

# Sustainable Happiness and your Ecological Footprint



by  
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Do you ever get down about the state of our environment or feel like a victim to circumstances beyond your control? Do you try your best to take sustainable actions but often feel like it'll never make a difference?

In this eBook you will learn about the *nine keys to sustainable happiness* that are essential for reducing our ecological footprint on the planet. The correlation between happiness and sustainability is tightly knit. With increased happiness, the Mayo Clinic and the National Research Council confirmed an elevated quality of life and emotional capability. This is so important because we need to be a capable society that can look positively towards the future and feel equipped to take on the environmental and social challenges that face us today.

When we are emotionally healthy then we have a strong foundation to build a thriving life. You know this by comparing good days to bad days. On good days, you are able to get stuff done, connect with people, go the extra mile for someone. But on bad days, it's all you can do to put one foot in front of the other. To-do lists are forgotten, relationships are strained and you may just want to crawl back into bed and hide.

## It's hard to save the world on a bad day.

In the following pages you will learn that happy people all over the world have been studied to reveal the nine common and essential behaviours for true and lasting happiness. Regardless of their race, religion, geographic location, income or social status, truly happy people all have these same nine essential characteristics in common. And so can you. You might even find you already do!

# INTENTION

Intention is the force and driver behind all the other characteristics of happy people. With intention, the individual has decided to live more consciously and recognize the desire to be happy. It might sound funny, choosing to be happy, as opposed to choosing to be sad? Not exactly. We don't wake up in the morning and ask ourselves do I want to be happy or sad today, it's always just a given that we want to be happy. But setting an intention of feelings that will help cultivate happiness can change your day entirely.

Setting an intention is like setting your compass for the day. Once your intention is set then you can make decisions and choose actions based on your intentions instead of being taken any which way the wind blows.

Intentions however, are not the same as goals. Where goals are measurable, like completing three things on your to-do list, intentions are attitudes and behaviors like joy, appreciation, attentiveness and contribution. Most importantly, no one can take away our intention. So although you cannot choose circumstances you can choose your reaction, attitude and intention, which empowers you to feel confident and capable.

It is when we don't set intentions that we may become a victim to circumstance. Your

subconscious may take over and lead you down a path you don't want to go. Similar to being in a row boat with no oars, you will drift on the water with no way to choose your destination. But if you set intentions then you can use the oars to move in the desired direction regardless of sunny skies or stormy seas. You will also notice that if you are not clear with your intentions they may conflict and leave you rowing in circles never getting anywhere. For this reason it is helpful to set intentions to engage your personal power and move through your day with elegance, grace and happiness.



Consciously setting intentions makes us accountable for our actions and able to live our own authentic life, not the one society would have us live. As conscious consumers setting intentions, we can avoid the advertising and media traps to buy now and instead learn the difference between our wants and needs. We can live with intentions that are based on our values and these values can determine our consumer habits.

By waking up every morning and consciously setting your intentions for the day, you are actively retraining your brain to learn new responses to familiar scenarios. This allows you to create more positive choices that lead to a happier life.

## Capitalize on your sleep.

If you set intentions every night before you go to sleep you can maximize the retraining of the neural pathways in your brain, because the last thoughts you have before you sleep remain in the brain for four more hours. This is a perfect opportunity to capitalize on the power of the brain to bring you greater happiness in your life.

## INTENTION EXERCISES

To give yourself a boost of dopamine and serotonin rush throughout your body before you even get out of bed, you can think of something that gets you really excited. Something as simple as a cleansing shower, that first sip of coffee, fresh air when you step out the door. It only takes a few seconds of focus to create that image in your head. Dopamine is the brain's primary contentment neurotransmitter so you can create a feeling of calm as you begin your day and serotonin is a feel good neurotransmitter to get you juiced about life as you set your intentions for the day.

### Setting Intentions

Before you get out of bed in the morning, set some intentions about how you want to feel that day. Ask yourself these questions:

- How do I want to be?
- How do I want to show up in the world today?
- How do I want to feel?
- What do I want to focus on or what kind of day do I want to have?

## Setting Core Intentions

Here is another exercise you may want to try while you light a candle and sip some tea to set some core intentions about your life. This sounds intense but it doesn't have to be when you understand what your core values and morals are.

Just as a reminder, values are principles that are based on your beliefs of what is right and wrong. Values are things like kindness, compassion, integrity, courage, honor, respect and fairness. We often take our values for granted, thinking that we know right from wrong intrinsically. But when life gets messy, it's nice to be reminded of what our core values are from a list of work we have already decided on when we were in a calm and centered state. Some examples might be:

- To show compassion for everyone regardless of how my ego judges them.
- To be kind to others even when they are not kind to me.
- To respect the environment by continually reducing my ecological footprint.
- To honor the planet when I eat food from it's bounty.

