

# THE SKILLS OF HAPPINESS

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*White Pine Mountain*

living & leading abundantly

## THE SKILLS OF HAPPINESS

*Ever feel like this? (I know I have!)*



## THE SKILLS OF HAPPINESS

*The skills of happiness*

The following presentation is about happiness. Specifically, it is about developing an underlying and predominant sense of well-being and contentment that one can have even in times of adversity and setback. Within this presentation is a definition of happiness, a summary of research that suggests why it is so important to achieve happiness and a number of dead ends we often encounter in our pursuit of happiness. Finally it covers a set of

*skills that lead to peace about the past, confidence in the future and joy and exuberance in the present*

– or, skills that lead to happiness.\*

\*All so you don't feel like the squirrel in the cartoon.

## *The science of positive psychology*

For its first 150 years, the field of psychology dealt almost exclusively with pathological issues. Beginning in 1998, the focus began to expand beyond illness to include what leads to meaningful, flourishing, joyous living... or what leads to happiness.

There has been extensive research in terms of what does it really mean to live happily, what does and doesn't lead to happiness, what are the benefits of being happy and what decisions or actions we can take to increase our level of happiness.

*This emerging field is called  
"positive psychology"*

and it is the foundation of this presentation.

Among the findings of this new research is that there are three primary determinants of our happiness: genetics (set point), circumstances and voluntary choices (how we choose to view and respond to our circumstances).

The research further suggests that set point is about 50% of our happiness, circumstances only 10% and voluntary choices 40%.

Since we can do nothing to change our set point and the only way to change circumstances is through the choices we make, the remainder of this presentation deals with voluntary choices.

### Choices That Lead to Happiness

$$\text{Happiness} = \text{Set Point} + \text{Circumstances} + \text{Voluntary Choices}$$

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
1. Forgiveness	1. Doing now what I am doing now	1. Faith
2. Gratitude	2. Honoring mind/body/spirit	2. Optimism
	3. Being Altruistic	3. Flexibility
	4. Thinking with abundance	4. Openness ("FOFO")
	5. Mastering our stories	
	6. Finding meaning/purpose/flow	
	7. Cherishing relationships	

## THE SKILLS OF HAPPINESS

### *Defining happiness*

Happy people have an underlying, predominant sense of well-being and contentment.

*They remember the past with serenity, anticipate the future with confidence and experience the present with joy and exuberance.*

This attitude is sourced from a life integrated by meaningful purpose and sound principles and enhanced by healthy relationships.



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### *Why it is worthy of pursuit (Nun Study)*

There are hundreds of studies that continually suggest people who are happy do better in almost every aspect of life. I have chosen to summarize two of the most famous, beginning with the Nun Study.

In 1932, 180 Nuns entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Milwaukee, WI. They each wrote a novitiate essay on admittance. In 2000, researchers sorted their essays based on joyfulness as expressed in each essay and then separated them into quartiles from the most to the least joyful. They then looked at the longevity of the nuns involved. What they found was astounding.

*The most cheerful quartile, on average, lived 19% longer than the least cheerful.*

	Alive at 85	Alive at 95
Most Cheerful	90%	54%
Least Cheerful	34%	11%

A recent Mayo Clinic study found similar results, confirming the relationship between happiness and longevity.

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### *Why it is worthy of pursuit* (Mills College Study)

The Mills College Study also demonstrates the value of happiness. Researchers separated women on the basis of their smiles from their 1960 graduating Mills College year book pictures into either Pan American smiles (fake smiles) or Duchenne Smiles (genuine smiles).\*

*Astonishingly Duchenne smilers were significantly more likely to be married, to stay married and to experience more personal well-being.*

Other studies have been done with baseball cards and elementary school student pictures, all with fairly similar results.



Pan American



Duchenne

\* There are 43 muscles that control our facial expression. Two of these muscles, which are critical to smiling, cannot be controlled voluntarily, but create a smile that can only be achieved if one genuinely feels joy. A genuine smile is called a Duchenne Smile.

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### *How we go astray*

There are a number of dead ends on the road to happiness. They often appear at first to offer a route to happiness, but almost always disappoint and often lead to downright misery.

#### **1. Pleasure dead end**

“So called pleasures, when they go beyond a certain limit, are but punishments.” –Seneca  
Use pleasure to be amused, not abused.

#### **2. Now dead end**

Don't trade off what you want MOST for what you want NOW.

#### **3. When/if dead end**

Don't wait to be happy. Happiness is now.  
No one/nothing is coming to make you happy.

