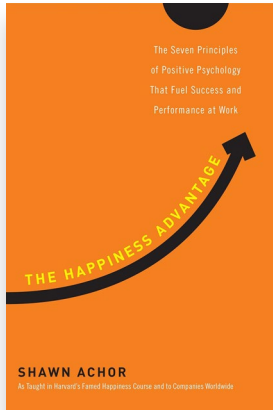


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The Happiness Advantage

THE SUMMARY

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PART 1: POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK

Introduction

If you observe the people around you, you'll find most individuals follow a formula that has been subtly or not so subtly taught to them by their schools, their company, their parents, or society. If you work hard, you will become successful, and once you become successful, then you'll be happy. This pattern of belief explains what most often motivates us in life. We think if I just get that raise, or hit that next sales target, I'll be happy. If I can just get that next good grade, I'll be happy. If I lose those five pounds, I'll be happy and so on. Success first, happiness second. The only problem is that this formula is broken.

If success causes happiness, then every employee who gets a promotion, every student who receives an acceptance letter, everyone who has ever accomplished a goal of any kind should be happy. But with each victory, our goalposts of success keep getting pushed further and further out, so that happiness gets pushed over the horizon. Even more important, the formula is broken because it is backward. More than a decade of groundbreaking research in the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience has proven in no uncertain terms that the relationship between success and happiness works the other way around.

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Chapter 1: Discovering the Happiness Advantage

You can eliminate depression without making someone happy. You can cure anxiety without teaching someone optimism. You can return someone to work without improving their job performance. If all you strive for is diminishing the bad, you'll only attain the average and you'll miss out entirely on the opportunity to exceed the average.

Extraordinarily, as late as 1998, there was a 17-to-1 negative-to-positive ratio of research in the field of psychology. In other words, for every one study about happiness and thriving there were seventeen studies on depression and disorder. This is very telling. As a society, we know very well how to be unwell and miserable and little about how to thrive.

In fact, as you will learn throughout this book, new research in psychology and neuroscience shows a surprising fact. We become more successful when we are happier and more positive. For example, doctors put in a positive mood before making a diagnosis show almost three times more intelligence and creativity than doctors in a neutral state, and they make accurate diagnoses 19% faster. Optimistic salespeople outsell their pessimistic counterparts by 56%. Students primed to feel happy before taking math achievement tests far outperform their neutral peers. It turns out that our brains are literally hardwired to perform at their best not when they are negative or even neutral, but when they are positive.

Chapter 2: The Happiness Advantage at Work

Shaped by my own study of the science of happiness and success, the principles that form the core of this book have also been field-tested and refined through my work with everyone from global financiers to grade-schoolers, surgeons to attorneys, and accountants to UN ambassadors. In essence, they are a set of tools that anyone, no matter their profession or calling, can use to achieve more every day. The best part about them is that they don't only work in a business setting. They can help you overcome obstacles, reverse bad habits, become more efficient and productive, make the most of opportunities, and help you to conquer your most ambitious goals in life and in work. In essence, they are a set of seven tools you can use to achieve more every day.

Chapter 3: Change is Possible

Brain change, once thought impossible, is now a well-known fact, one that is supported by some of the most rigorous and cutting-edge research in neuroscience. The implications are far-reaching. Once our brains were discovered to have such built-in plasticity, our potential for intellectual and personal growth suddenly became equally malleable.

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If change is possible, the natural question is, how long does it last? Can utilizing these principles make a real, lasting difference in our lives? In a word, yes. Studies have confirmed numerous ways we can permanently raise our happiness baseline and adopt a more positive mindset. Since this book is about the Happiness Advantage, it's more than a little comforting to know that people can become happier, that pessimists can become optimists, and that stressed and negative brains can be trained to see more positively. The competitive edge is available to all who put in the effort.

PART 2: THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Principle #1: The Happiness Advantage

Happiness can improve our physical health, which in turn keeps us working faster and longer and therefore makes us more likely to succeed. This revelation provides companies an additional incentive to care about employee happiness, since healthy employees will be more productive on the job. Research shows that unhappy employees take more sick days, staying home an average of 1.25 more days per month, or 15 extra sick days a year. These studies have determined that happiness functions as the cause, not just the result, of good health. What this means is that companies and leaders who take measures to cultivate a happy workplace will not only have more productive and efficient workers, they'll have less absenteeism and lower healthcare expenditures.