Morals are values based on a system of beliefs that is larger than ourselves, like a religion, industry or even the environment. To be happy and sustainable, it might be a good idea to consider what our morals are based on the values we hold in relation to the environment. What are the needs of the environment to heal, remain healthy and thrive and to be able to provide for our own growth and nurturing? What moral codes might the natural world be asking of us when we consider our values?

- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Your love and respect for the Earth is a reflection of the love and respect for yourself.
- Realize all our physical and some emotional needs are met by the Earth.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

By being accountable we are making our intentions come to life. Because we have set our intentions before even getting out of bed, we can remind ourselves

throughout the day to track back to our intentions if we find ourselves falling away from them. This makes us accountable. We are living our lives consciously and taking accountability for our actions.

Responsibility is different from accountability in that there ends up being a lot of 'shoulds' with responsibility. If we find ourselves in situations where we think we should do something or should feel a certain way then immediately we place blame on others or ourselves. Once the blame gauntlet is laid down, it's game over. Suddenly out of nowhere victim status prevails. Being a victim is terrifying because we feel like we have no power or control over the situation. We become helpless and hopeless.

When we feel like a victim and fear overwhelms us we are operating from the oldest part of our brain, the first to develop millions of years ago, called the cerebral subcortex located in the brain stem. What we want to do is be accountable for our lives and take control, and this involves using the newer part of our brain that has evolved us away from reptiles and into humans. This part of the brain is the neocortex and is where we get our intellect from. The neocortex is where we are able to have cognitive thoughts and abstract reasoning. It can be described as the manager of the brain that takes charge and overrides fearful thoughts from the old, reptilian part of the brain located in the brain stem.

What FEAR is:

FALSE  
EVIDENCE  
APPEARING  
REAL

Hanna is a perfect example of a happy person even though she has experienced one of the most difficult times in human history and lost most of her family during World War II. So why is she happy? Because even though she survived when most of her family was killed by the Nazis, she does not blame them for taking her family from her. Yes, she holds the Nazis responsible for killing her family but she does not blame them. By avoiding blame Hannah is avoiding victimhood and this allows her to maintain her power and proactive life. She lives for every moment, happy to be alive and experiencing all that she has, not all that she has lost. She is a valued person in her community and contributes positively to society and the environment.

We can learn from Hanna, to be accountable for our lives and the environment. There are many things we know we should do to heal the Earth. But wouldn't life be so much better if we felt accountable to do those things and in that way take control over the impacts our lives can make in the world? Being accountable helps us feel joy in what we do. As opposed to being responsible and feeling like we should do something which can make us feel like a victim of circumstance. Let's take accountability for the state of the environment. Let's feel in control to make changes to our world from a place of sincerity and love. Instead of blaming previous generations or other entities, let's take control and do something about it in our lifetimes. We don't want future generations to blame us and feel like victims because we didn't do our best to make positive changes, so let's show them we tried. Let's be accountable and proactive to our situation.



LOOK, YOU MAKE SOME GOOD POINTS  
BUT NONE OF THEM OVERPOWERS  
MY NEED TO BLAME OTHERS.

## ACCOUNTABILITY EXERCISE

We are going to use a mind-mapping exercise here to understand how we are accountable for the food we consume or the items we purchase as a consumer. Think of something that you really value in your life but know that it might have a negative impact on the environment if you use too much of it or get another. Maybe it's a car or something small like an avocado. In the centre of your paper write the word avocado. From there write down all the resources, people, energy, environmental impacts that took to get that avocado in your kitchen. This exercise helps us see the impact on the environment our daily choices have by looking at the bigger picture. Maybe you will buy less avocados. Maybe you will only have avocados when you are in the country where they grow. Maybe you will value the cost of organic avocados and never buy non-organic again. Maybe not much will change except your awareness of your choices. Regardless of the outcome, this exercise will help you see the connections between your actions and the rest of the world. You can visualize your part in the process and take accountability for your actions. Be empowered to act proactively and avoid blaming others and being a victim of circumstance.

## A bit more about the Brain

There are three major parts of the brain that I would like to discuss and simplify.

1. Brain Stem - This part of the brain is the oldest part in terms of evolution and is the first to develop when we are in the womb. Instinctual fears are cultivated in this part of the brain and it is physically not possible to create loving thoughts in this space. Very small thinking takes place in the brain stem. Ideas like, "when I touch the stove it is hot," and then you never touch the stove again. The brainstem is also the part that we call the reptilian brain, to put into context the evolution of the human brain and body.
2. Amygdala - The amygdala is the second oldest part of the brain and is the next part to develop in the womb after the brain stem. This is the emotional memory centre, specifically the painful memories. This is where we remember that time when we were bullied, raped, ditched by a lover, embarrassed in front of the entire class and other such horrible things that can happen in life. This is where we hold onto those memories tightly and let them, to a certain degree, determine how we live our lives.



