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The happiness advantage

Shawn Achor is a renowned expert in happiness, success, and potential. His groundbreaking research has been featured on the cover of Harvard Business Review and his TED Talk has garnered over 15 million views. As one of the world's leading authorities on positivity, he has shared his findings with Fortune 100 companies, educational institutions, and government organizations. Achor's journey began unexpectedly when he applied to Harvard on a dare. Raised in Waco, Texas, he never expected to leave, but after getting accepted, he felt thrilled and humbled by the privilege. He went on to spend twelve years at Harvard, pursuing his graduate studies, teaching courses, and delivering lectures. As a Proctor, Achor lived in college dorms for 12 years, helping undergraduates navigate academic success and happiness within the university's walls. This experience fundamentally changed his brain processing, filling him with gratitude for every moment. He now serves on the World Happiness Council, continuing his research and sharing his findings with millions through interviews with Oprah Winfrey and PBS programs. Praise for Achor's work includes "A supremely important book" (Medium), "Thoughtfully lays out the steps to increasing workplace positivity" (Forbes), and "Powerful . . . a world-famous expert" (New York Times). His research has also been published in top psychology journals, featured in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Forbes, and Fortune. Stress, exams, and blizzards may seem like insurmountable obstacles, but even these challenges can be overcome with the right perspective. My 12 years of teaching at Harvard provided me with a unique opportunity to observe how thousands of students navigated the stresses of college life. I noticed a pattern that would become a recurring theme in my work. John Milton's words in Paradise Lost, "The Mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven," resonated deeply with me as I watched Harvard students struggle to find their way. Many saw the university as a privilege, but others became consumed by the pressure and stress, losing sight of the opportunities available to them. A turning point came when I was invited on a speaking tour in Africa in 2009. Visiting a school in Soweto, where children lived without electricity or running water, I realized that my usual approach wouldn't work. Sharing stories about privileged American college students and wealthy business leaders seemed out of place. Instead, I tried to open a dialogue by asking the children if they enjoyed doing schoolwork. To my surprise, 95 percent of the children raised their hands and smiled genuinely. It was as if they saw schoolwork as a privilege that many others did not have. This experience shifted my perspective on how students interpret reality. Those who focused on the stress and pressure were missing out on opportunities, while those who saw learning as a privilege shone brighter. I became fascinated by the factors that contributed to positive mindsets in high-pressure environments. What was it about Harvard's competitive atmosphere that allowed some students to excel, while others struggled? I knew I had to explore this question further. Harvard's Magic Wears Off for SomeDespite its picturesque grounds and abundant resources, Harvard can be a breeding ground for unhappiness. The university's student body consists of some of America's brightest minds, yet many struggle with depression. In fact, a 2004 poll found that nearly half of all students suffered from debilitating depression, while over four in five experienced it at least once during the school year. This trend is not unique to Harvard; a Conference Board survey revealed that only 45% of workers were happy in their jobs, a 22-year low. Depression rates have skyrocketed, with the age threshold for unhappiness dropping from 29.5 years old in 1960 to just 14.5 today. My friends often asked why I would choose to study happiness at Harvard, given its privileged student body. But I saw it as an opportunity to explore what sets those who thrive apart from their peers. By studying the habits and experiences of the happiest students, I hoped to uncover patterns that could benefit others in a world increasingly plagued by stress and negativity. I was fortunate to stumble upon three pioneering professors - Phil Stone, Ellen Langer, and Tal Ben-Shabar - at the forefront of positive psychology. This emerging field focuses on what makes people excel rather than merely return to "normal." By exploring the intersection of science and happiness, I aimed to shed light on the habits and characteristics that enable individuals to flourish in an increasingly challenging world. A scatter-plot diagram plotting student performance against happiness reveals a striking pattern - one that fills me with excitement every morning. Traditional research focuses on finding general trends in data, often ignoring individual variations known as outliers. These anomalies can be conveniently dismissed as measurement errors or deleted to maintain a clear trend. However, I propose a different approach: instead of erasing these outliers, we should learn from them. By understanding and embracing the unique aspects of individuals, we