daily effort." ~William James

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
ACTION 1																					
ACTION 2																					
ACTION 3																					
ACTION 4																					



Key Points:

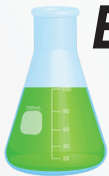
- An internal locus of control means your brain believes that your behavior matters.
- An external locus of control means your brain thinks that external forces are entirely responsible for outcomes.
- When the Jerk is active, you lose control and feel overwhelmed.
- When the Thinker is active you return back to an internal locus of control.
- By focusing on one concrete action that is within your control, the Thinker gains power.



METHOD

Three steps to regaining control:

1. Be aware that you are feeling overwhelmed.
2. Verbalize it to yourself (think, "I feel stressed.")
3. Write down a list of what is stressing you: _____



EXPERIMENT

Circle one item on your list of stresses and come up with one concrete action you can do to decrease that stress.: _____



Key Points:

- The more fully engaged your brain is, the more powerful it becomes.
- Flow occurs most often when challenge is present. We rarely experience flow in states of rest, such as during a relaxing vacation.
- High skill/low challenge = boredom. Low skill/high challenge = anxiety.
- To increase flow, attempt to find the optimal balance between challenge and skills.
- Challenge and skills are both perceived, which means if you change your perception, you can align them more effectively.



OBSERVATIONS

One activity that allows me to experience flow is _____
Think about your skill set versus the level of challenge the activity offers. What factors helped you to experience flow in that moment?



METHOD

Pick a task during which you would like to feel more engaged. Determine whether you need to increase skill or challenge.

–If you need to raise skill, make a list of all your existing skills that allow you to accomplish the task effectively. For instance, if you need to get a project done at work, list out the internal and external resources you bring to the table, such as personal strengths, knowledge, and professional relationships, that will help you get the job done.

–If you need to raise challenge, look for creative ways to grow more from the same activity. For example, if you are in a boring lecture, turn it into a learning experience. Make it a goal to learn five new things before the talk is over.

One task I would like to feel more engaged with is: _____
I am going to raise skill/challenge with this activity by: _____



EXPERIMENT

Try out your plan today and record your experiences. Was it hard? What was helpful?
Did you gain new insights?



Key Points:

- Optimism and positivity can actually change the effect stress has on our system.
- Eustress is the type of stress that raises performance. Distress is the type of stress which lowers performance.
- We feel distress when our brains believe the challenge outstrips our resources to deal with it.
- If you use a “fight or flight” response to stress, you increase the chance of distress.
- You can move the processing of the stress from the part of your brain that feels overwhelmed to the part that determine how to move forward.



OBSERVATIONS

Identify a trigger or an event that causes you to feel distress.

Can you change your mindset to be grateful for the stress you experience because it raises your performance?

Stressors (distress):

- _____
- _____
- _____

I am grateful for this stress because (eustress):

- _____
- _____
- _____



METHOD

Make a list of the resources you currently have to help you effectively deal with the stress. Write how you could utilize the current stress to your advantage.

STRESSOR	RESOURCES	NEW TACTIC
<i>Overwhelming list of to-do's</i>	<i>Day Planner, Staff, Spouse</i>	<i>Prioritize list, select top 3 to-dos that I can actually accomplish, delegate better</i>



EXPERIMENT

See how reframing the situation changes your experience from distress to eustress. Record results here.



Key Points:

- Every brain has mirror neurons which cause us to pick up on what other people are experiencing.
- Negativity and positivity are thus contagious (like smiles, yawns, stress).
- We are wirelessly connected to one another through a mirror neuron network.
- There are strategies for buffering against negativity.
- A single positive change you make can influence how you and other people are experiencing the world.

Experiment #1:

Genuinely smile at three people today and observe how it effects them.
Describe your experiences on the Action Plan worksheet.

Experiment #2:

Cut out negative news stories from your daily news diet for one week.
At the end of the week, describe any changes to your levels of happiness
over the course of your day on the Action Plan worksheet.

Key Points:

- Our happiness and health are affected by positive or negative coworkers.
- Negativity spreads like second-hand smoke through the mirror neuron network.
- 30% of heart disease is predicted by the manager-employee relationship.
- The social script is written by the most verbally and nonverbally expressive person.
- One small positive change to your mindset actually causes the toxic employee to experience that positivity through their mirror neuron network.