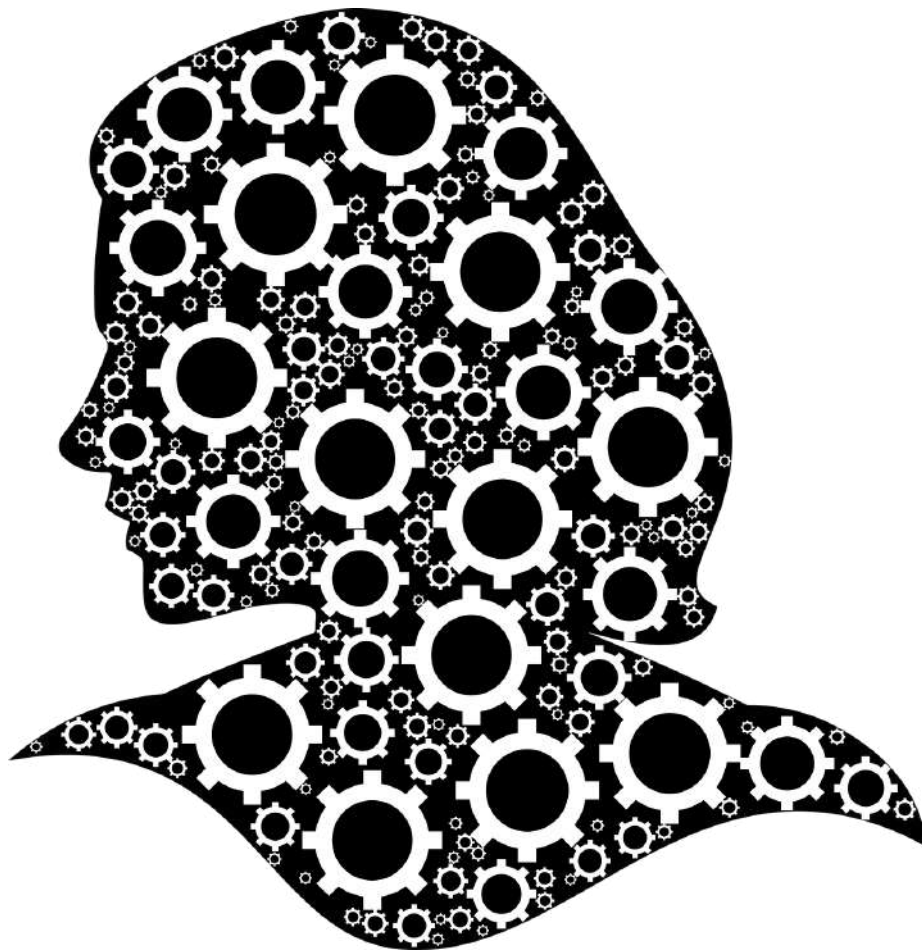
The amygdala is also in connection with the endocrine system. When those bad thoughts or stressors surface, like bill paying time, or in-laws coming to visit, or memories of the broken heart, we release fear/stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol throughout our body. These are useful hormones when our life is in danger. In the past when danger was imminent, such as being chased by a bear, cortisol and adrenaline would be released into our bodies and we would get a boost of energy to run fast, be agile, and think quickly to have the best shot at saving our lives. But now we rarely get the chance to run off these hormones when fear takes over and instead we sit at our desk stressing about how to pay the mountain of bills we've collected. The constant release of adrenaline and cortisol in our bodies causes our adrenal system to be overly worked which leads to a host of acute and chronic illnesses that are common today. Such as: fatigue,



weight gain/loss, moodiness/depression, blood pressure issues and the list goes on.

3. Neocortex - This is the newest part of our brain to evolve and is the last to develop in the womb. The neocortex is where we hold our intellect and perform cognitive feats, such as complex ideas, long-term thinking and most importantly loving thoughts. The neocortex is where our connection to the creator, the planet and each other is located and is called the human spirit. Our neocortex has the ability to over-power the other two parts of the brain and is what makes us human.