Extensive research has found that happiness actually has a very important evolutionary purpose, which Barbara Fredrickson has termed the "Broaden and Build Theory." Instead of narrowing our actions down to fight or flight as negative emotions do, positive ones broaden the amount of possibilities we process making us more thoughtful, creative and open to new ideas. For instance, individuals who are "primed" (meaning scientists help evoke a certain mindset or emotion before doing an experiment) to feel either amusement or contentment can think of a larger and wider array of thoughts and ideas than individuals who have been primed to feel either anxiety or anger. When positive emotions broaden our scope of cognition and behavior in this way, they not only make us more creative, they help us build more intellectual, social, and physical resources we can rely upon in the future.

Recent research shows that this "broadening effect" is actually biological and that happiness gives us a real chemical edge on the competition. How? Positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that not only make us feel good, but dial up the learning centers of our brains to higher levels. They help us organize new information, keep that information in the brain longer, and retrieve it faster later on. They also enable us to make and sustain more neural connections, which allow us to think more quickly and creatively, become more skilled at complex analysis and problem solving, and see and invent new ways of doing things. We even quite literally see more of what's around us when we're feeling happy. Eye-tracking experiments have shown that positive emotions actually expand our peripheral line of vision.

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Each principle in this book contributes to at least one, if not many, of the things scientists have found to be most crucial to human happiness. This includes things like pursuing meaningful life goals, scanning the world for opportunities, cultivating an optimistic and grateful mindset, and holding-on to rich social relationships.

As important as these larger shifts in thinking and behavior are, it's equally important to realize that the Happiness Advantage also lies in the small, momentary blips of positivity that pepper our lives each and every day. Just a short humorous video clip, a quick conversation with a friend, or even a small gift of candy can produce significant and immediate boosts in cognitive power and job performance. As Barbara Fredrickson points out, while making big changes and pursuing lasting happiness is certainly a worthy goal, when we "look under the hood at the dynamics of the process" we've found that "we should be focusing on how we feel from day to day."

Of course, since happiness is subjective and not the same for everyone, we all have our own favorite happiness booster. Maybe yours is listening to a particular song, talking to a friend, playing basketball, petting a dog, or even cleaning your kitchen. My friend Abby gains an embarrassing amount of satisfaction from mopping the floor. Researchers have found that "person-activity fit" is often just as important as the activity itself.

As you integrate happiness exercises into your daily life, you'll not only start to feel better, you'll also start to notice how your enhanced positivity makes you more efficient, motivated, and productive. This opens up opportunities for greater achievement, but the Happiness Advantage doesn't end there. By changing the way you work, and the way you lead the people around you, you can enhance the success of your team and your whole organization.

The best leaders use the Happiness Advantage as a tool to motivate their teams and maximize employee potential. We all know how this can be done on an organizational level. Google is famous for keeping scooters in the hallway, video games in the break room, and gourmet chefs in the cafeteria. The data couldn't be clearer that these policies, as well as more conventional happiness boosters like gym memberships, health benefits, and on-site day care, consistently deliver big dividends. Coors Brewing Company, for example, reported a \$6.15 return in profitability for every \$1 spent on its corporate fitness program. You don't have to make sweeping policy changes like these to capitalize on the Happiness Advantage. Even the smallest moments of positivity in the workplace can enhance efficiency, motivation, creativity, and productivity.

One way to do this is simply to provide frequent recognition and encouragement. As studies have shown, managers who do so see a substantial increase in their employees' productivity. One study found that project teams with encouraging managers performed 31% better than teams whose managers were less positive and less open with praise. In fact, when recognition is specific and deliberately delivered, it is even more motivating than money.

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Just as important as what you say to employees is how you say it. The best leaders know that delivering instructions in an angry negative tone handicaps their employees before the task is even underway. One study done at the Yale School of Management paints this picture perfectly. Student volunteers were put in teams to do business tasks together with the goal of earning money for an imaginary company. Then in came the “manager” who was actually an actor instructed to speak in one of four ways: with “cheerful enthusiasm,” “serene warmth,” “depressed sluggishness,” or “hostile irritability.” Of these four groups, which two do you think not only became more positive themselves, but proved far more effective than the other groups, winning their companies more profit in the end?

To help these people capitalize on the Happiness Advantage, I often recommend that they keep the number 2.9013 in mind. This may seem random, but a decade of research on high and low performance teams by psychologist and business consultant Marcial Losada shows just how important it is. Based on Losada’s extensive mathematical modeling, 2.9013 is the ratio of positive to negative interactions necessary to make a corporate team successful. This means that it takes about three positive comments, experiences, or expressions to fend off the languishing effects of one negative. Dip below this tipping point, now known as the Losada Line and workplace performance quickly suffers. Rise above to an ideal ratio of 6 to 1, and teams produce their very best work.

