Foreword

Chapter 1: Is It Possible to Become Happier?
3. This study was conducted by Martin Seligman, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, and Jeff Levy. Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Authentic Happiness. New York: Free Press.
6. The stories of Neil, in this chapter, and Judith, in Chapter 2 (not their real names), are presented in the television documentary In Pursuit of Happiness (www.happycanadians.com), made by Canadian Television, with Sarah Spinks as producer, Jon Dore as host, and me as expert. It first aired on CTV on June 17, 2006.


Chapter 2: How Happy Are You and Why?
1. Names, identifying information, and details about interviews have been changed for some of the examples offered in this book.
2. Ed Diener, the most distinguished and most widely published researcher in the field of subjective well-being, told me once that he coined the term subjective well-being because he didn’t think he would be promoted with tenure if his research were perceived as focusing on something so fuzzy and soft as “happiness.” The label caught on.
3. However, it’s worth noting that “well-being” is a broader, more holistic construct than “happiness,” encompassing people’s physical and mental health, in addition to their emotional well-being.
5. Ibid.


17. Diener et al. (1999), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 10.


22. Ibid.

23. It’s worth noting that people whose basic needs aren’t being met—needs for such requisites as safety, food, and shelter—report being very unhappy. For this group, more money (for medical care, nutrition, toys for their children, etc.) does indeed make a substantial difference to their well-being and quality of life. So the small correlation between happiness and wealth holds only for individuals above the “basic needs,” or poverty, threshold. For example, see Biswas-Diener, R., and Diener, E. (2001). Making the best of a bad situation: Satisfaction in the slums of Calcutta. Social Indicators Research, 55: 329–52.


42. Lyubomirsky, King, et al. (2005), op. cit. See foreword, note 1.
48. To protect confidentiality, names and identifying information about participants of research studies have been changed here and throughout the book.
49. Thomas Bouchard compiled and analyzed this fascinating sample.
56. For every single gene, each person has two alleles, one from the mother and one from the father. The short allele of the 5-HTTLPR gene decreases the brain supply of the neurotransmitter serotonin, a brain chemical that is needed to mitigate depression. Indeed, drugs like Prozac are called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) because they increase levels of serotonin and thereby lift depressive symptoms.
58. A typical participant in Davidson’s experiments is outfitted with electrodes—metal conductors about the size of a dime—that envelop his head, looking like a great big shower cap. The electrodes are attached to wire leads and electric current runs through those leads from the
participant’s scalp to Davidson’s measuring instruments. The current comes from biological
electrical signals, called biopotentials.

in anterior brain asymmetry and fundamental dimensions of emotion. Journal of Personality and
Social Psychology, 62: 676–87. Urry, H. L., Nitschke, J. B., Dolski, I., Jackson, D. C., Dalton,
See also van Honk, J., and Schutter, D. J. L. G. (2006). From affective valence to motivational

60. This remark was made by Nobel Prize winner and Princeton University professor Daniel
Kahneman.

from the Veterans Affairs Normative Aging Study. Journal of Personality and Social


63. This quote is from English statesman Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli, B. (2000). Lothair.

Chapter 3: How to Find Happiness Activities That Fit
Your Interests, Your Values, and Your Needs

from here. In Maehr, M. L., and Pintrich, P. R. (eds.). Advances in Motivation and Achievement
(vol. 7, pp. 21–49). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. Brunstein, J. C., Schultheiss, O. C., and

2. With the exception of the “natural” item, the measure of self-determined motivation presented
here was based on a methodology developed by Ken Sheldon and his colleagues. The four
reasons to engage in a happiness activity tap four kinds of motivation: (1) intrinsic motivation
(assessed by the item “enjoy,” though the item “natural” is closely related), defined as doing
something because it is inherently interesting and enjoyable; (2) identified motivation (“value”),
defined as doing something in order to express important values and beliefs; (3) introjected
motivation (“guilty”), defined as acting to avoid guilt or anxiety; and (4) external motivation
(“situation”), defined as doing something for a reward or to please others. According to Ed Deci
and Rich Ryan, these four motivations lie along a continuum, from internal (or autonomous) to
external (or controlled by others). Hence an aggregate self-determined motivation score is


4. Lyubomirsky et al. (2008), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.

5. For corroborating results with respect to the importance of fit in increasing well-being, see Fordyce (1977, 1983), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006a), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.


7. Lyubomirsky et al. (2008), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.

Foreword to Part II: Before You Begin

1. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire taps into several components of well-being, including self-esteem, sense of purpose, social interest, and humor, and has been successfully used in individuals of all ages. Reference: Hills, P., and Argyle, M. (2002). The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: A compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being. Personality and Individual Differences, 33, 1073–1082.

