

Key Takeaways from #1 New York Times bestseller BUILD THE LIFE YOU WANT

11 Principles for Building the Life You Want

- *Happiness is a direction, not a destination*
- *Unhappiness is not your enemy*
- *Choose your reactions, not your emotions*
- *You can substitute the emotion you want for the one you feel*
- *Focus less on yourself*
- *Your family problems can save your family*
- *Look for real friends, not deal friends*
- *Your work can be love made visible*
- *Find your spiritual path*
- *Become a happiness teacher*
- *Remember: happiness is love in action*

What Happiness Is and How to Build It

- **Happiness levels are plummeting** in the United States. People disagree about why this slump is happening – technology, polarized culture, the economy, politics, etc – but we all know it's happening.
- Happiness isn't a destination; **happiness is a direction**. It's not a matter of being but of becoming.
- This book is about learning how to become the boss of your own life—even when you're dealt a bad hand—to learn how to react to negative circumstances and consciously choose emotions that make you happier.
- The biggest reason people don't get happier is they don't really know what they're trying to increase. A good way to define happiness is in terms of its component parts: **enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose**. To get happier is to get more of these elements in a balanced way.
- Getting happier requires that we **accept unhappiness in our lives**—it's necessary and not an obstacle.
- **We all have our own natural mix of happiness and unhappiness**, depending on our circumstances and character. We need to use the mix we're given to best effect. The book includes an exercise for understanding your PANAS profile:
 - Mad Scientist (always spun up about something)
 - Judge (sober and cool)
 - Cheerleader (celebrate the good and don't dwell on the bad)
 - Poet (have trouble enjoying good things and always know when there's a threat lurking)
- To get happier, we first need to build our skills in **emotional self-management**. Then, we need to build the lives we want on the pillars of **family, friends, meaningful work, and faith**. That's the rest of the book!

Emotional Self-Management

- **Metacognition is key to emotional self-management**. It's the act of experiencing your emotions consciously, separating them from your behavior, and choosing how to react to them. It requires practice—here are a few ways to get started:
 - Observe your feelings as if happening to someone else.
 - Journal your emotions; it's one of the best ways to achieve metacognition.
 - Keep a database of positive memories, not just negative ones. Mood and memory exist in a feedback loop; there's a lot of power in reconstructing your memories more positively.
 - Look for more meaning and learning in the hard parts of life. Try in a methodical way to see how painful memories help you learn and grow.

- **Negative emotions aren't always pleasant, but they're necessary** -- they help us achieve enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose, and they keep us alive.
- But we can work to regulate those negative feelings and **choose more positive feelings**.
 - Gratitude is the most effective emotion to choose over a negative feeling. You can supercharge gratitude in your life with meditation or prayer, contemplating your death (seriously!), or doing a journaling exercise.
 - Laughter is like emotional caffeine -- find as many reasons to laugh as you can.
 - Hope is the antidote to pessimism, and it's something you can learn and practice.
 - Humility is key for real friendships, and it's positively associated with happiness and life satisfaction.
- **Focusing on others creates more happiness than focusing on your own self-care and how others perceive you.** Evolution explains why we care so much about others' opinions of us – for virtually all of human history humans' survival depended on membership in close-knit clans and tribes. Being cast out of your group meant certain death from cold, starvation, or predators. The instinct to want approval from others is woefully maladapted to modern life, though. It makes us unhappier!
 - Avoid your own reflection – a good way to do this is to limit the number of mirrors you have in your home.
 - Stop judging the things around you so much. Try to be more purely observational about the world around you, rather than assigning values to it – “this coffee has a bitter flavor” rather than “this coffee is terrible.”
 - Spend more time marveling at the world around you; awe diminishes the sense of self. Maybe it's stargazing or hiking or going to a museum.
 - Wander. Some of the most profound and intimate experiences in life come when you can observe your journey without expectation of some destination or external payoff.

Building the Four Basic Pillars of Happiness

- Family
 - Don't avoid conflict! Acknowledging it is good - it improves communication and gives you opportunities to grow in shared love.
 - Being complementary is more important than being compatible when it comes to your partner.
 - Negativity is a kind of emotional contagion that can spread in a family.
 - Forgiveness is a secret weapon and benefits everyone involved.
 - Honesty is key.
- Friends
 - Don't let an introverted personality or a fear of rejection block your ability to make friends, and don't let extroversion prevent you from going deep.
 - Build friendships that are based on love and enjoyment of another's company, not what he or she can do for you professionally or socially.
 - Too many deep friendships today are spoiled by differences of opinion.
 - The goal for long-term romance is a special kind of friendship, not undying passion.
 - Real friendship requires in-person contact. Technology can complement your deepest relationships, but it is a terrible substitute.
- Meaningful Work
 - Seek intrinsic rewards from your work: earned success and service to others, not money and power.
 - There are multiple models for career success and happiness: linear, expert, transitory, or spiral. Understanding yourself this way will help you find the right career path.
 - Work addiction is no joke for many millions of Americans and others all around the world. Look to confront the underlying issues that cause it.
 - You are not your job. Make sure you get space from your work, and have people in your life who see you as a person, not just a professional.

- Faith
 - Transcendental beliefs and experiences aid dramatically in our efforts to get happier.
 - Religious belief is strongly correlated with searching for and finding purpose in life. It appears to strengthen social bonds, lower loneliness, affect the brain, and lend access to insight and knowledge you can't get in other ways.
 - It is an error to wait around and hope that a spiritual practice finds us. The most important part of starting (or supercharging) a transcendental journey is actually starting.
 - Keep it simple - maybe commit a set period of time each day to your spiritual or philosophical life. Read more. Go outside and connect with nature.

The key to progress isn't perfection, it's to begin again, and again, and again. Remind yourself that **the life you want is built on love**, and start again!