

What Happy People Know: How the New Science of Happiness Can Change Your Life for the Better (Stauth, Cameron; Baker Ph.D., Dan)

Happiness is a way of life—an overriding outlook composed of qualities such as optimism, courage, love, and fulfillment.

That's one important thing that happy people know: Money doesn't bring happiness.

This biological circuitry of fear is the greatest enemy of happiness.

This fear system is our repository for past trauma, current tribulation, fear of the future, and archaic instinctual terrors.

This uncritical validation of feelings—which leads to the glorification of the victim role—is one of the many mistakes commonly perpetrated in the field of clinical psychology.

Even so, it's hard to talk anxiety lovers out of the glory of suffering. To them, it's the Red Badge of Worry. They even worry about not worrying.

No matter how much money people have, almost all of us want just a little bit more. But it never makes us happier. This is the failure of success.

More often than not, fear doesn't emerge as nail-biting, cold-feet terror, but surfaces instead as anger, perfectionism, pessimism, low-level anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation.

That was irrational, of course, considering his vast assets, but irrationality is what fear is all about. It hijacks the rational mind and recreates life in its own twisted image.

The 12 Qualities of Happiness

1. Love. This is the wellspring of happiness, renewable and everlasting. We often think that being loved is the best feeling in the world, but it's the second best. The best is loving someone else. Love is the polar opposite of fear, emotionally and neurologically. Thus, it is the antidote

to fear and the first step toward happiness. 2. Optimism. Optimism provides power over painful events. I used to think it was an attitude: seeing a glass as half-full instead of half-empty. But that felt artificial, a mere trick of perception. Then I suffered the worst event of my life. My son died. I thought the light had left my life forever. However, in my despair, I realized that my son had left me a legacy of love that was mine forever, and that if I could survive the loss of my child, nothing else could devastate me. When I realized this, I found that every hurtful event holds lessons, and that the more it hurts, the more you learn. Thus, I discovered the true meaning of optimism. Optimism is realizing that the more painful the event, the more profound the lesson. Once you bring this knowledge into your heart, you can never again look at any event as all bad. Optimism gives you power over fear of the future and over regret for the past. 3. Courage. This is your strongest weapon for overcoming the split-second power of the fear system. You can't rise above fear without courage, because fear is hardwired into your neural circuitry. There is no such thing as a "fear-ectomy." If fear is eternally programmed into your brain, though, so is courage. It comes from the neocortex and is a product of the spirit, the intellect, and the higher emotions of love and generosity. It is nature's natural balance for the fear that has helped us survive. It's the quality that allows us to thrive. 4. A sense of freedom. Nothing fills the soul like freedom. Freedom is choice, and choice is what makes us human. When we choose, we define who we are. Everyone has the power to make choices, but unhappy people don't know they have it. They think it's only for the rich. It's not. I've met a thousand rich people who didn't feel free. Choice is available to anyone who has the courage to exercise it. 5. Proactivity. Happy people participate in their own destinies and forge their own happiness. They don't wait for events or other people to make them happy. They're not passive victims. 6. Security. Happy people know that nothing, over time, lasts—not money, not approval, not even life itself. So they don't measure security with a calendar or a calculator. They simply like who they are. They're not slaves to popularity, longevity, or financial status. They know that security is an inside job. 7. Health. Happiness and health are interdependent. It's hard to be happy if you don't feel healthy, and it's hard to be healthy if you're not happy. Of special importance for happiness is healthy mood chemistry. You can have a happy life and not even know it if you're tortured by faulty mood chemistry. An imbalance of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine, for example, can

mask the happiness that lies beneath it. 8. Spirituality. Happy people aren't afraid to go beyond the boundaries of their own lives. They let go, and welcome extraordinary experiences. They have markedly less fear of death. They're not concerned about dying—they're concerned about not living. 9. Altruism. Unhappy people are usually too self-absorbed to be altruistic. But happy people know how good it feels. It connects you to others, gives you a purpose, and gets you outside yourself. 10. Perspective. Unhappy people tend to see things in absolute terms and often can't distinguish small problems from big ones. Happy people see shades of gray, and they know how to prioritize their problems and turn them into possibilities. They don't lose sight of life's big picture during bad times. 11. Humor. Humor is a shift of perception that gives people the guts to go on when life looks its worst. There is an abandonment in it that is close to enlightenment. It lifts suffering off the heart and hands it to the intellect and spirit, which alone have the power to heal it. 12. Purpose. Happy people know why they're here on earth. They're doing the things they were meant to do. If they died today, they would be satisfied with their lives.

