




awake

STOP SLEEPWALKING THROUGH LIFE AND
LEARN TO MAXIMIZE YOUR HAPPINESS

ELIZABETH WALLING



*for Darrick,
who never stopped
believing in me*



Disclaimer and Copyright Information

The information in this guide is for informational purposes only. Therefore, if you wish to apply ideas contained in this book, you are taking full responsibility for your actions.

The references provided are for informational purposes only and do not constitute endorsement of any sources.

Copyright © 2016 by Elizabeth Walling

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Contents

Introduction | *page 4*

What is Happiness? | *page 12*

Know Thyself | *page 20*

Push Pause | *page 31*

Do I Deserve to Be Happy? | *page 39*

Gratitude Makes Happiness | *page 46*

Happiness Hack #1: Develop a Skill | *page 51*

Happiness Hack #2: Create Something | *page 56*

Happiness Hack #3: Find a Cause | *page 63*

Final Thoughts | *page 68*

Introduction

First things first: however you came across this book, it is in your hands (or your device, as the case may be). *Don't ignore it.*

If your goal is to be happy, then don't cheat yourself and skim through the chapter headings. This book is meant to be read: each and every word.

You may think you know what I'm going to say, and maybe you do. But that doesn't mean you don't need to hear it.

I kept this book short and sweet so it will be an easy read. There's not much fluff within these pages, but there is a lot of heart.

So please, if you want to give this book a chance, don't give it a half-hearted one. Read it with an open heart – and, more importantly, put it into practice in your life.

After all, it's only your happiness at stake.

Finding Happiness

Somewhere on the list with the Fountain of Youth and the City of Gold is the Source of Endless Happiness. Because, after all, why do we even want to be young, beautiful, and rich?

We want to be happy, of course.

I once ran across a mental exercise where you keep asking *why* about your goals. Like this: you want to lose 10 pounds. *Why?* So you can fit in a smaller bikini. *Why?* So you'll feel more comfortable on the beach. *Why?* So you can have fun instead of worrying about your body. *Why?* So you can feel happy!

Or maybe you want to make an extra \$20,000 per year. *Why?* So you won't be living paycheck to paycheck. *Why?* So you have the money to buy a new car and send the kids to college in a few years. *Why?* So you won't worry about the car breaking down or your kids' futures. *Why?* So you can actually enjoy every day without anxiety. *Why?* So you can feel happy!

You can try this exercise with any of your goals, but you already know what the end result will be: **you want to feel happy.**



Who doesn't, right?

The trouble is, happiness doesn't seem to come naturally. Some appear to be born with innate happiness built into their genes, but they are the lucky ones... or are they?

What if happiness was a skill that could be learned? What if it's something that's right under your nose, and you can find it by changing your perspective (not your luck)? Or what if learning a new way of looking at the world is *exactly* what you need to start shaking things up and making your dreams actually happen?

About This Crazy Book

This book is an instruction manual of sorts, but it also is inspiration to take a closer look at the way you think. There are a lot of books about “thinking” your way to happiness – and I believe the advice in these books is solid.

But sometimes saying the solution to being happy is as simple as *deciding* to be happy...well, that falls a little flat for me.

I know happiness has a lot to do with what's going on between our ears, but changing your thinking isn't necessarily an inside job by itself. By altering our behaviors and our daily patterns, we can pave the way for a mindset

shift that is easier and more natural than just shouting, “Change your mind!”

So this book is a bridge between the philosophical side of happiness and the practical steps you can take to start making your life more fulfilling and enjoyable.

Wake-Up Calls

Do you ever wake up from a dream and think, “What in the world was *that* all about?”

Maybe it was purple aliens invading your kindergarten classroom, which was taught by your Aunt Sylvia, and apparently it was the 4th of July and Christmas at the same time – and you forgot to buy your husband a gift. Crazy, right?

But at the time, while you were sleeping, all of these crazy components seemed to make sense. **You just accepted whatever was in front of you as the truth.**

That is how we walk through life – I call it sleepwalking. We’re just going with the flow, not entirely paying attention to where we’re going or what we’re doing. Never really examining our decisions or our way of thinking.



Until we're slammed with a wake-up call.

They call them “wake-up” calls because we walk through life as if asleep. When we “wake up” suddenly things become clear that were once in a dream-like state of confusion – a bumbling, disjointed collection of odds and ends.

We “wake up” and all the pieces fall together. What brought us confusion and torment seems startlingly simple – so simple we wonder why it ever confused us at all.

We “wake up” and find the answers were always with us – it was only our own perceptions and patterns that muddied our views and kept us in a dreamlike state of confusion.



*The Cambridge dictionary defines a wake-up call as
“a shocking event that changes the way many people
think.”*



Unfortunately, sometimes an extreme event – an accident, a death, a divorce, a bankruptcy – is the only influence strong enough to wake us up

to the damage done by thinking patterns and habits that previously seemed harmless or too difficult to give up.

My Wake-Up Call


I hope that you don't have to go through a terrible shock or time of crisis to discover what's really important in life. I'll be honest: that's what it took for *me* to wake up and actually change my life.

Two years ago I sat crying with my husband on our front porch. We had the life we always thought we wanted. A custom-built log home on 15 acres next to a private lake. Complete with a flock of chickens and a wood-burning stove. A thriving local business that was one step from making it big. Two awesome little kids who we homeschooled. I'd written two books and was starting to make a name for myself.

And it was all falling apart.

My husband and I had almost zero communication. He'd been working 60+ hours a week for the last five years and it was taking its toll. Stress was at an all-time high, our marriage was in shambles, and we were at a crossroads.

It was time to choose who we were going to be for the rest of our lives.



So we gave up everything. We gave up all the ideas of what happiness was supposed to look like, what our dreams were supposed to be. We sold the house, the land, the business. We posted almost everything we owned on Craigslist. We donated more boxes and bags than we could ever count.

