

**Happiness adds and multiplies as we divide it with others.  
unknown**



# Happiness

## The Quest for happiness and a guide on how to stay happy for longer.

— Info blatantly plagiarised through the Internet—

How are you doing today?  
Not so bad, thank you, yourself?  
So what is wrong that you feel bad?  
Bad? I do not feel bad.....

Life is made up of good and bad things. Everyone wants the good out of life but sadly few have it. It seems so much easier to be sad and yet all of us, rich or poor, sick or healthy want to be happy.

Before we discuss the happiness of life lets be sure what it means to be unhappy.

There is one common enemy to all of us and that is depression. Depression has many forms. Anger, jealousy, loneliness, sorrow, tears, being restless, irritable, loneliness, feeling miserable and sadness are all different faces of depression.

It could be health, poverty or boredom that is the initiator of unhappiness.  
It might also be psychological.

If you are unhappy it might be a good idea to figure what is causing you to be miserable.  
We tend to blame everything around us for our unhappiness but that is usually just an excuse to shift blame.

Before you read further I would have to ask you to accept one powerful lesson I learnt in life and that is to never blame someone else for your own problems. I ask that you take personal responsibility for the things in your life that makes you unhappy.

It is a state of mind that can be changed and once you start taking responsibility for your own actions or lack thereof, then something can be done about fixing unhappiness.

Consider the following scenarios:

### Why are you so unhappy?

I am unhappy because my husband is constantly drunk and makes my life hell.  
Could also be:

I am unhappy because I do not move away from my constantly drunk husband that makes my life hell.

**Or**

I am unhappy in my job; there is no other work available.

Could be, I am unhappy in my job because I am too scared to quit, find or create another job.

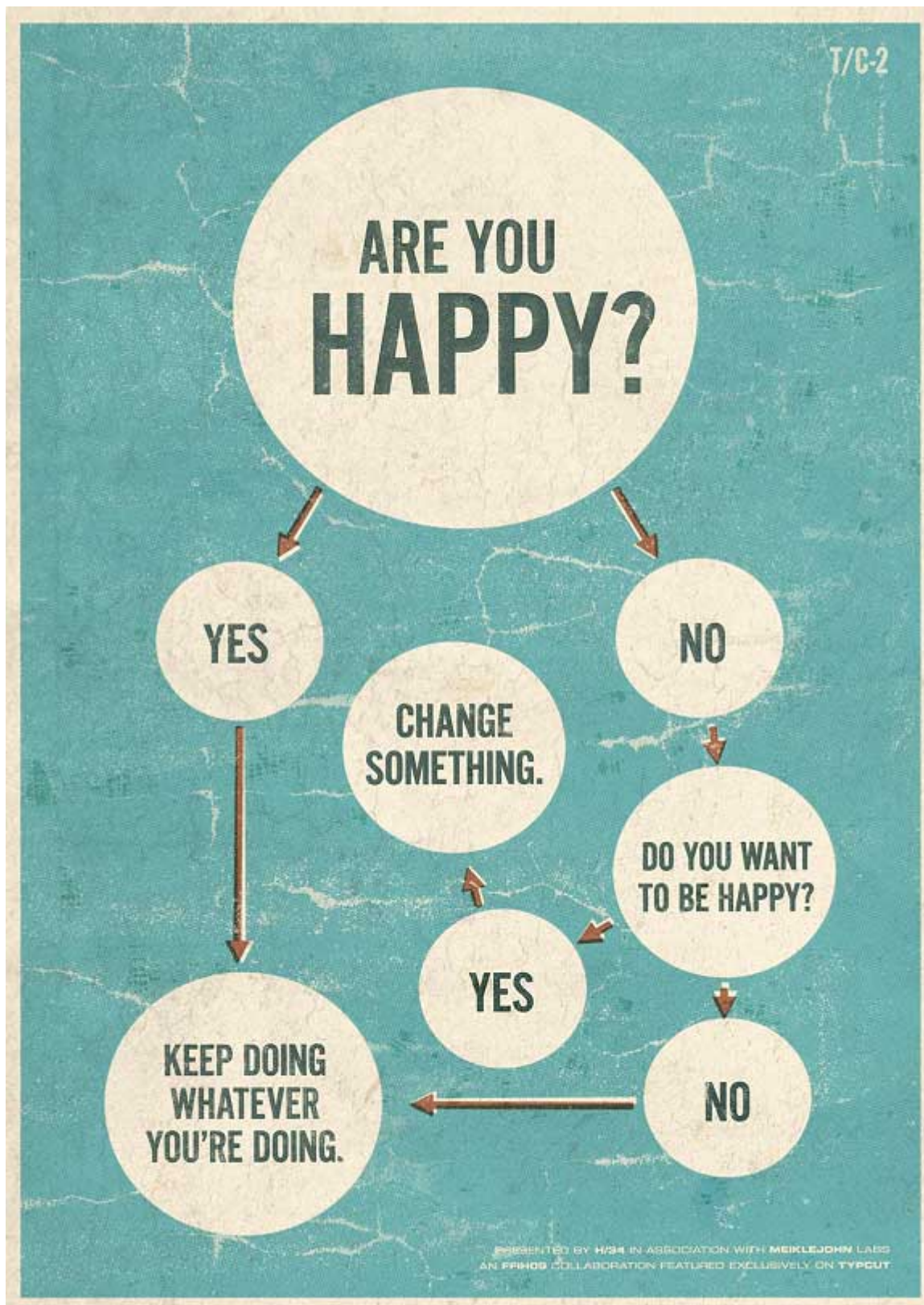
**Or**

I am depressed because I only a physical disability.

Could be, I am depressed because I am too lazy to think of ways how to adapt to my body.

Sometimes working on one problem might fix another.

The following flowchart explains the solution for all problems.



But what must you change? Nothing other than yourself, your personality, your actions, your circumstances, your life. Ironically it is also easier to change your own life rather than trying to change that of others.

So we have to throw away the blame game. From now on, if you want to progress to happiness stop blaming anyone else for your own unhappiness. If you have the desire to blame someone then blame yourself and yourself only.

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We must try and look at our cup as half full rather than half empty so instead of discussing how to get rid of depression in order to achieve happiness we will discuss happiness itself.

With happiness you do not have depression.

With happiness you have a goal and purpose in life or do no longer have the need for one.

Life at times seems so complex and yet it can be summed up in one word. This word explains why you are here on this planet and what your purpose in life is.

The word is **Happiness**.

Personally I think that achieving happiness is the single most important goal for everyone and our ultimate achievement and purpose in life.

I respect that for some people serving a Deity is the most important thing in life, but happiness would then be second.

Happiness need to be constantly nurtured. Happiness is not a natural state of being; it requires constant attention to stay in a state of happiness.

The good news is that the longer and more often you are happy the easier it is to stay happy.

Happiness can be achieved in so many ways and that is what these notes are all about.

Everything on these pages are either from my head, directly copied from the internet or re-written from someone else's work. Sharing is caring. 😊

"If you want to be happy, be." - Leo Tolstoy

This is where we start with a list of actions you can take today to seize that happiness. You don't have to do these all at once, but you should do most (if not all) of them eventually, and sooner rather than later. Pick one or two and start today.

I would like to break the solution to happiness into 2 categories.

1. Things I have to do to minimise the time I have to spend on making myself happy
2. Making myself happy.

The more you do of 1 the less you will have to do of 2. Simple. 😊

## 1. Things I have to do to minimise the time I have to spend on making myself happy

- ❖ **Get a good night's sleep.** I can right paragraphs of info here but that is what the internet is for. Lack of sleep is the cause of most unhappiness. It is like a boiling volcano waiting to erupt. You are angry, irritable and shout at someone. Why do you shout? Not because they are wrong or you are angry, it is because you are tired and need sleep.
  - ❖ **Heal yourself.** Are you continuously sick? Do you have an ache in your leg? Are you over or under weight? Fix yourself. In an emergency on an aeroplane you are required to put your own oxygen mask on before you attend to anyone else. Use the same principle when it involves your health. Heal yourself before you heal others.  
Depressed? Take **Omega-3 fatty acids**. 1,000 mg daily. Omega-3's aid in the brain's neuron connectivity. Enteric coated capsules help prevent burping the fishy tasting oil but you can also freeze them. Throw in a good multi-vitamin and avoid overly processed foods in favour of complex carbohydrates (whole grains), fish, free range meats, & vegetables and you're good to go.
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Some people might stop reading here because, life is not that easy. A chronic disease, Bipolar disorder etc, etc, can't just be fixed so simply by changing diet or medication. Or perhaps you feel that your living conditions are impossible to change and you cannot be happy until that is fixed..?

For problems in life you always have 2 choices.  
You either fix/change it or you move away from it.  
Remember the Matrix movie? You had the choice between the red or blue pill?  
You always have the choice between being miserable and being happy. It is your choice.

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- ❖ **Heal your house.** Broken things around the house can be the cause of serious irritations. Spend some time getting these things fixed. Complete uncompleted tasks.

