

# THE HAPPINESS ADVANTAGE-SHAWN ACHOR

## PART I: POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK

*This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.*

Waiting to be happy limits our brain's potential for success, whereas cultivating positive brains makes us more motivated, efficient, resilient, creative and productive.

### **Discovering The Happiness Advantage**

John Milton wrote in Paradise Lost, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven a hell, a hell a heaven."

Many of students saw Harvard as a privilege, but others quickly lost sight of that reality and focussed only on the workload, the competition, the stress. They fretted incessantly about the future, despite the fact that they were earning a degree that would open so many doors. They felt overwhelmed by every small setback instead of being energised by the possibilities in front of them. These were the ones whose grades and academic performance were suffering the most.

When I asked African Soweto students "Who here likes to do school work?" to my shock, 95 % students raised hands smilingly. When I said to my escort why they were so weird, he said "They see schoolwork as a privilege, one that their parents did not have." Same correlation was found at Harvard. Those who found being here as a privilege did better and those who found it stressful did worse.

### **Too Focussed on The Negative**

In a Wellness Week in a School in New England the daily topics for discussion were: Eating disorders, depression, drugs and violence, risky sex.

This focus on the negative tricks our brain to believe that most of life is negative.

After entering Harvard students have a terrible realization: 50 % of them are suddenly below average. With pressure to be great, when they fall, they fall hard. Depression follows-pulls them inward, away from friends, families and social supports, at a time when they need it the most.

Our brains are literally hardwired to perform best when they are positive. Students primed to feel happy before a math test far outperform their peers.

### **The Seven Principles:**

These actionable and proven patterns predict success and achievement.

**The Happiness Advantage:** because positive brains have a biological advantage over brains that are neutral or negative, this principle teaches us how to retrain our brains to capitalize on positivity and improve our productivity and performance.

**The Fulcrum and the Lever:** How we experience the world, and our ability to succeed within it, constantly changes based on our mindset. This principle teaches us how we can adjust our mindset (fulcrum) in a way that gives us the power (the lever) to be more successful.

**The Tetris Effect:** This principle teaches our brains to spot patterns of possibility, so we can see-and seize-opportunity wherever we look.

**Falling Up:** the principle is about finding the mental path that not only leads us out of failure or suffering, but teaches us to be happier and more successful because of it.

**The Zorro Circle:** this principle teaches us how to regain control by focussing first on small, manageable goals, and then gradually expanding our circle to achieve bigger and bigger goals.

**The 20 Second Rule:** this principle shows how, by making small energy adjustments, we can reroute the path of least resistance and replace bad habits with good ones.

**Social Investment:** this principle teaches us how to invest more in one of the greatest predictors of success and excellence-our social support network.

## **PART II: The Seven Principles**

### **Principle 1: The Happiness Advantage**

Happiness is the centre, and success revolves around it.

**Happiness Definition:** Experience of positive emotions- pleasure combined with deeper feelings of meaning and purpose. It implies a positive mood in the present and positive outlook for the future. It is a joy we feel striving after our potential.

The chief engine of happiness is positive emotions, since happiness is a feeling. The ten positive emotions are: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love.

Two groups of individuals were given a cold virus injection. A week later, the individuals who were happier before the test fought off the virus much better than the rest. They even had less sneezing, coughing, inflammation and congestion.

Instead of narrowing our actions 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.

Positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that not only make us feel good, but dial up the learning centres of our brains to higher levels. They help us organise new information, keep it in brain longer, retrieve it faster. We think more clearly and quickly, become skilled at complex analysis and problem solving, and see and invent new ways of doing things.

**Students who were asked to think about the happiest day of their lives right before the math tests outperformed their peers.**

Even the smallest shots of positivity can give someone a serious competitive advantage.

In a study, researchers randomly assigned participants to view videos with feelings of joy and contentment, neutral, sad. Indeed the people primed with positive feelings experience faster recovery from stress and its physical effects.

**Before a stressful, important presentation, to boost positivity and confidence, you can do any of the following: visualize giving a clear and cogent presentation, recall a past instance when you did very well, doing something entirely unrelated like- quick call to a friend, reading a funny article, a brisk walk around the block.**

**Happiness is not just a mood-it's a work ethic.**

While we each have a happiness baseline that will fluctuate around a daily basis, with concerted effort, we can raise that baseline permanently.