Happiness is profound, but simple.

Our basic balance begins to shift—from spirit to survival—and we lose our love for life. Ultimately, we find that the things we have to do to survive are often the things that end up killing us.

To my way of thinking, that was a survival fear. Contemporary fear, I've found, almost always fits into one of two categories: fear of not having enough and fear of not being enough.

Having enough and being enough are the two factors that best ensure survival, so fears about them are rooted to the core of the neurological fear system. They're as deep as the fear of death, and they are closely related to it.

Being miserable is easy. Being happy is hard.

The Six Happiness Tools

1. **Appreciation.** This is the first and most fundamental happiness tool. Appreciation is the purest, strongest form of love. It is the outward-bound kind of love that asks for nothing and gives everything. Research now shows that it is physiologically impossible to be in a state of appreciation and a state of fear at the same time. Thus, appreciation is the antidote to fear. Although fear was the first feeling that developed during evolution, love is believed to be the second. It, too, has tremendous survival value; our early ancestors, who fought to survive during the day, huddled together for comfort at night. Fear is strong, but love is stronger, because it's a product of the neocortex, not the lower brain.
2. **Choice.** Choice is the father of freedom and the voice of the heart. Having no choices, or options, feels like being in jail. It leads to depression, anxiety, and the condition called learned helplessness. Choice can even govern perception. Anyone can choose the course of their lives, but only happy people do it. Unhappy people make the mistake of giving in to the automatic fear reaction, which limits their choices drastically, to just fighting, fleeing, or freezing. Happy people turn away from fear, and find that their intellects and spirits contain a vast warehouse of choices.
3. **Personal power.** This is the almost indefinable proactive force, similar to character, that gives you power over your feelings and power over your fate. Personal power has two components: taking responsibility and taking action. It means realizing that your life belongs to you and you alone, and then doing something about it. Personal power keeps you from being a victim. When your personal power is at its peak, you're secure. You don't need to be popular; you don't need to be right; you don't even need money in the bank. You can handle whatever life dishes out.
4. **Leading with your strengths.** When you give in to the automatic fear reaction, it makes you focus on your weaknesses, which only reinforces your fear. But when you take the path of the intellect and spirit, you naturally begin to focus on your strengths—and start to solve your situation. People often think that fixing their weaknesses will save them, but it rarely works. It's just too painful. Leading with your strengths feels good, and that's why it works. Simple but true. You'll never be complete until you learn to lead with your strengths every day.
5. **The power of language and stories.** We don't describe the world we see—we see the world we describe. Language, as the single most fundamental force of the human intellect, has the power to alter perception. We think in words, and these words have the power to limit us or to set us free; they can frighten us or evoke

our courage. Similarly, the stories we tell ourselves about our own lives eventually become our lives. We can tell healthy stories or horror stories. The choice is ours. 6. Multidimensional living. There are three primary components of life: relationships, health, and purpose (which is usually work). Many people, though, put all their energy into just one area. The most common choice is work, because work best assuages our survival fears of not having enough and not being enough. Other people become obsessed with relationships (because relationship is another word for love), and some people limit their lives in the name of longevity. None of this works. Happiness comes from a full life.

The most important message that the science of happiness tells us about money is, almost nobody thinks they have enough. In the dark recesses of our brains, free-floating fear tells us that we need more, more, more—or our very survival will be threatened.

For example, in a survey of college students, the percentage of those who yearned for financial success above all else almost doubled from 1970 to 1990, reaching 74 percent. Over the same period of time, the percentage of those who primarily aspired to have a meaningful life decreased from 76 percent to 43 percent.

This rampant, metastasizing materialism is not making our society happier. It's making us miserable. Virtually every one of the recent studies on money and happiness indicates that money makes people significantly happier only when it relieves abject poverty. Beyond that, money just doesn't do much for happiness. It doesn't matter whether you spend your money at Tiffany or Target—no amount makes a significant difference.

When people yearn for money, though, they don't realize that they're being driven by an innate sense of scarcity.