can gain valuable insights into human behavior. The conventional focus on averages has led to what I call the "cult of the average" in behavioral sciences. This approach ignores the exceptional cases, leading to a lackluster understanding of human potential. In reality, studying only what is average will only lead to being average ourselves. Outliers are not just errors; they hold the key to unlocking new knowledge and opportunities. By analyzing these individual variations, we can uncover patterns and relationships that would otherwise go unnoticed. For instance, research has shown that happiness actually drives success, rather than the other way around. When we experience positive emotions, we become more motivated, resilient, and efficient, leading to better outcomes. In this context, I'd like to highlight Shawn Achor's principles of positive psychology, which aim to improve resilience, happiness, and performance. By applying these seven principles - such as creating a Positive Tetris Effect or Regaining control with the Zorro Circle - we can tap into the "Happiness Advantage" and transform our lives. Moreover, our brains are capable of change throughout our lives, meaning that everything from habits to emotional states is malleable. This understanding opens up new avenues for personal growth and development, allowing us to transcend our limitations and achieve more than what's considered average. Intellectual potential can be transformed into personal greatness. Shawn Achor discovered seven key principles in positive psychology that help individuals from all walks of life unlock their full potential and achieve happiness. We will briefly outline these 7 principles to give you a head start on harnessing the power of positive thinking. First, we must learn to tap into the Happiness Advantage by training our brains to be more optimistic. Research has shown that happy people experience better health, success, and achievements compared to those with negative mindsets. Fortunately, it's possible to shift your baseline happiness levels regardless of your natural disposition. Achor provides numerous evidence-based practices to boost short-term emotions and cultivate a positive brain. Here are some actionable tips you can start applying today: * Meditate for 5 minutes daily to grow the left prefrontal cortex, reducing stress and increasing happiness. * Anticipate future rewards or joyful events to boost endorphin levels. * Perform five deliberate acts of kindness daily to reduce stress and improve mental health. * Inject positivity into your environment by surrounding yourself with uplifting influences. * Engage in regular exercise to release endorphins, reduce stress, and improve motivation. By incorporating these practices into your daily routine, you can unlock the secrets to lasting happiness. In addition, Achor's research highlights the importance of investing in meaningful experiences and activities that bring more enduring joy than material possessions. By harnessing the power of positive thinking, you can create a ripple effect of success and achievement in your personal and professional life. Next, we will explore the concept of changing outcomes with the fulcrum and lever, inspired by the theories of Archimedes. This principle emphasizes the importance of shifting our mindset and extending our belief in what's possible to magnify our ability to create positive change. By adopting a more optimistic outlook, we can overcome challenges and achieve our goals. Stay tuned for the next section where we will delve deeper into this concept and provide practical tips on how to apply it in your life. Given text seems to highlight key concepts from Achor's book related to personal growth, mindset shifts, and habit formation. Here are some key takeaways presented in a paraphrased format: ##### Creating a Positive Tetris Effect The power of our minds shapes reality and outcomes. Focusing on positive beliefs and mindsets can lead to greater success and fulfillment. ##### Overcoming Mental Blocks A mental filter influences our thoughts and behaviors, but training the brain to see patterns can help overcome negativity. ##### Finding the Upward Path During crisis or challenging tasks, we often dwell on negative thoughts; instead, finding the upward path brings us out of the situation stronger than before. ##### Regaining Control with the Zorro Circle Positive feelings aid in problem-solving and thinking clearly. Refocusing on small goals helps regain control when feeling overwhelmed. ##### Transforming Habits with the 20-Second Rule Understanding how habits are formed is key to creating lasting change, which can be achieved by using the path of least resistance to replace bad habits. ##### Investing in Social Support Positive social connections are crucial for happiness levels, well-being, and performance; nurturing these relationships is essential for growth. Looking at how leaders build social capital and strengthen connections at work can greatly impact their success. When applying the seven principles together, they create a powerful effect that resonates beyond just themselves. By changing themselves first, they inspire others in a ripple effect that reaches up to three levels of influence, leading to improved happiness and results not just for themselves but also for