We left what we thought would be our “forever” life and started over at the ages of 31 and 28.


Why?

Because we woke up.

When everything comes crashing down on you, it suddenly becomes so easy to see what’s really important.

For us, it became crystal clear that we were so insanely fortunate to have each other. Our marriage and our kids. To have the people we love – it would be crazy not to realize how lucky we were. So all our decisions from that point on were based on that.

Maybe you’ve already experienced a wake-up call and you’re not sure what to do next. Or maybe you’re simply frustrated with negative patterns in your life and would like to try a different perspective (perhaps *before* you’re confronted with a huge wake-up call). Either way, I hope you find this book helpful in some small way.



I'll admit: I don't have all the answers and I hardly feel like the “master” of happiness.

But I've learned a few things on my own personal journey. Maybe all I know is a little, but if this little bit can help someone else in any way, then that makes it all worth it to me.


1

What is Happiness?

“There is only one cause of unhappiness: the false beliefs you have in your head, beliefs so widespread, so commonly held, that it never occurs to you to question them.”

Anthony de Mello

Happiness is a word we throw around too easily. Its meaning is so narrow we rarely feel it because – *this?* This can't be happiness. Happiness is... I don't know. But it must be something else.



Happiness, we think, is perfection. It's a smile with no sadness behind it. It's clean and clear. No flaws or blemishes can be in its presence. Happiness is when everything is perfectly fine.

We know perfection doesn't exist, and if happiness is perfection, then that makes happiness... *impossible*.

If that's true, then no wonder we aren't happy!

To truly experience the depth of happiness, we have to expand our understanding of it. Happiness *can't* be perfection, not unless we're willing to say happiness doesn't exist at all (as perfection doesn't).

But I'm sure you believe it's possible and even reasonably attainable to be happy, or else you wouldn't be reading this book. So beginning with that assumption (that happiness is, in fact, possible), what is it really?

What do you *really* feel when you're happy? This is the right question to be asking when seeking to define happiness.

Below are some of the thoughts that spring to my mind when I think of being happy. Read them slowly and let them sink in for a minute:


Happiness is ... *kindness.*
... *feeling content.*
... *being at peace.*
... *experiencing something delightful.*
... *enjoyment.*
... *laughter.*
... *friendship.*
... *love.*
... *feeling triumphant.*
... *being carefree.*
... *feeling respected.*

When you start to define happiness in new ways, it suddenly becomes clearer what we need to do to be happy.

So instead of trying to be happy... why not try to experience kindness? Or find something that sparks laughter? Or bring more friendship into your life? Or feel the triumph in facing a challenge?

These things feel a little more tangible, a little more reachable, than the somewhat ambiguous feeling of “happiness” we’re always pursuing.

Another trouble with happiness is we tend to feel it excludes any negative emotion whatsoever.



Again, we make the assumption that happiness must be perfect, so obviously any moment clouded with even a little sadness or discomfort or frustration must obviously not be a happy one, correct?

This narrow definition of happiness steals our best moments from us.

Once I let go of this false idea, the more I realized my life was *filled* with happiness. It was also simultaneously filled with regret, and sadness, and impatience and irritation. But I learned those emotions are simply part of life and there's no need to let them steal the show.

Happiness can exist only in acceptance.

George Orwell

For me, permitting myself to feel *unhappiness* is what opens my heart to being happy. It sounds contradictory, I know, but it is simply a way of acknowledging reality.

This means giving moments of sadness or frustration their place. Because, of course, every moment won't be happy. And many events will happen in your life that bring you anything but happiness.

And that's okay.

Happiness isn't a perpetual smile, and it isn't pretending that bad things don't exist. This is not about pretending. *Pretend* happiness isn't really happiness at all, is it?

No. So we must give genuine happiness the respect it deserves by allowing other emotions their place in our lives.

It's comforting to acknowledge sadness rather than to push it away. To say, "I'm feeling sadness right now," instead of frantically trying to push the feeling away, or trade it for something you perceive as better – like gratitude – or to force yourself to smile.

In fact, when I find myself fighting sadness (or any negative emotion – insert disappointment, shame, regret, anger, resentment, etc.), I realize the moment I am *willing* to feel sadness is the moment gratitude becomes possible.

Let me say that again: the moment I am willing to feel my sadness is the moment my heart opens to gratitude.

In fact, feelings of gratitude bubble up almost effortlessly.

It works even better when I put into words what I am sad about: “I’m sad my family and I aren’t getting along right now.” At that moment, I’ve accepted my sadness instead of pushing it away. When I feel I have permission to be sad, I feel permission to be grateful, too.

Because even in a moment of sadness, there is still gratitude.

Instead of saying to myself, “I am sad about this BUT I should be happy about that,” I can say, “I am sad about this AND I am happy about that.”


I can feel *both*. One doesn’t have to override the other.

Now it’s Your Turn

Try out my exercise from above. Make it your own. The next time you encounter a negative emotion, acknowledge it rather than push it away.

Like this:

1. You’re feeling frustrated with a situation at work. First, acknowledge the feeling: “I’m feeling frustrated right now.” If you

- 
- can, close your eyes and try to focus in on that feeling in your body – you might notice your stomach is a little sick, or maybe you feel flushed, or your heart is racing.
2. Now, expand on that and explain why you're feeling frustrated.
“I'm frustrated because I've been asked to do a project that will take extra time away that I wanted to spend with my kids.”
 3. Take a few breaths and allow yourself to feel the frustration and disappointment and any other emotion that comes up.
 4. Check in with how you feel again. Acknowledge the feeling and see if it feels any different. See if any thoughts arise.
 5. It's okay if you still feel frustrated. Again, this is not about forcing happiness, it's about making room for it. This may not come naturally at first.
 6. If you do feel any feelings of gratitude or other positive feelings, simply acknowledge them as well. Remember, one emotion doesn't replace the other – they can coexist.