Happiness advantage also lies in small, momentary blips of positivity that pepper our lives each and every day. As we have seen, a short humorous video, a quick conversation with a friend, even a small gift of candy can produce significant and immediate boosts in cognitive power and job performance.

**Proven ways to Improve Moods and Happiness**

**Meditate:** just 5 minutes a day do mindful breathing. If mind drifts from the breath, gently bring it back. It takes practice, but it is one of the most powerful happiness interventions. Studies have shown that immediately after meditation, we experience feeling of calm and contentment, as well as heightened awareness and empathy. Research shows that regular meditation can permanently rewire the brain to raise levels of happiness, lower stress, even improve immune function.

**Find Something To Look Forward To:** one study has shown that people who just thought about watching their favourite movie actually raised their endorphin levels by 27 %. Often, the most enjoyable part of the activity is anticipation. Even if you can't take a vacation right now, or a night out with friends, put something on the calendar-even a month or year away. Then whenever you need a boost of happiness, remind yourself about it. Anticipating future rewards can actually light up the pleasure centres in your brain much as the actual reward will.

**Commit Conscious Acts of Kindness**

Research has shown that completing five acts of kindness daily reported feeling much happier, and the feelings lasted for many subsequent days. Make sure that these are done deliberately and consciously. They need not be grand gestures.

**Infuse Positivity Into Your Surroundings**

Our physical environment can have an enormous impact on our mindset and sense of well-being. Flank your computer table with pictures of loved ones evoke positive emotion every time you glance at them.

Making time to go outside on a nice day also delivers a good advantage.

**Exercise:** it releases pleasure inducing chemicals called endorphins. It also boosts mood and enhances our work performance by improving motivation and feelings of mastery, reducing stress and anxiety, and helping us get into flow-when we are most productive.

Studies have proved that exercise works as well as anti-depressants. They also had the least relapse rate for depression. It is not just a mood lifter, but a long lasting one. Walk, bike, run, play, stretch, jump rope, do anything you like.

### **Spend Money (but not on stuff)**

Spend money on doing things rather than having things. Spend it on experiences with other people which produce emotions that are meaningful and long lasting.

Studies show that money spent on concerts, group dinners brought more pleasure than buying dress etc. Spending money on others also boosts happiness.

**Exercise a Signature Strength:** Each time we use a skill we are very good at, we experience a burst of positivity.

Even more fulfilling than using a skill is exercising a strength of character. Find what is yours. If you use it for a week in new way, you will be significantly be happier and the effects last long after the experiment. Love of learning is my strength.

Providing frequent recognition and encouragement is also very effective way to enhance efficiency, motivation, creativity, and productivity.

Recognition can be given by complimentary email, or a pat on the back for job well done.

### **The Losada Line**

Based on Losada's studies, 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. Below that the performance suffers. Rise above it-ideal ratio 6:1-and teams produce their best work.

In a mining company this strategy improved performance by 40 %.

### **Principle 2: The Fulcrum and The Lever**

I began to realize that our brains are like single processors capable of devoting only a finite amount of resources to experiencing the world. Hence, we are left with a choice: to use them to see only pain, negativity, stress, and uncertainty, or to use them to look at things through a lens of gratitude, hope, resilience, optimism, and meaning. Happiness is not about lying to ourselves, but by adjusting our brain so that we see the ways to rise above the circumstances.

Archimedes said: "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world."

In a seesaw, the fulcrum is at the centre of the lever. If we have a heavy and a weak boy, then it does not work unless we move the fulcrum toward the heavier boy.

Our brains work exactly like that. Our power to maximize our potential is based on two important things. 1. Length of our lever-how much potential power and possibility we believe we have, and 2. The position of our fulcrum-the mindset with which we generate the power to change.

In practical terms, irrespective of whether you are a student, teacher, or an executive trying to better results, you don't need to try so hard. Our potential is not fixed. The more we move our

fulcrum (mind-set), the more our lever lengthens and so the more power we generate. Move the fulcrum to the positive mind-set, and the lever's power is magnified-ready to move everything up.

It is not the weight of the world that determines what we can accomplish. It is our fulcrum and lever.