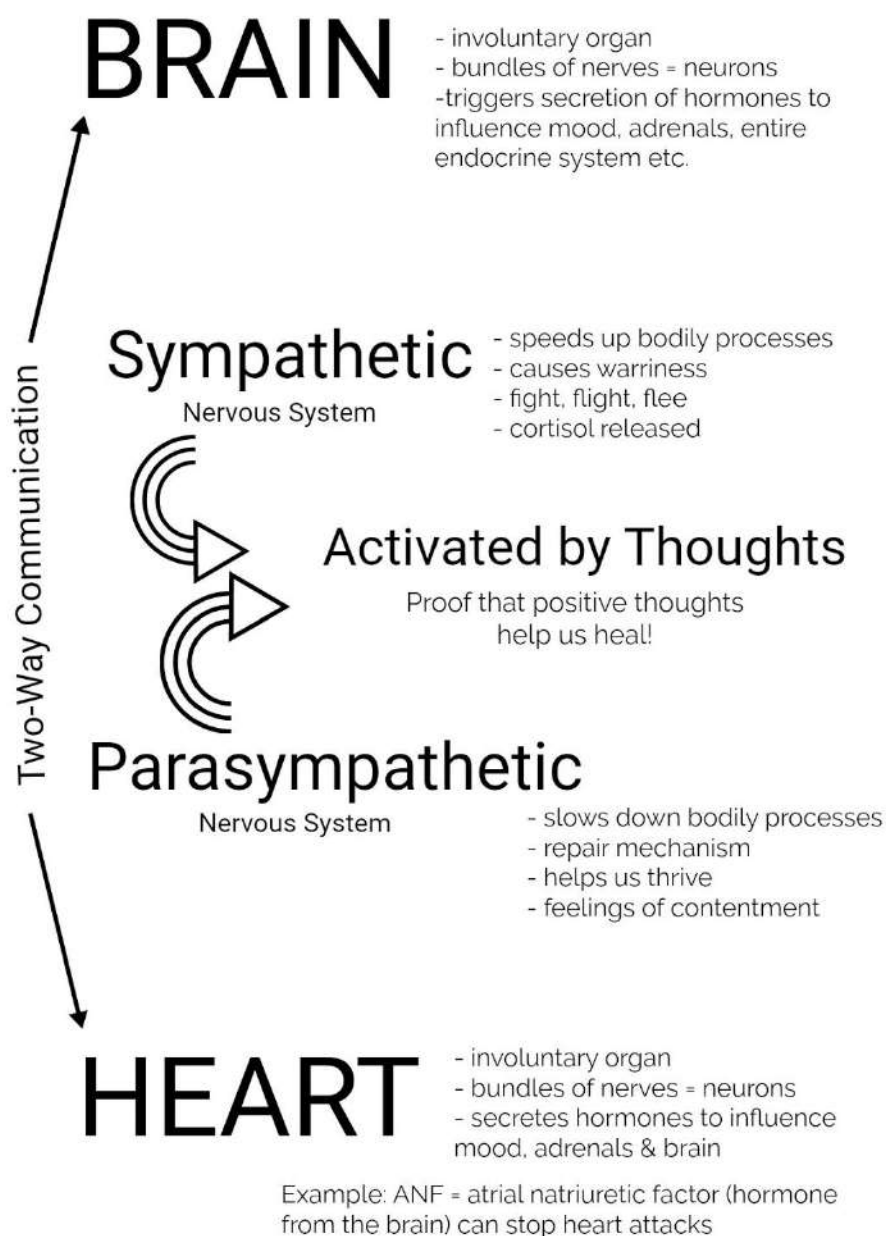
As humans, we have the ability to use our neocortex to overcome fear. We can think positive, loving, and kind thoughts to physically over-power and remove fear hormones from coursing through our body and creating stress in our system.



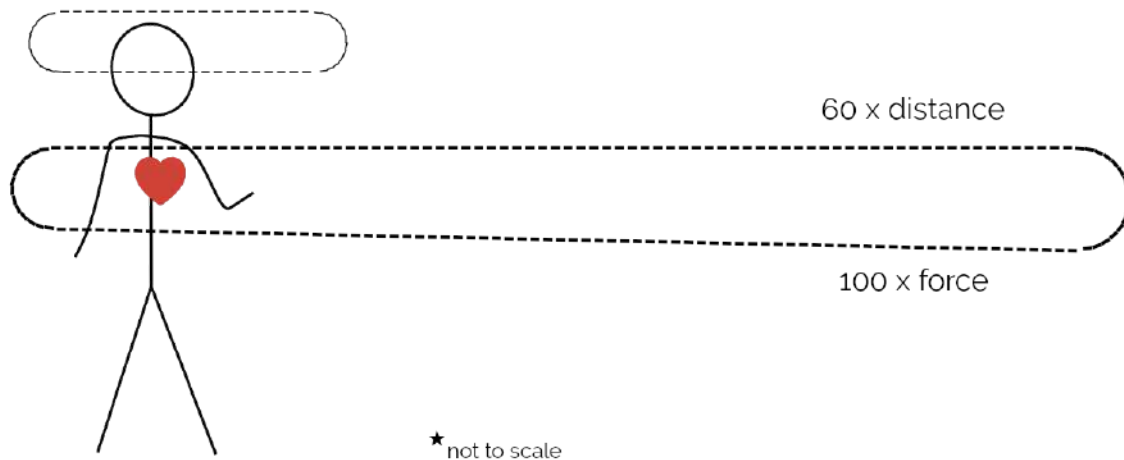
# The Brain-Heart Connection: Why Positive Thoughts Heal

The autonomic nervous system in the brain is similar to the heart and provides a communication pathway between the two.