A messy house can be overwhelming, and the habits required not only to get it cleaned but to keep it that way can seem like too much to tackle.

But here's the key: I've found that it's best to use small steps in getting where you want to go.

Try these habits for at least two weeks each before going onto the next:

- Put all papers (including school papers, post-in notes, bills, etc) in one in basket, and process at the end of each day
- Have a place for everything, and put everything in its place immediately
- Keep flat surfaces (counters, tables, desks) clear of clutter
- Never leave dishes in the sink. Or counter. Clean up any messes in the kitchen after you are done. Wipe the counters, keep the sink clean.
- Tidy the bathroom as you go. After using the bathroom, clean the sink, the toilet, spray down the shower, real quick. It only takes a couple of minutes, and the joy of a clean bathroom is unmatched.
- Pick up as you go. There are little things the kids leave around the house. P pick them up throughout the day, or keep a basket for their stuff and just dump them in there, for them to put away later.
- Never leave clothes out. I have a tendency not to hang up my once-used but still clean clothes in my bedroom, leaving them clutter the place up. No more. They either go in the dirty clothes basket, or they get hung in the closet.

- Take the trash out every day. It's cleaner, and even if the trash isn't quite full, this is a good habit.
- Tidy up before you leave the house. It's wonderful to come home to a clean house. Just pick up a little before you leave.
- Make your bed in the morning.
- Tidy up before you go to bed. Waking up to a dirty house is stressful. Waking up to a clean house is an incredible way to start the day.
- Don't let clutter pile up. There's a place in the kitchen where we pile books and papers. That needs to go. Piles are stressful. Clear this counter daily, along with the inbox we have for all incoming papers.
- Get rid of the papers on the fridge. I can pretty much put all of that info on our calendar. They leave a very cluttered appearance.
- Reorganize cluttered shelves. Take everything out of a shelf or drawer at once. You should focus on one drawer or shelf at a time, and empty it completely. Then clean that shelf or drawer. Sort through your pile, one item at a time, and make quick decisions. Have a trash bag and a give-away box handy. When you pull everything out of a shelf or drawer, sort through the pile one at a time. Pick up an item, and make a decision: trash, give away, or keep. Don't put it back in the pile. Do this with the entire pile, and soon, you'll be done. If you keep sorting through the pile, and re-sorting, it'll take forever. Put back only what you want to keep, and arrange it nicely.  
Be merciless. You may be a pack rat, but the truth is, you won't ever use most of the junk you've accumulated. If you haven't used it in the last year, get rid of it. It's as simple as that. If you've only used it once or twice in the last year, but know you won't use it in the next year, get rid of it. Toss it if it's unsalvageable, and give it away if someone else might be able to use it.  
Papers? Be merciless, unless it's important. Magazines, catalogues, junk mail, bills more than a year old, notes to yourself, notes from others, old work stuff ... toss it! The only exception is with tax-related stuff, which should be kept for seven years, and other important documents like warranties, birth and death and marriage certificates, insurance, wills, and other important documents like that. But you'll know those when you see 'em. Otherwise, toss!!!!  
If you are on the fence with a lot of things, create a "maybe" box. If you can't bear to toss something because you might need it later, put it in the box, then close the box, label it, and put it in storage (garage, attic, closet), out of sight. Most likely, you'll never open that box again. If that's the case, pull it out after six months or a year, and toss it or give it away.  
Create a system to stop clutter from accumulating. There's a reason you have tall stacks of papers all over the place, and big piles of toys and books and clothes. It's because you don't have a regular system to keep things in their place, and get rid of stuff you don't need. This is a topic for another day, but it's something to think about as you declutter. You'll never get to perfect, but if you think more intelligently about how your house got cluttered, perhaps you can find ways to stop it from happening again.  
Celebrate when you're done! This is actually a general rule in life: always celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small. Even if you just decluttered one drawer, that's great. Treat yourself to something delicious. Open that drawer (or closet, or whatever), and admire its simplicity. Breathe deeply and know that you have done a good thing. Bask in your peacefulness.
- Teach the kids to put their stuff away. By far the greatest source of stress and messiness. This will also be the most difficult task, and I don't know if it can ever be accomplished. But it's worth a try.

Now, these are a lot of habits, and it might seem overwhelming, but if you tackle one at a time (in whatever order you like), it won't be that hard. Give yourself several months to get there – don't expect overnight change!

- ❖ **Try not to gossip.** Each to their own. Smile.

- ❖ **Focus on the good things in life.** Everyone's life has positive and negative aspects — whether you're happy or not depends largely on which aspects you focus on. Did you lose today's softball game? At least you got to spend time with friends doing something fun. Did you sprain your ankle running? Well, your body probably needed a week's rest anyway, as you were running too much! Did your baby get sick? Well, at least it's only a flu virus and nothing life-threatening ... and at least you have a wonderful baby to nurse to health! You can see my point — almost everything has a positive side, and focusing on the positives makes all the difference.  
My Auntie Kerry died last week, (and I'm still grieving, but;  
1) I'm happy I spent time with her before her death;  
2) her death has brought our family closer together;  
3) her suffering has ended; and  
4) it reminded me to spend more time with the people I love while they're still alive.

Watch your thinking! Anti-rumination strategy is vital to breaking out of depression and other emotional ruts. Become aware of those times you dwell on the negatives in your life – either real or imagined – and stop them.

It takes work and persistence but if you constantly tell yourself to 'stop it' when you start to go over and over the negatives, then you are building a positive habit that will change your life for the better. Whether it's the jerk that cut you off in traffic or something a little closer to home, don't give yourself the anxiety of a negative thought.

- ❖ **Overcome prejudice.** We all have our prejudices, whether it's based on skin colour, attractiveness, height, age, gender ... it's human nature, I guess. But try to see each person as an individual human being, with different backgrounds and needs and dreams. And try to see the commonalities between you and that person, despite your differences.
- ❖ **Stop criticism.** We all have a tendency to criticize others, whether it's people we know or people we see on television. However, ask yourself if you would like to be criticized in that person's situation. The answer is almost always "no". So hold back your criticism, and instead learn to interact with others in a positive way.
- ❖ **Don't control others.** It's also rare that people want to be controlled, trust me. So don't do it. This is a difficult thing, especially if we are conditioned to control people. But when you get the urge to control, put yourself in that person's shoes. You would want freedom and autonomy and trust, wouldn't you? Give that to others then.  
The urge to control and criticize is especially strong when we are adults dealing with children. In some cases, it's necessary, of course: you don't want the child to hurt themselves, for example. But in most cases, it's not. Put yourself in the shoes of that child. Remember what it was like to be a child, and to be criticized and controlled. You probably didn't like it. How would you want to be treated if you were that child?
- ❖ **Rise above retaliation.** We have a tendency to strike back when we're treated badly. This is natural. Resist that urge. The Golden Rule isn't about retaliation. It's about treating others well, despite how they treat you. Does that mean you should be a doormat? No ... you have to assert your rights, of course, but you can do so in a way where you still treat others well and don't strike back just because they treated you badly first.
- ❖ **Be the change.** Gandhi famously told us to be the change we want to see in the world. Well, we often think of that quote as applying to grand changes, such as poverty and racism and violence. Well, sure, it does apply to those things ... but it also applies on a much smaller scale: to all the small interactions between people. Do you want people to treat each other with more compassion and kindness? Then let it start with you. Even if the world doesn't change, at least you have.  
Notice how it makes you feel. Notice how your actions affect others, especially when you start to treat them with kindness, compassion, respect, trust, love. But also notice the change in yourself. Do you feel better about yourself? Happier? More secure? More willing to trust others, now that you trust yourself? These changes come slowly and in small increments, but if you pay attention,

you'll see them.

- ❖ **Pay attention to people**, greet strangers, look into their eyes, chit chat, and smile.
- ❖ **Be present.** Don't think about how great things will be in the future. Don't dwell on what did or didn't happen in the past. Learn to be in the here and now, and experience life as it's happening, and appreciate the world for the beauty that it is, right now. Practice makes perfect with this crucial skill.

#### Practical Tips to Practice Being Present

1. **Pay Attention** – When you have idle time at a stop light or in a line at the grocery, for example, pay attention. Instead of letting your mind run ahead of you thinking about the route to your destination and possible traffic delays, or the list of errands that have to be completed after the grocery run, take a moment to pay attention. Turn off the radio in the car, roll down the windows and witness the traffic going in the cross direction, the jogger getting his morning run, the trees dancing in the wind, listen to the birds chirp, and the rustling of leaves. You only have to do it for a few moments, but it's a good start.
2. **Observe** – Next time you're in a meeting, observe what is going on. It's a bit more than paying attention in duration. Paying attention is on a trigger basis. Observation is like watching a movie on a screen. Watch the players in action. Watch the body language. Listen for intonations. Do not speak. This can be a very powerful tool as you sit and take in everything that is playing out. You have nothing at stake in the grand scheme of things, but watch as you are able to respond perfectly when questioned. You will be surprised.
3. **Breathe** – When you're ready to go beyond moments and minutes, try paying attention to your breath before you drift off to sleep. Before you drift off to sleep, spend 15 minutes paying attention to the rise and fall of your belly. If you feel yourself drifting off to sleep, or notice that your mind has wandered, gently bring it back to your belly. You could even put a book on it and watch it rise and fall.
4. **Meditate** – You can now begin to establish a sitting practice. It is the practice of sitting still for about 30 minutes in silence. Let your thoughts go. When you realize that your mind is chasing your thoughts, bring it back to your breath. Just be still. Nothing to do or think about. Nothing to ponder just be.

