

**The 7
Critical
Steps to**

Happiness

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INTRODUCTION

In the movie, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, Judi Dench's character, Evelyn, says,

“Nothing here has worked out quite as I expected.”

Maggie Smith's character, Muriel, responds,

"Most things don't. But you know, sometimes what happens instead is the good stuff."

Brief but powerful, this short exchange tells us a lot about how to achieve happiness.

What comes to mind when you think of "happiness?" Does it mean joy or excitement? How about comfort or fulfillment or peace or being satisfied? How about feeling loved? Happiness means different things to different people, but we know it when we feel it.

One thing it must mean is loving and accepting ourselves for who we are. Yet, from an early age we all receive criticism from others. Often these people are simply trying to train us in how to live safely and well. Parents and teachers and society all have rules for our benefit; these rules can be interpreted as criticism even when they are

positive, and we receive a great deal of negative criticism along the way as well.

We don't like criticism from others, but from a very early age we internalize it and begin to criticize ourselves. Studies have shown that as much as 87% of our self talk is negative.

Because of this, our self-esteem is threatened from an early age. We want acceptance from others, but we don't even give it to ourselves. All the negative emotions and all the shades of insecurity (fear, anger, hate, jealousy, envy, depression, anxiety, and sadness) begin by the time we're toddlers. We can combine all this under the umbrella of unhappiness; unhappiness drains our energy, distracts us, and causes us to act in self-defeating ways.

Unhappiness doesn't have to be our fate. Our first step toward happiness requires that we confront and deal with our fears. Everyone has them – EVERYONE – fears are natural, but every – EVERYONE – can overcome them and make peace with them. Our second step toward happiness is to learn some techniques for positive self-talk and behavior.

Like anything else of value, happiness takes some work, but it can be achieved. These ebook will show you first, how to fight fear and live peacefully with uncertainty, and second, how to think and act to facilitate happiness.

1. HAPPINESS IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF FEAR

Since unhappiness comes from a set of beliefs that we learn and perpetuate, isn't it logical to you that we can become happier by challenging and changing those beliefs? You are right, we can. We can make some basic decisions and implement them on a daily basis. At some point, we can even replace the old thinking with new thinking so that choosing the option for happiness becomes automatic. There will always be new challenges to our thinking, but we can meet those challenges successfully.

Happiness is not magic, and it's not magical thinking. It doesn't belong to a lucky few. Moving from a state where you experience a lot of negative emotions like anxiety and depression to happiness requires commitment and courage.

If you want to be happy, you have to entertain the possibility that you can be. Many people come to believe very early in life that life is a game they can't win. They spend the rest of their lives collecting evidence to prove that they are incompetent, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here are two facts that might surprise you

- There are only two emotions: fear and love.
- All fear is the fear of loss.

From the time we leave the safety and comfort of the womb, we are bombarded with various messages to tell us we will lose. In the womb we had comfort and security and nurturance without having to do anything. Inevitably, we experience a series of losses during the ordinary events of growing up which cause us to become preoccupied with avoiding loss instead of with celebrating life.

Norman Cousins once said, "The tragedy of life is not death, rather it is what we allow to die within us while we live." He's right, you know. In the areas of your life that aren't working, how much denial and avoidance of loss are you practicing? How many of these self-protective games have you played?

- **Quit before you start.** If you don't enter the game (that's any aspect of life you're avoiding), you can't lose.
- **Quit in mid-stream.** If you quit before the game is over, you might be a quitter, but you've saved yourself from being a "loser."
- **"That's OK, I didn't care anyway."** You never committed to it anyway, so it doesn't matter that you lost.
- **Dumb game.** If you decide that the game's stupid, it doesn't matter that you lost.
- **Endless game.** If you keep halfheartedly playing the game without ever coming to a place where you win or lose, then at least you haven't lost.

Did you find yourself in one of these? Just about everyone does. If you saw yourself, GOOD! You just took the first step to turn yourself around. That takes courage, but you can't change what you can't see.

The next step is to make a commitment; you need to commit yourself to changing both your attitude and your behavior. Spend some time looking at the areas of your life that you're unhappy with – what are these areas and what negative thinking and avoidance behavior are you practicing in these areas? Now, let's begin to discover how to confront this thinking.

In his excellent book, *What Happy People Know*, Dr. Dan Baker talks about fear and love:

“We need to be willing to charge headlong into the inferno of our most horrific fears – eyes open, intellect and spirit at the ready.... That takes courage, and that's when courage is one of the prerequisites for happiness. But where does that ability come from? What power grants the strength to overcome the sick, shaky feeling of fear? Only one power is that strong: love. In the ultimate analysis, human beings have only two essential, primal feelings: fear and love. Fear compels us to survive, and love enables us to thrive. ... For you to be happy, love must lead this dance.”

