The Happiness Advantage

- Dianne Auld
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The Happiness Advantage

Shawn Achor
Common misperceptions about happiness
Happiness research
The Seven Principles
Closing Keynote Speaker at WAW conference

Shawn Achor
The Happiness Advantage

Books – The Happiness Advantage and Before Happiness
TED talk on happiness is in the top 20 most popular TED talks, over 9 million views
Research made the cover of Harvard Business Review
His course on Positive Psychology at Harvard was rated the most popular course on campus

Common misperception
Success → Happiness

The truth as shown by research
Happiness → Success
The Happiness Advantage

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Happiness has as strong a correlation with long life as obesity and smoking

- 37% greater sales
- 3x more creative
- 31% more productive
- 40% more likely to receive a promotion
- 23% fewer fatigue symptoms
- Up to 10x more engaged
- 39% more likely to live to age 94

(Achor, HBR, 2012)
37% Greater Sales

- Martin Seligman brought in to help Metlife solve problems with salespeople. Looked at their explanatory style.
  - Those with more optimistic styles sold 37% more than pessimistic ones.
  - Most optimistic sold 88% more than the most pessimistic.
- Started hiring agents not on whether they passed the regular industry test, but how optimistic they were.
- Within a few years:
  - turnover of sales people had plummeted
  - market share had increased by almost 50%.

39% more likely to live to age 94

- Study of diaries of 180 Catholic nuns – all born before 1917
- Nuns asked to write down their thoughts in autobiographical journal entries
- More than 50 years later researchers decoded entries for positive emotions
- More joyful content nuns lived 10 years longer than other nuns
- By age of 85, 90% of the happiest quartile of nuns still alive
- Compared to 34% of the least happy quartile
As late as 1988 was a 17-to-1 negative to positive ratio of research in the field of psychology.

For every one study on happiness, 17 on depression and disorder.

In 1988 Martin Seligman, President of APA, announced time to focus on positive psychology.

In 2006 Dr Tal Ben-Shahar developed a positive psychology course at Harvard – 1 in every 6 students at Harvard enrolled in course.

Achor did study of 1600 high achieving undergraduates at Harvard – one of largest studies of happiness ever performed.

Found what causes some to thrive and some to sink.

A few years ago, Achor was asked to speak at New England boarding school “Wellness Week”.

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
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<td>Eating disorders</td>
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Not a wellness, week, a sickness week!
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7 principles – improve success and achievement

- Happiness advantage
- Fulcrum and the Lever
- Tetris effect
- Falling up
- The Zorro circle
- The 20 second rule
- Social Investment
Happiness is not hard wired

- Taxi drivers in London
  - London like a Byzantine maze. Developed signif larger hippocampus, brain structure devoted to special memory
- Roger – lost vision through accident, learnt braille
  - Tap his non reading hand, virtually nothing, reading hand – enormous area of cortical mass would light up,

Often conditioned to find negative

- Bombarded with bad news –wired to see negative
- Auditors, tax specialists, lawyers often very depressed because hard wired to look for problems
  - problem in contract, is there fraud, is there an error
- Have to get people to focus more on the positive than the negative.
- Do daily exercises to help change brain to start scanning for positives
The Power of Exercise

- Releases endorphins, boosts mood, enhances work performance, reduces stress and anxiety.
- Studies with depressed students:
  - One group given anti-depressants: 38% relapse
  - One group combination anti-dep & exercise: 31% relapse
  - One group 45 mins of exercise 3 times a week: 9% relapse
- 6 months later
7 principles – improve success and achievement

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**Fulcrum and the Lever**

- Changing your performance by changing your mindset
- Can’t change reality, but can change way we process the world
- Archimedes – “Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world.”
- By changing your mindset, you can change what is possible
Langer Study in 1979

- Took a group of 75 year old men – told going for a week to a retreat
  - Could bring along pictures, newspapers, magazines, books, dated no later than 1959, magazines there from 1955
  - Told to dress and act like they did at that time
  - Given ID badges with pictures of themselves in mid 50s
  - Had to talk about events that had happened at that time
  - Before week tested on every aspect deteriorates with age.

- After week had improved in every category:
  - Strength, posture, perception, cognition, short term memory
  - Significantly more flexible, improved hand strength
  - Intelligence increased, looked 3 years younger in photos
  - Even eyesight improved by almost 10%

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Tetris Effect

- Harvard Medical school – paid 27 people to play Tetris for multiple hours a day 3 days in a row
  - Afterwards reported looking at buildings and trying to fit them into each other, wanted to re-arrange cereal boxes in grocery aisle
- People hard wired to find the negative in every situation
  - Achor was working with tax auditors at KPMG
  - One drawn up Excel spreadsheet to give to his wife listing all the mistakes she had made over the past 6 weeks
- Need to build a positive Tetris effect through the exercises
  - Learn to scan for and focus on the positive – increases happiness, gratitude and optimism
  - Only get benefits through consistency, more you practice the easier it becomes

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Falling Up

After crisis or adversity, three paths

- Keep circling around where you currently are, no change
- Leads towards further negative consequences – far worse off after the negative event
- Third path, leads from failure or setback to a place where we are stronger and more capable than before the fall

Post Traumatic Growth

- Last 2 decades Richard Tedeschi and colleagues studied Post-Traumatic Growth as opposed to PTSD
- Great suffering or trauma can lead to great positive change:
  - What distinguishes the two – mindset
- Early failure often the fuel for ideas that transform industries, make record profits, re-invent careers
  - Walt Disney fired by a newspaper editor for not being creative enough
  - Beatles turned away by a record exec – “guitar groups are on their way out”
- Learn ABCD
  - Adversity, Belief, Consequence, Disputation
  - Things are never as bad as they actually seem
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**The Zorro Circle**

A 2002 study of 3000 employees – greater feelings of control at work predicted greater satisfaction in nearly every aspect of life, family, job, relationships, less stress, less work-family conflict.

Gains were less to do with how much control we actually have than how much we think we have.
The Zorro Circle

- Make two lists:
  - Things you can't control – let them go
  - Things you can control
    - Identify one small goal you can accomplish
    - Slowly expand outwards
- Great examples:
  - Exercise
  - Concept of continuous improvement
  - New York – broken windows theory

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The 20 Second Rule

- If you want to get something to become a habit, make it 20 seconds easier
- To stop a habit, make it 20 seconds more difficult.

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Social Investment

- When busy and stressed, ignore social networks, work longer, shut ourselves off, don’t socialise. Guaranteed to result in failure.

- Need to do the opposite. Maintain our social network, exercise groups, support groups. Social networks greatest predictor of happiness and success.

- Harvard Men study, 268 men from college in late 1930s to present day, looked at what characteristics distinguished the happiest fullest lives from the least successful ones.

- In 2009 George Vaillant told Atlantic Monthly - could sum up findings in one word:
  - Love – full stop.

Social Investment

- Replicated in countless studies, very happy people have strong social relationships. 1600 Harvard undergraduates – happiest 10% best social relationships 0.7 correlation

- IBM, MIT researchers spent a year following 2600 employees. More socially connected (size of address books etc.) better they performed. Quantify the difference, every e-mail contact was worth $948 in revenue.

  Relationships with other people matter more than anything else in the world
To end with – a 7 second experiment

- Naturally mimic others
  - Mirror neurons next to motor neurons in brain
- Happiness is enormously contagious (to 3 degrees)
  - Especially if it comes from leaders and managers
- Start applying the 7 principles:
  - make them a habit
  - encourage others in your organisation and social network to do the same