



11 Habits of Truly Happy People

By Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

When we think of happiness, we typically think of things that bring us immediate pleasure—a decadent meal, a favorite book, or a relaxing day on the beach. These pleasures do bring happiness, but only temporarily. Recent studies have shown that true happiness, or life satisfaction, works a bit differently.

In one study, University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin Seligman categorized hundreds of people into three groups based on how they pursued happiness:

The Pleasant Life: People in pursuit of the Pleasant Life seek happiness by looking for pleasure. They are good at savoring the moment and making their pleasures last. These people are often described as “thrill-seekers.”

The Engaged Life: People in pursuit of the Engaged Life seek happiness by working hard at their passions. They immerse themselves so deeply in these that they sometimes come across as cold and uncaring; but for them, time seems to melt away as they experience a state of total engagement.

The Meaningful Life: People in pursuit of the Meaningful Life use their strengths to work toward something they believe contributes to a greater good. This greater good motivates them deeply.

Seligman found that people who pursued the Pleasant Life experienced little happiness, while those who pursued the Meaningful Life and the Engaged Life were very happy.

While Seligman’s research is just a single study, it shows that where you focus your energy and attention has a big impact on your happiness. Those who pursued the Engaged Life and the Meaningful Life had something important in common—they were deeply passionate, and

they used their strengths to better themselves and the world around them.

Indeed, happy people are highly intentional. If you want to follow in their footsteps, learn to incorporate the following habits into your repertoire.

1. Create your own happiness (don’t sit back and wait for it). Every second you waste waiting for happiness is a second you could have been using to create it. The happiest people aren’t the luckiest, wealthiest, or best-looking; the happiest people are those who make an effort to be happy. If you want to create your own happiness, you have to start by making it a priority. We work so hard to avoid letting other people down, but we so often do so at the expense of our own happiness.

2. Surround yourself with the right people. Happiness is contagious. Surrounding yourself with happy people builds confidence and stimulates creativity, and it’s flat-out fun. Hanging around negative people has the opposite effect—they want people to join their pity party so that they can feel better about themselves. Think of it this way: If a person were smoking, would you sit there all afternoon inhaling the second-hand smoke?

3. Get enough sleep. I’ve beaten this one to death over the years and can’t say enough about the importance of sleep to improving your mood, focus, and self-control. When you sleep, your brain literally recharges, removing toxic proteins that accumulate during the day as byproducts of normal neuronal activity. This ensures that you wake up alert and clear-headed. Your energy, attention, and memory are all reduced when you don’t get enough quality sleep. Sleep deprivation also raises stress hormone levels on its own, even without a stressor present. Happy people make sleep a priority, because it makes them feel great and they know how lousy they feel



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when they're sleep deprived.

4. Live in the moment. You can't reach your full potential until you learn to live your life in the present. No amount of guilt can change the past, and no amount of anxiety can change the future. It's impossible to be happy if you're constantly somewhere else, unable to fully embrace the reality (good or bad) of this very moment. To help yourself live in the moment, you must do two things: First, accept your past. If you don't make peace with your past, it will never leave you and, in doing so, it will create your future. Second, accept the uncertainty of the future. Worry has no place in the here and now. As Mark Twain once said, "Worrying is like paying a debt you don't owe."

5. Learn to love yourself. Most of us have no problem marveling at our friends' good qualities, but it can be hard to appreciate our own. Learn to accept who you are, and appreciate your strengths. Studies have shown that practicing self-compassion increases the number of healthy choices you make, improves mental health, and decreases your tendency to procrastinate.

6. Appreciate what you have. Taking time to contemplate what you're grateful for isn't merely the "right" thing to do. It also improves your mood, because it reduces the stress hormone cortisol by 23 percent. Research conducted at the University of California, Davis found that people who worked daily to cultivate an attitude of gratitude experienced improved mood, energy and physical well-being. It's likely that lower levels of cortisol played a major role in this.

7. Exercise. Getting your body moving for as little as 10 minutes releases GABA, a neurotransmitter that makes your brain feel soothed and keeps you in control of your impulses. Happy people schedule regular exercise and follow through on it because they know it pays huge dividends for their mood.

8. Forgive, but don't forget. Happy people live by the motto "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." They forgive in order to prevent a grudge, but they never forget. The negative emotions that come with holding onto a grudge are actually a stress response. Holding on to that stress can have devastating consequences for your health and mood, and happy people know to avoid this at all costs. However, offering forgiveness doesn't mean they'll give a wrongdoer another chance. Happy people will not be bogged down by mistreatment from others, so they quickly let things go and are assertive in protecting themselves from future harm.

9. Get in touch with your feelings. Attempting to repress your emotions doesn't just feel bad; it's bad for you. Learning to be open about your feelings decreases stress levels and improves your mood. One study even suggested that there was a relationship between how long you live and your ability to express your emotions. It found that people who lived to be at least 100 were significantly more emotionally expressive than the average person.

10. Concentrate on what you can control. Rather than dwelling on the things you can't control, try putting your effort into the things that you can. Have a long commute to work? Try listening to audiobooks. Hurt your leg jogging? Try swimming. More often than not, we take the bad and let it hold us back when it doesn't have to. Happy people are happy because they take their failures in stride, not because they don't fail.

11. Have a growth mindset. People's core attitudes fall into one of two categories: a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. With a fixed mindset, you believe you are who you are and you cannot change. This creates problems when you're challenged, because anything that appears to be more than you can handle is bound to make

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you feel hopeless and overwhelmed. People with a growth mindset believe that they can improve with effort. This makes them happier because they are better at handling difficulties. They also outperform those with a fixed mindset because they embrace challenges, treating them as opportunities to learn something new.

Bringing It All Together

These strategies won't just improve your happiness; they'll also make you a better person. Pick those that resonate with you and have fun with them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning coauthor of [Emotional Intelligence 2.0](#) and the cofounder of TalentSmart® the world's leading provider of emotional intelligence [tests](#) and [training](#) serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries.

Dr. Bradberry is a LinkedIn [Influencer](#) and a regular contributor to *Forbes, Inc., Entrepreneur, The World Economic Forum, and The Huffington Post*. He has written for, or been covered by, *Newsweek, BusinessWeek, Fortune, Fast Company, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and The Harvard Business Review*.