Losada’s mathematical ratio joins the increasingly long line of evidence in support of the Happiness Advantage, one more way that groundbreaking science has triggered a revolution in the workplace. Once we accept this new order in the working universe—that happiness is the center around which success orbits—we can change the way we work, interact with colleagues, and lead our teams, to give our own careers, and our whole organizations, the competitive edge.

Principle #2: The Fulcrum Lever

Archimedes, the greatest scientist and mathematician of ancient Greece, famously posited, “Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world.” His point was simple. If we have a long enough lever and a good place to stand, we can move the entire world.

What I realized is that our brains work in precisely the same way. Our power to maximize our potential is based on two important things: (1) the length of our lever which is how much potential power and possibility we believe we have, and (2) the position of our fulcrum which is the mindset with which we generate the power to change.

What this means in practical terms is that whether you are a student striving for better grades, a junior executive striving for better pay, or a teacher hoping to better inspire students, you don’t need to try so hard to generate power and produce results. Our potential is not fixed. The more we move our fulcrum (or mindset), the more our lever lengthens and so the more power we generate. Move the fulcrum so that all the advantage goes to a negative mindset, and we never rise off the ground.

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Move the fulcrum to a positive mindset and the lever's power is magnified and ready to move everything up.

Every second of our own experience has to be measured through a relative and subjective brain. In other words, "reality" is merely our brain's relative understanding of the world based on where and how we are observing it. Most important, we can change this perspective at any moment, and by doing so change our experience of the world around us. This is what I mean by moving our fulcrum. Essentially, our mindset, and in turn our experience of the world is never set in stone, but constantly in flux.

Given what we now know about the relative nature of time, ask yourself this: how much more efficient and productive (not to mention happy) could you be if you changed the way you view the hours in your workday? In a scenario where reality can be experienced any number of ways depending on where you put your fulcrum, the question becomes not "why are there only 24 hours in a day?" but "how can I use my relative experience of the workday to my best advantage?"

The most successful people adopt a mindset that not only makes their workdays more bearable but also helps them work longer, harder and faster than their negative mindset peers. In essence, these people use their positive mindsets to gain control (relatively speaking) of time itself. For them, 24/7 is only an objective clock-calendar measurement. They take the same units of time given to everyone and use their mindset to become more efficient and productive.

Think of the last interminable meeting you were forced to sit through. You may have decided in the first three minutes that the stated objective of the meeting was not going to be met, or that you didn't care about the objective to begin with. Those two hours that followed suddenly became a tremendous waste of time, a drain on your energy and productivity and probably also your motivation. What if, instead, you chose to see the meeting as an opportunity and create your own objective? What if you forced yourself to learn three new things before the meeting ended? If you can't learn them from the actual content of the meeting, be more creative. What can you learn from the speaker about how to (or not to) give a good presentation? How would you present this idea differently? What's the best way to handle difficult question from colleagues? What's the best background color for PowerPoint slides?

Just as your mindset about work affects your performance, so too does your mindset about your own ability. What I mean is that the more you believe in your own ability to succeed, the more likely it is that you will. This may seem like overly inspirational hokum to some (and in truth, the idea has been peddled by some less than reputable sources over the years), but the last few decades have seen an explosion of serious science in support of it. Studies show that simply believing we can bring about

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positive change in our lives increases motivation and job performance; that success, in essence, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. More important, our beliefs about our abilities are not necessarily innate, but can change, as our mindset is almost always in flux.

So, when faced with a difficult task or challenge, give yourself an immediate competitive advantage by focusing on all the reasons you will succeed, rather than fail. Remind yourself of the relevant skills you have, rather than those you lack. Think of a time you have been in a similar circumstance in the past and performed well. Years of research have shown that a specific and concerted focus on your strengths during a difficult task produce the best results.

Even the way we describe seemingly straightforward tasks can make a difference in how people perform. In one experiment, subjects were asked to play either the “Wall Street Game” or the “Community Game,” a task designed to measure people’s willingness to cooperate under different conditions. In reality, they were the exact same game. But those who had been primed to think of community were more likely to be cooperative than those thinking of Wall Street. What we expect from people (and from ourselves) manifests itself in the words we use and those words can have powerful effect on end results. This means that the best managers and leaders view each interaction as an opportunity to prime their employees for excellence.