#### **4. Money dead end**

Money doesn't buy happiness... but it sure can help!  
Treat \$ as a resource, not a means to acquire status.

#### **5. Sympathy dead end**

Grief/anger/remorse are stages... move through them.  
Don't use negative emotions to manipulate others.

## THE SKILLS OF HAPPINESS

### *Finding peace with the past, confidence in the future and joy in the present*

Happiness is a skill, in fact, it is a set of skills. Like any skill, we might be better or worse than someone else because of genetics, but like any skill, the skills of happiness can be developed with focus and practice. In other words,

*we can become happier through practicing the skills of happiness.*

The remainder of this presentation sets forth the skills that lead to happiness, first those that lead to peace with the past, then those that garner confidence about the future and finally, those skills that let us relish the present where so much joy is to be found.

$$H = S + C + V$$

**HAPPINESS = Set Point + Circumstances + Voluntary Choices**

## *Finding peace with the past*

### **1. Forgiveness**

This is probably the most important skill of happiness. By forgiving, we are eliminating bad things from our past. Forgiveness is two very distinct and separate skills. Forgiving others is about releasing the desire for vengeance, while forgiving ourselves is about self-esteem and the belief that we are worthy of happiness. There are only four things we can do with hurts from the past: we can hold on to them, we can forget them, we can repress them, or we can forgive.

*Forgiveness is the only action which we can voluntarily take that leads to happiness.*

Forgiveness is like Tide – “It gets the dirt out!”

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### **2. Gratitude**

It is difficult to be happy without feeling gratitude and when we do feel grateful it is hard not to be happy. Gratitude is a skill which enables us to focus on and hold on to good things about our past. Researchers have found that if we would simply write in a journal at the end of each day three things for which we are grateful, we measurably increase our level of happiness.

## *Finding confidence in the future*

Much of the stress we face in life is caused by our fixed notion of how the future should unfold and our inability to adjust to the merry diversions the universe will invariably take. Planning for the future is great, being rigid about how it unfolds is not. Genuinely happy people “marry the future,” meaning they adjust to it and they do so, I believe, because they possess four fundamental happiness skills I call “FOFO,” for Faith, Optimism, Flexibility and Openness. Below is a brief explanation of each.

### **1. Faith**

Imagination without faith is a cruel master. Faith entails believing that the universe is benevolent. While it may not bring us what we want, it will always bring us what we need.

### **2. Optimism**

Happiness and optimism correlate almost one to one. We all have the ability to think optimistically and doing so is advantageous to our lives and our happiness. Optimists deal better with setbacks because they see setbacks as temporary, specific to the event and controllable (rather than permanent, pervasive and uncontrollable).

### **3. Flexibility**

When we look to the future, we tend to see one pathway forward when in fact there are a million pathways. Being flexible enough to adjust to variations in life leads to greater happiness.

### **4. Openness**

When the future doesn't turn out the way we expected, the happiest among us are open to new situations as opposed to being fixated on the future we originally perceived.

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## *Finding joy in the present*

### **1. “Doing now what I am doing now”**

Happiness is found in the present, but you must be present to find it. Most of us can read the paper, watch TV and carry on a conversation all at once. Problem is, we do none of them well and it leads to stress and unhappiness.

### **2. Honoring our mind/body/spirit**

We should continually ask ourselves to whom and to what do we give access to our minds/bodies/spirit. Taking care of ourselves leads to greater self-esteem and happiness.

### **3. Being altruistic**

Overcoming the fear of “I won’t HAVE enough” and using our talents and resources for the benefit of others actually lights up the pleasure centers of our brains.

### **4. Thinking with abundance**

Comparison is the thief of joy. Those who are happiest among us realize it is an abundant world and focus more on cooperation than competition.

### **5. Mastering our stories**

Often the most important conversations we have is with ourselves. Becoming a master rather than a slave to our internal voice is a key to happiness.

### **6. Finding purpose/meaning**

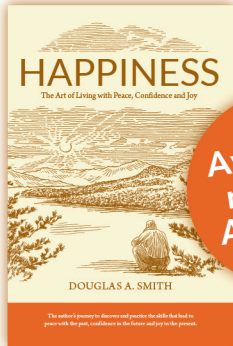
Man is a searcher of meaning. Using our talents and devoting our energies to things we deem of value leads to happiness.

### **7. Cherishing relationships**

Creating and nurturing healthy relationships and being sure we do not continually trade off relationships for purpose, are traits of those who live with joy.







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