### **Move the Fulcrum, Change Reality**

Relativity doesn't end with physics. Every second of our experience has to be measured through a relative and subjective brain. 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 the perspective at any moment, and by doing so change our experience of the world around us.

### **Turning Back the Clock**

In an astonishing experiment, a group of men 75 years old were brought to a retreat for a week. During that period they were shown all the things 20 years ago. The dress, the newspapers, the films, everything belonged to that period. Even their Id badges and pictures belonged to 55 years of age. They were asked to talk about the economy, politics of the same era. After the retreat, most of the men had increased physical strength, posture, perception, cognition, and short term memory.

Placebos are about 55-60 % as effective as most active medications in improving any medical condition including pain. The belief that they are taking an actual drug powerful enough to make the symptoms to disappear.

How does our relative perception of what is happening, or what we think will happen, can actually affect what does happen? One answer is that brain is organised to act on what we predict will happen next (expectancy theory). Neuroscientists explain that our expectations create brain patterns that can be just as real as those created by the events in the real world.

In one experiment, half of the cleaning staff employees were told of how much beneficial exercise they were getting through their job, and the other half was not given such a briefing. Several weeks later, after the experiment, found that the 1<sup>st</sup> group members had lost weight as well as cholesterol level. This was proved in several hospitals. No difference in work, but how their brains conceived the work they were doing. The mental construction of our daily activities, more than the activity itself, defines our reality.

The most successful people adopt a mind-set that not only makes their workdays bearable, but also helps them to work longer, harder and faster than their negative mind-set peers.

With a negative mind-set, long meetings can be draining your energy and your productivity. But what if, instead, you chose to see the meeting as an opportunity, and created your own objective? What if you forced yourself to learn three new things from it? It need not be about the actual content of the meeting only. You can learn from the speaker, how to (or how not to) make a good presentation. You can learn the best way to handle difficult questions from the colleagues.

We think our daily tasks just as tedious and drudgery as meetings. And it actually turns out like that. I love reading my books and consider that as "fun" and "playtime", and "enrichment." I told my friends that I was reading for pleasure, and realised that to be true. Ignore the

“deadline” mind-set which results in stress, and make it “lifeline” instead. It also helps if we stop focusing on end result of how we are going to use the reading material, and just focus on the pleasure of the means.

If we consider free time, hobby time, or family time as non-productive, then we will, in fact, make it a waste of time.

### **The Lever of Possibility**

Just as your mind-set about work affects your performance, so too does your mind-set about your own capability. The more you believe in your own ability to succeed, the more likely it is that you will.

Studies show that simply believing we can bring about positive change in our lives increases motivation and job performance; that success, in essence becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

What identity are you wearing today? If you are sporting a self-doubt, you will undercut your performance before you even begin. So when faced with a difficult task 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 that you have, rather than those you lack. Think of a time you have been in a similar circumstance in the past and performed well. Research has shown that a specific and concerted focus on your strengths during a difficult task produces the best results. You can use it in any situation.

When I have to give a lecture on a new material and I am unsure how it will be received, I try to focus on the fact that I am pretty good at reading people and how that helps me connect with the audience.

### **Leveraging Intelligence**

**More important still than believing in your own abilities is believing that you can improve these abilities.** People can be split into two categories: Those with a “fixed mind-set” believe that their capabilities are already set, while those with a “growth mind-set” believe that they can enhance their basic qualities through effort. They are not dismissive of the innate ability; they merely recognise that although people may differ in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests or temperaments, everyone can change and grow through application and experience. Fixed mind-set people miss choice opportunities for improvement and consistently underperform, while those with a “growth mind-set” watch their abilities move ever upward.

When we believe there will be positive payoff for our effort, we work harder instead of succumbing to helplessness.

### **Using the Fulcrum and Lever to Find Your Calling**

We view our work as a Job, Career, or a Calling. People with a Job see work as a chore and their pay check as a reward. They work because they have to and constantly look forward to the time they can spend away from their job. By contrast, people who view their work as a career work not only out of necessity, but also to advance and succeed. Finally, people with a calling view their work as an end in itself; their work is fulfilling not because of the external rewards but because they feel it contributes to their greater good, draws on their personal strengths, and gives them meaning and purpose. They find their work more rewarding and work

harder and longer. Generally, they are more likely to get ahead. What is interesting is this is true for any type of work.