You can practice being present from the bottom of the list to the top also, but I find that it's easy to go with small steps. Soon, you will begin to be aware in what you are actively doing. If you are cooking, don't think about what comes next, pay attention to what you are chopping now. When you are present, your life energy is infused into all that you do, from writing code for your website, to singing a lullaby to your child, to having dinner with a friend.

Once you become aware, you are then able to influence the world around you in seemingly effortless ways.

- ❖ **Develop compassion.** Compassion is developing a sense of shared suffering with others ... and taking steps to alleviate the suffering of others. I think too often we forget about the suffering of others while focusing on our own suffering, and if we learned to share the suffering of others, our suffering would seem insignificant as a result. Compassion is an extremely valuable skill to learn, and you get better with practice.

I believe compassion to be one of the few things we can practice that will bring immediate and long-term happiness to our lives. I'm not talking about the short-term gratification of pleasures like sex, drugs or gambling (though I'm not knocking them), but something that will bring true and lasting happiness. The kind that sticks.

The key to developing compassion in your life is to make it a daily practice.

## 7 Compassion Practices

1. Morning ritual. Greet each morning with a ritual. Try this one, suggest by the Dalai Lama: "Today I am fortunate to have woken up, I am alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others, to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, I am going to have kind thoughts towards others, I am not going to get angry or think badly about others, I am going to benefit others as much as I can." Then, when you've done this, try one of the practices below.
2. Empathy Practice. The first step in cultivating compassion is to develop empathy for your fellow human beings. Many of us believe that we have empathy, and on some level nearly all of us do. But many times we are centered on ourselves (I'm no exception) and we let our sense of empathy get rusty. Try this practice: Imagine that a loved one is suffering. Something terrible has happened to him or her. Now try to imagine the pain they are going through. Imagine the suffering in as much detail as possible. After doing this practice for a couple of weeks, you should try moving on to imagining the suffering of others you know, not just those who are close to you.
3. Commonalities practice. Instead of recognizing the differences between yourself and others, try to recognize what you have in common. At the root of it all, we are all human beings. We need food, and shelter, and love. We crave attention, and recognition, and affection, and above all, happiness. Reflect on these commonalities you have with every other human being, and ignore the differences. One of my favorite exercises comes from a great article from Ode Magazine — it's a five-step exercise to try when you meet friends and strangers. Do it discreetly and try to do all the steps with the same person. With your attention geared to the other person, tell yourself:
  1. Step 1: "Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in his/her life."
  2. Step 2: "Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life."
  3. Step 3: "Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair."
  4. Step 4: "Just like me, this person is seeking to fill his/her needs."
  5. Step 5: "Just like me, this person is learning about life."
4. Relief of suffering practice. Once you can empathize with another person, and understand his humanity and suffering, the next step is to want that person to be free from suffering. This is the heart of compassion — actually the definition of it. Try this exercise: Imagine the suffering of a human being you've met recently. Now imagine that you are the one going through that suffering. Reflect on how much you would like that suffering to end. Reflect on how happy you would be if another human being desired your suffering to end, and acted upon it. Open your heart to that human being and if you feel even a little that you'd want their suffering to end, reflect on that feeling. That's the feeling that you want to develop. With constant practice, that feeling can be grown and nurtured.
5. Act of kindness practice. Now that you've gotten good at the 4th practice, take the exercise a step further. Imagine again the suffering of someone you know or met recently. Imagine again that you are that person, and are going through that suffering. Now imagine that another human being would like your suffering to end — perhaps your mother or another loved one. What would you like for that person to do to end your suffering? Now reverse roles: you are the person who desires for the other person's suffering to end. Imagine that you do something to help ease the suffering, or end it completely. Once you get good at this stage, practice doing something small each day to help end the suffering of others, even in a tiny way. Even a smile, or a kind word, or doing an errand or chore, or just talking about a problem with another person. Practice doing something kind to help ease the suffering of others. When you are good at this, find a way to make it a daily practice, and eventually a throughout-the-day practice.
6. Those who mistreat us practice. The final stage in these compassion practices is to not only want to ease the suffering of those we love and meet, but even those who mistreat us. When we encounter someone who mistreats us, instead of acting in anger, withdraw. Later, when you are calm and more detached, reflect on that person who mistreated you. Try to imagine the background of that person. Try to imagine what that person was taught as a child. Try to imagine the day or week that person was going through, and what kind of bad things had

happened to that person. Try to imagine the mood and state of mind that person was in — the suffering that person must have been going through to mistreat you that way. And understand that their action was not about you, but about what they were going through. Now think some more about the suffering of that poor person, and see if you can imagine trying to stop the suffering of that person. And then reflect that if you mistreated someone, and they acted with kindness and compassion toward you, whether that would make you less likely to mistreat that person the next time, and more likely to be kind to that person. Once you have mastered this practice of reflection, try acting with compassion and understanding the next time a person treats you. Do it in little doses, until you are good at it. Practice makes perfect.

7. Evening routine. I highly recommend that you take a few minutes before you go to bed to reflect upon your day. Think about the people you met and talked to, and how you treated each other. Think about your goal that you stated this morning, to act with compassion towards others. How well did you do? What could you do better? What did you learn from your experiences today? And if you have time, try one of the above practices and exercises.

These compassionate practices can be done anywhere, any time. And with practice, you can begin to do it throughout the day, and throughout your lifetime.

This, above all, will bring happiness to your life and to those around you.

- ❖ **Notice the small things.** Instead of waiting for the big things to happen — marriage, kids, house, nice car, big promotion, winning the lottery — find happiness in the small things that happen every day. Little things like having a quiet cup of coffee in the early morning hours, or the delicious and simple taste of berries, or the pleasure of reading a book with your child, or taking a walk with your partner. Noticing these small pleasures, throughout your day, makes a huge difference.
- ❖ **Get rid of guilt feelings.** Use guilt to mend and heal and then let it go. Lingering guilt is like ignoring an illness and will not make you happy. Let the past be past. Do what makes you happy or stop doing it.
- ❖ **Avoid martyrdom.** Unless of course it gives you happiness. A martyr can rub shoulders with the fool.
- ❖ **Be grateful.** Learning to be grateful for what's in our lives, for the people who have enriched our lives, goes a long way toward happiness. It helps us to appreciate what we have and what we have received, and the people who have helped us.

Why should the simple act of thinking about who and what I'm grateful for make me happy?

Just a few reasons:

- Because it reminds you of the positive things in your life. It makes you happy about the people in your life, whether they're loved ones or just a stranger you met who was kind to you in some ways.
- Because it turns bad things into good things. Having problems at work? Be grateful you have work. Be grateful you have challenges, and that life isn't boring. Be grateful that you can learn from these challenges. Be thankful they make you a stronger person.
- Because it reminds you of what's important. It's hard to complain about the little things when you give thanks that your children are alive and healthy. It's hard to get stressed out over paying bills when you are grateful there is a roof over your head.
- Because it reminds you to thank others. I'll talk about this more below, but the simple act of saying "thank you" to someone can make a big difference in that person's life. Calling them, emailing them, stopping by to say thank you ... just taking that minute out of your life to tell

them why you are grateful toward them is important to them. People like being appreciated for who they are and what they do. It costs you little, but makes someone else happy. And making someone else happy will make you happy.

- ❖ **Simplify your life.** This is really about identifying the things you love and then eliminating everything else as much as possible. By simplifying your life in this way, you create time for your happiness, and you reduce the stress and chaos in your life. In my experience, living a very simple life is also a pleasure in itself.

The misunderstanding: that simplifying is basically just cutting stuff out, leaving an emptiness or void. People think that it leaves you with a boring life, and nothing fun. They couldn't be more wrong.

The real goal of simplifying, and the First Rule, is to first identify what is essential, what you love, what is important to you — and then cut out all the rest that distracts you and keeps you from doing what's important.

We have so much stuff in our lives, from possessions to things we need to do to information coming in to visual and emotional clutter, that we are overloaded. The result? We end up doing a lot of things that aren't really important to us, because we have so much other stuff to do that has crept into our lives and that we leave in our lives, unexamined.

Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Well, Socrates must have been an excellent simplifier — as evidenced by the fact that he just wore a robe and sandals. In any case, in order to simplify our lives, we must first examine our lives. What is important, and do all the things in our lives give us value? These are the questions to ask, and if you find the answers, simplifying is extremely easy.