Dr. Baker goes on to talk about appreciation as the highest, purest form of love. It's higher than romantic love,

the love parents have for children, or the love children have for parents. It's the strongest love there is, and it's the only thing strong enough to be the antidote to fear.

Dr. Baker describes his feelings during the loss of his infant son. It was at this time in his life that he discovered the feeling of what he calls "Appreciation." He felt that his son, even with his brief life, was a gift full of joy and love whose presence would never leave him. On Dr. Baker's part, he was feeling an unselfish love, the purest form of love, the love he calls appreciation.

An attitude of appreciation can help you survive all the difficulties in this world without being destroyed by them. It's the type of love that allows you to enjoy an experience while being able to let go. This attitude can help you when you lose loved ones, when unfortunate things happen, and even with confronting your own death. You face the fact that these negative things happen and you've chosen to experience and enjoy the good things, including your own life, while you have them. Dr. Baker concludes that the constant fear of loss is what creates our unhappiness and that once we face and accept this, we will be able to be happy.

Dr. Brené Brown states some similar ideas in her book, *Daring Greatly*. She says that our unhappiness is caused by anticipation of things going wrong. Using herself as an example, she talks about how we all suit up in our suits of armor in an attempt to keep ourselves safe from all the

negative things in the world. The problem is, of course, this doesn't keep the bad things from happening, but it does shut out a lot of the good things, including all of our positive emotions. She believes that we lose so much more than we win because of negative projections. Her solution is to know who you are, to believe in your inherent worth, and to face things as they come.

I recommend both of these books to you. They are excellent in their courage and simplicity. Telling the truth to yourself and standing in your courage are not easy things to do, but they will bring you the happiness you are looking for.

Replacing fear with truth and courage is the road to happiness. The following chapters will help you confront your negative thinking and behavior and replace it with truthful, courageous thinking and behavior. These are skills you or anyone else can learn if you have a true desire to do so.

2. HAPPINESS IS AN OPTION: CHOOSE IT

If we're so smart, why aren't we happy? For one thing, a lot of us don't really believe it's possible. But the secret is - happiness is a choice, just as unhappiness is a choice.

You don't believe me? You probably have lots of reasons not to. You may have faced external circumstances that challenged you and even threatened your survival. You may have internal demons that challenge your relationships or career or friendships or your own peace of mind. You may be full of confusion and doubts and can't see your way to being happy until you have answers for these things.

Many of us accept the fact that unhappiness is a natural state for us. We accept it, and fight like brave soldiers to survive in spite of it. We trained ourselves to be unhappy through thousands and thousands of negative responses. We can train ourselves to be happy by choosing, time after time, the response that will give us happiness.

In the past we responded with anger, impatience, jealousy, and fear, but each time we choose peace, acceptance, forgiveness, and love, we are telling ourselves that this is an option. Remember the old question, "Which would you rather be, happy or right?" Well, this choice comes down to "Would you rather dwell on being right and be unhappy, or would you rather dwell on having a response that makes

you happy." "Right" is subjective. It doesn't make you wrong or weak to choose being happy; it makes you smart.

3. PUT HAPPINESS FIRST

One thing we can agree on is that we all want to be happy, right? You might think so, but studies of people in every stage of life have shown that we virtually never put happiness first. It is always a by-product of something else and never the main event.

When you look at this breakdown, you might agree that it sounds fairly accurate:

Question: "What will make you happy?"

- Elementary school – children in third grade listed their wants as trips to the amusement park, dolls that talk, bicycles, no more homework, and video games.
- High school students – this age group wanted to be popular, to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, to excel in sports, to get a drivers license, they have nice clothes, and get into a good college.
- Mid-20's group – this group wanted a meaningful relationship, a better job, more money, a good apartment.
- Mid-40's group – this group wanted better relationships with their spouses, more respectful children, better job opportunities, financial security, less stress, and more personal time.
- Mid-60's group – this group wanted health, security, respect from others, status in the community. Once in a while, they mention peace or comfort or even happiness.

Never was the word " happiness" mentioned, but when people of every age were asked why they wanted bicycles or a drivers license or a better job, they always said it was because that would make them happy. They believed that happiness would be the end result of obtaining all of these things, but they never stated it directly. The result of that is that they're putting off their happiness until they have the things they think will give it to them. The solution is to choose to be happy now while they're working for whatever it is they desire.