The autonomic nervous system is made up of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems.



Because the brain and heart are so similar, have the ability to communicate and can be controlled by our thinking, it is essential to continually bring ourselves back to positive thoughts. The practice of positive thinking or just not letting fear rule our lives, will help us evolve as humans. We can train the newest part of our brain to really be in control, enjoy life more and live more in love than in fear.



The power of loving thoughts in our body and the world around us is exemplified above in this graphic that illustrates the electrical fields of the brain and heart. The electrical field of the heart can reach much farther than the brain and when activated with positive and loving thoughts can have a much greater and positive impact on our world.

## One More Thing: the bigger problem with hedonism

There is a trap that happens when we indulge in hedonism (overeating, drinking, drugs, consumerism) or any form of extreme celebration and over indulgence. We neurologically overload our brain. We intake way too much of a good thing at once and deplete our feel good hormones like dopamine and serotonin. This creates a trapped life of great highs and great lows. In the end, we harm our body by stressing it out with extremes which can lead to, you guessed it, more acute and chronic health issues.

# IDENTIFICATION & CENTRALITY

Identification and centrality are individual components of the nine characteristics of a happy person but go well together in describing how they work.

Identification involves knowing what makes us happy. What makes our hearts sing? Our values and needs propel us to find what it is that makes us happiest. This is when we admit what our dreams are. To cultivate sustainable happiness our dreams need to align with our values. Otherwise they will be dreams based on society's perspective and in the end will not provide continued happiness. It is perfectly O.K. to explore and find new things that make us happy, but it is still important for them to align with our values. Otherwise we will always be feeling empty inside, wondering why this shiny new idea, thing, adventure, or practice is still not making us happy.

For example, perhaps everyone in your community is buying snowmobiles to get out and explore the mountains in the winter and you want to explore with them. But riding a snowmobile goes against your values of environmental health, ecological impact and climate change initiatives. You will need to make a conscious choice to identify what it really is that will make you happy. Is it the snowmobiling, the fresh winter air, skiing in the pristine backcountry wilderness or is it spending time with your friends in nature that is really going to make you feel happy and aligned with your values? Whatever it is that you choose, you need to take accountability for it and not feel like a victim that you are missing out on something else. Blaming others for their actions while you take different ones is not going to make you feel happy.

Instead make a decision and feel empowered with it, knowing that you are living your values to increase your sustainable happiness. Identification involves asking ourselves if we can be truly happy with our dreams without exploiting others or the planet.

Identifying our dreams and what makes us truly happy takes guts, especially when we centralize them in our lives. This means that once we know what it is that makes us happy without exploiting others or the planet, then we make that thing central in our lives. We follow through on it and bring it into our lives on a daily basis. We feed our souls with it and light up the rest of our lives with the essence of the happiness we gain from that activity, practice, or creation. By identifying and making our dreams central in our lives we are saying to the rest of

the world that we matter, we believe in ourselves and our actions begin to have a domino effect in all other areas of our lives.

***If we do not centralize our dreams then we are not only cheating ourselves of our own happiness but we are cheating the rest of the world of our gifts that we were born to give.*** Often when we get caught up in our busy lives, we don't see our dreams as a viable choice. It is hard to imagine how we would pay the bills or look after our children or maintain a certain social status that others expect of us when we imagine living out our dreams. But it doesn't have to be all or nothing. We don't have to completely start over to live our dreams on a daily basis, to feed joy and happiness into other areas of our lives.



Let's say that you are an english teacher who loves to play piano. Your heart's desire is to only play piano every day all day. Maybe that would fulfill you or maybe that wouldn't, you don't know until you live it. So start with playing piano every day when you get home from work. Maybe you'll start getting up early to play before you start your day. Maybe you'll get asked to play Friday nights at the local cafe or club. Maybe eventually you will be playing so many gigs that you won't have time to teach english. Or MAYBE you will be completely fulfilled playing one hour a day and it lights you up completely when you teach english. Then you might get promoted to head of the english department or rewarded with extra time off or a raise. You never know if you don't try and implement your dreams into your daily life, make them central to your being.

So how do you know what makes you truly happy and lit up on the inside and out? To identify what those sweet nuggets of your happiest life are, start a bliss list. Write down every little thing that makes you lose all sense of time when you are doing it, makes you smile, feel lighthearted and expansive.

