



**Dr Bruce Wells**  
the happiness expert

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**Happiness Challenge**

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## YOU CAN BE HAPPY NO MATTER WHAT

### What the Book is about in a Nutshell

Many people believe they can only be happy when their problems are solved, relationships improve, and goals are achieved. In this simple guide, Dr Richard Carlson shows readers how to be happy right now — no matter the situation. In this 2-part book his plan is based on the principles of Thought; Mood; Separate Realities; Feelings and the Present Moment. The principles act as navigational tools helping the reader find contentment in life. They are like a set of operating instructions to guide the reader inward to a natural state which Carlson calls 'healthy psychological functioning' where happiness and peace resides. In part 2 he applies these principles to five key life areas. Carlson argues that once the principles are understood the reader can be happy and contented regardless of their problems in life.

### PART 1: THE PRINCIPLES

When you understand the principles of healthy psychological functioning you can feel happy right now, even if your life isn't perfect. Once you are feeling content, and no longer distracted by your false negativity, you will have better access to your true wisdom and common sense. Contentment is the foundation to a fulfilling life. It brings with it good relationships, job satisfaction, parenting skills, and the wisdom and common sense to move through life in a graceful manner. With feelings of contentment, problems won't stop you from enjoying life and being grateful for the simple things.

#### **1. The Principle of Thought**

Our ability to think creates our psychological experience of life, and thinking is a voluntary function. Every negative and positive feeling is a direct result of thought. It's impossible to have jealous feelings without first having jealous thoughts, etc. Importantly, it's our thinking and not our circumstances that determines how we feel. Blaming our circumstances (which are always neutral anyway) for our feelings is pointless. Also, our thinking is not reality, but only our interpretation of a given situation. Our thoughts are derived from our beliefs about things. The goal here is not to control what you think about, but to understand that thought is simply your attempt to shape reality.....and once a thought is gone it's gone.

#### **2. The Principle of Moods**

Our own understanding that thinking is a voluntary function fluctuates from moment to moment and from day to day; these variances are called moods. When you're in a high mood, life looks good. You have perspective, common sense, problems seem less formidable and easier to solve, relationships flow easily and communication is easy, you look beyond your circumstances and characteristics and just do the best you can. In low moods life looks unbearable hard and serious. You have little perspective, life seems all about you, you take

things personally and often misinterpret those around you, you see every suggestion from your partner as an attack, and you focus on reasons why you can't do something. The quickest way to a high mood is to discount the way we feel (and our negative thoughts) in a low state. So the secret is to recognise the state you're in and to understand that in a low mood you will generate lots of negative thoughts. Don't try and solve your problems in a low mood....even though you may feel that you want to. Simply wait out the low moods and accept them as part of life.

### **3. The Principle of Separate Realities**

Because we all think in a unique way, each of us lives in a separate psychological reality. Understanding this brings the joy back into our differences and means that logically you don't have to take personally the things that other people say or do. When you understand this you see how futile it is to try and change someone or to argue with them. When arguing each person will be certain that they are right – and from their position they may well be. Accept that your view of reality is only one way of looking at things.

### **4. The Principle of Feelings**

Our feelings and emotions serve as a built-in biofeedback mechanism that lets us know how we are doing from a psychological standpoint. When we are off track and headed towards unhappiness, away from healthy psychological functioning, our feelings will tell us. They tell us what our internal weather is like. Becoming more aware of your feelings and then expressing them is not a sign of emotional maturity (as many psychologists say) because you will always have a very different interpretation of events in your life depending on whether you are in a low mood or a high mood. There is no value in a low mood, except as a reminder that you shouldn't trust or truly listen to yourself at this time as your thoughts will be distorted and dysfunctional. Healthy psychological functioning is the feeling we experience when little (if anything) is on our minds – a positive feeling state that exists for no apparent reason (happy for no reason). Children possess this state of mind frequently. The way to happiness, then, is not to try and think your way to happiness but to stop thinking about things that annoy or anger you.

### **5. The Principle of the Present Moment**

Learning to keep our attention in the present moment, by paying attention to our feelings, allows us to live at peak efficiency and without the distraction of negative thinking. The present moment is where we find happiness and inner peace. Your past, as it exists today, is nothing more than the thoughts you have about it – simple memory. Knowing this means that you can keep your attention in this moment and allow memory thoughts to pass harmlessly through your mind. Our feelings will help us detect when our mind has slipped from the present moment as our mind spins forward towards worries or backwards towards regrets and past hurts. So the next time you are feeling stressed or frustrated, take a quick look at where your thoughts are – in the past, present, or future. Happiness is in the now.

## **PART 2: APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES**

### **6. Relationships**

As we get to know another person better our tendency to question their own thoughts will increase and with it will come the chance of conflict. Hopefully, with understanding we will gain new love and respect for them and we will retain our positive feelings for them as special and unique people who are different from us. Sometimes in relationships you will argue with your partner telling them that they must agree with you in order for you to love

them. But this need of yours to be right stems from an unhealthy relationship to your own thoughts. Do you believe that your thoughts are representative of the one reality? The trick is to put positive feeling above the need to be right. Also, don't try and give people advice when they are in a low mood as they will not be receptive to your ideas. Just listen and give them compassion.

## 7. Stress

Stress is nothing more than a socially acceptable form of mental illness, and can to a large extent be eliminated. Stress is not something that happens *to us* but rather something that develops from *within our own thinking*. The moment we define stress as coming from anywhere other than from within ourselves, we set ourselves up to experience it – and are too late to prevent it. Each time we describe stress as 'out there,' we validate its existence. To rid yourself of stress, first understand that stress is your *perception* of the situation, not something inherent in it. Remember that all circumstances and events are neutral. Once you see that there is no such thing as stress, only stressful thinking, you are on the road to immediate change and can take up responsibility for your own life. When you redefine stress as something you can control, you can maintain a positive feeling, regardless of the circumstances. The solution to stress is to begin to lower your tolerance to stress – the sooner you can feel your stress, the sooner you can nip it in the bud by changing your thoughts and returning to a positive feeling.

## 8. Happiness

Happiness is a state of mind, not a set of circumstances. When you try and search for happiness you are implying that it is outside of yourself. But it is not. Also, happiness is now. It occurs when you allow your mind to rest, when you take your focus off your problems and concerns, and instead, allow your mind to relax and remain right here in this moment. Happiness allows you to enjoy, rather than struggle with, the ebbs and flows of life. Excessive thinking about your past and your problems will convince you that you do, in fact, have good reasons to be unhappy but the past is over and it is only a harmless memory – it was real then, but it isn't real now. Also, happiness and desire are incompatible because the moment you think about something you want or don't have, you will lose your sense of connection to the present and will start searching for happiness outside of yourself. *Goals and desires are great but happiness must come first.* Happiness is a feeling, not an outcome.

## 9. Habits and Addictions

The ingredients needed to break any habit are happiness, resolve, and understanding. Happiness is the breeding ground that makes recovery possible, resolve is the inner commitment that points to your goal, and understanding is the vehicle that will take you there.



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)