In many cases, happiness is as easy as realization of it. What's standing in the way of happiness is all the negative self talk and training that brought us to a point where we thought we had to have something – whatever that thing is – in order to be happy. In many cases, it's just as easy as flipping a switch.

The solution, then, is as simple as making the decision to be happy now.

4. TELL THE TRUTH

Have you ever come across the type of person that you felt you just couldn't trust for some reason? You didn't know exactly what it was, but he just wasn't on the level. Or how about the type of person who always has a story, it's just not a story you believe. Most of us have come across those types – they're easy to spot because they're obvious. The truth is, though, we all have some “masking” in us.

As we were growing up and forming our ideas about how to act safely in this world, we all began to wear masks in varying degrees. We say and do the socially acceptable things, and we defer to people in authority over us, no matter what our age. We've been doing it for so long and it's so automatic, that many of us have no idea what we really think or feel. We do it because we don't want to be rejected by others and because we're not so sure about ourselves to begin with.

These masks keep us safe. They also imprison us. All of our “shoulds” and “have to's” and “ought to's” obscure who we really are. Some people are afraid of repercussions if they decide to be more authentically themselves. But authenticity is not a license to be boorish, and most people know that, so fear of repercussions is invalid. A few people may be threatened by your authenticity in and of itself, but more people will probably welcome it, and

studies have shown that the more authentic you are, the more authentic people you attract.

The more people trust themselves and are comfortable with themselves, the more authentic they become in what they say and in their behavior. The more people give up their masks, the more they can explore and celebrate their real self. This releases all the energy that went into maintaining their masks so that it can be put into celebrating their lives.

Do a little investigating into what you think and feel. Is an authentic? Is it working well for you? Is it time to replace those old thoughts and feelings with more authentic ones, ones that represent who you really are.

We are all changing and growing all the time. Choose the beliefs, feelings, and values that are real for you now. You will be freer, more alive, and happier.

5. LET IT GO

The surprising thing about judging is that the more judgmental we are about others, the more judgmental we are about ourselves. The real reason to let things go is that we ourselves will benefit from it.

Judgment is all around us all the time. We learned it as children. We heard from parents, friends, religious leaders, and the media. So, we began to do it ourselves at an early age. The result of all that judging is that we have a lot of opinions; many of them may easily be based on bias that we have learned in the past but may not be valid today.

Our habit of judging is exhausting since, now more than ever, we are bombarded by the media with more things to judge. Furthermore, media concentration on negative events leaves us stressed and anxious.

Another aspect of judgment is forgiveness. People have a problem with forgiveness because they feel that if they forgive someone who did something wrong, they are letting that person off the hook. So, a way to look at that is to concentrate on what it is doing for you, not what it is doing for the other person. When you let something go, you are freeing yourself from that burden of resentment that you have been carrying around with you. You have become more compassionate person. The great benefit is not in your compassion for the person who wronged you,

but in the compassion you are showing for yourself. By becoming less judgmental, you have freed yourself. It's not an easy concept to understand or to practice, but it works.

Take a look at all the people and things you are judging. Are your judgments valid? One question to ask yourself in each case: "Is this hurting me or helping me?" If it's not helping you, you should try to drop it. Does that sound simplistic? It's really not. We are talking about happiness, so the bottom line is to let go of whatever is hurting you. It never had any value. The more negative judgments you can release, the greater your happiness and freedom will be.

6. BE HERE NOW

Remember the statement, "All fear is fear of loss."? Closely connected with that idea is the idea that unhappiness exists when we think about or regret something in the past or when we worry about something in the future. When we live in the present moment completely, we don't experience unhappiness.

Have you ever known someone who wanted something so much but was afraid she wouldn't get it (for instance, a woman who wants to get married or have a baby) that she can't be happy in the present moment? Or, have you ever known someone who is so unhappy because of an event in the past (for instance, loss of a spouse through death or divorce) that he can't be happy in the present moment? I think we all have. But this is a choice those people make, knowingly or unknowingly. If they choose to let go of that memory or that fear in the present moment, they could begin to be happy. It doesn't mean giving up on their dreams or ignoring the memory of their loved ones; it means choosing happiness now.

Maybe, like those people, you are concentrating on something in the past or something you are afraid you won't get in the future to the extent that you can't enjoy today.

The difference between people who live unhappy lives and those who go on to thrive is not what happened or didn't happen to them, but how they reacted to it.

Living in the present will increase your happiness for another, obvious reason. When you increase your attention on something, you increase your ability to enjoy it. Make a conscious decision to be present in each moment. It increases your power and effectiveness and deepens your experience.