## RECASTING

***“We have the strength to master our reactions purposefully, and in doing so, positively transform both ourselves and the world.” Foster and Hicks***

In every life there is pain, it's part of our human experience. Whether it is emotional, physical or spiritual, pain is inevitable for everyone. Happy people know that they can't always be in control of what happens to them, but they can control how they react to painful situations. Happy people have a universal method for dealing with pain. It's not something they have strategically taught themselves, but instead is a way that makes sense for them to deal with and heal from the pain to move on and continue with a happy life.

Let me repeat this. It needs to be made clear that happy people are not living wildly joyful lives with no hint of any sadness or pain ever. It's just that happy people know how to deal with pain and move through it so they can get back to happy and not continue to carry around the pain like a sack of bricks over their shoulder. Because this is what will happen if we do not deal with our pain. We will end up carrying it around with us, wherever we go. So we must accept when we are in pain, of any sort, and deal with it when it occurs.



STEP ONE, recognize you are in pain. Identify what the pain is. Drilling down to identify the uncomfortable feeling as one of the primary emotions, will help to deal with the pain. The four primary emotions we all experience are: anger, fear, sadness and joy. If we are feeling pain, joy probably isn't one of the emotions we will identify with.



By identifying and feeling the emotion, happy people know that just because it is uncomfortable doesn't mean that it is negative or wrong. They don't try to push away the feeling to get back to happy because happy is comfortable or right and sadness, anger, fear or being uncomfortable is wrong. Instead they give into the feeling and allow themselves to be with it. As

uncomfortable as it is, they know that by feeling it they will heal that much quicker and not have to carry around that heavy burden. The emotions they are feeling help guide them to understand what is going on.

STEP TWO in the process: identify what we can learn from the upset. This helps us understand what was in and out of our control. What can we take accountability for and what was just a part of life?

STEP THREE, is to identify what are the opportunities available to us from this feeling or situation?

These steps are very crucial to dealing with and healing from life's bruises and bumps. We don't want to walk around as wounded warriors, we want to stretch across the Earth as vibrant and healthy individuals. To do this we must deal with our pain. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable so we can spend some time there and do the work that is required to heal. When we are healthy, healed and whole we can be proactive and contribute positively to society, lend a helping hand and care for our planet. The opportunities that we figure out in step three, are crucial to having a sense of freedom and autonomy. These emotions are

essential to reaching happiness as well as knowing we can help reclaim the planet from the environmental challenges facing us today.

Understanding and connecting with our primary emotions will fast track our healing. Yet sometimes I think we push away our primary emotions because there is such depth to them. We don't want to go that deep, we are afraid of the unknown. But what you find in the depths is diverse and rich. It is the stuff that makes life worth living. At the core of it all, digging through the depths, we all find the same thing, love. We are afraid of love because that is our animal nature



to live in fear. But love is what we have evolved to feel as we become more human and practice using the newest part of our brain, the neocortex. Remember, love is stronger than fear and can propel us to continue on, instead of giving up.

When we feel sad, angry, or afraid we can know that soon love will follow, if we only let ourselves be comfortable with being uncomfortable. If we study our emotions, understand what can be learned from the experience and identify what the opportunities are to move forward and feel genuinely happy again. This process takes as long as it takes, but is universal and necessary in a happy person's life.

Nature replicates this exact strategy for dealing with pain. In the Redwood forests of northern California a fire must burn through the trees to allow new seedlings to grow. The fire kills any small competing underbrush to make room for new trees. The cones from the giant redwoods require intense heat to release the seeds within the cones and the freshly burned underbrush provides a blanket of nutrients for the germinating seeds. Trauma in the forest is necessary for new growth to occur. The same is often true in our own lives. It is often from the most traumatic events that we grow and evolve to become brighter, grateful and happier humans.



## OPTIONS

Happy people are easy to spot, not just because they are smiling and embody a positive spirit, but also because they are often seen doing things that most others won't. They may not be completely radical and ride their unicycle to work through rush hour traffic, but they wouldn't think that they couldn't. Happy people often are striving to uncover new approaches to old problems. They are innovative because of their sense of freedom that they feel, which allows them to think outside of the box and be creative. They move through life knowing that every experience is a chance for an adventure and possibilities that cannot be anticipated in advance.



Goals are not a big part of a happy person's life because they can limit the richness and diversity that can come with each new day. Because a lot of life is unpredictable, goals would simply get in the way of new and favourable opportunities. If a goal was set to be achieved by a certain date then any other opportunities that came up in that time may be overlooked because it didn't serve that one goal, but what would be missed may be greater than the goal itself. Happy people like to be flexible. By living life by their values and setting intentions they can avoid making goals which might limit their adventures and participation in life's rich experiences.

A happy persons greatest enemy is self-limiting beliefs. They know that once they start doubting and holding themselves back from their dreams, no matter how small or big, they are restricting their sense of freedom and options in life. Because of the belief in themselves that they can do what their hearts desire, they are able to be more creative in how they do it. Every person knows the happiness they get from being creative, expressing themselves in a creative way or just letting it flow to find out what will happen is a creative approach to life as well.



