

# The 12-Step Bush Recovery Program

*A Lifesaving Guide to Shaking Off the Horrors of  
the Last Eight Years, with Practical Advice on  
Relapse, Remission, and Recounts*

**Gene Stone**  
with Carl Pritzkat and Tony Travostino

VILLARD



NEW YORK

— Guest Speaker Sonja Lyubomirsky on —

## HAPPINESS

*Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D., author of the bestselling How of Happiness, is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside. Originally from Russia, she received her A.B., summa cum laude, from Harvard University and her Ph.D. in social/personality psychology from Stanford University. She currently teaches courses in social psychology and positive psychology and serves as the Department of Psychology's graduate advisor. She is an associate editor of The Journal of Positive Psychology and (with Ken Sheldon) holds a five-year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct research on the possibility of permanently increasing happiness.*

Bad stuff happens to all of us. The George W. Bush presidency is an example. Where to begin?

According to an August 2008 Associated Press poll, only 18 percent of those polled believed the country was on the right track; 76 percent felt it was on the wrong track. Six years before, 68 percent of the country felt it was on the right track. A July 2008 CNN opinion poll showed that only 3 percent of this country thought things were going “very well.” And a poll taken by NBC in that same month found that only 13 percent liked the direction this country was taking.

People are not happy in America. How to recover?

1. Many psychological studies suggest that one of the most effective recovery methods is to recognize some benefit in having lived through those eight years. This

may be difficult, but thoughtful people have the ability to do it. Perhaps the Bush years led you to reorder your priorities, or to recognize strengths that you never thought you had, or to find a new purpose. Perhaps it prompted you to make new friends, to share humorous videos and stories, and to bond with others who share your views.

2. Sometimes it takes a bad event to shake things up, to compel paradigms to shift, to push our thinking to a higher level. As philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger." Granted, the W presidency may have produced a chain of events that led to many deaths, but it didn't kill most of us. Instead, perhaps it transformed us in ways that might make it better in the end.
3. Psychological scientists have found that one of the most effective coping strategies is social support, that is, turning to the comfort and contact of other people. Social support makes us less anxious and depressed, and it even makes us healthier. We should now turn to our friends, our partners, our colleagues, companions, and confidants. They will give us room to share our feelings, to belong, and to discover that we are not alone.
4. Traumatic and painful experiences can shake our most basic assumptions about the world. The Bush presidency may have made you ask the Big Questions: Why us? How can we prevent this type of situation from recurring? And, if you're religious, How

could God let it happen? Countless studies show that this process can be difficult and painful but ultimately quite valuable.

5. In my research, I have found that one of the most powerful strategies for becoming a happier person is the regular expression of gratitude. For example, experimental happiness “interventions” have revealed that people who practice gratitude once a week, either by counting their blessings or by writing letters of gratitude to the people in their lives who have been kind to them—but whom they have never properly thanked—become happier over time and experience increases in their sense of connection with others.

This work suggests that we should try to focus not on what we *don't* have but on what we *do* have. To help us recover from the *W* years, we should focus our attention on the people, things, ideas, and events that have made our personal lives and our larger world a better place.

6. I don't mean to suggest that we should all try to look back on the Bush years through rose-colored spectacles. We should be realistic but also recognize our strengths, and then rise to the occasion and go forward with an energetic and optimistic spirit.