What Happiness is *Not*

This should go without saying, but it must be said: **happiness is not doing whatever you want.**

Actions have consequences. That is the nature of this life.

True happiness stems from understanding the short-term and long-term results of our actions. Brushing our teeth may not bring us much happiness, but tooth decay and gum disease would obviously make us *unhappy* – so happiness is performing a menial daily task that has a positive impact on our lives.

In the same sense, happiness doesn't come at the expense of others.

Although we can't make everyone happy, we can (and should) avoid causing them harm if at all possible. Taking advantage of others, or doing whatever you want without regard for how it impacts others, isn't happiness – it's arrogance and narcissism.

I'm assuming since you're reading this book, you're a decent human being who understands these principles and will keep them in mind as you seek happiness in your life.


2

Know Thyself

A solid sense of self will help a person to lead a full and happy life.

Kimberly Elise

Imagine you're working at a zoo. You have a lion in one habitat and a panda bear in another. You don't know much about animals, but they need to be fed. You have a choice of raw meat or bamboo. You have no clue which animals needs which food.



Even though your task is pretty simple, because you don't know anything about the animals you're feeding, you're stuck feeling confused, frustrated, and embarrassed. And you're definitely not feeling happy.


Of course, the problem is easily solved by getting to know the animals you're feeding. Even just a rudimentary study of lions or pandas would answer your questions. Suddenly your confusion, frustration, and embarrassment would melt away. Your decision would come easily, and you would start to feel happy again.

In the same way, knowing who *you* are is the key to avoiding much of the confusion and frustration that prevents you from enjoying your life.

To be happy, you must know *yourself*.

If you don't know who you are, if you don't know where you're going in life, you'll often to run into walls when you have to make decisions (however big or small). And you'll find yourself making many decisions that ultimately don't enrich your life or bring you happiness. You'll often make choices you regret, and even repeat similar mistakes over and over again... without ever really understanding *why*.

The plan is for you to build a solid sense of self. We want to build this sense of self purposefully. It needs to be done with intention.




You probably already have a sense of self in place, but it was most likely formed from a collection of experiences in your life. And more often than not, these experiences are negative. That's because negative experiences tend to have a deeper emotional impact on us, and therefore stand out to us more.

While positive experiences do impact our sense of self, it's the negative ones that tend to linger and have a deeper impact than they should.

I was called "fat" by a boy in my first grade class when I was six years old, and I still remember that moment quite clearly. For years I thought of myself as chubby or fat. I just took it as a given. It was part of my sense of self.

Now, when I look back on pictures on myself as a child, it's pretty obvious I was average in size. I wasn't a skinny kid, but I wasn't big either. Just straight up average. Funny how I spent so many years believing I was something I wasn't, just because of a few words said to me by a boy I barely knew.

But isn't that the way it always works? It's the truths we never question that hold us back. What we believe about ourselves will have more of an impact on every moment of our lives than anything else, but we rarely question our beliefs about who we are. Even worse, we never intentionally *decide* who we will be.



The answer is to start deciding *now*. The first step to deciding who you will be is to discover who you are.

If you aren't intimately familiar with your vision of yourself, you will never tap into your inner strength.

If you don't actively participate in deciding who you are, the way you spend your time will feel random and out of your control. You'll never seem to be able to make time for the things you really want to do. Your beliefs about yourself and your life will never feel stable, but instead will change constantly depending on which friend you're hanging out with, or which news station you're watching. You won't feel as if you have any choices. Your life will be determined by momentary feelings and by pressure from others.

You've probably heard me (and a lot of other people) talk about how it's important to love yourself, but how can you love someone if you don't know them? *You can't.*

You have to know yourself to love yourself, to honor your beliefs, to respect your own boundaries, to envision your future.


These are all keys to forming a foundation for happiness, and you can't do any of them if you don't have the slightest clue who you are and what really

makes you tick. You must take the time to understand your strengths, your natural talents, what brings you joy, what makes life worth living for you.

Getting to know yourself can take time. I'm still in this process two years into making a commitment to know and value myself. But the progress I've made since I started is remarkable and I am a much happier person by far.

“To perform at your best, you need to know who you are and why you think and feel the way you do. You need to understand the forces and influences that have shaped your character from earliest childhood. You need to know why you react and respond the way you do to people and situations around you. It is only when you begin to understand and accept yourself that you can begin moving forward in the other areas of your life.”

Brian Tracy, Maximum Achievement




When I first started this journey, I realized a certain self-perception I had about myself was having a crippling effect on myself and my life: I assumed everyone else knew better than me. I didn't trust my own judgment or listen to my own intuition. I didn't place any worth on my own experience or reasoning.

Because of this belief system, I often had trouble standing up for myself or asserting myself, even in situations where it was really important. The negative impact these beliefs had on myself and my family was evident, but for many years I never understood it, because I never let myself question it.

The truth that I eventually understood was that I *was* actually a very assertive person. Ask my husband – he'll tell you from firsthand experience that I really know my own mind when it comes down to it, and I'm not afraid to speak it, either.

It was not my nature in any way, shape, or form to “sit down and shut up” – but from an early point in my childhood I'd trained myself to stifle my own opinions and not to question authority.

Over the years, I essentially shut myself off in most situations (except perhaps with those closest to me – again, I refer back to my husband!). But in everyday social situations, I just nodded and smiled. I forgot how to have an opinion of my own. Under the guise of “respecting” others (i.e. avoiding conflict whenever possible), I completely forgot to respect myself. Over



time, I developed a very weak sense of self and had trouble making up my own mind.