So if you don't like your work, but can't change the job, then change your mind-set. Ask yourself what potential meaning and pleasure already exists in what you do. A janitor finds her work as simply cleaning, while another one feels that she is creating a healthy environment for the students.

Rewrite your "job description" into a "calling description." Think about how the same task can be written in a way that would entice others to apply for the job. The goal is not to misrepresent the work they do, but to highlight the meaning that can be derived from it. What are your personal goals in life? How can the current job tasks be connected to this larger purpose? Researchers have found that even the smallest tasks can be imbued with greater meaning when they are connected to personal goals and values. The more we can do this, the more likely we are to see the work as a calling.

On one side of a paper write down a task you are forced to perform at work that feels devoid of meaning. Then ask yourself: What is the purpose of this task? What will it accomplish? Draw an arrow on the right and write down your answer. If what you have written seems still unimportant, ask yourself again: What does this result lead to? Draw another arrow and write it down. Continue doing this until you get a result that is meaningful to you. In this way, you can connect every small thing you do to a larger picture, to a goal that keeps you motivated and energised.

A few choice words can alter a person's mind-set, which in turn can alter their accomplishments. A reminder of her innate intelligence by a teacher led to improvement in math test.

When a manager expresses faith in employee's skill, he doesn't just improve mood and motivation; he actually improves their likelihood of succeeding. Best managers view each interaction as an opportunity to prime their employees for excellence.

In a school experiment, after an intelligence test, a group of average students were randomly picked and told that they were academic superstars. At the end of the year, they were actually seen to be at the top. This phenomenon is called Pygmalion Effect: when our belief in another person's potential brings that potential to life.

Every Monday ask yourself three questions 1. Do you believe that the intelligence and skills of my employees are not fixed, but can be improved with effort? 2. Do I believe that employees want to make that effort, just as they want to find meaning and fulfilment in their jobs? 3. How am I conveying these beliefs in my daily words and actions?

While it is important to shift our fulcrum to a positive mind-set, we don't want to shift it too far to have unrealistic expectations about our potential.

### **Principle 3: The Tetris Effect**

#### **Training Your Brain to Capitalize on Possibility**

The Tetris effect stems from a very normal physical process that repeated playing triggers in their brains. They become stuck in something called "cognitive afterimage."

In our work world, as in our personal lives, we often are rewarded for noticing the problems that need solving, the stresses that need managing, and the injustices that need righting. Sometimes this can be very useful. The problem is that if we get stuck in only that pattern, even a paradise can become a hell. And worse, the better we get at scanning for the negative, the more we miss out on the positive-those things in life that bring us greater happiness, and in turn fuel our success. The good news is that we can train our brains to scan for the positive-for the possibilities dormant in every situation- and become experts at capitalizing on the Happiness Advantage.

### **Your Brain as Spam Filter**

On a daily basis, we are bombarded with competing demands on our attention to deal with this overload, our brains have a filter that only lets the most pertinent information through to our consciousness.

This filter is like a spam blocker on your email. Scientists estimate that we remember only one of over 100 pieces of information we receive; the rest effectively gets filtered out. Now this could be just fine if we could trust our spam filter to know exactly what is best for us. Unfortunately, we can't. These filters scan only for what they are programmed to find. If we have programmed our brains to delete the positive, that would be disastrous.

This selective perception is also why when we are looking for something, we see it everywhere.

Try this experiment. Close your eyes and think of the colour red. Picture it in mind's eye. Now open your eyes and look around your room. Is red popping out at you everywhere?

### **The Power of A Positive Tetris Effect**

When our brains constantly scan and focus on the positive, we profit from three of the most important tools available to us: happiness, gratitude, and optimism. Few things in our life are as integral to our well-being as gratitude. Consistently grateful people are more energetic, emotionally intelligent, forgiving, and less likely to be depressed, anxious, or lonely. Gratitude has proven to be a significant cause of positive outcomes.