When we allow ourselves to be open to new options and express our creative spirit, we instill a sense of faith that carries us forward into the unknown with a smiling heart. We also gain resilience

to bounce back from difficult situations. With faith and resilience we can create a better future for our grandkids and the environment.

When we practice dealing with our emotions in uncomfortable or traumatizing experiences we allow our brains to form new neural pathways which creates new responses to similar situations in the future. What this means is that we no longer freak out over drama in our life but instead have a healthier way of dealing with it. We train our brains to react in new ways. We allow ourselves to accept the situation, feel the emotions, process it for meaning and give ourselves some options to feel in control of our lives. This practice inevitably makes us better problem solvers and increases our confidence in life in general because we have the tools to deal with whatever comes our way. Life may push us down but now we know how to get back up again and keep moving forward, maybe even with a skip in our step.

## OPTIONS EXERCISE

Try giving yourself some different options for a day. Take a different route to work, exercise at a different time of day or with a new group of people. Practice buying nothing for a day and see how much of what you do purchase on a daily basis is unnecessary and wasteful on your wallet and the environment. Instead of watching the news at 6 o'clock, find other sources online. Shake it up and try not to limit yourself. Build confidence in trying new things without judgement. Allow your creative spirit to be expressed. Maybe you can challenge yourself to trying one new thing a day, no matter how big or small. Don't limit yourself. You can do whatever your heart desires and do it well if you want to.

Your BELIEF  
in yourself  
determines  
**EVERYTHING**

## APPRECIATION

Appreciation is the best action you can take to help yourself feel better. Happy people know that appreciation is transformational. The act of appreciating literally changes the chemistry in our brains and chemicals flowing in our bodies to give us a rush of oxytocin and remove any trace of fear. Because appreciation and fear come from two different places in the brain, the neocortex and the amygdala respectively, they cannot exist at the same time in our thoughts. So if fear is bringing us down and we know it is not real, then a simple act of listing all the things in that moment or in our lives that we appreciate, will banish fear from our thoughts instantly.

When we practice appreciation we are bringing attention to the current moment. Even if we are appreciating the flowers that someone brought us a week ago, we are bringing our awareness into the present and feeling positive about life as it is. This is why the act of appreciation is healthy and helps build relationships with others as well. By being present we can appreciate others for who they are in the moment and not judge them on past experiences. It allows us to connect more deeply with others and build a sense of trust in the relationship.

Appreciation also knocks out the ideas of not having enough or being good enough, our two biggest fears in life. A group of students embarked on a research project to ask happy people in the second part of their lives, "what made their lives happy"? Not one person said that happiness came from material things. So not having enough is not a real reason to feel sad, it is only the fear cultivated in the older parts of our brain that make us believe that without enough we cannot be happy. Of course it is natural to want enough material possessions to live a comfortable life, but beyond that, the constant accrual of stuff doesn't correlate with increased happiness. What the participants in the study did say made them happiest was giving and connecting to others. We are hardwired to connect and when we do, it contributes to our emotional well being. Appreciating the moment for what it is will make you happier than wishing it were something else.

***Suffering comes from wishing things were different than they are.***

The act of appreciation can make us recession proof. Yes, it can! Because wealth was originally defined as "weal" meaning *well being* and, "Th" meaning the *condition of*, it is the *condition of well being* that defines wealth. We know that after we have enough money to ensure our essential needs are met, no amount of money after that will give us a greater sense of well being. Only appreciation can increase our sense of well being and thus true wealth, and this is how we can ensure our lives are recession proof. No one can take away your own sense of well being.

## APPRECIATION EXERCISE

Make a bliss list. Write down all the things that make you feel good. It can be anything from a hot cup of coffee to a day spent at the beach with your family. It might be a space in your home that you create wonderful art or a walk that you take in the forest. Whatever makes your heart sing and brings a smile to your face. Whatever makes you feel loved, comfortable, safe



and confident, write it down. Anything in your life that you appreciate such as a loved one, a pet or even access to fresh clean drinking water. Write it down and don't stop. You can keep this list as a reminder for when life gets tough or you can create a new list every time you notice fear or anxiety creeping in and there is no actual danger nearby.

## GIVING

There is a reason happy people end up giving so much. It's because the feel-good drug that courses through our bodies when we are happy, oxytocin, also gets released and bathes us in feel good emotions when we give unconditionally. True giving comes from the same place as deep happiness.

Giving can be tricky. We've all heard before that we shouldn't give to get. But sometimes we don't give to get anything material, we just give to be liked. Energetically, this is still giving to get. Happy people know that how we give is a reflection of who we are, and the best kind of giving, the kind that gives you that feel good oxytocin rush, comes from unconditional giving. With no expectations, we are free to simply enjoy the act of giving, unencumbered.