I tell this story because I know some of you can relate. I also want to illustrate how much our sense of self dictates our decisions and the course of our lives – and therefore, our happiness.


Developing a Solid Sense of Self

Getting to know yourself and deciding who you will be in your life is a very personal journey, and there's no true roadmap that can tell you the exact way you must go. But there are a few general guidelines that might help you:

1. Commit to the Task

Committing yourself to learning who you are and where you want to go in life is a must. This is not an easy journey, though it is rewarding. You'll probably have to let go of preconceptions, behaviors, and thinking patterns that you've likely had for years.

You'll often need to step away from what other people think and what society as a whole tells you about who you should be and where you should



go in life. You'll need to learn to make these decisions for yourself (though it's always wise to seek input from sources you trust).


Commitment is necessary also because the journey is long, and has its ups and downs. A sense of self is not something you can master in 60 days or even six months. It's something that's developed over years, truly a lifetime. And of course you'll make plenty of mistakes along the way. Commitment helps you learn from those mistakes and do better, instead of giving up and never becoming who you were meant to be.

2. Learn What Recharges You

Are you an introvert or an extrovert? Or somewhere in between?

An introvert is energized by alone time. They might love people, but they also need solitude to restore their energy levels, and they become exhausted when they don't get enough time to themselves.

An extrovert, on the other hand, is energized by people. They can handle being alone for short periods, but often thrive when they're in the center of the action. They love groups and parties, and need plenty of time with others to feel balanced. Too much alone time leaves them feeling sad or antsy.



Knowing what fuels you is vital to your sense of self. Being an introvert or an extrovert is just a piece of the puzzle. It's important to spend a little time almost every day allowing yourself to recharge or reflect.

For some, this means meditation. For others, it's a cup of coffee and a favorite novel. It could be practicing a hobby or even playing a sport (especially if you need to express some aggressive emotions!).


Explore your options and think about what helps you recharge. When things get hectic or you feel overcome by emotions, allow yourself some space to decompress – kind of like a gentle “reset” button – so you can come back to life with a mind that's refreshed.

3. Treat Yourself Like a Human Being

If you're a decent person, you don't likely call people names, constantly shame them for their mistakes, or act like nothing they ever do is good enough.

Most of us wouldn't treat another human being that way. But that's often exactly how we treat ourselves.

Some of the best qualities we offer others – our patience, understanding, compassion, support, encouragement, love – are those we often don't give to ourselves.



Instead, we treat ourselves as if we were somehow subhuman, and then seek these qualities from others, which usually leads to disappointment (more or less).


However, if you expect to develop a strong sense of self, you have to start by treating yourself like a human being. Take care of yourself and talk to yourself in the way you would want someone you love to talk to themselves. Just basic human respect and decency – it doesn't seem a lot to ask, and yet it's the one thing many of us won't give ourselves. And that's a huge mistake.

After all, the voice we hear the most is our own, and if we can't treat ourselves with respect and compassion, then how can we truly expect ourselves to grow?

The truth is, we can't. If you want to grow as a person, you have to treat yourself like a human being.

4. Take Responsibility

In order to gain control over your future, you have to take responsibility for it. Not because everything is in your control (it isn't), but because whatever is in your control, is your responsibility.



For instance, changing the past is not a choice we can make, but learning from it is. Being perfect isn't an option, but learning to do better is. We may not be able to choose everything that happens to us, but we can choose how we react to it.

By focusing on what is within our control (however small), we gain a sense of freedom and strength in our lives.


3

Push Pause

“Often, psychological laziness will have you switch your life over to autopilot and fall asleep at the wheel rather than stay awake to what will fulfill your heart’s deepest desires and your soul’s purpose.”

Debbie Ford

The less we feel in control of our lives, the less we experience happiness. In fact, our greatest moments of stress and frustration often stem from experiencing negative circumstances we can’t control.



There are many things we can't control, but you may control more than you think.

But first you have to get off autopilot.


Would it surprise you to learn that you might not be making as many decisions as you think you are? You're probably only making a fraction of the decisions you think you're making.

Most of the time, you're on autopilot.

In real life, autopilot stands for *automatic pilot*. It's a program that allows a craft to fly on a set course without intervention from a pilot.

Most of the decisions you make every day are made by your programming — aka, the mental patterns you've developed over a lifetime. They can be made without intervention from the pilot — aka, you.

Sure, you're sitting there in the pilot's seat most of the time, but you're not really focused on whether or not your decisions are on course. You're letting autopilot take care of that for you.



At first, this can sound a little crazy. Are we really just sleepwalking through life? But as you start paying more attention to the decisions you make every day, you'll see that in many cases, it's true.

Decide what's On Autopilot

Certain things *should* be on autopilot. “Should I take a shower today?” Or “Should I buckle my seatbelt?” aren't decisions that should be up for discussion every day. It makes sense for certain decisions to be made automatically, to leave our mental energy for more important things.

But problems arise when we let autopilot thinking take over our lives. There are plenty of decisions that *shouldn't* be on autopilot. If you automatically say “yes” every time someone asks you for a favor or wants you to participate in an event or project, you might notice your life feels hectic and overscheduled.

But how do you stop making automatic decisions?

My Panera Story

My husband and I were eating out at Panera recently when something extraordinary happened. Well, it probably wouldn't seem very extraordinary, but to me it definitely was.

We were almost done with our meal, when one of the employees came up and asked if we were done. I paused, looked at my plate and realized I still had some delicious sandwich left to enjoy. So I replied, “No, not yet. Thanks!”

That was it.


See, nothing too special, right?

But to me that was an amazing moment of success.

Why? Because I *paused*.

You see, normally when a server comes up to ask if I'm done, I would just answer, “Yes, thank you” — regardless of whether or not I was actually done.