### **Getting Stuck In A Positive Tetris Effect**

The best way to kick start this is to start making a daily list of good things in your job, your career, and your life. This way, your brain will be forced to scan the last 24 hrs. for potential positives-things that brought small or large laughs, feelings of accomplishments at work, a strengthened connection with the family, a glimmer of a ray of hope for the future. In just 5 minutes a day, this trains the brain to be more skilled at noticing and focussing on possibilities for personal and professional growth, and seizing opportunities to act on them.

This exercise has staying power. Those who wrote 3 good things in a day for a week were happier and less depressed at the 1, 3, and 6 month follow-ups. More amazing, even after stopping the exercise, they remained significantly happier and showed higher levels of optimism. The items you write down need not be profound or complicated, only specific.

A variation of this exercise is to write a sort journal entry about a positive experience. We have long known that venting about hardships and suffering can provide welcome relief, but researchers have found that journaling about positive experiences has at least an equally powerful effect. Experiments have shown that writing down positive experiences for 20

minutes, 3 times a week created large spikes of happiness, but three months later they even had fewer symptoms of illness.

### **Practice, Practice, Practice**

We can build this Tetris effect only through consistency. For this, we have to practice it enough to become a habit. The key here is to ritualize the task. For example, pick the same time each day to write down your gratitude list, and keep the necessary items easily accessible and convenient. You can set an alarm if you like. The more you involve others (family, friends), the more the benefits multiply.

### **Principle 4: Falling Up**

Capitalizing on the Downs to Build Upward Momentum

#### **Mapping The Way To Success**

The human brain is constantly creating and revising mental maps to help us navigate our way through the complex and ever changing world.

The most successful decisions come when we are thinking clearly, and creatively enough to recognise all the paths available to us, and accurately predict where the path will lead. The problem is that when we are stressed or in a crisis, many people miss the most important path of all: the path up.

On every mental map after crisis or adversity, there are three mental paths. One that keeps circling around where you are. Another one takes you to further negative consequences. The third path leads us from a failure or setback to place where we are stronger and more capable than before. To be sure, finding that path in challenging times is not easy. In a crisis, we tend to form incomplete maps, and find it difficult to know the best path. In fact, when we are hopeless and helpless, we stop believing that such a path exists.-so we don't even bother to look for it. The ability to find this path is the difference between those who are crippled by failure and those who rise above it.

Studies have shown that if we are able to conceive of a failure as an opportunity for growth, we are more likely to experience that growth. Conversely, if we conceive fall as the worst thing in the world, it becomes just that. Jim Collins 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.” With this we have the ability to move up not despite the setbacks, but because of them.

#### **Post Traumatic Growth**

A maxim- “what doesn't kill us makes us stronger.”

Many persons after suffering from trauma from serious ailments, loss of a loved one, or financial, found positive growth after that. This is in terms of increase in spirituality, compassion, better family and social relations, and personal growth.

However, this growth was possible only for those with a positive mind-set. People's ability to find a path up rests largely with how they conceive of the cards they have been dealt with. The

strategies for Adversarial growth include positive reinterpretation of the situation/event, optimism, acceptance, and coping mechanisms that include focusing on the problem head on.

“Eureka, We Failed!”

We all experience adversity of one kind or another in terms of failure, disappointments, suffering. However, with every setback comes some opportunity for growth that we can teach ourselves to see and take advantage of.

Tal Ben-Shahar: “things do not necessarily happen for the best, but some people are able to make the best out of things that happen.”

We know of many celebrities who have failed before becoming successful. Michael Jordon, Walt Disney (fired from newspaper office for not being creative), Beatles, Edison. For this reason, many venture capitalist will only hire managers who have already experienced their share of business flops.

Two shoe salesmen were sent to Africa in 1900s to assess opportunities. One reported, “Situation hopeless. They don’t wear shoes.” The other reported, “Glorious opportunity! They don’t have any shoes yet.”

If you are in a bank and a robber shot you in the arm, do you consider yourself lucky or unlucky?

Martin Seligman found that a consistent minority seemed immune to setbacks. No matter what difficulty they faced, they always bounced right back. He soon discovered that they all shared a positive way of interpreting adversity.

### **Learn Your ABCDs**

#### **A: Adversity, B: Belief, C: Consequence, D: Disputation**

Adversity is an event we can’t change. Belief is our reaction to the event; why we thought the event happened and what we think it means for the future. Is it permanent or pervasive? Are there any solutions, or do we think it is unsolvable? The consequences depend on one of the two beliefs.