Principle #3: The Tetris Effect

In a study at Harvard Medical School’s Department of Psychiatry, researchers paid 27 people to play Tetris for multiple hours a day, three days in a row. For days after the study, some participants literally couldn’t stop dreaming about shapes falling from the sky. Others couldn’t stop seeing these shapes everywhere, even in their waking hours. Quite simply, they couldn’t stop seeing their world as being made up of sequences of Tetris blocks.

What was going on here? Are Tetris addicts temporarily insane? Not at all. The Tetris Effect stems from a very normal physical process that repeated playing triggers in their brains. They become stuck in something called a “cognitive after image.” You know those blue or green dots that cloud your vision for a few seconds after someone takes a flash photograph of you? This happens because the flash has momentarily burned an image onto your visual field so that as you look around at the world, you see that same light pattern, or after image, everywhere. When these kids played Tetris for an extended period, they similarly became stuck with something clouding their vision which in this case was a cognitive pattern that caused them to involuntarily see Tetris shapes wherever they looked. This isn’t just a vision problem. Playing hour after hour of Tetris actually changes the wiring of the brain. Specifically, as subsequent studies found, the consistent play was creating new neural pathways, or new connections that warped the way they viewed real life situations.

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Everyone knows someone stuck in some version of the Tetris Effect, someone who is unable to break a pattern of thinking or behaving. Often, this pattern can be negative. It's the friend who walks into any room and immediately finds the one thing to complain about, or the boss who focuses on what an employee continues to do wrong, instead of how he's improving. It could also be the colleague who predicts gloom before every meeting, no matter the circumstances. You know the type. Maybe you're even one of them. These people usually aren't trying to be difficult or grumpy. Their brains are just really outstanding at scanning their environment for negatives and immediately spotting the annoyances and stresses and hassles.

Sometimes this can be very useful. The problem is that if we get stuck in only that pattern, always looking for and picking up on the negative, even a paradise can become a hell. Worse, the better we get at scanning for the negative, the more we miss out on the positive and it's those things in life that bring us greater happiness and in turn fuel our success. The good news is that we can also train our brains to scan for the positive, the possibilities dormant in every situation, and become experts at capitalizing on the Happiness Advantage.

While there are always different ways to see something, not all ways of seeing are created equal. As we know from people stuck in a Negative Tetris Effect, the consequences can be debilitating to both our happiness and our work performance. On the other hand, imagine a way of seeing that constantly picked up on the positives in every situation. That's the goal of a Positive Tetris Effect. Instead of creating a cognitive pattern that looks for negatives and blocks success, it trains our brains to scan the world for the opportunities and ideas that allow our success rate to grow.

When our brains constantly scan for and focus on the positive, we profit from three of the most important tools available to us: happiness, gratitude, and optimism. The role happiness plays should be obvious as the more you pick up on the positive around you, the better you'll feel, and we've already seen the advantages to performance that brings. The second mechanism at work here is gratitude, because the more opportunities for positivity we see, the more grateful we become. The third driver of the Positive Tetris Effect is optimism. It instinctively makes sense that the more your brain picks up on the positive, the more you'll expect this trend to continue and so the more optimistic you'll be. Optimism, it turns out, is a tremendously powerful predictor of work performance. Optimists also cope better in high stress situations and are better able to maintain high levels of well-being during times of hardship. These are all skills that are crucial to high performance in a demanding work environment.

Think of the consequences this has on your career success which is almost entirely predicated on your ability to spot and then capitalize on opportunities. When someone is stuck in a Negative Tetris Effect, his brain is quite literally incapable of seeing these opportunities. Armed with positivity, the brain stays open to possibility. Psychologists call this "predictive encoding." Priming yourself to expect a favorable outcome actually encodes your brain to recognize the outcome when it does in fact arise.

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Just as it takes days of concentrated practice to master a video game, training your brain to notice more opportunities takes practice focusing on the positive. The best way to kick-start this is to start making a daily list of the good things in your job, your career, and your life. It may sound hokey, or ridiculously simple, but over a decade of empirical studies has proven the profound effect it has on the way our brains are wired. When you write down a list of “three good things” that happened that day, your brain will be forced to scan the last 24 hours for potential positives like things that brought small or large laughs, feelings of accomplishment at work, a strengthened connection with family, a glimmer of hope for the future. In just five minutes a day, this trains the brain to become more skilled at noticing and focusing on possibilities for personal and professional growth, and seizing opportunities to act on them. At the same time, because we can only focus on so much at once, our brains push out those small annoyances and frustrations that used to loom large into the background, even out of our visual field entirely.

