

Chapter 3: Habits of Happy People

We Brits love eating pies, that's the only kind of British food that's worth eating! So let me compare happiness to a pie. Leading positive psychologists claim that happiness has three sources, in other words, that the Happiness Pie has three slices. The first slice is our genetic makeup, or, to put it simply, our hardwired sense of happiness or grumpiness that runs in the family. We can't do much about that. Some scientists argue that this is the biggest slice, perhaps 50% or more, but it is scientifically difficult to prove. The second slice is our environment. If you live in a warzone, for example, that may have a big impact on your mood. You may be able to change the situation and move to a happier place or not. The third slice represents life skills, or what we call the habits of happy people. That's the main focus of the new Science of Happiness. We can definitely change this slice of the pie!

Some of these skills can be practiced immediately, for example, random acts of kindness and what we call active listening. And these skills may boost our mood pretty quickly too. Some skills such as physical exercise require more effort, but they have a long-term impact on our well-being. Let's take a look at the pie again. The two exciting things about the life-skill slice of the pie, is that you can control what you have on it. And secondly, you can get off your chair and eat some of it right now! So let's talk about life skills or what we call the habits of happy people.

In this course, we focus on seven habits or clusters of habits related to well-being. I should mention that there could be eight or nine or more. Essentially, what we've done is distilled results of thousands of scientific studies into seven discrete areas that we can easily put into practice.

The first habit is about building close relationships. Pretty well everybody in the world agrees that these are a top priority, if we want to take care of our well-being. The second habit is kindness, including random Acts of Kindness and volunteering, which often have an immediate impact on our happiness. The third area is physical well-being, we are now seeing a torrent of new discoveries showing that physical well-being strongly affects psychological wellbeing including nutrition, exercise, exposure to light and sleeping patterns that's the mind-body connection.

The next area is Flow, which we can experience through creative, challenging activities that we love doing, such as sports or playing music. The fifth habit finding and using our strengths, not only enriches our personal life but has a major impact on self-esteem and confidence. The 6th habit finding meaning is one of the best and only ways to deal with personal suffering as well as promote long term well-being.

Finally, cultivating a positive mindset and especially gratitude, savoring, and hope is a time-honored way of strengthening our emotional resilience. You may recall that we talked about happiness pie, the one that has three slices, now let's talk about happiness soup.

And don't worry I won't talk about British soup. My favorite soup is a Spanish soup called Gazpacho. It is a cold soup that I used to love eating in the summer. Gazpacho can have a large variety of different ingredients, but, essentially, you've got to have plenty of tomatoes.

You've got to throw in some garlic and you've got to have onion, green peppers, cucumbers, lemon and olive oil. But you can use different quantities of those ingredients, which you combine to make many different recipes of Gazpachos. Why am I talking about this?

I think you've probably guessed.

We are talking about making Happiness Soup. It's like making Gazpacho! Let's go back to the seven habits. We are not saying you need to apply all of the habits of happy people on a daily basis. You would probably go nuts! Depending on your unique personality and circumstances you need to create your own special recipe of Happiness Soup. Your special bend of habits that makes you happy. So for example, if you are more introverted you may have difficulty reaching out and performing spontaneous Acts of Kindness towards strangers, so you could focus a little more on exercise and Flow activities. Once you have more confidence, you can focus on the habits that you don't practice so much. Trying a new habit is like trying a little more garlic in your soup, it may grow on you. So the following course on the Science of Happiness explores each ingredient of happiness in depth. Once you have the ingredients, you can mix and match and enjoy your favorite Happiness Soup!