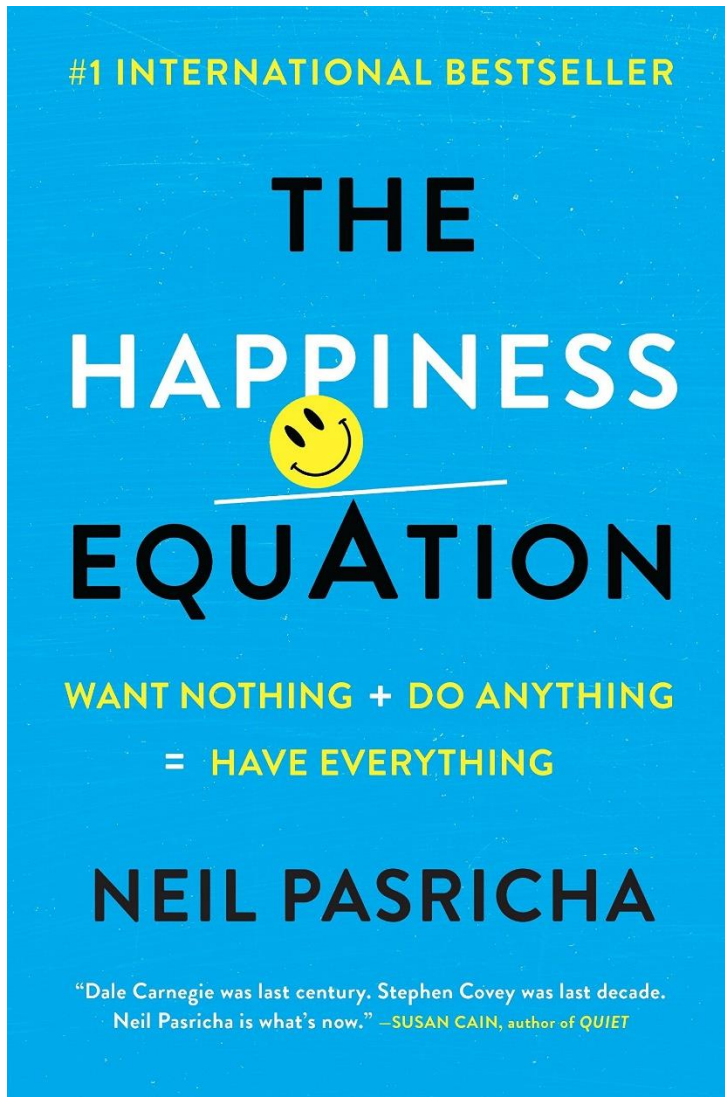


# THE HAPPINESS EQUATION SUMMARY

By Neil Pasricha



How happy would you say you are with your life, on a scale from one (“not at all”) to ten (“my life is perfect bliss”)? If your answer to this question was anything below a seven or an eight, this book summary is for you.

Happiness isn’t a given, but it is something you can work toward. And doing this isn’t as difficult as you might think. This doesn’t mean that you need to go on expensive yoga retreats, visit all seven wonders of the world, or have millions of dollars in order for you to feel positively about your life. All you need are the nine secrets outlined in this book summary. Let’s get started.

In this summary of *The Happiness Equation* by Neil Pasricha, you’ll learn

- that you're already a lottery winner;
- about a part of the human brain that actually *searches for* problems; and
- why retirement isn't all it's cracked up to be.
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## **THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #1: IT'S IMPORTANT TO START FROM A PLACE OF HAPPINESS AND PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU ENJOY DOING THEM.**

In the early parts of your life, you may have been taught that happiness is only achievable after a great deal of hard work and lots of success. However, this exact logic is actually responsible for a lot of people's unhappiness, because the equation actually works the other way around.

This leads us to the first secret of happiness: success and great work come from people who are *already* happy.

Happiness isn't something to chase. External circumstances, such as getting a raise at work, only account for 10 percent of someone's personal happiness. The rest comes from within oneself, and is based on viewing the world in a positive light.

In order to assist in the recognition of this everyday happiness, do a *20 minute replay* before going to bed. This simple practice involves keeping a daily journal to write down at least one thing that made you happy during the day. This can help in multiple ways: from helping you recognize moments of happiness in the future to allowing you to relive that happy emotion at the end of each day.

