

## Shawn Achor: 8 Steps to Happiness

<http://www.newsmaxhealth.com/Health-Wire/shawn-achor-happiness-success/2013/06/14/id/510072>

By Marti Lotman

Success – whether in career or relationship – is dependent on happiness, according to the best-selling author of *The Happiness Advantage* Shawn Achor.

“The research we’ve been doing shows that if you raise success rates, happiness rates stay the same. But if you flip around the formula and you raise levels of happiness first, then success rates rise dramatically,” Achor, a Harvard-trained researcher, tells Newsmax Health.

His newest book, *Before Happiness*, posits that before you can start making changes to your happiness, health, or job, you first have to realize that change is possible. Fortunately, according to Achor, change, regardless of genes and environmental factors, is possible for everyone.

“The interesting thing is that most people hold a belief that their happiness or their potential is determined based upon their genes or their environment, that some people are born happy and some people aren't.”

Others blame outside factors such as the economy or their boss for unhappiness. Achor suggests the following steps to increasing your happiness:

### 1. Cancel noise

Many people are unable to make changes in their life because their brains are listening to too much external and internal noise. External noise may include negative information, news, gossip, or negative people. Internal noise includes what people consider their genetic makeup. Achor recommends “noise cancelling,” or reducing your intake of negative news stories and the amount of time you listen to the radio in the car by just 10 percent. Achor also recommends reducing the amount of time spent on social media sites and web forums, which are often a breeding ground of negativity.

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### 2. Believe success is possible

Perceive success as being closer than you may feel at first. "In other words what we found is that people at the end of a marathon sprint to the end, even though they're exhausted. It's amazing. Your brain drops an accelerant into your system. It's so powerful they actually put medics right there at a point called the 'X spot' in marathons." Achor's research has shown that individuals can simulate X spots at work or school by making goals more modest. They can also focus on the progress they've made instead of the progress they need to make. This change in mindset causes the brain to accelerate faster toward that success.

### 3. Involve others

Once you feel you are operating out of a positive mindset, it's important to get others on board as well. If you're the only one with a positive reality, you won't believe change is possible for long. "You need to get other people around you to see this as well. One way to do this is through success franchising, which is once you've seen the success in your life you try to narrow it down to a simple goal or rule that you then can show other people, so it becomes a one-sentence explanation for ways you are able to succeed by applying that principle."

### 4. Set the tone

You can set the tone of a conversation by being the first one to speak, according to Achor. This tone change can even alter people's thought patterns. "You set the tone by starting with something called the power lead, which is you start with something positive to start the phone call or the meeting, which actually sets the tone for the rest of the conversation that follows. What we found is that's one of the simplest ways of actually getting under people to start to see the reality you started with instead of having to backtrack and convince people of another reality."

### 5. Be mindful

Research has shown that even people with chronic illness and pain can lessen their symptoms by shifting their focus to more positive thoughts. A focus on positivity has also shown to increase pain tolerance and longevity. Spending just two minutes a day for 21 days in a row writing or thinking of three things you're thankful for teaches the brain to shift its focus.

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### 6. Increase social connection

According to Achor, social connections are the greatest predictor of long-term happiness and productivity. They may also combat obesity, high blood pressure, and smoking. Achor suggests starting by sending a positive email to one coworker a day for three weeks to increase your social network.

### 7. Re-evaluate your relationship to stress

Changing one's mindset about stress can have a positive impact on health. According to Achor it can improve the immune system, deepen social bonds, and free up our brain. "You can have the same level of stress as somebody else but you'd have 23 percent fewer stress-related symptoms. So that's 23 percent less headaches, backaches, and fatigue in your life. So the reason that's so important is that stress is inevitable in everyone's life. Young or old, you'll feel the stress. Stress's affects upon our body is changed based upon our mindset and if we have a positive mindset about stress instead of hiding it, we see it as a challenge, it turns out the human body and brain completely change."

### 8. See the negative

Although some people see negative situations as only that, when we embrace them as opportunities for resilience they can take on a more positive quality. "Intentionally in the midst of something negative, look for how it actually could cause us to grow . . . we need to encourage people to look for growth in the midst of the challenges that we experience in our life." Doing 15 minutes of mindful cardio activity like gardening, walking the dog, going for a walk, or yoga was found to have the equivalent effect of taking an antidepressant, according to Achor. "For the next two years, you have 30 percent less likelihood of getting depressed again and the reason for that is that exercise trains your brain to believe that your behavior matters and when that happens, you start creating an entire constellation of positive habits in your life which buffers the depression or negativity that we experience."

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