EXPERIMENTS

1. Make a change to your own habits. This positive effect should ripple out, affecting the toxic employee. Pick one of the positive habits in the “Changing your Mindset” section: gratitudes, lifestream, attention training, etc.
2. Praise the toxic employee when they choose the positive route. This helps them channel their brain’s resources toward a belief that their behavior can matter (optimism).
3. Stop giving toxic employees the control. Remember that the social script is written by the most expressive person. Increase how verbally and nonverbally expressive you are.
4. Change your mindset. Find something to be grateful for about the toxic employee.

Key Points:

- If you solely praise the outcome, the recipient believes that only good outcomes matter.
- If you praise the process, the recipient creates a mental calculus that their behavior matters.
- Long term, praising the process helps people to become more resilient in the midst of the ups and downs of life.
- If you want to raise outcomes, focus praise on the process.



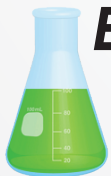
OBSERVATIONS

Notice when someone around you does something you think is deserving of praise.



METHOD

Determine what process led them to that outcome.
(e.g. A team member did a great job on a project by putting in a few extra hours and communicating well with the client.)



EXPERIMENT

In verbal or written form, deliver the praise to the person. Over the next week, record whether that person continues to exhibit the type of behaviors you praised and whether the behavior leads to greater success.



Key Points:

- Money gets us into the room, but it doesn't mean we're engaged once we're there.
- Praise and encouragement increases the brain's belief that our behavior matters, which creates a cascade of success.
- Leaders who increase their recognition and encouragement by one per day have been found to increase team productivity by up to 31%



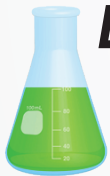
OBSERVATIONS

Once a day for 21 days in a row, consciously scan for a genuine compliment that you could give that is out of the ordinary for you (a person you don't normally praise or a behavior you often overlook).



METHOD

Deliver the recognition or encouragement in person.
Make sure the compliment is authentic and specific (not "glad you work with me").



EXPERIMENT

Record recipient's name and the praise you gave

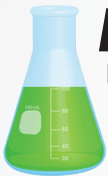
- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1. | 12. |
| 2. | 13. |
| 3. | 14. |
| 4. | 15. |
| 5. | 16. |
| 6. | 17. |
| 7. | 18. |
| 8. | 19. |
| 9. | 20. |
| 10. | 21. |
| 11. | |

What impact did this exercise have on your relationships and life?



Key Points:

- There is an extremely strong correlation (.7) between social support and performance during a time of challenge.
- Social support is equally predictive of longevity as smoking, high blood pressure and obesity.
- When people are stressed, they usually hunker down and divorce themselves from social support.
- Instead of disconnecting from social support, positive outliers increase their social investment.



EXPERIMENT

Pick one of these experiments to increase social investment:

- 1) Invite a coworker to eat lunch, and don't talk about work.
- 2) Start a mid-afternoon walking club with your colleagues or neighbors. Get outside in a group for 15 minutes.
- 3) Join a book club or athletic team that meets regularly. The key is not to skip it if you get busy.
- 4) Make it a goal to learn one new piece of social information from everyone you talk to (hobbies, favorite vacation spots, kids' names, etc.) for one week.

Record your experiences and any change in your energy levels as a result of the activities:

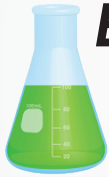
Key Points:

- Gratitude allows your brain to most adaptively use its finite resources when scanning the world.
- The Tetris Effect is a cognitive afterimage. If you view the world through one pattern for too long, you get stuck in that pattern.
- Training our brains to scan for the negative first can create a negative Tetris Effect.
- Gratitudes can change your current pattern, and create a positive Tetris Effect, raising your ability to reap the Happiness Advantage.
- Writing down three things you are grateful for for 21 days in a row can significantly raise your optimism even 6 months later.



METHOD

Download the I Journal app if you have a smartphone, or get a pad of paper or create a new Word document and save on your desktop.



EXPERIMENT

For 21 days in a row, record three things you are grateful for and why. The three gratitudes must be different each day, and they must be specific (i.e. you cannot say you are merely grateful for your health or family without saying why). If you use the I Journal app, take a picture each day to develop a visual record of one of the gratitudes. At the end of the 21 days, you will have a portfolio of meaningful text and pictures which helped you create your new Tetris Effect.

Did this experiment have an impact on your life? Describe.



