

**Sonja Lyubomirsky's book,
The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want**

From online Wiki book summaries:

Summary Author: **Kathryn Britton**, MAPP, CPC, former software engineer, is a certified professional coach working with professionals to increase well-being, energy, and meaning in their lives. Visit Theano Coaching. She is writing about her experiences as a Positive Organization Advisor within a very large corporation. She recently started a blog, Reflections on Positive Psychology.

(Formatted with bulleted ideas by Kathy, Pocket Perspectives....Kathy will take notes on book and fill in ideas under each area...for personal use...this is a very good book!!!!...practical, good ideas, strategies have been tested and verified in use on college campuses and support groups...sounds like many of the ideas are tried and true.)

Summary

In the spirit of the Oscars, I nominate Sonja Lyubomirsky's book, The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want for **best single book about positive psychology** to have on the shelf. There are many great books around these days, including books that go into specific topics in more detail. But when you need to recommend a book to a person who will read just one, I think this is it.

Part 1 addresses the questions,

- "Is it **possible** to become happier?" and
- "**Why** does it matter?"
- When I was growing up, my mother frequently commented that happiness was lagniappe — that's a Cajun word that roughly means the 13th in a baker's dozen. The baker may choose to throw it in, but is not obligated to do so. So I grew up thinking that the pursuit of happiness was a silly goal.

Sonja explains why taking action to be happier is not a silly goal, though construction of happiness is a better description than pursuit.

She argues that

- one's happiness is about **50% determined by genetics** (the happiness set point).
- Then only about **10% is determined by the things we tend to pursue in the name of happiness**: life circumstances such as wealth, possessions, occupation, living conditions, family relationships, church membership.
- The remaining **40%** is determined by **habits, behaviors, and thought patterns** that we can directly address with intentional action.
- She argues that it is **much more fruitful to address the 40% associated with our own behavior than it is to pursue the 10% associated with life circumstances.**

Happiness is not a silly goal for another reason.

- Sonja explains that happy people tend to be **healthier, more effective at work, more energetic, and of greater benefit to the people around them.**
- That's an **important message** for the general public.

Part 2 contains 12 specific activities for raising happiness through intentional behavior:

Practicing gratitude and positive thinking -

- (1) Expressing gratitude,

- (2) Cultivating optimism, and
- (3) Avoiding overthinking

Investing in Social Connections -

- (4) Practicing acts of kindness and
- (5) Nurturing social relationships

Managing Stress, Hardship, and Trauma:

- (6) Developing Strategies for Coping and
- (7) Learning to forgive

Living in the Present:

- (8) Increasing Flow experiences and
- (9) Savoring life's joys
- (10) Committing to goals

Taking care of body and soul:

- (11) Practicing religion and spirituality,
- (12) Taking care of body through meditation, physical activity, and acting like a happy person

None of these are brand new to people who have been working in positive psychology,

- but she puts them together into a cogent way that is very accessible to general readers.
- Her notes include references to other sources for people who want to go deeper —
- perhaps read Bob Emmons' book on gratitude
- or Csikszentmihalyi's book on flow.

Some of the 12 activities

- have **multiple variations** that make them **adaptable** to individual circumstances.
- Most come with **brief descriptions of the research** that shows they make a difference.
- Readers may say “Ho hum” when they see a strategy such as “Celebrate good news,” or “Hug frequently,” but she includes research information that may make them **look at these strategies with new eyes**.
- She also addresses **limitations** of various approaches.
- Journaling **may be effective** for coping with difficulties, practicing optimism, and committing to goals, **but it can get in the way** when trying to savor more.

Here on Positive Psychology News Daily, we've had numerous discussions about **how to find the right fit between person and activity**.

- Sonja devotes a chapter to **selecting activities that fit a person's interests, values, and needs**.
- The chapter includes her **Person-Activity Fit Diagnostic** adapted from work by Ken Sheldon to help a reader select four best-fitting activities.
- She mentions some **empirical validation of the effectiveness** of the diagnostic tool.
- It seems somewhat less mature than some of the individual activities, but then, it is breaking new ground.

Part 3 addresses the secrets to abiding happiness.

- Any of the 12 activities are good while it lasts, but **how do we make it last?**
- She discusses **timing** and **variation**,
- **social support**,
- and **motivation**,
- as well as the **science behind turning happiness-inducing behaviors into habits**.

I thought it was very responsible to include a postscript addressed to people who are depressed, “I should stress, however, that although a program to become happier can positively be attempted by those who are depressed, relief from depression is not what this book promises.” She includes some very useful information to encourage them to seek help elsewhere.

To conclude, this book contains

- a **very practical program** for the general public **to put many aspects of positive psychology in practice in their daily lives**.
- It doesn't cover all of positive psychology.
- For example, the **importance of identifying and applying strengths is notably absent**.
- But it cuts a wide swath with **clear descriptions** of research, **practical suggestions**, and **engaging examples**.
- Last week a friend asked me what one book she should buy on the subject, and this is the one I suggested.