Let's look at how finding what is essential, what we love, and what is important to us, can help us simplify, and what it leaves in our lives:

1. The first question: What is most important to me? What do I love to do? The answer is different to every person. For me, it's simple: I love my wife and kids, I love writing, I love reading, and I love helping others. For others, it may be hiking or mountain biking or creating music or anything, really. Answer this question first.
2. The second question: what are the things going on in my life, the things I do every day and every week and month, and how are they related to what is important to me? If you are going out drinking with the guys, and it's not really important to you, and it's stopping you from doing what is important, that's a candidate for simplifying. Examine all your commitments, and ask yourself if they are really important to you, if they give you great value for your time, and if they are related to what is truly important.
3. Possessions: The same questions can be asked of all the stuff you own — do you really love them? Are they truly essential? Another question you can ask, to clarify your thinking: If my house burned down, which few things would I want to replace? Get rid of all the rest. They leave clutter and stress and keep you from enjoying the stuff you really love.
4. Everything else: This same concept can be applied to anything else in your life — your work, the information you read every day, the television programs you watch, the people in your life. Know what's essential, what you love, what's important ... and get rid of the rest.
5. What you're left with: If you get rid of the extraneous stuff, the stuff that's not related to what's important to you, what do you have left? Just the important stuff. Just the stuff you really love to do. When you get rid of the other stuff, when you cut, let's say, television and hours of Internet surfing and beer drinking from your life, don't just cut it out — remember what's important and what you love to do, and do that instead. For me, that means spending

time with my family instead of working, that means writing or reading instead of watching TV, that means helping others instead of going to the mall (something I want to do more of).

- ❖ **Slow down.** Similar to simplifying, slowing down is just a matter of reminding yourself that there's no need to rush through life. Schedule fewer things on your calendar, and more space between things. Learn to eat slower, drive slower, walk slower (unless you're doing it for exercise). Going slowly helps to reduce stress, and improve the pleasure of doing things, and keeps you in the present moment. It helps sometimes to wake up earlier so that you do not need to rush and you have an extra few minutes to just do nothing or meditate.
  1. Examine your commitments. A big part of the problem is that our lives are way too full. We can't possibly do everything we have committed to doing, and we certainly can't enjoy it if we're trying to do everything. Accept that you can't do everything, know that you want to do what's important to you, and try to eliminate the commitments that aren't as important.
  2. Do less each day. Don't fill your day up with things to do. You will end up rushing to do them all. If you normally try (and fail) to do 7-10 things, do 3 important ones instead (with 3 smaller items to do if you get those three done). This will give you time to do what you need to do, and not rush.
  3. Leave space between tasks or appointments. Another mistake is trying to schedule things back-to-back. This leaves no cushion in case things take longer than we planned (which they always do), and it also gives us a feeling of being rushed and stressed throughout the day. Instead, leave a good-sized gap between your appointments or tasks, allowing you to focus more on each one, and have a transition time between them.
  4. Eliminate as much as possible from your to-do list. You can't do everything on your to-do list. Even if you could, more things will come up. As much as you can, simplify your to-do list down to the essentials. This allows you to rush less and focus more on what's important.
  5. Now, slow down and enjoy every task. This is the most important tip in this article. Read it twice. Whatever you're doing, whether it's a work task or taking a shower or brushing your teeth or cooking dinner or driving to work, slow down. Try to enjoy whatever you're doing. Try to pay attention, instead of thinking about other things. Be in the moment. This isn't easy, as you will often forget. But find a way to remind yourself. Unless the task involves actual pain, there isn't anything that can't be enjoyable if you give it the proper attention.
  6. Single-task. This is kind of a mantra of mine, as I talk about how to single-task all the time. But it's an important point for me, and for this article. Do one thing at a time, and do it well.
  7. Eat slower. This is just a more specific application of Tip #5, but it's something we do every day, so it deserves special attention..
  8. Drive slower. Another application of the same principle, driving is something we do that's often mindless and rushed. Instead, slow down and enjoy the journey.
  9. Do nothing. Sometimes, it's good to forget about doing things, and do nothing.
- ❖ **Learn to accept.** One of the challenges for people like me — people who want to improve themselves and change the world — is learning to accept things as they are. Sometimes it's better to learn to accept, and to love, the world as it is, and people as they are, rather than to try to make everything and everyone conform to an impossible ideal. I'm not saying you should accept cruelty and injustice, but learn to love things when they are less than "perfect".
- ❖ **Be Early.** Being late always stresses us out. We have to rush to get ready, rush to get there, and stress out the whole time about looking bad and being late. Learn the habit of being early, and this stress disappears. Make a conscious effort to start getting ready earlier, and to leave earlier. This also makes driving less stressful. Time yourself to see how long it actually takes to get ready, and how long it actually takes to get somewhere. You've probably been underestimating

these times. Once you know these times, you can plan backwards so that you show up 10 minutes early each time. It's a good feeling.

- ❖ **Eliminate unnecessary commitments.** We all have many commitments in our life, starting with work but also including commitments related to kids, our spouses, things to do at home, other family, civic, side work, hobbies, online activities and more. Consider each of them, the amount of stress they provide, and the value you get out of them. Edit brutally, and take steps today to remove the ones that stress you out the most.
- ❖ **Avoid difficult and negative people.** You know who they are. If you take a minute to think about it, you can identify all the people in your life — bosses, co-workers, customers, friends, family, etc. — who make your life more difficult. Now, you could confront them and do battle with them, but that will most certainly be difficult. Just cut them out of your life.  
Avoid negative people:

It is very easy to get caught up in the negativity of today's society, especially if you are closely connected to certain individuals who are negative. Avoiding negative people may sometimes bring on guilt at first, particularly if avoiding a friend or loved one. However, when you are surrounded by these emotions, you in turn will become negative. So follow these steps to avoid negative people.

#### 1. Step 1

Choose your friends and the people you hang out with wisely. It's easy to get caught up in the same routine, day after day; however, you need to decide if the person you are around is healthy. Don't pick up the phone or answer the door if a certain negative individual is calling or coming by.

#### 2. Step 2

Avoid the negative people at work. If you socialize with negative coworkers on the job or away from the job, this can lead to your having negative feelings towards your employer.

#### 3. Step 3

Turn the television off during news briefs that focus on everything that is going wrong in your community or even the world. News anchors relay negativity each time they air and hearing such negativity may make you depressed or even angry.

#### 4. Step 4

Listen to upbeat music, instead of talk show radio programs. Usually the people on here are having discussions focused mainly on who did something wrong or telling news around the world that may bring on negative emotions.

#### 5. Step 5

Avoid reading books or magazines that may portray or write a story on negative people. Even if it's fiction, the characters and people in the book or magazine can cause negative feelings. Read something uplifting and encouraging or something that will make you laugh.

#### 6. Step 6

Stop socializing in places that does not supply you your happiness. Perhaps in some situations you may enjoy the atmosphere and social aspect, but analyze the negativity and if

need be, make a change. Find other avenues of socializing, such as joining clubs, going for walks in the park or opting for a nice dinner out on the town instead.

- ❖ **Focus:** Your focus determines your reality.

It's something we don't think about much of the time, but give it some consideration now:

- If you wake up in the morning and think about the miserable things you need to do later in the day, you'll have a miserable day. If you wake up and focus instead on what a wonderful gift your life is, you'll have a great day.
- If we let our attention jump from one thing to another, we will have a busy, fractured and probably unproductive day. If we focus entirely on one job, we may lose ourselves in that job, and it will not only be the most productive thing we do all day, but it'll be very enjoyable.
- If we focus on being tired and wanting to veg out in front of the TV, we will get a lot of television watching done. If, however, we focus on being healthy and fit, we will become healthy and fit through exercise and good eating.

This may seem simplistic, but it's completely true. This is the magical power of focus.

Let's look at some of the ways you can use focus to improve different aspects of your life.

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought." - **Buddha**

Focus on the Positive

Be aware of your negative thoughts, and replace them with positive thoughts. I learned this through quitting smoking and running — there are many times when you feel like giving up, and if you don't catch these negative thoughts in time, they'll fester and grow until you actually do give up.

Instead, learn to focus on the positive. Think about how great you feel. Think about how other people have done this, and so can you. Think about how good it will feel when you accomplish what you're trying to do.

- ❖ **Get rid of Debt.** It might not be easy to do but getting rid of debt is essential to happiness. Below is a step-by-step guide of how to get rid of your debt. It is a list of ideas and advice from different people. There are many redundant suggestions, but I've included the redundant ones because they gave a different twist on the same thing that I really liked. For example, there are several tips about being creative so that you spend less on entertainment, eating out, and the like. They are basically the same tip — but with different suggestions. I kept them separate because I liked them all.