Does a Life of Leisure Increase Happiness? Leisure is one of those luxuries that's best in small portions. When it's all there is to life, it's as boring as being locked in jail.

One of the tales we tell ourselves is that wealth and leisure are a comfortable, complementary pair. Science shows that that's usually not true. The vast majority of millionaires in America are self-made, and one of the primary ways they gain their wealth is by sacrificing their leisure and freedom.

When happy people choose their jobs, they don't follow money—they follow their passions. When they do this, they tend not to worry too much about money, even if they're relatively poor, because they know they won't have to suffer to make more of it.

Ironically, people who follow their hearts often end up with plenty of money, because they usually become highly proficient at their work and they enjoy working long hours. Loving your job is the ultimate freedom. It means, in effect, that you never have to work—you just play hard and collect your check. You can't beat that for leisure.

Once Mohandas Gandhi was asked, "You have been working at least 15 hours a day, every day, for almost 50 years. Don't you think it's time for a vacation?" Gandhi replied, "I am always on vacation."

This expectation of status pointed out an important general principle in the science of happiness: Happiness depends to a significant degree upon expectations. If you inflate your expectations, you're begging to be unhappy. That's one of the worst problems with wealth—it always bloats expectation. Rich people whine about things that would delight most people.

Happy people get their status from within. Their status symbols are things like a happy family, good friends, and pride in their work.

Management means realizing that you can't control everybody and everything, and dealing with the world on its own terms—giving a little, taking a little. It works.

In the human mind, money is married to survival, and you will always be nagged by fear of money's scarcity, just as you will always be nagged by fear of the fate that survival holds off: death. Your heart should tell you to accept this fear.

Happy people, however, know that it's wise to regularly back away from life's banquet, so that pleasure will stay novel and refreshing. Unhappy people, including this film star, dive headlong into pleasure and try to wring every drop of gratification from it.

My friend and colleague Dr. Martin Seligman once did a fascinating exercise in which he asked a group of students to engage in two acts, one pleasurable and one altruistic. Virtually all of the students reported that the altruistic act made them happier than the pleasurable act. After the altruistic act, the rest of the day went better for almost all of them.

There's a better way. It's transcendence. Even though your black box of fears and traumas—your amygdala—will always be in your brain, you can transcend its pain. You can rise above it by funneling your mental energy into your spirit and intellect. Your powers of intellect and spirit can create new meaning out of old memories.

But focusing on weaknesses, like focusing on anything else that's negative, just reinforces fear. It limits your options to the sparse menu of the fear response: fighting, fleeing, and freezing.

Focusing on strengths works simply because it feels better than focusing on weakness. It creates energy, which is always necessary for transformation. Also, it's self-sustaining and it's full of rewards.

Courage, they say, is not the lack of fear, but the ability to take action in spite of it. But where does that ability come from?

In the ultimate analysis, human beings have only two essential, primal feelings: fear and love. Fear impels us to survive, and love enables us to thrive. This complementary pair of feelings has been the driving force of human history.

For you to be happy, love must lead this dance.

Appreciation is the highest, purest form of love. It is the type of love that can blossom even when it is not returned. It is the outward-bound, self-renewing form of love that has no dependence upon romantic attachment or family ties. People who truly appreciate feel the same

about the object of their appreciation whether it is present or absent. They appreciate it even if it is, by objective standards, not worthy of their appreciation. Appreciation asks for nothing, and gives everything.

What power grants the strength to overcome the sick, shaky feeling of fear? Only one power is that strong: love.

Most important of all, during active appreciation, the threatening messages from your amygdala and the anxious instincts of your brainstem are cut off, suddenly and surely, from access to your brain's neocortex, where they can fester, replicate themselves, and turn your stream of thoughts into a cold river of dread.

It is a fact of neurology that the brain cannot be in a state of appreciation and a state of fear at the same time. The two states may alternate, but are mutually exclusive.

Because fear is the greatest enemy of happiness, appreciation is the most important of the six major happiness tools. It is the source that gives power to the other tools.

In their hearts, there must certainly be a deep appreciation for life in general, and for other people in particular. This love, as much as their physical bravery, is the reason we regard them as heroes. It was appreciation that enabled

Military units have always been based on small, tightly bonded groups, the size of platoons, because leaders have always known that the strongest motivating force in the world is love of the people around you.

Only love is stronger than fear.