2. Note that I have slightly altered the wording of a few items to enhance clarity.

Chapter 4: Practicing Gratitude and Positive Thinking


7. Fredrickson et al. (2003), op. cit. See above, note 5.


15. Quote from psychiatrist Roger Walsh.


18. Tkach (2005), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.

19. Seligman et al. (2005), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.

20. Lyubomirsky et al. (2008), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.


35. This general suggestion about how to develop hope and analysis of “barrier hopes” has been made by the late psychologist C. R. Snyder.
36. See the “Look for the Silver Lining” exercise in MacDonald (2004), op. cit. See above, note 16.
38. This technique is called ABCDE disputation and is described in greater detail in Chapter 6. A = adversity (the issue that you face). B = belief (the negative belief engendered by the adversity). C = consequence (how you feel in response to the adversity). D = disputation (challenging the negative belief). E = Energize (note how more optimistic explanations can give you more energy and make you feel better). References: Seligman, M. (1991). Learned Optimism. New York: Free Press; and Seligman (2002) Authentic Happiness, op. cit. See chapter 1, note 3.
46. Unscrambled, they are basis, snowy, and toxin.
47. Nolen-Hoeksema (2003), op. cit. See above, note 41.

Chapter 5: Investing in Social Connections
2. Lyubomirsky, King, et al. (2005), op. cit. See foreword, note 1.
3. For review, see ibid.
4. This study is described in Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al. (2005), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 7.
5. Tkach (2005), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.
6. All the studies conducted in my laboratory (and described in this book) include at least one control group. The control group in this particular study consisted of participants who didn’t perform any extra acts of kindness but were instructed simply to list various events that happened to them weekly.


12. Unfortunately, five participants are too few a number (“too small a sample size,” in scientific terms) to allow researchers to generalize their findings to the community at large. In all the studies that I have done with my students and collaborators—indeed, in almost all the research cited in this book—the sample sizes have been large enough to permit such generalization and large enough to permit comparisons across groups (e.g., to answer such questions as: Is the kindness group happier than the control group?) and across time (e.g., Is the kindness group happier in May than it was in January?).

13. Here’s a sampling: Pay the toll of the car behind you or put change into an expired parking meter; pick up litter in your neighborhood, beach, or park; paint a neighbor’s home; volunteer at a food pantry, homeless shelter, or church/temple/mosque; teach an illiterate adult to read; cook a special meal for a busy family member, neighbor, or friend; spend time with an elderly relative or neighbor, or visit a nursing home; give up your seat on the bus or train; do a household chore even when it’s not your turn; rescue an animal; open the door for someone or let somebody ahead of you in line; help someone carry a bag or package; donate to a charity your money, your time, or your blood; call, write, or travel to see a friend in need; tutor or be a mentor to a younger person; and leave a thank-you note for your mail carrier, trash collector, or any other individual who simplifies your life.

14. Some of these suggestions are borrowed from Carlson (1997), op. cit. See chapter 4, note 49.


20. For review, see Lyubomirsky, King, et al. (2005), op. cit. (see foreword, note 1). See also Myers (2000), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 14.


29. Ibid.


34. Gottman and Silver (1999), op. cit. See above, note 27.


37. A number of these suggestions are from McGinnis, A. L. (1979). The Friendship Factor. Minneapolis: Augsburg. The magic number of “three” was suggested by Stanford University professor Laura Carstensen.
38. A Russian proverb.
41. In a subsequent study, Jane Marie Clipman gave students the opportunity to wink or to give compliments, instead of hug. Winking and complimenting also increased well-being.

Chapter 6: Managing Stress, Hardship, and Trauma


19. Ibid.


29. Quotes are from Davis et al. (1998), op. cit. See above, note 12.

30. Ibid.
36. Seligman (1990), op. cit. See chapter 4, note 38.
40. For excellent reviews of this research, see McCullough and Witvliet (2002), op. cit. (see above, note 37), and McCullough, M. E. (2001). Forgiveness: Who does it and how do they do it? Current Directions in Psychological Science, 10: 194–97.
44. This exercise is adapted from one developed by Martin Seligman and Tracy Steen.
46. See http://www.forgivenessday.org/hero.htm for examples of such “heroes of forgiveness,” including both famous individuals and extraordinary ordinary people.
Chapter 7: Living in the Present


8. This exercise was developed by Marty Seligman and Tracy Steen.


11. In addition, some people find flow in vandalism, physical violence, or exerting tyrannical control over a group, an organization, or a nation. Others experience flow while risk taking in reckless driving, gambling, shoplifting, or committing fraud. Therein lies another potential negative side of flow. Although these activities might make you feel joyful and self-possessed in the short term, the long-term costs are very high, and the happiness will not endure. Use good judgment.