Disputations involves first telling ourselves that our belief is just a belief, not a fact- and then challenging (or disputing) it.

And finally, if the adversity truly is bad, is it as bad as we first thought? This is called decatastrophizing.

Our fear of consequences is always worse than the consequences themselves.

Success is about more than simple resilience. It’s about using the downward momentum to propel ourselves in the opposite direction. It’s about capitalizing on the setbacks and adversity to become even happier, even more motivated, and even more successful.

### **Principle 5: The Zorro Circle**

How Limiting Your Focus to Small, Manageable Goals Can Expand Your Sphere of Power

#### **Circle of Control**

One of the biggest drivers of success is the belief that our behaviour matters; that we have control over our future. Yet when our stresses and workloads seem to mount faster than our ability to keep up, feeling of control are often the first things to go, especially when we try to tackle too much at once. If, however, we first concentrate our efforts on small manageable goals, we regain the feeling of control so crucial to our 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.

Interestingly, the gains in productivity, happiness and health have less to do with how much control we actually have and more with how much control we think we have.

Feeling a lack of control over pressure at work is as great a risk factor for heart disease as even high blood pressure.

### **Losing Control: The Duelling Brain**

Our actions are often determined by the brain's two duelling components: our knee jerk like emotional system (jerk) and our rational, cognitive system (thinker). The oldest part of the brain, evolutionary speaking is the jerk. It is used to "fight or flight" mode of survival response to threats. The thinker's purpose is think, then react.

Most our daily challenges are better served by the Thinker, but unfortunately, when we are feeling stressed the Jerk tend to takes over. Once the stress has reached a critical point, even the smallest setback can trigger brain's panic button. Then Jerk overpowers thinker's defences, spurring action without conscious thought. We have become victims of emotional hijacking.

### **Regaining Control, One Circle at A Time**

The first goal we need to conquer is the 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 the negative emotions, improving well-being and enhancing decision making skills. So whether you do it by writing down feelings in a journal or talking to a trusted co-worker or a confidant, verbalizing the stress and helplessness you are feeling is the first step toward regaining control.

Once you have 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. You can write these down on a piece of paper. The point is to tease apart the stresses that we have to let go because there are out of our hands, while at the same time identifying areas where our efforts will have a real impact, so that we can focus our energy accordingly.

Once this is done, identify one small goal you can quickly accomplish. By narrowing the scope of action, and focussing the energy and efforts, the likelihood of success increases. This is analogous to using a hose for washing a car by putting a thumb over hose's spout increasing the water pressure. By tackling one small challenge at a time-a narrow circle that slowly expands-we can relearn that our actions do have a direct effect on our outcomes, that we are largely the masters of our own fates. With an increasingly internal locus of control and a greater confidence in our abilities, we can then expand our efforts outward.

## **You Can't Sprint Your Way to A Marathon**

Trying to reach for stars all at once is a recipe for failure. Pushing the limits of possibility is important, just not all at once. That's why psychologists who specialize in goal setting theory advocate setting goals of moderate difficulty-not so easy that we don't have to try, but not so difficult that we are discouraged and give up. When the challenges we face are particularly challenging and the payoff remains far away, setting smaller, more manageable goals helps us build our confidence and celebrate our forward progress, and keeps us committed to tasks at hand. An advice for book writing is "Don't write a book, write a page."

The practice of finding and improving small problems has helped businesses flourish. This practice is referred to as Kaizan, which is a Japanese word for "continuous improvement." It involves focus on tiny, incremental changes-improving efficiency.

A student had a massively disorganized room where accidents could happen. He knew the problem, but the idea of tackling the massive problem felt completely overwhelming and he would always give up. So we began with his desk and found a small patch having a stack of papers on it, and traced a circle, just one foot in diameter around it. "Let's clear this off," I told Joey, "and put each paper in its rightful place." Then, instead of moving on to the rest of the desk right away, I told him to spend the next day defending the newly clean patch against any threats to order. Although even this was difficult for him, he managed and was genuinely pleased. So the next day we chose another corner of his desk and applied the same rule. With each subsequent day came one more clutter free circle-not to mention a greater sense of control and strengthened commitment to the project. A mere two weeks later, the room was a spotless shadow of the former self.