The firefighter I saw on TV could have been diminished by his ordeal, rather than revitalized by it. Some people look into the face of death and spend the rest of their lives running. But not him.

And so we continue, using love to find courage, and courage to find love, with tragedy certain in our mortal lives—and happiness as possible as ever.

Complacency is a house of cards, because if life teaches us anything, it's that problems and loss are inevitable. Happiness isn't the art of building a trouble-free life. It's the art of responding well when trouble strikes.

Take my word for it: Your worst memories will never fade.

I began to stop feeling as if my emotions depended mostly upon the actions of others and upon destiny itself. Life could batter me, but it couldn't make me hate anyone—not even myself.

The more I emptied myself of my energy and my love for others, the more I felt myself begin to fill up again with life and hope.

So on that otherwise ordinary day, I became an optimist. I learned what optimism really is: It's knowing that the more painful the event, the more profound the lesson.

Wisdom only comes the hard way. But when it comes, it can keep you from suffering even greater tragedies in the future, including the greatest tragedy of all, which is to waltz through life unaware, unconnected, and unfulfilled.

No matter what happens in life, there's always something left to love, and the love that remains is always stronger than anything that goes against it.

Thus, positive thoughts not only rescue the body, but also improve mental function, which then enhances brain biochemistry. Then brain biochemistry inspires positive thoughts, and the whole process begins again.

To perform the most fundamental form of the Appreciation Audit, reserve 3 to 5 minutes, preferably three times each day, to think about something you deeply appreciate. Many people do it during their commute, since there's not much else to do. It's best to spread it

throughout the day, to achieve the maximum physical and psychological effect. You can focus on anything. It can be your children and the love they bring to your life, or your husband or grandmother. It can be chocolate chip cookies, fishing, your first kiss, or the time you hit a home run. The important thing is the quality of the feeling. The Appreciation Audit is a form of focused meditation, which has been shown in numerous studies to have a powerful impact upon the balance of the autonomic nervous system, the brain's neurotransmitter profile, the cardiovascular profile, muscular tension, and the psyche. Its effects last long after the exercise has ended, sometimes for several hours.

Another variation is to concentrate on more than one subject. Some people construct Top Five lists, such as Top Five Favorite People, Top Five All-Time Vacations, Top Five Things I Love about My Son, Top Five Foods, or Top Five Things I'm Looking Forward To.

He realized that fear is always of the future, and that he had never been able to control the future before and wouldn't be able to now. His reptile of fear gradually grew weaker, and his spirit began to soar.

Life is love: bittersweet, vulnerable, ever-changing, imperfect—and eternally worthy of unbounded appreciation.

Besides, most problems aren't emergencies. They're chronic, complex situations that require rational thought, creativity, and the other emotionally intelligent qualities that fear snuffs out. Fear's sparse repertoire—fighting, fleeing, or freezing—is notoriously ineffective for resolving difficult situations.

1. Discovery. This is the stage in which people identify their own best qualities, which have helped them the most in the past. The questions could range from What am I best at? to What did I do previously that solved a similar situation?
2. Dream. This is the stage in which people envision possibilities. The questions could include What's the best thing that could come out of this problem? or Who can help me?
3. Design. This is the stage in which people chart a course of action. The question might be Where's the best place to start? or How long will this take to succeed?
4. Delivery. This is the action phase. In this phase, the best

questions might be What is the first thing I need to do? What's next?
What's the final step?

People often think they can hate some people and love others fully, but it's hard. Love and hate can't live in the same heart. Think of the happiest people you know. They probably don't love just their spouses and kids and hate a number of other people.

For the most part, hate is fear. We only hate the things we're afraid of. When someone hurts us terribly, we often hate him for it. But we hate him mostly because we're afraid he'll hurt us again—either literally or in our minds, which replay the scene of hurt again and again.

Forgiveness doesn't alter what has happened. The memory remains; the hurt is unchanged. But forgiveness grants us new eyes, through the grace of love, that see the hurt in a different way. Forgiveness isn't forgetting. It's just leaving behind your own hate and rising to the next level of life. It's not about letting the other guy off the hook—it's about letting yourself off the hook.

Self-hate is fear of not being loved. When this fear gets a foothold, it always finds a reason to justify its existence. Nobody's perfect, and if you're afraid you're not good enough to be loved, you'll always find an imperfection to feed that fear.

