

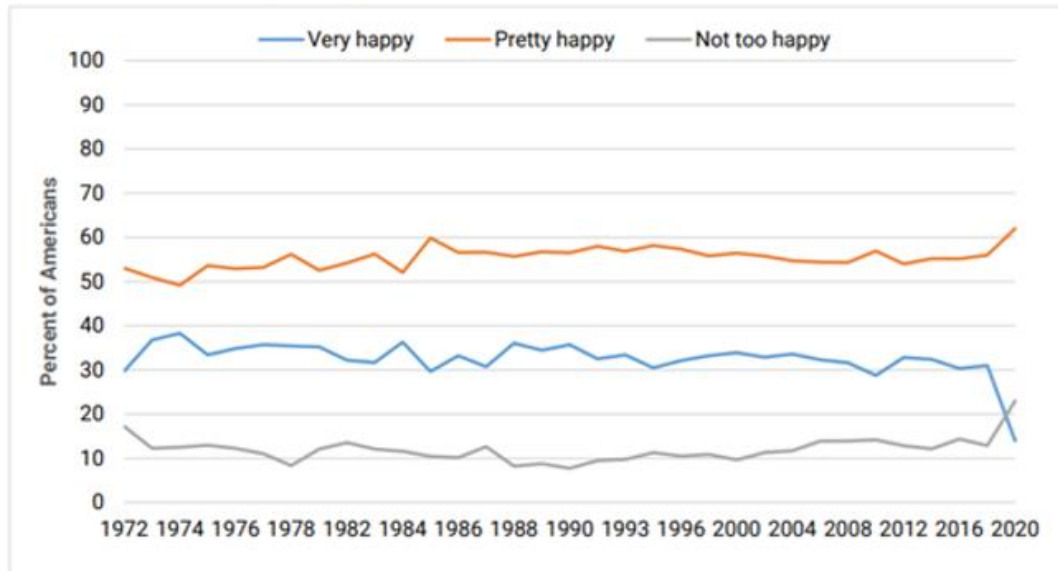
Rewire Your Mind for Happiness

Updated: Sep 14, 2021

Are you happy? If you're not as happy as you'd like to be, you're not alone.

A 2020 [survey](#) by NORC at the University of Chicago found that only 14% of Americans feel "very happy", which is the lowest since the survey began in 1972.

Happiness reaches lowest point in decades.



Question: Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?
Source: COVID Response Tracking Study conducted 5/21-29/2020, with 2,279 adults age 18 and over nationwide, and the General Social Survey, conducted 1972-2018.

[Image Source](#)

From the chart, we can see that the number of people who feel "not too happy" has been on the rise since 1990, with a big spike starting around 2018. Clearly, most of us could use some help with our happiness. The good news is, [studies](#) show that about 25% of our happiness potential is determined by our genes, meaning 75% is within our control! But who should we learn about happiness from? The world's happiest man is Matthieu Ricard who is a molecular biologist turned Buddhist Monk. He was given that title after researchers scanned his brain and found the highest levels of gamma waves (associated with happiness) ever recorded by science. He also wrote the book *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill*. In his book, he explains happiness is different from pleasure, and that the root of our happiness (and unhappiness) is in the way we think.

This article will detail eight ways to rewire our mindset for happiness (you can click on any one to jump to that section):

1. [Seek inner happiness, not outer pleasure](#)
2. [Focus on repaying gratitude, not on entitlement](#)

3. [Want less](#)
4. [Give without expecting anything in return](#)
5. [Focus on effort, not results](#)
6. [Turn failures into lessons](#)
7. [Compare yourself to yourself, not to others](#)
8. [Be strict towards yourself and lenient towards others](#)



Image by Shaurya Sagar on Unsplash

Without further ado, let's get into it!

1: Seek Inner Happiness, Not Outer Pleasure

Pleasure is a temporary, fleeting feeling that comes from outside stimulation. In our modern, materialistically rich world, outer pleasures are easier to access than ever. Examples include eating delicious food, getting social media likes, watching emotionally riveting movies and shows, and traveling to new places. The problem with external pleasures is that while they lead to a temporary "high", they also result in a "low" afterwards. The bigger the "high", the greater the "low" afterwards. Therefore, it's very important to moderate pleasures and not seek excessive pleasures.