There are also contradictory tips. One says to pay off the credit cards with the highest interest, for example, while another says to pay the one with the lowest balance. They are both valid approaches with solid reasons behind them, and each will work for different people. Find the tips that will work best for you, and try them out.

I hope this serves as a valuable resource

1. Don't get into debt. Use cash for all your purchases and don't take on any debt except home and auto.
2. Spend less than you earn.

3. When debt is closed out, put 60% in savings and enjoy the remain 40%.
4. Take stock of all your liabilities, so you know exactly how much you owe to the world. Put them in a spreadsheet, with monthly payments, interest amounts, balances, and a running grand total of all your balances. Update it monthly as you pay off debt, and watch the overall amount go down slowly. It's very motivational.
5. Have only one credit card with a low limit, and only one loan with monthly payment not exceeding 25% of income.
6. Build up an emergency fund first. If you come into extra money (tax returns, etc.), use it to build an emergency fund and pay off debt after that.
7. Cut up your credit cards.
8. Stop using credit cards to make it to the next paycheck. Stop getting further into debt.
9. Don't overpay your debts — leave enough so you have enough for regular expenses too.
10. Avoid eating out. Cook your own meals, except on very special occasions.
11. For entertainment, visit friends and be creative on how to entertain yourselves and your family without spending a dime.
12. Don't pay off your credit card balance from the emergency account. Don't touch the emergency account at all — it doesn't exist!
13. Look for expenses coming up in the future and plan for them, so you don't have to go into debt when they come up.
14. Make a budget — Purpose every cent (including some buffer).
15. Snowball the debt — Pay minimums on everything, attack the smallest balance with all the extra cash you can assemble, then move on to the next one.
16. Be on the same page as your spouse or partner. Competing interests are suicide.
17. Recognize your spending tendencies (and your family's) and place limits on them. Develop good habits instead.
18. Read Dave Ramsey. Read "Your Money or Your Life".
19. Keep trying and don't give up. Make a commitment, and if you aren't getting out of debt slowly but surely, revisit that commitment. Change is difficult and it takes drastic change in mindset and behaviours to get out of debt. Anyone can do it — as long as you really want to do it.
20. Stop spending! You have to really, truly want to do this. Otherwise, you'll put yourself on a financial diet and then crash and burn and find yourself justifying why you deserve to spend so much money on a new iPhone when you have a perfectly good phone and €20,000 in debt.
21. Praise yourself for every small accomplishment. But, don't praise yourself by spending frivolously.
22. Find the tools that work for you and stick to them. If the tools aren't working, find new tools. There are plenty of tools and ideas out there — for free.
23. Change yourself. If you have a spouse or partner that is contributing to the debt, it can be a big challenge to get them to change. Focus first on changing your behaviours and attitude.
24. Be realistic. If you started accumulating debt three or four years ago, realize that it will probably take you more than three or four years to get out of debt and stay out of debt.
25. Create a realistic budget. Put as much money as you can towards paying down debt and having an emergency fund, but allow for a little bit of. Only the truly dedicated can live with no social/recreational activities for the amount of time it takes to become debt-free.
26. Eliminate. Take a hard look at what's truly necessary, and be willing to make compromises. Cable TV, satellite radio, and lunches in the office cafeteria are not necessities. If you have a hard time letting go of these things, run your numbers through a debt calculator twice — once with your current budget, and once with additional money currently paying for niceties. You'll be amazed at how much of a difference those few extra euro make.
27. Get creative. If there's something you think you don't have time to do more frugally, find a way around it. For example, cooking at home is much cheaper than eating out. If you don't have time to cook, try investing in a crock pot.
28. Be patient. Debt reduction is a long, slow process. Depending on the method you use, you may see no significant progress at first, but it will happen.

29. Stop borrowing money – no matter what! This means no more credit cards, no more car loans, no more cash advances, no more home equity lines, etc. If you can't afford to buy something with CASH you have now, then YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BUY IT.
30. Save up the money and buy it with cash. By the time you've saved up the money, it's very likely you will have realized you don't even need the item you were thinking about buying anyway. This happens all the time.
31. Track your expenses in a software program like Quicken. Categorize your expenses and report out how much you spent in each category so you can easily spot your problem areas (eating out, clothes, gas), then target those for reduction. Always know exactly how much money you have in your checking account.
32. Maximize your 401K contribution. Every time you get a raise, increase your contribution by 1-2% because you won't miss the extra money if you don't ever see it.
33. Pay yourself 10% first. Put this into an account that is hard to touch. A money market account can earn good interest. Make sure it is a chore to get the money out (you have to drive to the bank), so you will only tap it consciously and for major expenses.
34. Make a plan ... ANY plan. You're better off with a mediocre plan than no plan at all. When in doubt, the "snowball method" is simple and works well.
35. Leave yourself some "wiggle" room. Life throws some unexpected expenses your way, so include some slack in your plan for these little setbacks.
36. Have a long range vision. Keep your eyes focused on where you will be five (or ten, or fifteen) years from now, because getting out of debt takes time.
37. Turn off your television, and discard catalogs and other advertisements immediately (but not coupons!). Do this, and your urge to buy stuff you don't need will plummet.
38. Move into a smaller place. Forcing you to get rid of a lot of stuff that you're probably still in debt for will show you just how little any of it matters.
39. Find your purpose. Is it your children, to start your art business, work from home, free money so that you can give? Finding motivation beyond the money drives our passion. Otherwise our drive is limited. This passion will lead us find out the 'right' things to do like stop borrowing, creating budget, etc. Take a look at the things you value deeply and view that framework to judge your actions buy.
40. Examine your expenses and eliminate the unnecessary. Think about gym memberships you're not using, cable TV, Netflix, other types of subscriptions and see which are least necessary.
41. Got a raise coming up? Bookmark it. Pretend it didn't even happen, and funnel all of the new money into the debt relief.
42. Focus on the debt and getting out of it. Not focusing and humming along on credit is what gets people in trouble every time.
43. Change how you think of money. Calculate how much money you make (net) per hour. Do this regardless of whether you are a business owner, salaried or hourly employee. Now apply the time factor to any purchase you make. For example, is that 32" flat screen television you're thinking of purchasing worth 10, 20 or 30 hours of your time. Once the amount was removed from the equation and the time factor applied, spending habits can change overnight.
44. High interest. Pay off the cards with the highest interest first.
45. Balance transfers. By transferring balances on credit cards, you can consistently pay an average of 4%. One thing to look out for is transfer fees: make sure that the fee isn't greater than the interest you would save.
46. Optimize small long-term advantages instead of large short-term payments — for example, go for the difference between 8% and 6% on a note, or cancel satellite TV and save/invest/pay debt with the difference.
47. Educate yourself on your alternatives. Sometimes we spend a lot on things because we assume there are no alternatives. Is cooking at home as bad as you think? What about ten-year-old cars? Roommates? Cheaper parts of town? Thrift stores? Libraries? Bicycling? Wearing a sweater and fuzzy slippers inside in the winter so you can turn down the heat? Ask questions, do some experimenting, do some research. Find your biggest expenditures and do some brainstorming and some googling.
48. Think about your goals. The author of The Tightwad Gazette was willing to work harder to save on food, clothing, and entertainment so she could spend more on housing, have more

kids, and let one parent stay home with the kids. Quit spending money on stuff you don't care about.

49. Pay attention to whether you're buying stuff just because of societal norms or parental expectations or keeping up with the Joneses. Hang around people who are the way you want to be so that peer pressure can be used for good instead of evil!
50. Pay more than the minimum.
51. Make it a habit. You'll be very happy when you have some extra spending/saving money after your payments stop.
52. Think about wealth rather than debt. If you think "I'm going to get out of debt" you will keep thinking about debt. If you think "My financial situation will contribute to my overall wealth," that thought can keep you going.
53. Extra cash. When you make extra money from overtime or bonuses, use it to pay debt.
54. Debt slavery. Realize that (almost any) debt = slavery. If you don't mind debt, why get out of it?
55. Read personal finance books, publications, blogs. Self-development blogs like this Zen Habits are also great.
56. Think positive. Telling yourself "no" stinks, choosing to not go on vacation stinks, looking around and feeling like everyone else has more money than you stinks, even if you make a good chunk'o'change. Instead think about how each month you owe less is a good month.
57. Pay off your smallest debt first to get the momentum going. Some people go by the rule to pay the highest interest ones off first, but others like the rush from paying a card off completely and closing it. It's a great motivation to continue.
58. Be willing to make sacrifices. Remember, you own things. They do not own you. We had to sell one of our cars and get a "beater" but this was the best move we could have made. It was so empowering not to have a car note hanging over our heads.
59. Put a note in your wallet with this text: "DO I REALLY REALLY NEED THIS?"
60. See yourself as completely debt free. FREEDOM! What is that gonna feel like. Imagine it.
61. Use supermarket fliers and plan menus for the week, clip coupons, and put the amount of money you save from coupons each week into a savings account.
62. When you make your budget, be honest. Make sure you budget for gifts, entertainment and whatever other things we all spend too much money on and don't like admitting.
63. Find free or low cost entertainment. Check the local newspaper, or look online and see what upcoming events are going on. Many towns have free concerts in local parks, the local libraries often have free arts and crafts classes, get a state tourist guide and see what's going on in your area, and be a tourist in your own town.
64. Be creative. Learn to paint or refinish hand me down furniture, or sew curtains and pillows. I have been reading DIY blogs and gotten some really great ideas for my home.
65. Start a garden. Grow tomatoes, peas, beans, and herbs in pots if you don't have a yard.
66. Make more money. Sometimes you can only stretch your current income so far. But how can you start an online business, without spending a lot of money? And without your own product? By selling other people's products – as an affiliate.
67. Educate. Above all else, teach your children early so they don't make the same mistakes as us!
68. Create a balance sheet and update it every month. List your assets on one side and your liabilities on the other. Assets should only include things you can easily sell and there approximate value. Liabilities should include all of the money you owe others. If your starting value is negative your goal should be to make that number smaller every month. If your number is positive your goal should be to make that number larger every month. The real value of this exercise though is it puts you in the habit of checking your financial situation every month which will reinforce habits that are increasing your wealth and hopefully allow you to catch and stop habits that are decreasing your wealth.
69. Credit documentary. Watch the PBS documentary about credit card companies. Get mad, really mad and start hating the credit industry. They are enabling you to do some terrible things to yourself. Cut up your cards and pledge to never use them again. It is a form of slavery.
70. And another. Another movie that looks critically about credit cards is MaxedOut.