Motivation is another great contributor to a person's overall happiness, which brings us to the second secret of happiness: do things because you love doing them, not because of external goals, rewards, or what other people might think.

When you're solely motivated by money or admiration, you're entering a never-ending cycle of unhappiness. Even in reaching your goal, it will only result in a fleeting moment of happiness before you feel the compulsion to set another goal.

The author started his blog, *1000 Awesome Things*, because writing brought him joy and he liked the idea of posting one happy detail for one thousand workdays.

However, when the site started to gain a following, he began setting goals. At first, he wanted to reach one million visitors. Once he'd accomplished that, he wanted to reach ten million. Then, his goal was to write a book. And then he wanted the book to become a bestseller. There was simply no end.

He was chasing a happiness that didn't – and couldn't – last. This led him to start participating in activities simply for the sheer joy of doing them.

## **THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #2: THERE ARE TWO CONFLICTS THAT INTERFERE WITH BEING HAPPY, BUT SIMPLY**

## **BY BEING ALIVE, YOU ALREADY HAVE THE TICKET TO HAPPINESS.**

There's no escaping negative thoughts. They're simply bound to show up no matter how positive of an outlook you have on life.

When you're trying to work through these thoughts, you'll likely feel as if you have a battle raging in your mind. Well, that's because a battle *is* raging, one between two parts of your brain: the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex.

The amygdala is very old, and its job is to always be on high alert, scanning every situation for potential problems and threats. Way back when, our ancestors were constantly on the lookout for saber-toothed tigers and other predators, and the amygdala was responsible for keeping them alive. Clearly, times are different now, however the amygdala still has the same old job, which means it sets off alarms no matter how small the threat, for example, that upcoming presentation you've been preparing for.

The prefrontal cortex, which developed more recently, attempts to reason through these worries with rational thoughts and logic. However, the amygdala often wins these battles, therefore resulting in a lot of anxious and unhappy people.

As if that weren't enough, there's another battle that we're constantly having with ourselves, which is a conflict between feelings of self-worth and feelings of self-doubt.

A great example of when this might happen is in seeing a neighbor's new car. Though you might've been fine a minute ago, suddenly you start feeling miserable about your life and your inability to afford your own new car.

While you might not always be able to calm your amygdala, especially if you're about to make your public-speaking debut, there are definitely reliable methods to dealing with envy and discontent.

This brings us to the third secret, which is all about putting things in the right perspective: make an effort to consciously remember how lucky you are to simply be alive in the first place.

Think about how truly unbelievable it is that all the conditions necessary for human life on earth came together perfectly to make the human race – how remarkable it is that you're even capable of engaging with this book summary!

Keep in mind that while there are 7 billion people alive today, there are 108 billion people who have died, which means that 14 out of every 15 people who have ever been born are already deceased. Being alive at all is a little like winning the wild cosmic lottery!

### **THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #3: RETIRING ISN'T THE KEY TO HAPPINESS — IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO PURPOSEFULLY REMAIN ACTIVE IN YOUR LIFE.**

Are you looking forward to hitting retirement age, sitting back and enjoying the fruits of your labor? If you actually want to remain happy and healthy, though, the answer to that question should be, “No!”

Retirement is a concept the Germans invented in 1889. The idea was to open up the job market to younger people and let people over the age of 65 enjoy their final years.

Sure, it sounds like a noble idea – but it’s no longer appropriate. In 1889, the average lifespan was 67 years. Nowadays, a person at age 65 may still have decades of healthy, active living to look forward to.

Research has shown that healthy people have a natural motivation to stay productive. A survey from the mid-twentieth century shows that 50 to 60 percent of people over the age of 65 would actually rather postpone retirement and continue working.

And this truly is a good thing, since being productive gives us purpose and a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Purpose is one of the most important factors of happiness, and it’s something people living on the island of Okinawa, in the East China Sea are very familiar with.

Okinawans have the highest life expectancy on Earth, and they have *no* concept or word for retirement. What they do have is *ikigai*, which roughly translates to “the reason you wake up in the morning,” and this is recognized as being vital to longevity, as well as quality of life.

Researchers at Tohoku University spent seven years studying the impact of *ikigai* on 43,000 different people. The research showed that the people who actually felt healthiest and least stressed all reported that they had a reason to get out of bed in the morning. And by the end of the study, 95 percent of those with an *ikigai* were still alive, compared to 83 percent of those without one.