A cluttered desk is fundamentally no different from a cluttered in-box, a problem that haunts too many workers. In both instances, the things of our lives have gained control over the functionality of our lives, and productivity suffers as a result.

For handling a problem of unanswered emails for two months, I asked Barry to write down thoughts when he felt stressed about this problem. Then, I asked him to just tackle only new emails daily for 3-4 days. Once he started feeling in command, I asked him to go through one of the earliest day's unanswered mails at a time. I also asked him not to spend more than an hour answering mails. Without a time limit, even small, incremental tasks can quickly escalate back into an overwhelming challenge.

### **Principle 6: The 20 Second Rule**

#### **How To Turn Bad Habits into Good Ones by Minimizing Barriers to Change**

In life, knowledge is only part of the battle. Without action, knowledge is meaningless. Aristotle: To be excellent we cannot simply think or feel excellent, we must act excellently.

The fact of the matter is, positive habits are hard to keep, no matter how commonsensical they might be.

We are a mere bundle of habits. Given our natural tendency to act out of habit, James surmised, couldn't the key to sustaining positive change be to turn each desired action into a habit, so that it would come automatically, without much effort, thought, or choice? If we want create a lasting change, we should make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy. Habits are

like financial capital-forming one today is an investment that will automatically give out returns for years to come.

William James said, “A tendency to act only becomes effectively ingrained in us in proportion to the uninterrupted frequency with which the actions actually occur, and the brain grows to their use.”

### **The Paths of Least Resistance**

Inactivity is simply the easiest option since we follow the path of least resistance.

Unfortunately, though the passive leisure like watching TV and trolling around on Facebook, might be easier and more convenient, than biking or playing soccer, they don't offer the same rewards. Studies show that these activities are enjoyable and engaging for about 30 minutes, then they start sapping our energy, creating “psychic entropy”- that listless, apathetic feeling.

On the other hand, “active leisure “like hobbies, games, and sports enhance our concentration, engagement, motivation, and sense of enjoyment. Compared to TV watching, experiments show 2.5 times more enjoyment with hobbies and 3 times more enjoyment with sports. And yet, teenagers spend 4 times more time on watching TV than on sports or hobbies. The reason, it is incredibly difficult to overcome the inertia. Active leisure is more enjoyable, but it almost always requires more initial effort. This is called “activation energy.” The same energy, both physical and mental is needed of people to overcome inertia and kick-start a positive habit.

The advertisers and marketers make a living on the path of least resistance.

It's not the sheer number and volume of distractions that get us in trouble; it's the ease of access to them.

### **Redirecting the Path: The 20 second Rule**

If you want to practice guitar, you may need extra efforts to get it out of closet. If it is more than 20 seconds, the inertia overpowers. So, if you keep it easily accessible (less than 20 seconds of effort), you can do it easily. Lower the activation energy for habits you want to adopt, and raise it for the habits you want to avoid.

Stopping email or phone alerts, disabling automatic login and password, etc. help avoid distractions.

Limiting the choices we have to make can also help lower the barrier to positive change. Too much choice saps our reserves.

Each night before I sleep, I wrote down a plan for where I would exercise in the morning and what parts of my body I would focus on. Then, I put my sneakers right by my bed. Finally-and most important-I just went to sleep in my gym clothes.

### **Set Rules for Engagement**

Follow some simple rules known as “second order decisions”, these are essentially decisions about when to make decisions, like deciding ahead of time when, where, and how of doing things next day. For example, deciding to check emails only once per hour. Deciding whom to thank in a meeting, and before starting the meeting, publically doing so.

## **Principle 7: Social Investment**

### **Why Social Support Is Your Single Greatest Asset**

When we encounter an unexpected challenge or threat, the only way to save ourselves is to hold on tight to the people around us and not let go.

The most successful people hold tighter to their social support. Instead of divesting, they invest. Not only are these people happier, but they are more productive, engaged, energetic, and resilient. They know that their social relationships are the single greatest investment they can make in the Happiness Advantage.