71. Oprah. Great advice on Oprah's Debt Diet along with great forms to help you find out where you are and plot a course out.
72. Read the book: How to Get Out of Debt, Stay out of Debt and Live Prosperously by Jerrold Mundis. Once you've read it, read it again.

That is the end of "**Things I have to do to minimise the time I have to spend on making myself happy**" even after having done all the above there will still be times when you find yourself unhappy.

Remember, to 'be happy' is not a natural state of mind. It needs constant work and initiative.

## 2. How to make myself happy.

- ❖ **Connect with others.** In my experience, very few things can achieve happiness as well as connecting with other human beings, cultivating relationships, bonding with others. When we connect with other humans, we are no longer alone. We share our suffering, our experiences, our common trials. The misery we face is no longer insurmountable when we have someone to face it with us.
  - Do some kind of activity with others. If you don't immediately have someone to connect with — such as a spouse, kids, or other close family or friends — make an effort to get out of your house and to meet up with others. If you're afraid of meeting strangers, it helps to find places where you're comfortable — for example, in a college class, for some people, at a bar you're familiar with, for others. But failing that, try some kind of group activity — a reading group, a running group, a support group, a volunteer group. The activity greases the social wheels.
  - Ask for a hug. If you do have easy access to a loved one, don't be afraid to ask for a hug — it's one of the best medicines. That might sound corny, but it's true. Human contact is something we all need, especially in times of need, and it is a very good way to connect with others.
  - Visit family and friends. If you have loved ones you don't see every day, get out of your house and go visit them. Just being in their presence, making the effort to connect with them, that'll go a long way to making human connections. Talk with them, share, bond. When my Auntie Kerry died, my family here on Guam immediately got together, and just being in each other's company in such a time not only brought us closer together, and gave us that release of emotions we needed, but made us feel better during our time of grief.
  - Nix the TV and movies. Many times people spend time together watching TV and movies. While that's OK some of the time, it isn't the best way to connect with others. The problem with such passive entertainment is that it separates us, even if we're close together. We end up not talking, but watching. Instead, play sports, play a board game, have coffee or tea, have a picnic — anything that you do together, where you can talk and connect, is a good thing.
  - Find commonalities. If you don't have easy access to loved ones, and need to make new friends and connect with new people, it's best to start by trying to find common ground. What shared interests do you have? Have you lived in the same place, gone to the same school, worked in the same place? Do you have similar hobbies or passions? When you find that common ground, you can connect.
  - Open up. Once you've found common ground, and gotten comfortable with a person, don't be afraid to open up a little. Of course, you don't pour out all of your innermost secrets the first time you meet someone — it has to be a gradual opening up. But if you never open up, you will never make a real, deep connection. It'll just be something on the surface. It's when people share something real, and personal, that these real connections are made.
  - Practice, and get comfortable. Often we are shy or socially anxious when we are in uncomfortable situations. The remedy for this is to get comfortable, and the

only way to do that is to keep doing it, keep practicing, until you're better at it. The more you do it, the more comfortable you'll get.

- Do it in small doses. If the above tip sounds like too much for you — you have a hard time even contemplating practicing social situations until you're comfortable — then it's best to do it in small doses. Start with somewhere you're fairly comfortable, and just try talking to someone you know a little. Then try someone you don't know, but in a comfortable situation. Do it one dose at a time, celebrate your success, and then give it another try on another day. You don't have to make huge connections all at once.
- Groom yourself. This might sound obvious, but it's amazing how big of a difference this can make. First, being well-groomed makes a good impression on others you don't know well, and helps them to react more positively to you. But second, and more importantly, being well-groomed helps you to be more confident with yourself, and that makes all the difference in the world.
- Learn to be a good listener. A very important point, but its incredible how many people ignore this fundamental skill. I've talked to so many people who I can tell are really good people, but who I tire of talking to simply because they don't seem to hear anything I say. I listen to them, but they don't return the favour, and as a result, it's a one-sided conversation. No one likes that kind of conversation (except the person doing all the talking). If you want to make a connection with another person, you have to begin by listening. Learn to ask questions to get the other person talking about herself — that's everyone's favourite subject. And when they do start talking, learn to actually listen. Don't just stare with a blank look, and think about what you want to talk about. Hear what they're saying, respond with appropriate words and sounds and facial expressions, and ask follow up questions. If you can learn to listen, you'll go a long way in making connections with anyone.
- Find ways to express your love. Whether you're connecting with loved ones, with new people, or with those in need ... the ultimate connection is always through love. And the way to make this kind of connection is by first expressing your love — without expecting it to be returned — in any way you can. How can you express your love? That's up to you — you have to find ways that are appropriate to the situation, the relationship, and to you as a person — but some ideas: hugs, an affectionate smile, a nice letter, doing something considerate for the person, just spending time with them, telling them you love them, listing the reasons you love them ... I'm sure you can think of many more. :)

❖ **Spend time with those you love.** This might seem almost the same as the item above, and in reality it's an extension of the same concept, a more specific application. Spending time with the people you love is extremely important to happiness ... and yet it's incredible how often we do just the opposite, and spend time alone, or disconnected from those we love, or spend time with people we don't much like. Make it a priority to schedule time with the people you love. Make that your most important item of the day. For myself, I have a time when I cut off work, and the rest of the day is for my family. Weekends are exclusively for my family. And by setting aside this sacred time, I ensure my happiness by letting nothing come between me and the people I love most.

❖ **Help others.** Is there any better feeling than helping a fellow human being? There aren't many. And it's not too hard.

Helping a fellow human being, while it can be inconvenient, has a few humble advantages:

1. It makes you feel better about yourself;
2. It connects you with another person, at least for a moment, if not for life;
3. It improves the life of another, at least a little;
4. It makes the world a better place, one little step at a time;
5. And if that kindness is passed on, it can multiply, and multiply.

So take just a few minutes today, and do a kindness for another person. It can be something small, or the start of something big. Ask them to pay it forward. Put a smile on someone's face.

Don't know where to start? Here's an extremely incomplete list, just to get you thinking — I'm sure you can come up with thousands more if you think about it.

- ❖ **Sprinkle simple pleasures throughout your day.** Knowing what your simple pleasures are, and putting a few of them in each day, can go a long way to making life more enjoyable
- ❖ **Do the things you love.** What do you love doing most? Figure out the 4-5 things you love doing most in life, the things that make you happiest, and make those the foundation of your day, every day. Eliminate as much of the rest as possible. For me, the things I love doing are: spending time with my family, writing, reading, and running. I do those things every day, and very little else. It may take a while to get your life down to your essentials like I have (it took me a few years of careful elimination and rescheduling and saying "no" to requests that aren't on my short list), but it's worth the effort.
- ❖ **Do work you love.** An extension, of course, of doing the things you love, but applied to work. Are you already doing the work you love? Then you're one of the lucky ones, and you should appreciate how lucky you are. If you aren't doing the work you love, you should make it a priority to try to find work you're passionate about, and to steer your career in that direction. Lose yourself in your work. Once you've found work you love, the key is to lose yourself in it ... clear away all distractions, find an interesting and challenging task, and just pour all your energy and focus into that task. With practice, you'll forget about the outside world. There are few work-related joys that equal this feeling.

Have you ever lost yourself in your work, so much so that you lost track of time? Being consumed by a task like that, while it can be rare for most people, is a state of being called Flow.

What is Flow is, why it's important, and how to achieve it on a regular basis for increased productivity and happiness at work?