Altruism has been called the great paradox: When you give something to someone else, you're the one who feels best. Giving is getting.

I know you've experienced this. During the holidays, which do you anticipate with greater pleasure—the gifts you'll get, or the gifts you'll give?

Giving is the purest form of appreciation, because it's appreciation in action. It's not a philosophy; it's an experience.

Doing something good feels good, in and of itself. It awakens your love and bonds you with other people. When this bond is formed, it not only gives you a better feeling about the person you're helping, but about all people in general.

Because altruism is the purest form of appreciation, it empowers you to love people even when they don't love you.

Choice is the voice of the heart. It's honesty in action. That's why it's so powerful.

Possibilities, in fact, are not only ever-present, but indispensable. They are as necessary for the life of the mind as oxygen is for the life of the body.

The false perception of having no possibilities feels like jail. It creates a sensation of helplessness that is deadly to the mind and spirit. This helplessness leads to depression and anxiety, and often creates anger, obsessiveness, self-destructiveness, hopelessness, and a sense of victimization. I see people with this problem every day.

Choice, and only choice, is what makes each person unique.

Even though possibilities always exist, we lose sight of them when we are blinded by fear. This fear usually starts when we fail once too often, or when we are thwarted too many times by the people around us. When this happens, our problem-solving creativity shrivels. At worst, it narrows to just fighting, fleeing, and freezing. We become merely reactive, instead of proactive. Problems become prisons.

Freedom from these self-imposed prisons comes only when we suspend fear by evoking appreciation, envisioning all of our remaining possibilities, and then choosing one.

Dr. Seligman believed that having options and making choices is the very foundation of human psychological health. Life can be brutal, he said, but if we always have options, we'll always have hope. And hope, or optimism, he believed, was our greatest blessing—the one thing we still can have when everything else is gone.

This state strikes when people feel powerless to manage their own environments, and thus ensure their own survival. It brings the fears of not having enough and not being enough roiling to the surface. These fears become so overwhelming that many people don't even try to fight

back or flee—they just freeze, and passively wait for the threats to go away.

Learned helplessness can overtake almost anyone, but it most often occurs in three basic situations: when someone fails too many times, when someone is boxed in by a double-bind, lose-lose situation, or when someone is dominated by somebody else who takes away his opportunity to choose.

(Later on, I learned that in the realm of choice, it's always use-it-or-lose-it time.)

We change—for better or for worse. Depending upon what we choose.

he told me that he didn't believe in destiny anymore. We remake our destiny every day, he said, by what we do—and what we don't.

The results were a stunning confirmation of self-determination theory. The main thing that made the events feel good was the sense of being in charge of them.

He also found that this initial success could be a springboard for continued achievement, if students kept reaching their goals. When goals come from the heart, he said, "Success begets further success," and creates "a spiral of success."

Thus, choice is the human burden—and the human blessing. It is our only path to genuine appreciation of self, and this aspect of appreciation is absolutely indispensable for happiness. If you don't love yourself, you can't possibly love your life.

Every choice has consequences, and these consequences create our lives—for better or for worse.

This ability to alter perception is one of your greatest human abilities. It means that no matter how difficult your life may become, you will always have the power to rise above suffering. It means that you can choose a perspective on reality that will enrich you instead of diminish you.

This means that every urge you will ever have—including every fearful urge and every angry urge—contains a quarter-second window of opportunity in which you can disengage from that urge.

The significance of this is extraordinary. One-quarter of a second may not sound like much time, but in the arena of thought, it's a virtual eternity. It's more than enough time for you to choose to interpret perceptions differently. This quarter-second is your ultimate power over perception.

In every moment of life, we have the option of being automatically reactive—and limiting our options to just fighting, fleeing, or freezing—or using the life-changing quarter-second to engage in choice and expand our options.

There are other words for personal power. Probably the best is “character.” You could also call it strength, individuality, heart, will, or even charisma. All of these elements are part of personal power, but the whole of it is greater than the sum of its parts.

There are other words for personal power. Probably the best is “character.” You could also call it strength, individuality, heart, will, or even charisma. All of these elements are part of personal power, but the whole of it is greater than the sum of its parts. Ultimately,

Personal power is about doing. It's a moving, changing entity, like wind. Because it's about doing, it consists of two active forces: taking responsibility and taking action.