I don't exactly know how that became my automatic response — maybe I felt I was taking too long to eat and inconveniencing them somehow. I *always*



said “yes” no matter what was actually going on – without one thought about whether or not I was actually done eating!

So the day I actually paused and made a decision based on what was right in that moment (not just repeating the same autopilot response I always had), it felt like a big win for me.

It took me years and years to realize how many areas of my life this habit affected. The majority of decisions I made were automatic. Later I would look back on my decisions, and they didn’t make sense. And I couldn’t even tell you *why* I made them.

This habit pattern robbed my life of a lot of happiness, because I ended up tuning out my intuition, making avoidable mistakes, and rarely making *intentional* decisions.

At first I didn’t even know how to break this pattern. I started by often recognizing the mistake afterward, but never during the moment. Most of the time, my response was often so automatic, I would make a decision or give an answer before I was even conscious of doing it.

Then it hit me: I needed to push pause.

Why Pause

Just imagine if life had a remote control, and you could push pause whenever you needed to. Take a breath. Think about what you really want. Think about what's right or best for the situation. Then, when you're ready, just push play again.

Life may not come with a remote control, but you can *pause* more often than you may think.


We live with a lie that tells us we don't have time to make a clear decision. The truth is, we have way more time than we think.

Almost always, we have a few seconds to judge a situation. And if you clear your mind without worrying about how long it's taking or whether you'll make the right choice, you might realize that one or two seconds is actually plenty of time for many everyday decisions to be made.

What about the big stuff?

For bigger decisions, the lie is often that we have to make the decision *right now*.

The salesperson at the car dealership might try to make you *think* you have to tell them whether you are going to buy that car tonight or never, but it's



not true. For most big decisions, you can step back, evaluate, and make the choice when you are under less pressure.

It's true: some decisions will need to be made on the spot — like slamming on the brakes when the car in front of you stops quickly. But most of these decisions are actually subconscious, which means they are being made by your mental programming.

And what dictates your programming? **Your everyday decisions and habits.**

The daily decisions you make are imprinted on your memory. Your mind makes connections and builds habits. This can have either a positive or negative snowball effect on your decision-making skills, depending on whether you develop a habit of making intentional decisions from a place of awareness.

When you pause and make better everyday decisions, you build new connections and habits in your mind. After a while, you're programming your mind to make better decisions. It will become more automatic. **So when split-second decisions *are* necessary, you're more likely to make the right choice.**

Now it's Your Turn

Start practicing the pause right away.

This is something that you can start doing today. In fact, you'd better start as soon as you can, because it will take you some practice before it comes naturally.

At first, like me, you won't remember to pause until after you've already made an autopilot response. That's okay.

This is the first step and there's no way around making a lot of mistakes in this area. Noticing these mistakes is how you will eventually remember to pause. Over time you'll get comfortable pausing whenever you feel the need.

At that point, you'll notice a shift in the decisions you make. It can be quite sudden once you get the hang of it. Your decisions will begin lining up with your long-term goals and the direction you want your life to go.

And as you make more intentional and conscious decisions in your life, you'll feel a stronger sense of control over the outcome of your life... which of course, can lead to more happiness.


4

Do I Deserve to be Happy?

We all of us deserve happiness or none of us does.

Mary Gordon

One of the big obstacles of happiness is not feeling you're worthy of it. It may be your mother's voice in the back of your head telling you you'll never amount to anything. Or maybe you have a mistake (or more than one) that haunts you in the back of your mind and whispers that you deserve to suffer.



When you don't feel worthy of happiness, you will automatically avoid or sabotage situations that could make you happy. Or, even worse, you might put yourself in situations that are more likely to have a negative impact on your life.

You might do this intentionally or you might not even realize you're doing it at all. But either way, the feelings you have about yourself will affect your decisions.


If you feel you're not worthy of being happy, then your decisions will lead you in a negative direction.

In order to move your life in a positive direction, you'll have to work through those feelings of unworthiness or low self-esteem so you can prevent them from sabotaging your happiness. This topic is a deep one, and more than I can cover in this book, but I'll share some ideas that have helped me.

It Doesn't Matter if You Deserve It or Not

Do you deserve to be happy?

Here's my answer: **it doesn't matter.**



If you think happiness is a selfish pursuit, think about it this way: the impact you have on the world around you is directly related to how you feel.

When you are miserable and hate yourself, these emotions will stain everything you do and every interaction you have with other people.

We can't help it. What's going on in our heads will affect our actions. And our actions affect others.

So being happy isn't just about *you* feeling good. It's about how you affect the world around you. **It's to the benefit of everyone you ever meet if you're a happy person.**

Remember in the beginning of the book when we talked about expanding the definition of happiness? Being a happy person means being kind, content, at peace, carefree. A loving person. A good friend. How can being those things *not* benefit the people around you?

If you're a mom, don't your kids benefit from your happiness? If you run a business, do you think your customers or employees are affected by how you feel?

Being happy has very little to do with whether or not you deserve it. In the end, that's small beans compared to the total impact you have in your life.

So, do you deserve to be happy?

The real question is: does everyone else deserve the negative impact you'll have on their lives by *not* being happy?

But What About How Others Suffer?

I can't help but acknowledge how fortunate I am in this life. I've had my share of trials and dark hours, but I still realize my suffering doesn't compare to what many others experience.

I have a home to live in and food on the table. I am surrounded by the people I love best in the world. I don't have any major health problems or financial burdens. I have clean water to drink and clean air to breathe.

I am incredibly fortunate.

Sometimes it's hard to feel that you deserve happiness when so many others are suffering in the world. People have to live with famines and wars and torrid living conditions. People do terrible things to others. These are ugly realities we all must face.



So I don't blame you for asking: why do *I* deserve to be happy when so many others suffer?