What is Flow?

Put simply, it's a state of mind you achieve when you're fully immersed in a task, forgetting about the outside world. It's a concept proposed by positive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, and these days you're likely to read about it on blogs and in all kinds of magazines.

When you're in the state of Flow, you:

- are completely focused on the task at hand;
  - forget about yourself, about others, about the world around you;
  - lose track of time;
  - feel happy and in control; and
  - become creative and productive.
- ❖ **Find time for peace.** With the hectic pace of life these days, it's hard to find a moment of peace. But if you can make time for solitude and quiet, it can be one of the happiest parts of your day.

One problem with our complicated lives these days is that many of us never find time to spend alone, in peace, without being bombarded with noise and information. There's no time for solitude and quiet contemplation, and as a result, we have stress and anxiety and depression and repression.

Find time each day to be alone, for your mental health, by stealing pockets of time from other areas of your life.

This time will pay off for you in the long run. You will become sane, and with the ability to reflect on your life, on what you've gone through in the last 24 hours, in the last week, in the last year, you can slowly improve it or learn to be happy with it.

Finding time for solitude is extremely important, and yet it's an area that is often neglected. I don't mean time alone, where you're watching TV or surfing the Internet or reading or watching the news. There's nothing wrong with those activities, but they aren't conducive to contemplation, to getting to know yourself, to reflecting on what you've been going through, for thinking about your dreams.

Learning to spend time in quiet solitude is also very difficult. It's probably best if done in small doses at first, so if you only do it for 20 or 30 minutes at first, that's OK. Learn to fight the urge to turn the TV on or turn your computer on or play music or read. It's hard, but it's worth it.

What follows are just some ideas for recapturing about an hour a day of extra time, from other sources of time, so that you can have time for solitude. These are temporary fixes ... ways for you to find that time for 30 days, and in those 30 days, you can find other ways to simplify your life so that you can have this time permanently. Use those 30 days, in part, for thinking about the complications in your life, about things you might want to eliminate to free up more time for important things, like your dreams, your loved ones, your passion, and solitude.

1. Television. I'm not on a crusade against television, and I'm not saying you should get rid of it. I watch lots of movies. And though I've eliminated cable TV from my life, I'm not saying you should. This is a temporary fix, remember ... so try to reduce your television consumption by 60 minutes, just for 30 days. You may find that you enjoy reduced TV consumption, but every person is different.
2. Internet. Again, I'm not saying you should stop using the Internet. Just reduce your consumption of the Internet by 60 minutes for 30 days. Be sure to use those 60 minutes for solitude and contemplation. Reducing your Internet use will force you to use the time you do use the Internet more productively ... you can still do the things you love to do, but you have to use them in a more focused way.
3. Wake earlier. I've talked about the benefits of rising early, and how to do it in the past, and one of its best benefits, for me, is the quiet time I have alone. I like to use this time for writing, for exercise, and for contemplation. Try waking 1 hour earlier, just for 30 days. Or if that doesn't work for you, stay up an hour later. Either way works.
4. Email. If email consumes a huge part of your life, try going on an email diet. Only allow yourself to do email once a day, for 30 minutes. See if you can stop yourself from doing email at all other times. Remember, this is just for 30 days ... after that, if you want to go back to doing email all day long, you can.
5. Stop shopping. Again, it's only temporary! But if you're also trying to reduce debt or save money, this is a great permanent solution. But just try it for 30 days. Eliminate all shopping except essential grocery shopping. Everything else goes on a 30-day list.
6. Leave work early. If your work allows it, see if you can leave work earlier. If you have a smart boss, the only thing that will matter is if you're getting your work done — not how long you're in the office. So really focus on getting the essential work done within the time you have, and leave an hour earlier.
7. Go to work late. The flip side of the above suggestion. Again, this is if your work allows it.
8. Take a longer lunch. Sometimes it's easier to squeeze out extra time for your lunch break than it is to come in early or to leave early. If you can take 90 minutes for lunch, use the first 30 for eating (pack a lunch if possible) and the other 60 for solitude.
9. Stop digesting news. Are you a news junky? I've written before about how I haven't watched TV news or read a newspaper or even Internet news sites for a couple of years.

It's possible to go without it. See if you can stop reading newspapers, or watching TV news, for just 30 days. After that, you can go back.

10. Don't do anything after work. If you make social commitments after work, or business meetings, or whatever, stop making these plans for 30 days and use this time for solitude.
11. Skip civic commitments. Do you volunteer or serve in an organization or are you a member of some group? Skip the meetings and other functions for a month. The organization won't fall apart without you ... even if you're president, you can temporarily hand the reins over to your vice president.
12. Minimalize laundry. Do you do a load of laundry several times a week, or even every day? That's an hour or two each time. Instead, go to a laundry mat and do your laundry all in one shot — that'll take about two hours. You can easily save 1-3 hours this way. Better even is to make your washing load smaller. Perhaps some of your clothes really do not need to be washed so often?
13. Minimalize housework/yardwork. Do these chores take up a large part of your day? See if you can minimalize this, just for a month. Relax your standards a little. Or do a speed-cleaning stint once a week for two hours, and don't clean the rest of the week. For yardwork, hire a teen-ager to do it for a month.
14. Cut out non-essential reading. Cut out magazine reading and most book reading (unless it's essential) to give you some extra time. This will also include cutting out newspaper and Internet reading, if you aren't implementing the tips above.
15. Minimalize recreation. Partying, drinking, playing sports, playing video games ... however you spend your free time, see if you can cut into that time.

Remember to use any time you free up for solitude and contemplation, not extra TV time.

- ❖ **Enjoy Life Now.** Often we're told that we have to suffer now — give up what we want — in order to succeed later, that in order to save we must sacrifice. Give up instant gratification to get delayed gratification.

But you can do both.

For years, I was confused about this, as I read books and websites that sent me two different messages:

1. Pleasure later. The first message was that in order to be successful, in order to build wealth, you have to delay gratification. You can't have instant gratification and be successful.
2. Pleasure now. The second message was usually from other sources on happiness, but sometimes from the same source: enjoy life now, while you can, because it's short and you never know when your last day will come. Live every day like it's your last.

Trouble is, I agree with both messages.

That's because I've reconciled the two philosophies into one: Live life now and enjoy it to the fullest — without destroying your future. The key to doing that? Find ways to enjoy life completely, utterly, maximally ... that don't cost your future very much.

Here are some tips for actually living that philosophy:

- Find free or cheap pleasures. Frugality does not have to be boring or restrictive ... if you use your imagination. Be creative and find ways to have fun — loads of it — without spending much money. Have a picnic at the park, go to the beach, do crafts, board games, fly a kite, make art, bake cookies ... I could list a hundred things, and you could come up with a few hundred more. Make a list of simple pleasures, and enjoy them to the maximum. This is the key to the whole idea of enjoying life now without spending tomorrow's money.

- Make simplifying fun. I'm a big fan of simplifying my life, from decluttering to creating a simple lifestyle in every way. And to me, this is great fun. I get rid of stuff (and possibly make money selling it) and have a blast doing it. That's good math.
- ❖ **Become a lifelong learner.** I find an inordinate amount of pleasure in reading, in learning about new things, in enriching my knowledge as I get older. I think spending time reading some of the classics, as well as passionately pursuing new interests, is energy well invested. Try to do a little of it every day, and see if it doesn't make you happier.
- ❖ Again - **Simplify your life.** Depressed? Grab a cupboard and reorganize it and see if that lifts your mood. You can also simplify your surroundings. Get rid of clutter and all the things you do not need or use anymore. This creates space and perhaps an open canvas to recreate and re-invent yourself.
- ❖ **Exercise.** It can be hard to start an exercise program but once you get going, it relieves stress and can really give you a good feeling.
- ❖ **Meditate.** You don't need to join a Zendo or get a mat or learn any lotus positions, but the simplest form of meditation can really help you to be present and to get out of the worrying part of your head. You can do it right now: close your eyes and simply try to focus on your breathing as long as possible. Pay attention to the breath as it comes into your body, and then as it goes out. When you feel your mind start to wander, don't fret, but just simply acknowledge the other thoughts, and then return to your breathing. Do this a little each day and you'll get better at it.
- ❖ **Spend time in nature.** Go outside and take a walk each day, or take the time to watch a sunset or sunrise. Or find a body of water — the ocean, a lake, a river, a pond — and spend time taking a look at it, contemplating it. If you're lucky enough to live near some woods, or a mountain, or a canyon, go hiking. Time in nature is time invested in your happiness.
- ❖ **Hobby.** Stress is a major symptom of a complex and fast paced society. These symptoms are, but not limited to depression and anxiety. Medical science has documented the adverse effects of stress on our mental, physical and emotional health. The information age and the ever increasing change in technology adds to our stress levels. Medical science has provided medications to help treat the symptoms of stress. These medications are important and potentially beneficial, but they are not without their side effects. A less evasive and more satisfying solution to dealing with life's stress is to find a hobby.  
Without any misconception or hesitation I can say that hobbies are good for us. Hobbies can do wonders for our minds, our bodies and our souls. Some people including myself turn their hobbies into money making projects. So why not join the fun. Dive into a hobby and have a blast. It is good for you.
- ❖ **Be unhappy on purpose.** Sometimes the path to happiness is to being unhappy, on purpose. Do not feel guilty when you cry, feel sad or even depress but do it in the framework of 'Achieving happiness'.