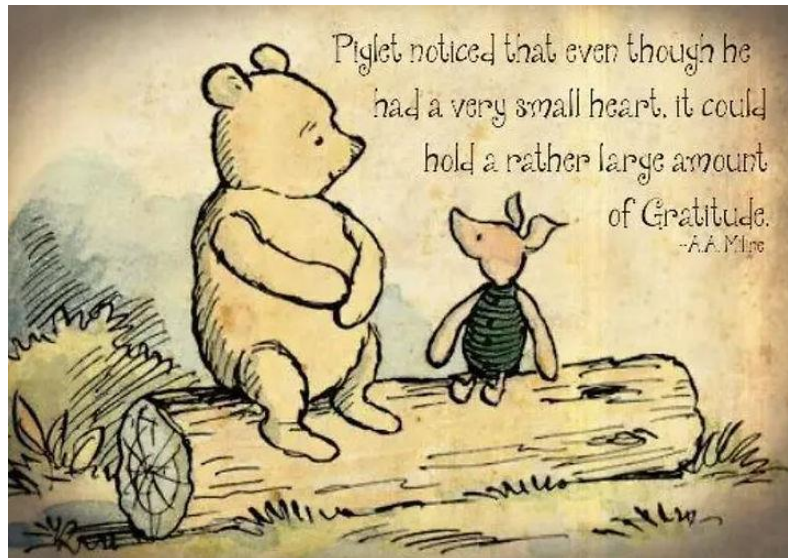
What is **happiness** then? There are a lot of definitions out there. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines happiness as *a state of well-being and contentment*. Ricard defines happiness as *a long-lasting, healthy state of mind*. Peter Crone, the Mind Architect, defines happiness as *the absence of the search for happiness*. Putting all of these ideas together, let's define happiness as *a long-lasting feeling of contentment and peace*. In this happy state, we wouldn't search for outside pleasure.

So how can we become happy? The rest of this article will help with that.

2: Focus on Repaying Gratitude, Not on Entitlement

Entitlement is a big killer of happiness. It makes us feel like other people should be giving more to us, or the world should be treating us better. This type of attitude also kills relationships.

To overcome entitlement, we need to nurture **gratitude**.



[Image Source](#)

We can reflect on how much others have given us, such as parents, teachers, government, all workers in society, and Mother Nature. Living in a mindset of gratitude is to live in a world of joy, and from that mindset of gratitude, we will naturally want to repay gratitude to others.

2.1 Parents

Our parents raised us and put up with us when we were helpless infants that needed 24/7 care. They worked hard to put food on the table every day and to pay for our education. When we were sick, they took care of us. When they got something good, they shared it with us. They selflessly gave us what they didn't get when they were younger so that our lives would be better than theirs.

Perhaps you might feel like your parents demanded a lot from you, such as good grades and attending all those extra classes. But ultimately, their intention was always for our benefit. They never asked us to pay them back a single dollar or minute.

When we think about all that our parents have given us, how could we not feel grateful? When we feel grateful, we don't feel unhappy. In fact, we want to repay their gratitude. How can we do that? The obvious things are to buy things for them like good food and useful gadgets. But even better would be to spend more time with them, give them more words of appreciation, notice what they're worried about, and reduce their worries.

Some people complain that their parents didn't do enough for them or didn't raise them properly. But no one is perfect. Parents always try their best in the circumstances that they were faced with; they weren't purposely trying to mess up. Rather than feeling entitled to a "good childhood", we should be grateful for all the effort and hard work that parents went through despite all their difficulties. To repay their gratitude, we can make their remaining years better, and ensure the future generations get better circumstances.

2.2 Teachers

It's thanks to teachers that we have our knowledge and abilities today. There are so many people in poor countries who did not get an education and cannot earn a living. Just like parents, teachers want the best for their students without expecting anything in return. When we were lazy and had a bad attitude, teachers would push us and try to get us to improve. When we worked hard, teachers worked just as hard to support us in our growth.