Again, for me this comes back to the impact I have on the world around me. If I truly believe I am fortunate in this life, then what right do I have to sit back and do nothing because I feel guilty? *Who does that benefit?* It does nothing to ease the suffering of others or have even the slightest positive effect on the world.

To suffer because others suffer does not help anyone.

By discovering what truly makes you feel happy and fulfilled in life, you will open the door to becoming someone who can truly have a positive impact on others.

If knowing others suffer is something that bothers you, then you possess some of the best qualities a person can have: empathy, compassion, sensitivity, humanity. I believe in being deeply compassionate toward others.

But compassion and guilt are not the same thing. Guilt leads to inaction – it paralyzes you. Compassion leads you to act in ways that help others. Don't get them confused.

Improving Your Self-Worth

If you struggle with feeling unworthy of happiness, you may benefit from working on improving your self-worth. Another term for self-worth is self-esteem.

Self-esteem is not only how confident you are in your abilities, but it's also how worthy you feel of love, friendship, success and happiness.

Building happiness and self-esteem often go hand in hand, so many of the steps in this book (especially in the chapters ahead) can help you improve your self-esteem. However, you may need to seek out specific resources to help you as well.

(If your low self-esteem is connected to body image issues, you might enjoy reading my book [Love Your Body](#), which focuses on practical ways to promote positive body image.)

5

Gratitude Makes Happiness

Gratitude helps you to grow and expand; gratitude brings joy and laughter into your life and into the lives of all those around you.

Eileen Caddy

Being awake and being grateful are synonymous. It's not possible to sleepwalk through life when you are truly grateful. And it's impossible to be grateful when you're asleep at the wheel in your life.

**Gratitude sparks awareness – or awareness sparks gratitude.
Either way, awareness and gratitude walk hand in hand.**

You will not find happiness without gratitude. It just makes sense: if you're always focused on the negative – how could that awaken happy feelings?

Or if you're just coasting along and not bothering to experience the moments of your life – if you're not experiencing your life, you can't expect to experience happiness.

Being grateful, of course, doesn't mean pretending negatives don't exist.

It is simply acknowledging those negatives and then bringing to mind what we have to be grateful for, in spite of those negatives. In fact, those very negatives just may serve as a reminder to cherish what we *do* have.

Don't just take my word for it. Science agrees with me:

Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, ranging from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., a leading gratitude researcher, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.

- from [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com)

There have been a number of studies done to see if gratitude improves emotional health – and the majority of them show that being grateful does, in fact, have a positive effect on the way we feel. Here are a couple of links that may interest you if you want to learn more:

- [In Praise of Gratitude, Harvard Mental Health Letter](#)
- [Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude](#)

Gratitude is a necessary ingredient for happiness. Period.

Don't Like the Word Gratitude?

Now, I'll admit the term "gratitude" has been thrown around a lot in recent years – for good reason, as we've seen. But I understand that when you hear a word one too many times, you may start to tune it out.

If the word "gratitude" doesn't resonate with you, try thinking of it as "appreciation" instead.

Appreciating good things makes sense, doesn't it? We all like to be appreciated for our efforts. In fact, I would go as far as to say appreciation is a key ingredient for any good relationship – be it a romantic relationship, in business, or with friends and family.

When we appreciate the goodness in others, it not only honors the person we appreciate, but it also warms our own heart as well.

The same goes for all the good things in your life – even if you feel shorted on life's blessings. The act of appreciating whatever good is there (if it's only a warm bed and a good meal, so be it) sparks a sense of contentment in us, however small.

Whether the word "gratitude" or "appreciation" resonates with you more, start working today to find more ways to experience feeling grateful.

It's a necessary ingredient for your happiness.

3 Ways to Bring Gratitude into Your Life

Gratitude is a habit that you can build. At first it can help to be intentional about your gratitude. Over time, you should notice it becomes more natural. Here are some ways to actively bring more gratitude into your life:

1. Start a Gratitude Journal

At the end of the day, spend five minutes writing down one or two things you are grateful for. It might be something that happened to you that day, or a good memory, or something basic that you get to enjoy every day (like hot coffee in the morning!). It can be something big or small – the “size” doesn’t matter. As you might have guessed, it’s the thought that counts.

2. Say “Thank You” a Little More

Sometimes we forget to express our gratitude with the two simple words, “thank you.” It might be your spouse or your child, or your co-worker, or even a neighbor. You might genuinely appreciate someone, but forget to show it. Saying *thanks* is a good way to give gratitude more space in your life.

3. Write a Letter


Writing is a powerful tool. It engages the mind and allows you to meditate on your feelings. Write a letter to someone you may have never properly thanked for their kindness. It may be a parent or grandparent, or an old teacher or friend. Be genuine in your thanks to them and let them know how much their kindness meant to you. Personally deliver it to them if you can – it will have all the more impact on you both.

6

Happiness Hack #1: Develop a Skill

“Research on happiness suggests that enduring happiness comes from finding opportunities to develop new skills.”

*Barbara Ann Kipfer, Field Guide to Happiness
for Women*



Children seem to have a remarkable ability to find happiness. Their curiosity fuels their exploration of the world where everything is new and exciting, and where possibilities are seemingly endless.

Where did that feeling go?


Curiosity gets lost in the mire of burnout. Perhaps we get bogged down with bills and expectations, long working hours and the dreaded status quo burying what used to be our hopes and dreams. Maybe our failures are so painful we're afraid of having hopes and dreams again.

The Problem with Dreams

In the business world, I often see the phrase, “Dream big!” But what does that really mean?

It means nothing, to me, if everyone's idea of *dreaming big* is the same old bigger house, bigger car, bigger paycheck and bigger vacations. Even our dreams follow a cookie-cutter formula. No wonder we've lost our childlike sense of adventure!