Key Points:

- Lifestream is a journaling technique where you record one meaningful moment each day for 21 days in a row.
- It only requires one meaningful experience for your brain to judge that day as a meaningful one.
- The brain has trouble telling the difference between reality and visualization, so Lifestreaming allows you to double the meaningful moment you experience.
- Our brain judges time based upon nodes of meaning in our life, so without access to these, time seems to pass too quickly.
- Having a task-based mindset lowers our meaning and raises stress.
- Lifestreaming allows the brain to connect the dots between meaningful moments each day. Once you have developed a trajectory of meaning, your brain starts linking your work, commute, emails and family to that stream.
- Lifestreaming improves your immune system and can even increase pain tolerance as your brain lowers stress and reaps the Happiness Advantage.



OBSERVATIONS

During the course of your day, be on the lookout for moments of meaning about which you can Lifestream.



EXPERIMENT

Two Part Experiment:

Part One: Lifestream

In a word document, journal, moleskin, etc., Lifestream for five minutes *maximum* each day. Write about one meaningful moment you experienced over the past 24 hours and write down every detail you can remember. The goal is for your brain to visualize and re-experience the meaningful moment. Try to recall as many details (i.e. what someone said to you, what the weather was like, where you were, what you were thinking, etc.)

Part Two: Connect the Dots

At the end of the 21 days, go back and read your Lifestream entries. Then record below how you see your meaning moments link together. If there are gaps in meaning in your life, reflect on how you can connect some of those moments of meaning to the parts that seem less meaningful (like meetings or emails). Ultimately, your trajectory of meaning should branch out into other domains of your life.

Observations on my trajectory of meaning: _____



ACTION PLAN

CH 14: CONCIOUS ACTS OF KINDNESS

Key Points:

- Doing an altruistic act deepens the amount of social support the giver feels.
- A single piece of praise can motivate positive behavior for weeks and months.
- Routinizing conscious acts of kindness changes the social script to allow for more positive praise and collaboration.
- Conscious acts of kindness also makes your brain scan the world for more ways to knit together social networks.



EXPERIMENT

For 21 days in a row, when you first open your inbox, before reading any emails, write a 2 sentence email thanking someone in your social support network (a coworker, family member, friend, old teacher, etc.) Each day, record not only changes to your happiness level after writing the email, but the response you got from the recipients using the Action Plan worksheet.

How did you feel after writing the email? Note any responses to the email you may have received.

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

Day 5: _____

Day 6: _____

Day 7: _____

Day 8: _____

Day 9: _____



ACTION PLAN

CH 14: CONCIOUS ACTS OF KINDNESS

Day 10: _____

Day 11: _____

Day 12: _____

Day 13: _____

Day 14: _____

Day 15: _____

Day 16: _____

Day 17: _____

Day 18: _____

Day 19: _____

Day 20: _____

Day 21: _____

Overall thoughts: _____

Key Points:

- The brain can do two conscious tasks at once, but multitasking decreases your success rates on both tasks dramatically.
- By focusing on your breath for two minutes for 21 days, you can train your brain to fully focus your intellectual resources on the task.
- Doing multiple tasks just one at a time allows you to devote your brain's resources more effectively and to decrease stress on the system.



EXPERIMENT

For 21 days in a row, watch your breath go in and out for 2 minutes each day. Try to quiet your mind. This is best when done as a break from work. Then observe your energy patterns throughout the day to see if you get more work done. Record the results each day.

Today I noticed:

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

Day 5: _____

Day 6: _____

Day 7: _____

Day 8: _____

Day 9: _____

ACTION PLAN

CH 15: ATTENTION TRAINING

Day 10: _____

Day 11: _____

Day 12: _____

Day 13: _____

Day 14: _____

Day 15: _____

Day 16: _____

Day 17: _____

Day 18: _____

Day 19: _____

Day 20: _____

Day 21: _____

Overall thoughts: _____



Key Points:

- Regular exercise is the equivalent of taking an antidepressant.
- Exercise trains the brain to believe that your behavior matters, raising optimism.
- People who exercise in the morning have higher intelligence and creativity at work.
- Exercise creates a cascade of success as the positive benefits ripple from activity to activity.



EXPERIMENT

Create an exercise plan below that you feel like you can keep up with for two months. Don't set the goal too high, but do try to keep the exercise regular. Ideally try to exercise each time at the same time of the day. At the end of each week record here what you've noticed about changes to your level of happiness. (Bonus: Pick a type of exercise that is social, so that you are deepening social support while creating a positive Tetris Effect.)

My Exercise Plan: _____

Observations Week 1: _____

Observations Week 2: _____

Observations Week 3: _____

Observations Week 4: _____

Observations Week 5: _____

Observations Week 6: _____

Observations Week 7: _____

Observations Week 8: _____