In the quest to build personal power, there are four extremely common beliefs that seem comforting, but are deadly foes. They are: 1. I've been victimized. 2. I'm entitled to more. 3. I'll be rescued. 4. Someone else is to blame. Those are the beliefs that had destroyed the rock star's personal power, and—if you'll be honest and really try to get it—you'll see that they're probably also beliefs that are holding down your personal power.

It's amazing, I'll mention, how many people take full responsibility for their own behavior, but refuse to take responsibility for their feelings. They think their feelings are a force of nature, wild and uncontrollable. Not so.

If you don't believe in what you're doing but still devote all your life's energies to it, your personal power disappears. It's not just other people and the cruelty of life that beat down the internal vital force of personal power. Often as not, we do it to ourselves—willingly, consciously, and gleefully. We just don't have the courage to live up to our values.

But I've met many people who have found themselves, gained a great deal of personal insight—and were still absolutely miserable. Finding yourself is just the beginning. The important thing is being yourself. Acting like yourself. That's harder. But it's that path that leads to personal power.

Being yourself requires courage. Sweat. Sacrifice. It means forgetting about what others want you to be and being who you are. It means living up to your values. Your values are the individualized beliefs that make you you. Without them, you—as an individual—cease to exist.

When people live up to their values, it gives them a sense of purpose, peace of mind, and fulfillment—all necessary ingredients for happiness. It allows their spirit to lead in the dance of the spirit and the reptile.

Victimization, Entitlement, Rescue, and Blame are so common, and so often tied together, that I've begun to describe them with an acronym. I call them the VERBs.

They carry their hurt forever. They begin to define themselves as their pain, and lose touch with their true selves. This rots the foundation of their personal power and warps their view of reality.

The most common instance of this plight is feeling victimized by one's childhood. This condition is pandemic.

But childhood ends. The memories don't, though. Old pain is still pain, and the recollections of it will always hurt. These days, however, it's widely considered a psychological pathology to still have painful childhood memories. Painful memories are supposed to be validated, explored, processed, and resolved—thus alchemizing them into happy memories. Now, that's crazy. There's no pathology in being troubled by a troublesome past. It's normal, a sign of health. It makes you human. As Dr. Martin Seligman has said, "It's as if some idiot raised the ante on what it takes to be a normal human being."

Life hurts. If it doesn't hurt some of the time, it's not life. But you can't allow yourself to get wrapped up in this hurt, constantly reliving it, fearing the future and grieving the past. That's victimization.

Victimization is more common than ever before, partly because of two multibillion-dollar professions: the psychology profession and the legal profession. Every day, lawyers and psychologists convince thousands of people that they have been victimized.

Entitlement is victimization waiting to happen.

Satisfaction without effort doesn't create happiness. It creates only dissipation, alienation, boredom, weakness, and a sense of worthlessness.

Thus, they borrowed a phrase from Alice in Wonderland, in which a contest for supremacy ended in a dodo bird's verdict: "Everyone has won—so all must have prizes!"

Blame is just the flip side of rescue. It's another way of ceding your personal power to somebody else. When you blame someone, you're telling her, "You have control over my feelings and fate, not I."

Even people who don't blame others often blame themselves. It feels tough and strong to blame yourself. But it's the opposite. It's not a sign of strength, but of fear. When you run into difficulties and take the fork in the road that leads to fear, a natural reaction is to blame yourself. Fear needs a bad guy, just as rescue needs a hero. But when you blame yourself, all you do is reinforce fear. You convince yourself that your

worst dread is real: You're not good enough! When you believe this, the wound you create becomes a huge emotional drain. It's as if a psychological artery has been severed, causing you to bleed out, until your personal power has been drained.

Even as this happens, though, many people are still proud of themselves, thinking that they are taking responsibility. Blame isn't responsibility. Responsibility is about using personal power and making changes. Blame is about sabotaging personal power and staying frozen in fear. Responsibility is a call to action; blame is a call to anger. Action solves problems; anger solves nothing. Anger is just fear wearing the mask of aggression. Because blame is inspired by fear, the strongest force against it is love.

And even when blame already exists, love wipes it away. The purest form of love—appreciation—creates compassion for others and for oneself. Blame wilts in the face of this far stronger force.

Job needed to make one of the most important perceptual shifts that exists: shifting his focus from his problems and weaknesses to his possibilities and strengths.