This exercise has staying power. One study found that participants who wrote down three good things each day for a week were happier and less depressed at the one-month, three-month, and six-month follow-ups. Even more amazing, after stopping the exercise, they remained significantly happier and showed higher levels of optimism. The better they got at scanning the world for good things to write down, the more good things they saw, without even trying, wherever they looked. The items you write down each day don’t need to be profound or complicated, only specific. You can mention the delicious take-out Thai food you had for dinner, your child’s bear hug at the end of a long day, or the well-deserved acknowledgement from your boss at work.

Principle #4: Falling Up

Study after study shows that if we are able to conceive of a failure as an opportunity for growth, we are all the more likely to experience that growth. Conversely, if we conceive of a fall as the worst thing in the world, it becomes just that. Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, reminds us that, “we are not imprisoned by our circumstances, our setbacks, our history, our mistakes, or even staggering defeats along the way. We are freed by our choices.” By scanning our mental map for positive opportunities, and by rejecting the belief that every down in life leads us only further downward, we give ourselves the greatest power possible to move up, not despite the setbacks but because of them.

So, what distinguishes the people who find growth in these experiences from those who don’t? There are a number of mechanisms involved, but not surprisingly, mindset takes center stage. People’s ability to find the path up rests largely on how they conceive of the cards they have been dealt. The strategies that most often lead to Adversarial Growth include positive reinterpretation of the situation or event, optimism, acceptance, and coping mechanisms that include focusing on the problem head-on (rather than trying to avoid or deny it). As one set of researchers explains, “it appears that it is not the type of event per se that influences post traumatic growth, but rather

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the subjective experience of the event.” In other words, the people who can most successfully get themselves up off the mat are those who define themselves not by what has happened to them, but by what they can make out of what has happened. These are the people who actually use adversity to find the path forward. They speak not just of “bouncing back,” but of “bouncing forward.”

One way to help ourselves see the path from adversity to opportunity is to practice the ABCD model of interpretation: Adversity, Belief, Consequence, and Disputation. Adversity is the event we can’t change. Belief is our reaction to the event which includes why we thought it happened and what we think it means for the future. Is it a problem that is only temporary and local in nature, or do we think it is permanent and pervasive? Are there ready solutions, or do we think it is unsolvable? If we see the adversity as short-term or as an opportunity for growth or appropriately confined to only part of our life, then we maximize the chance of a positive consequence. But if the Belief has led us down a more pessimistic path, helplessness and inaction can bring negative Consequences. That’s when it’s time to put the D to work.

Disputation involves first telling ourselves that our belief is just that—a belief, not fact—and then challenging (or disputing) it. Psychologists recommend that we externalize this voice (i.e., pretend it’s coming from someone else), so it’s like we’re actually arguing with another person. What is the evidence for this belief? Is it airtight? Would we let a friend get away with such reasoning? Is the reasoning clearly specious once we step outside of ourselves and take a look? What are some other plausible interpretations of this event? What are some more adaptive reactions to it? Is there another counterfactual we can adopt instead?

Finally, if the adversity truly is bad, is it as bad as we first thought? This particular method is called decatastrophizing. This means taking time to show ourselves that while the adversity is real, it is perhaps not as catastrophic as we may have made it out to be. That may sound like a positive platitude stripped off of a Hallmark card, but the idea that things are never as bad as they seem is actually a fact based on our fundamental biology. Thousands of years of evolution have made us so remarkably good at adapting to even the most extreme life circumstances that adversity never hits us quite as hard or for quite as long as we think it might.

Remember that success is not about never falling down or even simply about falling down and getting back up over and over. Success is about more than simple resilience. It’s about using that downward momentum to propel ourselves in the opposite direction. It’s about capitalizing on setbacks and adversity to become even happier, even more motivated, and even more successful. It’s not falling down, it’s falling up.

Principle #5: The Zorro Circle

The concept of the Zorro Circle is a powerful metaphor for how we can achieve our most ambitious goals in our jobs, our careers, and our personal lives. One of the biggest drivers of success is the

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belief that our behavior matters, and that we have control over our future. Yet, when our stresses and workloads seem to mount faster than our ability to keep up, feelings of control are often the first things to go, especially when we try to tackle too much at once. If, however, we can concentrate our efforts on small manageable goals, we regain the feeling of control so crucial to performance. By first limiting the scope of our efforts, then watching those efforts have the intended effect, we accumulate the resources, knowledge, and confidence to expand the circle, gradually conquering a larger and larger area.