To repay the gratitude of teachers, we should try to fulfill teachers' aspirations for us. All teachers hope that their students will use the knowledge they gained for good, to becoming contributing members of society, to make the world a better place. This is something that parents share in common with teachers. Without our parents and teachers, we would amount to nothing. Therefore, we should use the abilities we gained from them to repay their gratitude.

2.3 Government

The government provides so many essential services that many people take for granted, such as national defense, healthcare, roads, public transportation, education, waste management, electricity, and so much more. There are so many poor and unstable countries in the world where citizens do not receive such services from their government, so we are extremely fortunate to have our government.

To repay the gratitude of our government, we should we contribute to the country and society in whatever way we can, whether that's through our job or through volunteering. We should also follow the laws and pay our taxes to repay gratitude to the government.

2.4 All Workers in Society

In our modern society, the amount of work and labor that goes into every day items is unimaginable. For example, when you go to the grocery store, you can buy food from all over the world. Think about all the farmers, transportation workers, and scientists involved in providing you with food. When you use your phone or computer, think about all the factory workers, office workers, raw material extractors, engineers, etc. that are involved in making your device. When you use the roads, think about all the construction workers and maintenance people required for those roads.

Our daily life requires the service of countless people in society. Without them, we would be living like cavemen in the wild. To repay their gratitude, we should respect all people in

society because everyone is contributing in their own way, and we should do our best to contribute to society in our own way.

2.5 Mother Nature

While it's certainly nice to have technology and money, none of that matters without air and food. It's Mother Nature that gives us these two things. And like a true mother, Mother Nature has never asked for anything in return for its service. Even though humans are polluting the earth and hurting Mother Nature, it still does its best to nurture all life on earth.

To repay Mother Nature's gratitude, we should do our best to take care of the environment. We can reduce things that hurt the environment such as driving, eating animal products, and throwing away garbage. We can also increase things that help the environment such as gardening, composting, buying local food, and buying organic food.

2.6 Gratitude + Giving = Happiness

"Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more."

—H. Jackson Brown Jr.

When we're always expecting others to give to us, we become unhappy. When we're mindful of how much others have given us, and when we focus on giving to others, we become happy. To nurture the habit of gratitude, we can keep a gratitude journal, where we write down at least three things we're grateful for that day. Then we can go a step further and keep track of at least one way we've given back gratitude that day.



Image by Gabrielle Henderson on Unsplash

By reminding ourselves daily of gratitude and giving, we will naturally rewire our mindset to experience more happiness and joy in life.

3: Want Less

Just like how pleasures need moderation, the same is true for desires. People often think if they could just get what they want, they would be happy. The problem is, desires are limitless, and the pleasure of attaining something is only temporary. After you attain it, you might become stressed about losing what you obtained, or you'll be unhappy when you find something else you haven't obtained yet.

The great Stoic philosopher Seneca said it well when he said,
"It is inevitable that life will be not just very short but very miserable for those who acquire by great toil what they must keep by greater toil."