Perhaps the only thing that might be missing is motivation to put the above into practise. ☺

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## So you lack motivation?

Even the most motivated of us — you, me, Tony Robbins — can feel unmotivated at times. In fact, sometimes we get into such a slump that even thinking about making positive changes seems too difficult.

But it's not hopeless: with some small steps, baby ones in fact, you can get started down the road to positive change.

Yes, I know, it seems impossible at times. You don't feel like doing anything. I've been there, and in fact I still feel that way from time to time. You're not alone.

When I fall out of exercise, due to illness or injury or disruption from things going on in my life, it's hard to get started again. I don't even feel like thinking about it, sometimes. But I've always found a way to break out of that slump, and here are some things I've learned that have helped:

1. **One Goal.** Whenever I've been in a slump, I've discovered that it's often because I have too much going on in my life. I'm trying to do too much. And it saps my energy and motivation. It's probably the most common mistake that people make: they try to take on too much, try to accomplish too many goals at once. You cannot maintain energy and focus (the two most important things in accomplishing a goal) if you are trying to do two or more goals at once. It's not possible — I've tried it many times. You have to choose one goal, for now, and focus on it completely. I know, that's hard. Still, I speak from experience. You can always do your other goals when you've accomplished your One Goal.
2. **Find inspiration.** Inspiration, for me, comes from others who have achieved what I want to achieve, or who are currently doing it.
3. **Get excited.** This sounds obvious, but most people don't think about it much: if you want to break out of a slump, get yourself excited about a goal. But how can you do that when you don't feel motivated? Well, it starts with inspiration from others, but you have to take that excitement and build on it. Once I've done that, it's just a matter of carrying that energy forward and keeping it going.
4. **Build anticipation.** This will sound hard, and many people will skip this tip. But it really works. It helped me quit smoking after many failed attempts. If you find inspiration and want to do a goal, don't start right away. Many of us will get excited and want to start today. That's a mistake. Set a date in the future — a week or two, or even a month — and make that your Start Date. Mark it on the calendar. Get excited about that date. Make it the most important date in your life. In the meantime, start writing out a plan. And do some of the steps below. Because by delaying your start, you are building anticipation, and increasing your focus and energy for your goal.
5. **Post your goal.** Print out your goal in big words. Make your goal just a few words long, like a mantra ("Exercise 15 mins. Daily"), and post it up on your wall or refrigerator. Post it at home and work. Put it on your computer desktop. You want to have big reminders about your goal, to keep your focus and keep your excitement going. A picture of your goal (like a model with sexy abs, for example) also helps.
6. **Commit publicly.** None of us likes to look bad in front of others. We will go the extra mile to do something we've said publicly. For example, when I wanted to run my first marathon, I started writing a column about it in my local daily newspaper. The entire island of Guam (pop. 160K) knew about my goal. I couldn't back down, and even though my motivation came and went, I stuck with it and completed it. Now, you don't have to commit to your goal in your daily newspaper, but you can do it with friends and family and co-workers, and you can do it on your blog if you have one. And hold yourself accountable — don't just commit once, but commit to giving progress updates to everyone every week or so.
7. **Think about it daily.** If you think about your goal every day, it is much more likely to become true. To this end, posting the goal on your wall or computer desktop (as mentioned above) helps a lot. Sending yourself daily reminders also helps. And if you can commit to doing one small thing to further your goal (even just 5 minutes) every single day, your goal will almost certainly come true.

8. Get support. It's hard to accomplish something alone. When I decided to run my marathon, I had the help of friends and family, and I had a great running community on Guam who encouraged me at 5K races and did long runs with me. When I decided to quit smoking, I joined an online forum and that helped tremendously. And of course, my wife Eva helped every step of the way. I couldn't have done these goals without her, or without the others who supported me. Find your support network, either in the real world or online, or both.
9. Realize that there's an ebb and flow. Motivation is not a constant thing that is always there for you. It comes and goes, and comes and goes again, like the tide. But realize that while it may go away, it doesn't do so permanently. It will come back. Just stick it out and wait for that motivation to come back. In the meantime, read about your goal (see below), ask for help (see below), and do some of the other things listed here until your motivation comes back.
10. Stick with it. Whatever you do, don't give up. Even if you aren't feeling any motivation today, or this week, don't give up. Again, that motivation will come back. Think of your goal as a long journey, and your slump is just a little bump in the road. You can't give up with every little bump. Stay with it for the long term, ride out the ebbs and surf on the flows, and you'll get there.
11. Start small. Really small. If you are having a hard time getting started, it may be because you're thinking too big. If you want to exercise, for example, you may be thinking that you have to do these intense workouts 5 days a week. No — instead, do small, tiny, baby steps. Just do 2 minutes of exercise. I know, that sounds wimpy. But it works. Commit to 2 minutes of exercise for one week. You may want to do more, but just stick to 2 minutes. It's so easy, you can't fail. Do it at the same time, every day. Just some crunches, 2 pushups, and some jogging in place. Once you've done 2 minutes a day for a week, increase it to 5, and stick with that for a week. In a month, you'll be doing 15-20. Want to wake up early? Don't think about waking at 5 a.m. Instead, think about waking 10 minutes earlier for a week. That's all. Once you've done that, wake 10 minutes earlier than that. Baby steps.
12. Build on small successes. Again, if you start small for a week, you're going to be successful. You can't fail if you start with something ridiculously easy. Who can't exercise for 2 minutes? (If that's you, I apologize.) And you'll feel successful, and good about yourself. Take that successful feeling and build on it, with another baby step. Add 2-3 minutes to your exercise routine, for example. With each step (and each step should last about a week), you will feel even more successful. Make each step really, really small, and you won't fail. After a couple of months, your tiny steps will add up to a lot of progress and a lot of success.
13. Read about it daily. When I lose motivation, I just read a book or blog about my goal. It inspires me and reinvigorates me. For some reason, reading helps motivate and focus you on whatever you're reading about. So read about your goal every day, if you can, especially when you're not feeling motivated.
14. Call for help when your motivation ebbs. Having trouble? Ask for help. Email me. Join an online forum. Get a partner to join you. Call your mom. It doesn't matter who, just tell them your problems, and talking about it will help. Ask them for advice. Ask them to help you overcome your slump. It works.
15. Think about the benefits, not the difficulties. One common problem is that we think about how hard something is. Exercise sounds so hard! Just thinking about it makes you tired. But instead of thinking about how hard something is, think about what you will get out of it. For example, instead of thinking about how tiring exercise can be, focus on how good you'll feel when you're done, and how you'll be healthier and slimmer over the long run. The benefits of something will help energize you.
16. Squash negative thoughts; replace them with positive ones. Along those lines, it's important to start monitoring your thoughts. Recognize negative self-talk, which is really what's causing your slump. Just spend a few days becoming aware of every negative thought. Then, after a few days, try squashing those negative thoughts like a bug, and then replacing them with a corresponding positive thought. Squash, "This is too hard!" and replace it with, "I can do this! If that wimp Leo can do it, so can I!" It sounds corny, but it works. Really.

The beginning.

## Guide to Happiness:

### Things I have to do to minimise the time I have to spend on making myself happy

- ❖ Get a good night's sleep.
- ❖ Heal yourself
- ❖ Heal your house.
- ❖ Try not to gossip.
- ❖ Focus on the good things in life
- ❖ Overcome prejudice.
- ❖ Stop criticism.
- ❖ Don't control others
- ❖ Rise above retaliation
- ❖ Be the change.
- ❖ Pay attention to people,
- ❖ Be present. Develop compassion
- ❖ Notice the small things
- ❖ Get rid of guilt feelings.
- ❖ Avoid martyrdom.
- ❖ Be grateful.
- ❖ Simplify your life.
- ❖ Slow down.
- ❖ Learn to accept.
- ❖ Be Early.
- ❖ Eliminate unnecessary commitments.
- ❖ Avoid difficult and negative people.
- ❖ Focus:
- ❖ Get rid of Debt.

### How to make myself happy.

- ❖ Connect with others.
- ❖ Spend time with those you love.
- ❖ Help others.
- ❖ Sprinkle simple pleasures throughout your day.
- ❖ Do the things you love.
- ❖ Do work you love.
- ❖ Find time for peace
- ❖ Enjoy Life Now.
- ❖ Become a lifelong learner.
- ❖ Again - Simplify your life.
- ❖ Exercise.
- ❖ Meditate.
- ❖ Spend time in nature.
- ❖ Hobby.