many others. For more on this topic and how Achor's work applies these strategies, check out his book summary bundle, which includes an infographic, text summary, and audio summary. Shawn Achor, a renowned expert in happiness, success, and potential, has spent twelve years at Harvard conducting research that has been featured globally. His TED Talk has gained over 15 million views, making it one of the most popular ever. Achor's work has reached top psychology journals, major publications like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, as well as Fortune and Forbes. He continues to serve on the World Happiness Council. Achor shares a personal anecdote about applying to Harvard due to a dare. Raised in Waco, Texas, he never expected to leave but was thrilled when accepted. Achor stayed for twelve years, earning his BA and pursuing graduate studies. During this time, he taught various courses, became a Proctor, and delivered lectures. He lived in college dorms for nearly 12 of those years. Achor explains that seeing Harvard as a privilege changed his experience. Even amidst stress and challenges, he felt grateful for every moment. His extensive time at Harvard allowed him to observe patterns among students navigating the pressures of higher education. The concept "The Mind is its own place" from John Milton's Paradise Lost resonates with Achor's observations. Many students initially see Harvard as a privilege but soon lose sight of this, focusing instead on workload, competition, and stress. They become consumed by worries about their future, losing the ability to create happiness in their current circumstances. The students who were earning degrees with promising futures felt overwhelmed by minor setbacks rather than energized by the possibilities before them. I observed these students struggling in their academic pursuits and realized that they were not only more susceptible to stress and depression but also had poorer grades and performance compared to their peers. During a speaking tour in Africa, I visited a school in Soweto where children lacked basic amenities like electricity and running water. It was there that I understood the futility of using typical research methods with these students. Instead, I tried to open a dialogue, asking if they liked doing schoolwork. To my surprise, 95 percent raised their hands, smiling genuinely. The local CEO, Salm, explained that for them, attending school was a privilege many parents could not afford. This experience sparked an interest in me to explore the factors contributing to positive mindsets among high-achieving individuals and those who struggled under pressure. Harvard University, despite its impressive facilities and faculty, struggles with a significant issue: chronic unhappiness among its students. A 2004 Harvard Crimson poll revealed that nearly half of all students suffer from severe depression, while only about half report being happy at their jobs. In contrast to other institutions, Harvard's focus on the average can lead to neglecting individuals who excel in happiness and performance. The conventional approach to measuring success is based on a flawed equation: hard work leads to success, which in turn generates happiness. However, recent breakthroughs in positive psychology have turned this formula on its head. Research has shown that happiness actually drives success, not the other way around. When individuals are in a positive state of mind, their brains become more engaged, creative, motivated, and productive at work. Statistical procedures aim to eliminate outliers as they can skew results and alter findings. However, I've chosen to focus on these deviating cases, seeking to understand what makes them unique rather than erasing them from the data. This unconventional approach challenges traditional psychology's reliance on averages, which often leads to neglecting individual differences and ignoring what truly sets high achievers apart. Experts like Shawn Achor have spent years studying the relationship between happiness and success. His work demonstrates that by cultivating a positive mindset, individuals can unlock their full potential and gain a competitive edge in the workplace. By reprogramming our brains to become more optimistic, we can tap into the benefits of happiness and watch it fuel our pursuit of excellence. In his book "The Happiness Advantage", Shawn Achor, a renowned researcher from Harvard University, presents a fresh approach to achieving success at work by tapping into the power of happiness. Through his extensive research and case studies with top executives worldwide, he reveals seven actionable principles that can be applied in various settings - from classrooms to corporate boardrooms - to unlock one's full potential and gain a competitive edge. These principles include retraining one's brain to recognize opportunities (The Tetris Effect), breaking down large goals into manageable ones (The Zorro Circle), and investing in social support networks, which are key predictors of happiness and success. Achor's work offers practical advice on how to cultivate a positive mindset, not just for personal happiness but also as a means to excel professionally and achieve extraordinary results in both work and life.

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