As we go about our daily lives, our actions are often determined by the brain's two dueling components: our kneejerk-like emotional system (let's call him the Jerk) and our rational, cognitive system (let's call him the Thinker). The oldest part of the brain, evolutionarily speaking, is the Jerk, and it is based in the limbic (emotional) region, where the amygdala reigns supreme. Thousands of years ago, this knee-jerk system was necessary for our survival. Back then, we didn't have time to think logically when a saber-toothed tiger jumped out of the underbrush; instead, the Jerk readily leapt into action. The amygdala sounded the alarm, flooded our body with adrenaline and stress hormones, and sparked an immediate, innate reflex which was a "fight or flight" response. It's thanks to the Jerk, really, that we are all sitting here ten thousand years later.

Most of our daily challenges are better served by the Thinker, but unfortunately, when we're feeling stressed or out of control, the Jerk tends to take over. This isn't something that happens consciously. Instead, it's biological. When we're under pressure, the body starts to build up too much cortisol, the toxic chemical associated with stress. Once the stress has reached a critical point, even the smallest setback can trigger an amygdala response, essentially hitting the brain's panic button. When that happens, the Jerk overpowers the Thinker's defenses, spurring us into action without conscious thought. Instead of "think, then react," the Jerk responds with "fight or flight." We have become victims of what scientists call "emotional hijacking."

When small stresses pile up over time, as they so often do in the workplace, it only takes a minor annoyance or irritation to lose control and let the Jerk into the driver's seat. When this hijacking occurs, we might lash out at a colleague or start to feel helpless and overwhelmed or suddenly lose all energy and motivation. As a result, our decision-making skills, productivity, and effectiveness plummet. This can have real consequences not just for individuals, but for entire teams of organizations.

So how do we reclaim control from the Jerk and put it back into the hands of the Thinker? The answer is the Zorro Circle. The first goal we need to conquer, or circle we need to draw, is self-awareness. Experiments show that when people are primed to feel high levels of distress, the quickest to recover are those who can identify how they are feeling and put those feelings into words. Brain scans show verbal information almost immediately diminishes the power of these negative emotions, improving well-being and enhancing decision-making skills. So, whether you do it by writing down feelings in a

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journal or talking to a trusted coworker or confidant, verbalizing the stress and helplessness you are feeling is the first step toward regaining control.

Once you've mastered the self-awareness circle, your next goal should be to identify which aspects of the situation you have control over and which you don't. Write out all your stresses, daily challenges, and goals, then separate them into two categories: things that you have control over and things you don't. Anyone can do this simple exercise on a piece of paper, an Excel Spreadsheet, or even on a napkin over post-work martinis. The point is to tease apart the stresses that we have to let go of because they're out of our hands, while at the same time identifying the areas where our efforts will have a real impact.

Principle #6: The 20-Second Rule

Positive habits are hard to keep, no matter how common-sensical they might be. The New York Times reports that a whopping 80% of us break our New Year's resolutions. Even when we feel committed to positive change, sustaining it for any real length of time can seem nearly impossible.

I decided to take up the guitar once again, since I already owned one and knew that I enjoyed playing it. Common wisdom has long proposed that it takes 21 days to make a habit, so I decided to make a spreadsheet with 21 columns, tape it to my wall, and check off each day I played. By the end of the three weeks, I felt confident that (a) I would have a grid full of 21 check marks, (b) daily guitar playing would have become an automatic, established part of my life, (c) my playing would improve, and (d) I would be happier for it.

Three weeks later, I pulled the grid down in disgust. Staring up at four check marks followed by a whole lot of empty boxes was more discouragement and embarrassment than I needed. I had failed my own experiment. Worse still, I was shocked, depressed even, at how quick I had been to give up. A positive psychologist should be better at following his own advice! (Of course, the feelings of failure only deepen when you realize you're now a depressed positive psychologist.) The guitar was sitting in the closet, a mere 20 seconds away, but I couldn't make myself take it out and play it. What had gone wrong? It turns out that the telling words here are *make myself*. Without realizing it, I had been fighting the wrong battle and one I was bound to lose unless I changed my strategy.

The point is that whether it's a strict diet, a New Year's resolution, or an attempt at daily guitar practice, the reason so many of us have trouble sustaining change is because we try to rely on willpower. The reason willpower is so ineffective at sustaining change is that the more we use it, the more worn-out it gets.

