



**Dr Bruce Wells**  
the happiness expert

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## THE HAPPINESS ADVANTAGE

### What the Book is about in a Nutshell

The fundamental rationale of the book is that happiness fuels success, not the other way around as has been popularly believed. As Achor notes, if success causes happiness then every person who accomplishes a goal of any kind should be happy. However, this is often not the case as happiness gets pushed continually over the horizon. Recent surveys show that only 45% of workers are happy at their jobs and depression rates are 10 times higher than they were in 1960.

The book is made up of 3 parts. In part 1 the reader learns about the Happiness Advantage (HA). In part 2 the reader learns of the 7 positive psychology principles that fuel success and performance at work. Finally, in part 3, the reader discovers how she can spread the happiness advantage at work and at home.

### **PART 1: POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK**

In the Introduction he comments on the research community and society's obsession with negativity and of the many enduring benefits of positive psychology. Another key foundation premise of the HA is neuroplasticity which posits that we can rewire our brains to be more positive, resilient, creative, and productive, regardless of our age or background.

### **PART 2: THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES**

#### **1. The Happiness Advantage**

Happiness is defined as the experience of positive emotions (pleasure combined with deeper feelings of meaning and purpose) or more specifically, the joy we feel striving after our potential. Research studies reveal that happiness leads to success in nearly every domain in our lives including health, friendship, community involvement, creativity, and in our jobs and careers. The Broaden and Build Theory is important for explaining the evolutionary purpose of happiness – instead of narrowing down our reactions to fight or flight as negative emotions do, positive emotions broaden the amount of possibilities we process making us more thoughtful, creative, and open to new ideas. At the same time positive emotions help us build more intellectual, social, and physical resources we can rely upon in the future. Several proven methods for raising your happiness level each day include: meditate for 5 minutes every day, find something to look forward to, commit conscious acts of kindness, inject positivity into your surroundings, exercise, spend money on experiences and not on stuff, and exercise a signature strength. To better flourish have a ratio of 3:1 positive to negative interactions or emotional experiences during each day. And in a work setting aim for a 6:1 ratio.

## **2. The Fulcrum and the Lever**

Our brains work like a fulcrum and a lever. Our power to maximise our potential is based on 2 things – the length of our lever (how much power we believe we have) and the position of the fulcrum (our mindset for change). So, by changing the fulcrum of our mindset and lengthening the lever of our possibility, we change what is possible. With the right positive mindset we can change our view of reality and thus change our results. For example, depending on one's mindset the passage of time during an event (a meeting, a kiss, watching TV) can be fast or slow. Placebos used in experiments prove this. So when doing an activity focus on the process, the means, and not the ends and look for a benefit from the activity. Also, to gain better results from an activity use your strengths. Is your work a job (work just for paycheck), a career (want to do well), or a calling (job is fulfilling and serves a greater purpose)? Regardless of which one you choose for more job satisfaction and success look for meaning in your job and try to align your personal goals with those of the company.

## **3. The Tetris Effect**

Due to the negativity of our environment (media we listen to, friends we associate with, type of profession we have) our brains can develop negative patterns of thinking that follow us everywhere we go. Constantly scanning for the negative undercuts our creativity, raises our stress levels, makes us more susceptible to depression, and lowers our motivation to strive for goals. We have to teach our brains to scan for the positive and thus capitalize on the HA. When we focus on the positive we are happier, more grateful, and are more optimistic. Learn to scan for positives by listing 3 good things that happened that day.

## **4. Falling Up**

By scanning our mental map for positive opportunities, and by rejecting the belief that every down in life leads us only further downward, we give ourselves the greatest power possible: the ability to move up not despite the setbacks, but because of them. People who experience positive growth in response to setbacks use the following strategies: positive reinterpretation of the event, optimism, acceptance, and focusing on the problem head-on. These people do not bounce back, they bounce forward. How we choose to explain the nature of past events, explanatory style, has a large impact on our happiness and future success – optimistic people interpret adversity as being local and temporary (confined to that event and the effects will pass), while pessimistic people see adversity as more global and permanent (true for all events and the effects will never change). One way to learn how to develop optimism and to see setbacks as opportunities is to practise the ABCD model of interpretation: identify the Adversity, identify our Belief or our reaction to the event (optimistic or pessimistic), view the Consequences of holding certain beliefs, and Dispute or challenge our beliefs by searching for any evidence for them.

## **5. The Zorro Circle**

When we concentrate our efforts on small, manageable goals, we regain a feeling of control over our performance and accumulate the resources, knowledge, and confidence to tackle larger projects. Feeling a sense of control over our work and family life is one of the strongest drivers of wellbeing, life satisfaction, and performance. The most successful performers in life have an internal locus of control, the belief that their actions have a direct effect on their outcomes, as opposed to an external locus of control where people see daily events being dictated by external forces. To concentrate on small, manageable goals: practise self-awareness of your feelings, identify which aspects of the situation you have control over, and identify small goals you can quickly accomplish.

## 6. The 20-Second Rule

Turn bad habits into good habits by minimising barriers to change. Willpower alone is insufficient at helping people sustain change because it does nothing to change the neural pathways. These pathways can only be set up and reinforced by doing the desired habit. We develop habits, both good and bad, by following the path of least resistance. It is our ease of access to distractions and undesired behaviours that gets us into trouble. The solution is to set up our environment so that the path of least resistance leads us to the desired behaviour, and eventually, the good habit. Lowering the time (and energy) needed to implement a new behaviour by just 20 seconds can be all the time it needs to develop a new habit. A second effective strategy is to reduce the number of choices you have in certain situations so plan ahead and decide when, where, and how you will do things at certain times of the day.

## 7. Social Investment

When we encounter a 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. Research has found that the happiest 10% of people among us share one characteristic in common – they have strong social relationships. This factor is by far the greatest predictor of happiness (more so than GPA, income, race, age, or gender). When we have strong social support we are happier, more motivated, more resilient, healthier, less stressed, and we live longer. Of all the social ties we have at work the boss/employee relationship is the single most important social bond for work satisfaction and productivity. To strengthen this relationship managers should: make eye contact with workers, listen actively, initiate conversations that aren't always task-focused, have face-to-face meetings, send gratitude emails to workers, share upbeat news about good times more than bad times, and give active and constructive responses to others' good news.

## **PART 3: THE RIPPLE EFFECT**

Once we start capitalizing on the HA in our own lives, the positive changes quickly ripple out. The more the HA principles are practised, and become habits, the more the neural pathways in the brain will be strengthened shifting your mindset toward the positive and increasing your ability to capitalise on other principles. Also, your increased positivity will impact the lives of those around you. The presence of mirror neurons in the brain means that we mimic the feelings, actions, and physical sensations of other people. There are nearly 1000 people within 3 degrees of most of us and so by becoming happier you will have the potential to improve the lives of many others.



Dr Bruce Wells is a happiness expert and professional speaker with a PhD in psychology and degrees in health promotion and physical education.

He has over 20 years' experience in the health and wellness industry in Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. He is a former school teacher, university professor, international tour guide, personal fitness trainer, and is the author of *Happiness Anywhere Anytime*.

Bruce regularly appears on Channel 9's Today show, various radio programs and regularly contributes articles to syndicated papers across the country. He is also a professional speaker delivering presentations to corporate and community health groups. For further details of his programs go to [www.brucewells.com.au](http://www.brucewells.com.au)