Happy people have adequate self-esteem, value and worth, to know they have valuable gifts to give, no matter how small or big their impact. And the more they give, the happier they feel. They understand the balance between giving to others and giving to themselves. Happy people know that they must take care of themselves first, give to themselves to ensure their needs are met and then they can give unconditionally to others, that much easier, with no expectations of getting something in return. It's not about being a martyr and always giving to others, no matter our personal condition. It is about giving in a way that connects us, builds stronger relationships, enhances the structure and system of the community. With true unconditional giving, relationships can be transformed to reveal a new focus and greater meaning in the connection. Giving can be used as a 'white flag', a truce that can dissolve any meaningless miscommunications that may have occurred.

Giving can also help in the grieving process. If we are feeling needy or have a sense of lack in our life, often giving can be the perfect antidote. It seems counter-intuitive, but when we are feeling needy, what we are most missing is a connection with others, the planet and the source. By giving, we can fast-track our way to getting connected and feeling whole again. It takes away the feeling of being alone, disconnected and instead brings a sense of meaning into our

lives. Giving also takes us out of our own story that may be saying negative things about our lives and instead focuses our attention on others which is another way to feel connected and less needy or lonely.

## GIVING EXERCISE

Answer the following questions:

- What is something you want to give more of? Examples: love, time, energy, money?
- What is something you want to give less of?
- What are the things or ways in your life that you want to give differently?

## TRUTH

Truth is a choice that happy people make every day. They decide to be truthful with themselves and others. They confront their personal mythologies and look at their own behaviours with honesty, to learn and grow into their true authentic selves. This takes courage, but it is worth it. Just as going deep into what our core primary feelings are when we are upset, it is necessary to get honest with ourselves to be able to identify our issues, heal and let go of our past. This process allows us to move forward with a fresh start, almost like a reset button being pressed.

It also takes courage to be truthful with others. Speaking honestly doesn't have to sound mean, it can be done with compassion. If there is an alternative motive for telling the truth with someone, other than deepening and strengthening the relationship, then being truthful might only be serving one person. This would be counterproductive to building meaningful relationships that can withstand all the bumps and bruises that life can hold.

Trust is a key characteristic of any successful group of people. To work together as a strong and effective team, there needs to be a sense of trust amongst each other. Knowing that others have your back and won't turn or gang up on you, is a team that will thrive under pressure and pleasurable times.

It also takes a certain amount of truth to get honest about our impact we are having on the planet. If we are really truthful with ourselves, we will acknowledge that our actions have impact on the environment around us, and we can then course correct ourselves to live more in harmony with the nature that surrounds us.



When we are truthful and honest with ourselves and others, our personal health is increased as well. This is easily demonstrated by the various areas of the body that are studied when we take a lie detector test. When we are lying, the test will reveal that we have an increased pulse rate and blood pressure, our breathing becomes shallow, and our palms may become sweaty too. These symptoms of lying are opposite to the physical condition the body takes when it is calm, relaxed, and living truthfully. When we are meditating we see a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure, our breathing is deep and full, using the entire diaphragm and our skin doesn't sweat (unless we are in a very hot environment).

Being honest and living truthfully increases our physical health and biochemical wellness. Some may say that it makes us vulnerable. But a certain amount of vulnerability is necessary to cultivate stronger connections with each other because truth acts like a magnet. Case in point, who do you want to be best friends with, the person that lies to you all the time or the one who is honest about life? When we are vulnerable we share our feelings, which is a truthful act and builds strong relationships based on trust.

# CONCLUSION

As you can see, being happy takes a bit of conscious effort. It also takes dedication over the long-term. And it is not something that we can get once and then never have to think about again. Happiness is a life-long pursuit and practice. By starting with intentions, we can build our happiness quotient to grow into other areas of our lives that reap great rewards.

Becoming accountable for our lives and living our dreams will kick start a new perspective on life. The feel good rush of oxytocin will become more consistent and new neural pathways will form in the brain. Reactions to painful situations will not be so daunting and we will know that once we have dealt with the pain we will have more options to consider, and that will be freeing.

Appreciating what we do have and living in the moment will relieve suffering from wishing things were different than they are. More freedom will reign and a lightness will be cast over every aspect of our lives. Giving will become much easier and even rewarding with another boost of oxytocin to the system. The cycle of giving and receiving will be complete and a sense of security and connection will grow.

Seeking truth in ourselves and our relations will be desired not dreaded and bonds will strengthen to take on challenges that face us today. A force will be felt from our growing state of happiness and it will light fires of inspiration and action to do something about the state of our planet. To have confidence in going against the grain in creating a world where money and power don't rule the world.

We will become new leaders for the environmental movement while enjoying life and having fun!





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