When I had a difficult time setting goals, I eventually realized all those big goals and dreams were really just stressing me out. Something wasn't clicking for me. My dreams weren't motivating me, or making me happy.



I realized all my dreams were based in *accumulating*. Stuff, cars, property, clothes. Thinking about owning all that stuff just weighed me down! I almost began to dread the day I would reach my dreams.

Hint: you should never dread reaching your dreams.

So I put them all on the backburner. I let go of what I thought life would have to look like in order for me to be happy (because, obviously, it was wrong). And I worked on *doing* more and *learning* more in the meantime.

Eventually a new way of dreaming crept into my heart. I realized what I really craved was *freedom* and *experiences*.

I wanted *less* obligation, not more. I wanted to rent a condo in Maui for a month – not buy a house and then worry about taxes and the real estate market and maintenance. I wanted extra day trips with the family more than granite countertops.

Once I changed the way I thought about my goals, everything changed. My whole self felt uplifted. I was actually looking forward to waking up each day and making my dreams happen a little at a time.

Stop Dreaming, Start Exploring

I say forget dreaming big for a while. *Explore* big instead.

Your skills in the department of dreaming are most likely rusty and in need of some oiling. Exploring the world around you with new eyes will inspire *better* dreams than you can dare to imagine if you've been stuck in a rut too long.

How do you explore exactly?


Just like a child, you need to learn something new. Develop a new skill. A child explores by learning, and learns by exploring. And so should you.

What should you learn?

First things first: *should* will have nothing to do with it. Life is full of *shoulds*, and while they have their place, they don't belong here.

Go and learn something that makes you smile, something that kindles a creative flame inside of you.

Learn to paint. Learn how to use your camera. Learn to cook Thai food. Learn to speak Spanish. Take a lesson in writing poetry or public speaking.



Try yoga or salsa dancing. Learn to change your own oil in your car if you don't know how. Learn some new makeup tips on Pinterest.

It doesn't really matter what it is. Pick a skill and start learning. You don't have to master it. You may find you don't enjoy it at all. But it will still teach you something, if only the lesson that you don't like that particular activity!

More than anything, learning a new skill will spark a new outlook on life. It can awaken a long lost sense of wonder and adventure and *possibilities*. As you develop new skills, you may find it easier to start dreaming again, to envision new solutions to old problems, to break old habits and start new ones.




7

Happiness Hack #2: Create Something

"A creative life is an amplified life. It's a bigger life, a happier life, an expanded life, and a hell of a lot more interesting life."

Elizabeth Gilbert



Creativity is an outlet for our soul. While the last chapter focused on developing skills, this chapter is about what to do with those skills: create something.


No, you don't have to be the next Picasso or Shakespeare to be creative. Sometimes we think creative people are the artists that live on the fringes, but creativity is for all of us.

I would go as far to say that creative expression is a *necessary* component of a happy life.

You see, up until now we've been focusing on how to bring happiness into your life on an internal and personal level. This is of vital importance, because as the saying goes, "*You cannot pour from an empty vessel.*"

In the same way a pond with no outlet can become stagnant, when we have no outlet we tend to feel stale and *stuck*. And the way to "unstick" ourselves is to pour forth like a dam breaking.

Some of the things we create may be just for ourselves (think of them as practice creations), while others we will share with close friends. Still others we may feel inspired to share with the world.



Who you share with is up to you, and you may not know what that answer is until you are finished with whatever you are creating. The important part is to harness that creativity and find an outlet for it.

Here are some ideas below:

10 Ideas for Unleashing Your Creativity

1. Journal

I started journaling again in 2015 and I found it to be incredibly healing. I write so much for my work that I forgot what it was like to write just for the love of it.

I write whenever my heart feels full or when I want to sort out my thoughts on paper. Some of my entries are deeply personal. Some I liked so much they ended up in parts of this book.

This isn't necessarily about recording daily events in a diary, but more like letting your thoughts and feelings flow onto paper. They can be pure poetry or stark prose – your writing style is up to you, and it can vary with your moods. Just write. No expectations, no boundaries. Who knows where it may lead?

2. Cook

Cooking can be intensely therapeutic, but the creativity involved in cooking is often lost in the day-to-day drudge of preparing meals. It's time to bring some of the joy and love into our meals – even if we're only preparing them for ourselves, but especially when we're cooking for others.

Try a new recipe or dust off an old favorite and make delicious things in your kitchen. See if it doesn't bring a smile to your lips.

3. Write a Note

You don't have to be a writer to put a few quick thoughts on paper. Write your grandma an old-fashioned letter to tell her how things are going in your life. Jot a quick love note to your spouse. Write a silly poem reminding your kids to do their chores (instead of just telling them firmly for the umpteenth time!).

4. Arrange Some Flowers

No skills necessary. If you think you'll be awful at this, pick Gerber daisies in three colors. You can't mess this up. Put them in a big vase and enjoy. You can be more adventurous, of course, but it's not necessary. The point is to have a hand in something that's absolutely beautiful. Put your

arrangement in your favorite spot in the house. Or even better, pass it on to a friend or loved one for them to enjoy.

5. Take Pictures (Not Selfies)

In a world saturated in selfies, don't forget to take pictures of actual life happening. Every object tells a story, from a little toy bus to a street sign to a broken bicycle on the side of the road. You may not be a writer, but you can let a picture tell the story instead. (I hear they're worth 1,000 words).

6. Color

Yes, I said color. In case you've missed out on the trend, adult coloring books are all the rage these days. And for good reason! Researchers say coloring is like a form of meditation and can help us deal with negative emotions (learn more in [this article](#)).

Even if you don't have a natural talent for art, coloring is practically foolproof. For a few dollars you can get a book full of inspiring pictures and a pack of colored pencils, and start having fun.