Letting go of the past and the future and fully enjoying the present will increase your happiness.

7. BE HEALTHY TO BE HAPPY

Your attitude can go a long way toward making you happy. How conscientious you are about checking your attitude to make sure that you're telling yourself the truth and confronting your negativity will make a big difference to your happiness. But I think you have to agree that without good health, it's impossible to maintain peak happiness.

Take a look at this list and pick out something to do that will help you improve your health and maintain it.

1. Exercise – did you know that people who exercise regularly live about 5 to 7 years longer than inactive people? Try to get about 30 minutes of exercise on most days.

2. Watch Your Weight – obesity is linked to heart disease, type II diabetes, several other health conditions, and reduced life expectancy. Find out what your ideal weight is and find a plan to help you get there. It's easier than ever these days because we all have more options. Do it.

3. Stop smoking – people who smoke die about 10 years earlier than if they had never smoked, BUT if you stop smoking, you can get most of those years back.

4. Get enough sleep – get the amount of sleep that is right for you. Doctors generally recommend around seven

hours per night. It helps to repair your body and regenerate you overall.

5. Eat smart – it's easier than ever these days to eat healthfully because we have a lot of choices. To make it simple, try to build your diet around vegetables and fruits, lean sources of protein, and complex carbohydrates. If you take the time to learn a little bit about good nutrition and food choices, you'll find that there's enough out there to choose from so that you can be healthy and not feel deprived.

6. Floss – you might not know how important this is, and not just for your teeth. Flossing removes bacteria that could otherwise cause inflammation in your gums. This inflammation activates your body's inflammatory response; this in turn raises your blood pressure and puts you at risk for heart disease and stroke. It can also damage brain tissue. Studies are showing that inflammation is at the core of much disease today; flossing is an easy way to guard your body against inflammation.

7. Socialize – people with a strong social network of family and friends live longer than those who are not connected to others. Connection is an antidote for stress.

8. Get a check up – you will live a longer, healthier life if potential problems like diabetes or heart disease are caught early.

These are minimal things you can do to stay happy and healthy. Consider them. They take a little work, but there's a great payoff.

CONCLUSION

Are you thinking by now that happiness sounds like it's a lot of work? I agree. But isn't being miserable a lot of work, too? Not many things are more exhausting than depression. Or disappointment. Or all the other negative things that we feel through our negative self talk, negative attitude, and negative reactions.

If you're skeptical about how well this approach to consciously seeking happiness will work for you, why not give it a try? If it's too much trouble, your misery will be waiting for you to reclaim it.

I wish you great happiness.

BONUS: 20 GREAT HAPPINESS QUOTATIONS

1. The secret of happiness is not in doing what one likes, but is liking what one has to do. – Sir James M Barrie

2. There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval. – George Sanayana

3. But what is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads? – Albert Camus

4. There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will. – Epictetus

5. Happiness depends on being free, and freedom depends on being courageous. – Thucydides.

6. Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence. – Aristotle

7. Our greatest happiness does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed us, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits. – Thomas Jefferson

8. Happiness is experienced when your life gives you what you are willing to accept. – Ken Keyes Jr

9. To win one's joy through struggle is better than to yield to melancholy. – Andrew Gide

10. Nine requisites for contented living: Health enough to make work a pleasure. Well enough to support your needs. Strength to battle with difficulties and overcome them. Grace enough to confess your sins and forsake them. Patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished. Charity enough to see some good in your neighbor. Love enough to move you to be useful and helpful to others. Faith enough to make real the things of God. Hope enough to remove all anxious fears concerning the future. – Johann von Goethe

11. All animals except man know that the principle business of life is to enjoy it. – Samuel Butler

12. It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is. – Erasmus.

13. One is happy as a result of one's own efforts – once one knows the necessary ingredients of happiness – simple tastes, a certain degree of courage, self-denial to a point, love of work, and, above all, a clear conscience. – George Sand

14. Some pursue happiness, others create it. – Anon

15. No man is more cheated than the selfish man. – Henry Ward Beecher

16. Five great enemies to peace inhabit us: avarice, ambition, envy, anger and pride. If those enemies were to be banished, we should infallibly enjoy perpetual peace. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

17 Fear less, hope more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; love more, and all good things will be yours. – Swedish proverb

18. Few are they who have never had the chance to achieve happiness... And fewer are those who have taken that chance. – Andre Maurois

19. Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be. – Abraham Lincoln

20. Happiness is: a good martini, a good meal, a good cigar and a good woman...or bad woman, depending on how much happiness you can stand. – George Burns