Unfortunately, we face a steady stream of tasks that deplete our willpower every single day. Whether it's avoiding the dessert table at the company lunch, staying focused on a computer spreadsheet

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for hours on end, or sitting still through a three-hour meeting, our willpower is consistently being put to the test. So, it's no wonder, really, that we so easily give in to our old habits, to the easiest and most comfortable path, as we progress through the day. This invisible pull toward the path of least resistance can dictate more of our lives than we realize, creating an impassible barrier to change and positive growth.

It's not the sheer number and volume of distractions that gets us into trouble; it's the ease of access to them. Technology may make it easier for us to save time, but it also makes it a whole lot easier for us to waste it. In short, distraction, always just one click away, has become the path of least resistance.

I thought back to that initial experiment. I had kept my guitar tucked away in the closet, out of sight and out of reach. It wasn't far out of the way, of course (my apartment isn't that big), but just those 20 seconds of extra effort it took to walk to the closet and pull out the guitar had proved to be a major deterrent. I had tried to overcome this barrier with willpower, but after only four days, my reserves were completely dried up. If I couldn't use self-control to ingrain the habit, at least not for an extended period, I now wondered what would happen if I could eliminate the amount of activation energy it took to get started.

Clearly, it was time for another experiment. I took the guitar out of the closet, bought a \$2 guitar stand, and set it up in the middle of my living room. Nothing had changed except that now instead of being 20 seconds away, the guitar was in immediate reach. Three weeks later, I looked up at a habit grid with 21 proud check marks.

What I had done here, essentially, was put the desired behavior in the path of least resistance, so it actually took less energy and effort to pick up and practice the guitar than to avoid it. I like to refer to this as the 20-Second Rule, because lowering the barrier to change by just 20 seconds was all it took to help me form a new life habit. In truth, it often takes more than 20 seconds to make a difference but the strategy itself is universally applicable. Lower the activation energy for habits you want to adopt, and raise it for habits you want to avoid. The more we can lower or even eliminate the activation energy for our desired actions, the more we enhance our ability to jump-start positive change.

The 20-Second Rule isn't just about altering the time it takes to do things. Limiting the choices we have to make can also help lower the barrier to positive change. Researchers have discovered that too much choice saps our reserves. Their studies showed that with every additional choice people are asked to make, their physical stamina, ability to perform numerical calculations, persistence in the face of failure, and overall focus drop dramatically. These don't have to be difficult decisions either. The questions are more "chocolate or vanilla" than they are *Sophie's Choice*. Yet every one of these

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innocuous choices depletes our energy a little further, until we just don't have enough to continue with the positive habit we're trying to adopt.

Whether you're trying to change your habits at work or at home, the key to reducing choice is setting and following a few simple rules. Psychologists call these kinds of rules "second-order decisions," because they are essentially decisions about when to make decisions, like deciding ahead of time when, where, and how to work out in the morning.

Of course, this technique isn't just good for decisions like whether to use the treadmill or StairMaster. In his brilliant book *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz explains how setting rules in advance can free us from the constant barrage of willpower-depleting choices that make a real difference in our lives. If we make a rule to never drive a car when we've had more than one drink, for example, we eliminate the stress and uncertainty of trying to make a judgment call every time we aren't sure if we're too drunk to drive (which probably means we are). At work, setting rules to reduce the volume of choice can be incredibly effective. For example, if we set rules to only check our e-mail once per hour, or to only have one coffee break per morning, we are less likely to succumb in the moment, which helps these rules to become habits we stick to by default. Rules are especially helpful during the first few days of a behavior-changing venture, when it's easier to stray off course. Gradually, as the desired action becomes more habitual, we can become more flexible.

Principle #7: Social Investment

Studies show that each positive interaction employees have during the course of the work day actually helps return the cardiovascular system back to resting levels (a benefit often termed "work recovery"), and that over the long haul, employees with more of these interactions become protected from the negative effects of job strain. Each connection also lowers levels of cortisol, a hormone related to stress which helps employees recover faster from work-related stress and makes them better prepared to handle it in the future. Furthermore, studies have found that people with strong relationships are less likely to perceive situations as stressful in the first place. So, in essence, investing in social connections means that you'll find it easier to interpret adversity as a path to growth and opportunity; and when you do have to experience the stress, you'll bounce back from it faster and better protected against its long-term negative effects.