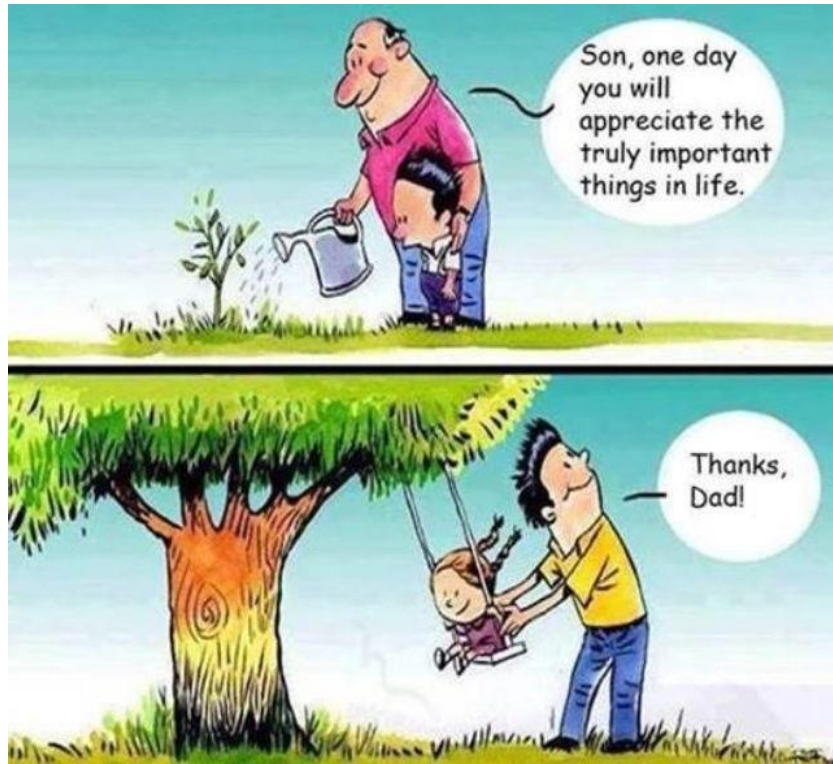
For example, some people work so hard to buy a big house, bigger than they really need. After borrowing money to buy the house, they then end up working even harder to pay back the mortgage, spending most of their time working and little time actually in the house.

Seneca also said,
"No person has the power to have everything they want, but it is in their power not to want what they don't have, and to cheerfully put to good use what they do have."

For example, I don't have a car to drive to work. Rather than complaining about having to take public transit, and I cheerfully put to good use my commute time. I use it to listen to educational podcasts. Since I'm not driving, I can even take notes on my phone. If I'm tired, I can nap on the bus. I also save money on insurance and gas. Often times, when we put to best use what we do have, we no longer crave for something we don't have.

4: Give Without Expecting Anything in Return

To be able to give is a great fortune. Giving without expecting anything in return is a what gives humans long-lasting fulfillment and contentment. As Nelson Henderson once said,
"The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

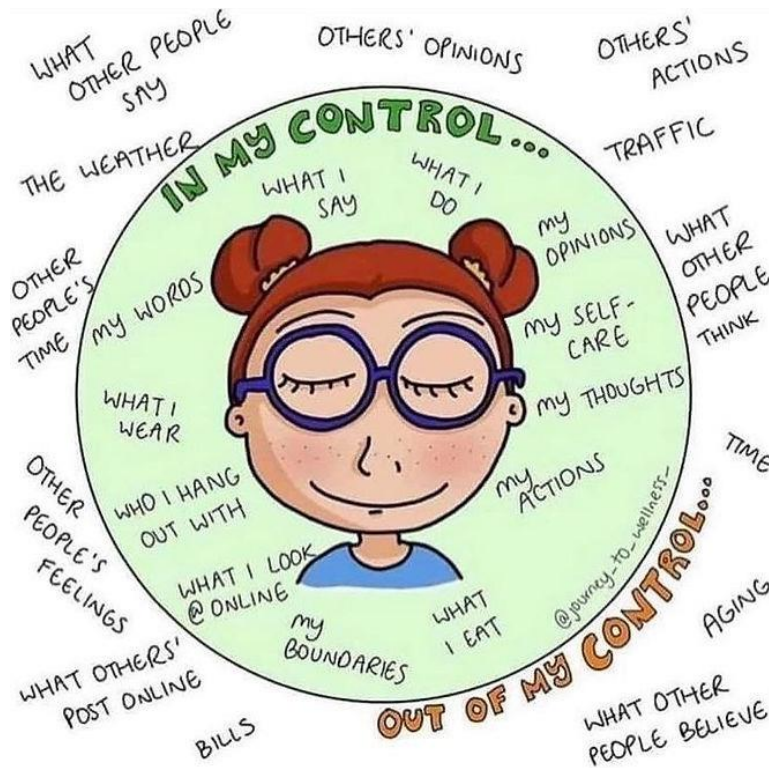


[Image Source](#)

When we serve others, help others, or give to others without expecting anything in return, we are truly making the world a better place, and when we make the world a better place, we feel an inner sense of contentment and value. Furthermore, serving others give us a fulfilling purpose in our lives. Knowing that we made a positive impact on others brings us long-lasting contentment, which is true happiness.