It's astonishing how strong most people are. With death inevitable and pain a part of every day, we still wake up each morning with new plans, and sleep each night with new dreams.

Happiness researcher Dr. Barbara Frederickson has noted that joy is probably the single most powerful trigger of exploration and creativity, and that love is by far the strongest force in creating human bonding and cooperation.

Wisdom almost always ushers in happiness, and was recently shown by Walter Bortz, M.D., of Stanford University, to be the best single predictor for aging well.

After all, is it not beautiful that suffering can create wisdom? What if suffering created only ... suffering? That would be tragic.

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said of suffering, “That which doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.” For the past 100 years, people have repeated this aphorism. God knows why. It’s stupid.

It all depends on how you respond to it.

However, if you respond with the neocortical powers of your spirit and intellect, you’ll have a chance to learn optimism, find meaning in your pain, become proactive—and achieve wisdom. But none of this will be possible unless you lead with your strengths. You can’t overcome suffering with anything less than your best.

You’re the hero of your own story.

Best Practices helps businesses focus on what they do best. Companies don’t last when they try to do all things adequately, at the expense of excellence in their strongest areas.

Almost every time I counsel guests at the Ranch, I ask them to identify their Best Personal Practices, using constructive questions like these. • What makes you happiest? • When were you happiest? • How did you become happy then? • What do you like most about yourself? • What creates that quality? • How do you make that quality last? • When did you have that quality the most? • How could you create more of it? • What gives you peace of mind? • What brings out the best in you? • Who appreciates you the most? Why? • What are your primary strengths? • What are your core beliefs? • What values do you live by? • Who is in your emotional support network? • What best helps you feel creative?

One of the advantages of Best Personal Practices is that it helps people distinguish their strengths from their dreams. Dreams are fine, but too many people confuse what they wish they were good at with what they really are good at. They live in a dream world.

You create your own perception and your own meaning, but reality is reality.

A good rule to follow in self-talk is to talk to yourself the way you want others to talk to you. Many people would never let other people berate them, and yet they talk to themselves like dogs. They tell themselves, “You’re fat!” or “You’re gonna screw up!” They think they’re challenging themselves to do better, but all they’re doing is pushing themselves down the path of fear.

She sighed from deep inside. “Story a my life.” It was one of her favorite phrases. Victims tend to use it a lot.

We all have different ways in which we can tell the story of our lives. Some work, and some don’t. I call the ones that work healthy stories, and the ones that don’t horror stories.

How do you tell the story of your life? Take a moment and tell yourself the condensed version right now, in about the same way you usually do when you meet people. Don’t gild the lily—be honest.

“I basically mean, how are you doing at the three most important elements of your life? Your sense of purpose. Your health. Your relationships. Those are the basics of multidimensional living—you know, a full life. Hardly anybody’s happy without a full life.”

She seemed pleased, as if she’d given the right answer on a quiz. But I wasn’t pleased. I was hearing a lot of things that made me concerned: negative language, a horror story version of her life, a lack of appreciation for what she had, a feeling of having no choices, a preoccupation with her weaknesses, and no real sense of taking responsibility with personal power.

I was also hearing the single most common cry of the American people: My job is killing me! We work to survive—obeying our most primal instinct—but then we find that the things we do to survive are the things that end up killing us.

Over time, I realized my life was better than I’d thought, if I just took time to live it.

To get to happiness, or anywhere else, you've got to decide what you really want, and then put your energy where it will do the most good. If you do that, you'll find plenty of time.

You have, quite literally, all the time in the world. You have exactly as much time as the richest person in the world, the most powerful person, and the wisest person: 24 hours each day. Time is not a tyrant. Time is the great equalizer.

Studies of the subjective sense of time show that when people are engaged in things they love, time flows at the pace they dictate: fast

Boredom is one of the worst possible stressors.

Others think they can escape stress by not working at all. But that means living a life without purpose, and that's like trying to live on cotton candy. Boredom is one of the worst possible stressors. Your

"Every day, do something you love."

The key to feeling healthy is simple: Appreciate the health you have, and show your appreciation by doing as much with it as you can.

"It's this: Every moment that's ever been, or ever will be, is gone the instant it's begun. So life is loss. And the secret of happiness is to learn to love the moment more than you mourn the loss."