We have all heard the popular maxim "two heads are better than one," but the benefits of social interaction in the workplace go far beyond group brainstorming. Having people we can count on for support in the office even if it's just people we can talk to about last night's *Lost* episode actually fuels individual innovation, creativity, and productivity. For instance, one study of 212 employees found that social connections at work predicted more individual learning behavior, which means that the more socially connected employees felt, the more they took the time to figure out ways to improve their own efficiency, or their own skill set.

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Perhaps most important, social connections motivate. When over a thousand highly successful professional men and women were interviewed as they approached retirement and asked what had motivated them the most throughout their careers, overwhelmingly they placed work friendships above both financial gain and individual status. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins illuminated a similar truth: “The people we interviewed from good-to-great companies clearly loved what they did largely because they loved who they did it with.”

The better we feel about these workplace relationships, the more effective we will be. For example, a study of over 350 employees in 60 business units at a financial services company found that the greatest predictor of a team’s achievement was how the members felt about one another. This is especially important for managers because while they often have little control over the background or skill sets of employees placed on their teams, they do have control over the level of interaction and rapport. Studies show that the more team members are encouraged to socialize and interact face-to-face, the more engaged they feel, the more energy they have, and the longer they can stay focused on a task. In short, the more the team members invest in their social cohesion, the better the results of their work.

Every time you cross the office threshold, you have an opportunity to form or strengthen a high-quality connection. When traveling down busy corridors, greet colleagues you cross paths with, and remember to look them in the eye. This isn’t just for show. Neuroscience has revealed that when we make eye contact with someone, it actually sends a signal to the brain that triggers empathy and rapport. Ask interested questions, schedule face-to-face meetings, and initiate conversations that aren’t always task-oriented.

It is important to note that building strong social capital does not require that all colleagues become best friends or even that everyone like one another all the time. What does matter is that there be mutual respect and authenticity. Coercing employees into awkward icebreakers or forced bonding activities, like making everyone at a meeting share something about their private lives, only breeds disconnection and mistrust. It’s better that these moments happen organically, which they will if the environment is right. The best leaders give their employees the space and time to let moments of social connection develop on their own.

Connecting with employees face-to-face also provides a perfect opportunity for frequent recognition and feedback. Delivering specific and authentic praise for a job well done strengthens the connection between two people. This is why I often ask managers to write an e-mail of praise or thanks to a friend, family member or colleague each morning before they start their day’s work, not just because it contributes to their own happiness, but because it very literally cements a relationship. Whether the “thank you” is for years of emotional support or for one day of help around the office, expressions of gratitude at work have been proven to strengthen both personal and professional bonds.

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In fact, studies have shown that gratitude sparks an upward spiral of relationship growth where each individual feels motivated to strengthen the bond. It also predicts feelings of integration and cooperation within a larger group, which means that the more gratitude one employee expresses toward another employee, the more social cohesion they feel among the whole team. In other words, gratitude can fuel your own identity as a “glue guy.”

PART 3: THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Conclusion: Spreading the Happiness Advantage at Work, at Home, and Beyond

Once we start capitalizing on the Happiness Advantage in our own lives, the positive changes quickly ripple out. This is why positive psychology is so powerful. Using all seven principles together sparks an upward spiral of happiness and success so that the benefits quickly become multiplicative. Then the positive effects begin to ripple outward, increasing the happiness of everyone around you, changing the way your colleagues work and eventually shaping your entire organization.

What this means is that leading by example is no longer an empty mantra. Practicing the seven principles in your own life can actually become your most effective leadership tool, without you even knowing it. Take an executive who has been writing down a gratitude list each night before he goes to sleep. As he leads his team’s morning meeting, he’s now in a mindset that allows him to spot more opportunities to be positive which might compel him to praise the work of one of his direct reports. This in turn (a) primes the recipients brain with positive emotions which helps him think more creatively and efficiently; (b) gives him a sense of having achieved a goal, however small, and the confidence to go after bigger and bigger ones, and (c) provides the spark that builds a high-quality connection between the executive and his employee which cements the social cohesion and organizational commitment of the whole group. All of this ensures that each person in that room will spread positivity to their own reports and so on and so on, until each person profits from it. Thus, what started as a personal, at-home exercise for one member of management trickles down to impact everyone at every level of the organization.

When you capitalize on the Happiness Advantage you are doing far more than improving your own well-being and performance. By making changes within ourselves we can actually bring the benefits of the Happiness Advantage to our teams, our organizations, and everyone around us.