12. David Lodge coined a wonderful term for this phenomenon: future nostalgia.


15. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid, 237.
24. Humphrey Bogart says this to Ingrid Bergman in the last scene of Casablanca, before she boards a plane to Lisbon, never to see him again.
29. This wonderful example was cited by Haidt and Keltner (2004), ibid, 537.
32. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, has been a pioneer in this field. For an overview of these studies, see Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness, 15th anniversary ed. New York: Bantam Dell.
36. This idea was suggested by social psychologist Jaime Kurtz.
45. For evidence that people are capable of doing both—that is, living in the present and being oriented toward the future—see Liu, W., and Aaker, J. (2007). Do you look to the future or focus on today?: The impact of life experience on intertemporal decisions. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 102: 212–25.
46. The quote is from former president Bill Clinton. Remnick (2006, September 18), op. cit., 53. See chapter 6, note 51.

Chapter 8: Happiness Activity No. 10: Committing to Your Goals


12. This phenomenon is essentially what happens in a rebound effect, when you are trying so hard not to think about or do something that you end up thinking or doing it. For a review, see Wegner, D. M. (1994). Ironic processes of mental control. Psychological Review, 101: 34–52.


21. These suggestions were adapted from two exercises developed by Martin Seligman and Tracy Steen.

22. Quote by Robert Peter Tristram Coffin.


36. Dubé et al. (in press), ibid. The case study of Mrs. M is presented on pp. 17–20.

Chapter 9: Taking Care of Your Body and Your Soul


33. Many of these studies, described in this section, are well reviewed in Shapiro et al. (2002), op. cit. See above, note 31.
36. See also a study that found that a sixteen-week training program in Transcendental Meditation led to improved blood pressure, insulin resistance, and the reduction of other risk factors for coronary heart disease: Paul-Labrador, M., Polk, D., Dwyer, J. H., Velasquez, L., Nidich, S., Rainforth, M., Schneider, R., and Merz, N. B. (2006). Effects of a randomized controlled trial of transcendental meditation on components of the metabolic syndrome in subjects with coronary heart disease. Archives of Internal Medicine, 166: 1218–24.


48. To measure your heart rate during exercise without disrupting your workout too much, stop what you’re doing and take a six-second pulse in your wrist or neck—that is, count the number of times you feel a pulse during a precise six-second period. Multiply by ten and you have your heart rate. To increase accuracy, use a longer time period—for example, take a ten-second pulse (then multiply by six) or a thirty-second pulse (then multiply by two).


51. Lyubomirsky, King, et al. (2005), op. cit. See foreword, note 1.


Chapter 10: The Five Hows Behind Sustainable Happiness


10. Lyubomirsky et al. (2008), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.


12. Namely, cognitive theory and hopelessness theory.

13. Lyubomirsky et al. (2008), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.

14. Behavioral therapy, which aims at getting the depressed person to increase the number of pleasant experiences in his or her daily life, is a clear exception.

15. Keyes (2005), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 2.


19. It’s relevant here to consider the work of Leaf Van Boven at the University of Colorado, who has found that people are happier if they invest their money and resources in experiences (which of course include a wide variety of activities) rather than possessions. He posits three reasons for this: (1) Experiences, relative to material things, are more likely to improve with time; (2) people are less likely to compare unfavorably their experiences (as opposed to their possessions) with those of more fortunate others; and (3) experiences have more social value and are more likely to promote relationships. I would add a fourth benefit: Experiences (including activities) are relatively less prone to hedonic adaptation. For a review, see Van Boven, L. (2005). Experientialism, materialism, and the pursuit of happiness. Review of General Psychology, 9: 132–42.


22. Robert Jeffery, Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, University of Minnesota. Personal communication, July 17, 2006.


25. Dubé et al. (in press), op. cit. See chapter 8, note 35.


31. Lyubomirsky et al. (2008), op. cit. See chapter 1, note 15.


34. Attributed to seventeenth-century scholar and mathematician Isaac Barrow: “Nothing of worth or weight can be achieved with half a mind, with a faint heart, and with a lame endeavor.”


Postscript: If You Are Depressed


6. This is called the diathesis-stress model. Diathesis represents a genetic susceptibility or predisposition. Stress represents an environmental trigger or precipitating event.


29. In most states, only medical doctors (who have M.D. degrees) can prescribe medication. Psychotherapists cannot but will refer you to someone who can.

30. It’s worth noting that because new scientific data about antidepressant drugs are arriving at a dizzying pace, you’ll want to be sure that your doctor’s knowledge is absolutely current.


38. Seligman et al. (2006), op. cit. See chapter 7, note 16.


42. Positive psychotherapy was developed by Nossrat Peseschkian, and personal growth therapy was investigated by Christine Robitschek. For brief descriptions of these positively focused therapies, see Compton, W. C. (2004). Positive psychology interventions. In Compton, op. cit., 182–95. See chapter 9, note 22.