5: Focus on Doing Your Best, Then Let Whatever Happens Happen

People often judge themselves based on results, which is a sure way to create disappointment. You could work hard and do everything "right" and still get an undesirable result. Why? Because there are too many factors that you cannot control in the result. To expand this idea, *focus on what's in your control and let go of what's outside your control.*



[Image Source](#)

For example, when Jay Shetty was writing his book, [Think Like a Monk](#), people asked him what his goal was for the book. Most people would say things like "I hope it becomes a best seller", but Jay said "I just want to write the best possible book I can." He focused on what was in his control: writing a good book, getting advice from everyone he could, connecting with as many public figures as he could, using as many interesting marketing methods as he could.

The day before the book launch, Jay sent an email to his team saying how grateful he was to everyone for doing their utmost, and that no matter what the result is, he's very happy because everyone did their best. His publisher replied, "Oh that's a very nice and surprising thing to hear! We usually only get nice messages like this *after* a book does well, not before." Later, his book ended up being the #1 best seller in many countries for months. A big part of his success can be attributed to the fact that he was 100% focused on doing his best and didn't waste energy worrying about the results. Jay showed a great example of just focusing on input and intention while detaching from the result.

Now you might be thinking, "But what if the result is bad?" That brings us to #6.

6: Turn Failures into Lessons

"We're programmed to believe that life is for enjoyment, but actually it's for education... We think we're in a candy shop, but we're in a classroom."

—Jay Shetty

Setbacks, mistakes, and failures are guaranteed in life. But they don't have to ruin your happiness, your sense of peace and wellbeing. The key is to turn these setbacks into lessons, which will then make us feel gratitude and progress, both of which are positive.

"When you don't get what you want, you get more of what you need. When you're attached to what you're want, you're not open to what you need."

—Jay Shetty

Whenever something undesirable happens in life, always ask yourself, *"How can I use this to improve myself?"* and *"What can I learn from this?"*. This way, you turn that setback into a lesson, which then makes you grateful for that event. When you act on that learning, you'll have proof that you improved yourself, and that feeling of progress gives you more happiness.

The Japanese term "**kintsukuroi**" is a great analogy for this. Kintsukuroi is the act of repairing broken pottery with gold or silver and understanding that it is now more beautiful after being broken and repaired. The same is true for setbacks in our lives. The act of repairing with gold is to learn from the setback and act on those learnings to improve ourselves.



[Image Source](#)

A great video I like to watch facing setbacks and failures is this [video](#) from Jay Shetty:

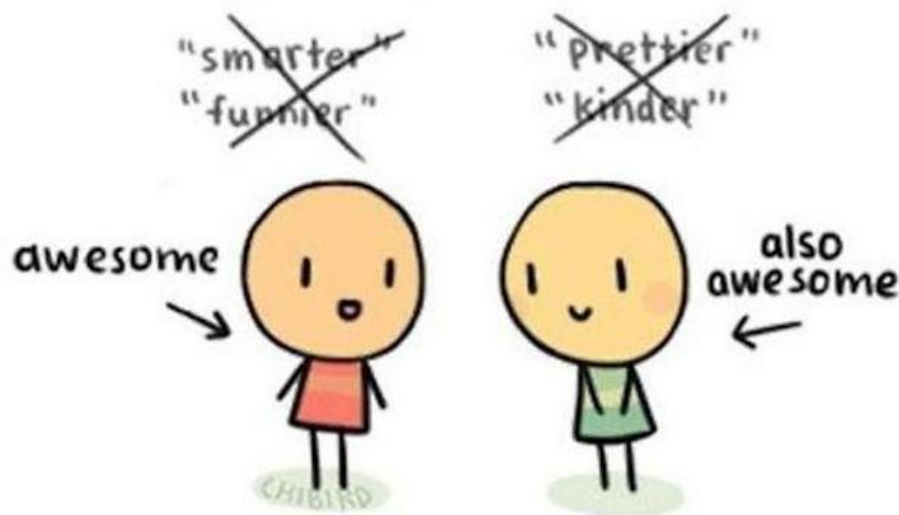
In the video, he talks about how all great people with amazing successes have failed big. He gives examples such as Brian Acton, J.K. Rowling, and Bill Gates. He emphasizes that failures are only failures if we don't learn from them because if we learn from them, they become lessons. With this kind of attitude, if we don't achieve our initial goal, we'll end up achieving even more than what we originally had aimed for, and we'll look back on our failures with gratitude and humility.