Harvard Men Study: One of the longest running psychological studies of all time followed 268 men from their entrance to college in the late 1930s all the way through the present day. From the wealth of data, scientists have been able to identify the life circumstances and personal characteristics that distinguished the happiest, fullest lives from the least successful ones. In 2009, George Vaillant, the psychologist who directed the study for the last 40 years, told Atlantic Monthly that he could sum up the findings in one word: **“love-full stop.”** He further added, **“70 years of evidence that our relationships with other people matter, and matter more than anything else in the world.”**

Other psychologists have also concluded, **“Like food and air, we seem to need social relationships to thrive.** That’s because when we have a community of people we can count on-spouse, family, friends, colleagues-we multiply our emotional, intellectual, and physical resources. We bounce back from setbacks faster, accomplish more, and feel a greater sense of purpose.” First, social interactions jolt us with positivity in the moment, then, each of these single connections strengthens a relationship over time, which raises our happiness baseline permanently.

In a study appropriately titled “Very Happy People,” researchers sought out characteristics of the happiest 10 % among us. Turns out, there was one-and only one- characteristic that distinguished them from others: the strength of their social relationships. My empirical study of well-being among 1600 Harvard undergraduates found a similar result-social support was a far greater predictor of happiness than any other factor, more than GPA, family income, SAT scores, age, gender, or race.

We have such biological need for social support, our bodies can literally malfunction without it. For instance, lack of social contact can add 30 points to an adult’s blood pressure reading. In his seminal book *Loneliness*, psychologist John Cacioppo concluded based on 30 years of research that a dearth of social connections is just as deadly as certain diseases. It causes psychological harm as well. A national survey of 24000 workers found that men and women with few social ties were two to three times more likely to suffer from major depression than people with strong social bonds.

When we enjoy strong social support, we can accomplish impressive feats of resilience, and even extend the length of our lives. One study found that people who received emotional support during the 6 months of after heart attack were three times more likely to survive. A breast cancer support group actually doubled women’s life expectancy post-surgery. When set adrift, it seems, those of us who hold on to our raft mates, not just rafts, are the ones who will stay afloat.

Edison invented bulb with 30 assistants.

A study of 1000 highly successful professional men and women at the time of retirement cited work friendships as most motivating factor above financial gain and status.

### **Appreciating Assets**

Financial planners tell us that the surest way to grow our stock portfolios is to keep reinvesting the dividends. So it is with our social portfolios as well. Not only we need to invest in new relationships, we should always be reinvesting on our current relationships. The longer you hold them, the stronger they become.

When travelling down busy corridors, greet colleagues looking in their eyes. It triggers empathy and rapport. Ask interested questions.

We all know that important part of maintaining social bond is being there, both physically and emotionally, when someone is in need. However, studies show that how we support people during good times, more than bad times, affects the quality of relationship. Sharing upbeat news with someone is called “capitalization,” and helps multiply the benefits of the positive event as well as strengthen the bond between the two people involved. Responding warmly and enthusiastically to someone’s good news is very important.

Shelly Gable, a leading psychologist has found that there are four types of responses to someone’s good news, and only one of them contributes positively to social relationship. The winning response is both active and constructive; it offers enthusiastic support, as well as specific comments and follow-up questions (That’s wonderful! I am glad your boss noticed your good work. When does the promotion go into effect?). The passive one is (That’s nice.) Blatantly negative one (“you got the promotion? I am surprised they didn’t give it to Sally.) Both are equally harmful. The most destructive one is ignoring it and asking something else.

### **PART 3: The Ripple Effect**

The Mirror Neuron Effect: our brain cells, sense and mimic the feelings, actions, and physical sensations of another person.

Your colleagues are contagious. Our emotions are also contagious. When 3 persons are in a room, the most emotionally expressive person transmits his mood to others within two minutes. It is like second hand smoke. A boss with strong negative mood can spread it quickly to others in office.

Luckily, positive emotions are also contagious. There is evidence to show that changing your behaviour first-even your facial expression and posture-can dictate emotional change.

So the happier everyone is around you, the happier you will become. That is why we laugh more at a funny movie in a theatre full of laughing people.

The more genuinely expressive is someone, the more their mind-set and feelings spread.

One college study has shown that when students with low GPAs simply began rooming with higher scoring students, their GPAs increased.

Studies show that rapport strengthens between two people when they lock eyes. Eye contact makes mirror neurons fire.