You can even bring older kids in on the fun (ones who might think they're a little past the age of coloring books). I've found coloring can be a pretty fun family activity. I let my kids choose a page and we all pitch in to make something uniquely ours.

7. Grow Some Herbs


When I moved to the city, I thought my gardening days were over. But as it turns out, you can do a lot with a container and a back porch. I'm growing a little mess of rosemary, lavender, thyme and oregano right now.

Herbs are insanely easy to take care of (neither of my thumbs are green, believe me), smell amazing and you can actually use them in cooking recipes and homemade remedies (two more creative habits you can try!). Pruning, watering and harvesting can be fun and even a little therapeutic.

8. Actually Print Your Pictures

Remember all those lovely pictures you're supposed to take? Don't leave them on your camera or your phone! Print them out and make a little scrapbook or collage with your favorites (for ideas, Pinterest is always a good place to start).

Prints can be made very inexpensively at your local drug store or online at sites like Shutterfly (usually for just a few cents each – Google a coupon code and get the best deal possible).



Actually printing your pictures and surrounding yourself with your favorite memories is a great reminder of what life is really made of – little moments of beauty and happiness.

9. Make a Video

Don't worry – you never have to share it (unless you want to). Like journaling, recording a video where you just share your thoughts or something that's on your heart can be very therapeutic.

Talking something out – even just with yourself – can help you digest the emotions surrounding it and may be what you need to move past whatever's on your mind.

Speaking can also help you find your unique “voice” – the individual way you approach life and put thoughts into words. Finding your own voice can inspire confidence and feeling more comfortable in your own skin.

10. Build Something


Even if it's just with Legos (not everyone is a professional wood worker, after all!). Constructive thinking and creativity work together to help us solve problems. So whether you're building something useful or just having some fun, making something with your hands can help nurture those processes in your brain that can inspire new ideas and solutions.

8

Happiness Hack #3: Find a Cause

*“If you want happiness for an hour — take a nap.
If you want happiness for a day — go fishing.
If you want happiness for a year — inherit a fortune.
If you want happiness for a lifetime — help someone
else.”*

Chinese Proverb



In the end, all of our inside work on finding happiness is supposed to bloom into something that extends outside of ourselves. In the previous chapter, we talked about expressing that happiness through creativity. In this chapter, we'll take that one step further and talk about how to find deep motivation to continue building a happier life.


It's time to find a cause.

I've found this is a constructive way to channel feelings of guilt and shame into something positive and productive. When we feel guilty and ashamed, these emotions typically immobilize us. We're stuck in the mud of the past.

Forgiving yourself – although it may be the ultimate destination – doesn't always feel reasonable or even possible at times. It's in these moments that we need something to help us rise to the occasion and experience wholeness even when we feel broken.

When you're in this place, it can be incredibly healing to take up a cause. A cause is a principle you can advocate and support – something you can believe in.

Now, this may bring to mind charitable organizations, animal shelters, or political movements – those are definitely causes you can choose to support (and there's nothing wrong with that). But you can also think outside the box.




When it comes to our mistakes and heartaches, they can fill our lives with negative, paralyzing emotions (which, perhaps, to some degree is unavoidable), and we can also choose to learn from them.

We can choose to learn *why* they happened, and perhaps learn to prevent them in the future. Or, since some heartache is inevitable, we can learn invaluable coping skills to get us through the hard times.

There is honor in learning from your mistakes and growing from your heartache, but you can take it a step further (and this is where your cause may lie): you can help others overcome the same.

Two years ago, I took up a cause for myself to learn from my biggest and most crippling mistakes. I knew there was no way to erase them or undo their consequences. But I could choose to avoid making the same mistakes again.

So I started soul searching. I began looking for the “why” behind my mistakes. I found patterns of thinking and behavior. And then I looked for the “why” behind those. Over a long period of time, it became clear why I had made decisions I regretted. With that knowledge, it was obvious what I needed to learn and practice to avoid the same patterns.



But all that soul searching opened my eyes to more than my own behavior. I started noticing the same patterns in those around me – people who were chronically making the same kinds of mistakes I had always made, and suffering because of it.


Then I found a cause beyond myself: helping others avoid my mistakes.

I knew my mission was next to impossible. Like I said in the beginning of this book, most of us will need a wake-up call before we're willing to change. But who knows? Maybe someday I will reach someone who needs to hear what I have to say and is ready to change. I know it sounds cliché, but if I can help one person, it's worth it.

The book you're reading right now exists because I found my cause.

What is your cause? What can you help someone with? Your cause doesn't have to reach millions or even thousands... or even hundreds. Find something you're passionate about and run with it.

Or if you're not sure what to do, just help someone. It might be an elderly neighbor who's lonely and depressed, and it would light up their day if you just spent an hour or two talking with them. Or maybe they just need help carrying their groceries.



Maybe your cause could simply be to make someone smile every day. To call the teller at the bank by her name instead of rushing in and out without even making eye contact.

Don't ignore a cause because it seems small or unworthy. No cause is. You can choose to have your life affect others in a positive way, and truly, what is more worthy than that? If only more people chose to do the same, what a different place this world would be.

Final Thoughts

This is where we part ways. I'm happy you've chosen to spend these moments of your life with me, and I hope this book has helped you in at least some small way.

Remember, happiness can have many definitions and affect us in different ways throughout our lives. My happiness now is certainly different than it was 10 years ago, and I have no doubt it I'll experience it differently 10 years from now.

The point is that happiness isn't one thing: it's unique to every individual and every moment of our lives. Widening our understanding of what it takes to live a happy life is part of finding that happiness for ourselves.

If you've found this book helpful in any way, please feel free to share it with others by sending them to this link so they can download their own copy for free: <http://www.livingthenourishedlife.com/awake>

Have a beautiful day!

~ Elizabeth