7: Compare Yourself to Yourself, Not to Others

We've probably all experienced comparing ourselves to others, whether it's against classmates, colleagues, friends, people on TV, or people on social media. To build our happiness on being better than other people is basically putting ourselves in prison, with other people being the jail guard. We cannot control other people's circumstances, so basing our happiness on their circumstances is to give our happiness into their control.

No one's life is perfect, and everyone is dealing with their own troubles. Comparing our troubles to other people's fortune is not just a bad habit, but completely inaccurate. For example, a millionaire might compare herself to a billionaire and feel bad, but maybe she has a much better family life. Or a small celebrity might compare himself to a big celebrity and feel bad, but he doesn't know how much that big celebrity wants to have the privacy and freedom of a small celebrity.

stop comparing yourself to others.



[Image Source](#)

Rather than competing with others, we should seek to be inspired by others good points and to compete with ourselves. Ask yourself questions such as

- Am I better than my past self one year ago?
- Am I attaining my full potential currently?
- If I unexpectedly died tomorrow, would I be proud of the type of person I lived as?

When we re-direct energy into improving ourselves, achieving our full potential, and [cultivating our character](#), we will create more happiness and progress in our lives.

8: Be Strict Towards Yourself and Lenient Towards Others

Relationships are a big part of happiness. In his [Ted Talk](#), *What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness*, researcher Robert Waldinger reported, *"The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period."*

When it comes to relationships, unhappy people focus their energy on

- The faults of the other person
- What the other person should be doing more of
- How the other person wronged them

Unhappy people are strict towards others are lenient towards themselves. They expect others to change and improve, but they themselves don't put in effort to change and improve. They want others to give more to the relationship while they take more. They want to be understood, but they don't try to understand the other person. It's no wonder they have so many conflicts in relationships!

On the other hand, happy people focus on

- The strengths of the other person
- The contributions of the other person
- The hardships the other person is going through

Happy people are strict towards themselves and lenient towards others. They focus on doing their best, giving lots to the relationship, being empathetic, and helping the other person with that they need.

The Dalai Lama explained it well when he said,

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

Compassion is about being tolerant towards others, trying to reduce their suffering, and viewing their happiness as our own happiness. Relationships is too big of a topic to go in-

depth here, so if you want to learn more about how to nurture loving relationships, check out this [article](#).

Conclusion

Happiness is not about chasing temporary pleasures, it is about rewiring our way of thinking for long-lasting contentment and peace. Rewiring our mindset is not only free and available to us at any time, it address the root of our happiness. As Dr. Alan Zimmerman says,

Watch your thoughts. They become words.

Watch your words. They become actions.

Watch your actions. They become habits.

Watch your habits. They become character.

Watch your character. It becomes your destiny.

This article detailed eight major ways to rewire our mind for happiness:

1. Redirect our goal from outer pleasure to inner contentment
2. Contemplate how much others have given us and try to repay gratitude
3. Reduce desires and make full use of what we already have
4. Plant trees under whose shade you do not plan to sit
5. Focus on what's in your control (your efforts), not what's outside your control (the results)
6. Ask yourself, "How can I make good use of this setback?"
7. Compete with yourself and be inspired by others
8. Expect more from yourself and be tolerant towards others

I hope you will find at least a couple of these methods useful in improving your happiness!