This means it’s incredibly important to make sure that retirement doesn’t strip you of your purpose in life, remembering the fourth secret to happiness: stay productive and keep your *ikigai* alive!

### **THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #4: THE WAY YOU SPEND YOUR TIME IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE AMOUNT OF MONEY YOU’RE MAKING.**

It might feel good to be paid well for a job well done, but the amount on your paycheck doesn’t actually tell the entire story.

For instance, a Harvard graduate makes an average of \$120,000 per year, but they also receive a maximum of two weeks vacation while working 85 hours per week for each of those remaining 50 weeks. That adds up to 4,250 hours per year and only \$28 per hour.

Now let's look at an assistant manager of a retail store, who earns an average of \$70,000 per year. She also gets two weeks of vacation, but her average workweek is 50 hours, meaning she works only 2,500 hours per year. And lo and behold, the assistant manager also earns \$28 per hour.

So, you have to look at what you value more – the number after the dollar sign on your paycheck, or the time you lose when you spend all your time working instead of doing the things that bring you joy?

We need to start valuing our time more — we have so little of it. Actually, it might help you to adhere to the fifth secret of happiness, which is to *overvalue your time*.

Doing this means that you should have a keen awareness of the way you spend your time, reconsidering how important your time is when you're not spending it doing the things that make you truly happy.

If you're a person who has difficulty with time management, it might help to set up a structure. Divide your week into three separate categories – “Sleeping,” “Work,” and “Things I Love Doing.”

When you evenly divide the 168 hours of the week into these categories, you'll get 56 hours to allocate to each, which should leave you well-rested and feeling the benefits of a healthy work-life balance.

This isn't what Harvard alumni feel on a daily basis. With their 85-hour average workweek, it's far harder than it should be to actually find the time to get a good night's sleep, let alone do anything other than work.

In the next book summary, we'll explore how to make room in the day for the things that are truly important.

**THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #5: IN ORDER TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS AND FIND THE TIME TO ENJOY WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT, ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE LESS TO CHOOSE FROM SO THAT YOU CAN CREATE SOME MUCH-NEEDED SPACE.**

Making decisions can be stressful. And it's not helpful that the average day includes an almost endless list of them. When the author counted each of his daily decisions, he found 285 of them. And it turns out, most of these daily decisions weren't even truly important, such as what time to check his mailbox.

However, the truth is that every decision we make takes some mental energy, meaning it can cause some level of stress. You can reduce this stress, however, and even save time and increase productivity, through eliminating your choices.

Benjamin Lee, the author's former colleague, had an epiphany that resembled this and acted upon it. He only goes shopping for clothes once a year, at which time he buys 30 boxer shorts, 30 identical pairs of socks, 15 shirts, and 5 pairs of black pants.

Because of this, he only has to do laundry once a month, and it's never necessary for him to make a decision about what he has to wear. According to his calculations, by removing these decisions, he saves 15 minutes every day, which adds up to an entire week every year.

Lee worked to create space that would help him to have time to focus on the things he actually wants to spend his time doing and which make him happy – and that's what the sixth secret to happiness is all about.

There's another way to allow yourself more time, which is to take the time you need from competing tasks through being creative with deadlines.

In 1955, the scholar C. Northcote Parkinson developed *Parkinson's Law*, which states that work will only take as long as your deadline allows it to take.

For example, if you have a deadline for a writing project that's due in three weeks, you'll more than likely spend most of that three weeks researching and writing while also procrastinating the project and worrying about it. But what if you made your own deadline of one week? Since you'd no longer have the time to procrastinate, you'd probably start working as soon as possible, and because you'd be working harder, the quality of your work might not suffer as much.

Setting fake deadlines like this is just one way you can make more time when it appears to be in short supply.

## **THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #6: IT'S IMPORTANT TO BREAK PAST YOUR BARRIERS AND DO THE THINGS YOU LOVE, EVEN IF DOING SO SEEMS SCARY.**

Can you remember the last time you crossed something off your bucket list? If it's been a long time, it might be time to consider what might be stopping you from doing so. It's usually not money or resources that prevent us from doing something we really want to; we actually set up our own barriers, fooling ourselves into staying away from things that would make us happy.

Typically, the two barriers that keep us from happiness are the *Can't Do* and the *Don't Want To* barriers.

Having the idea that you can't do something is a great way to prevent yourself from even attempting the activity. The author believed he couldn't swim, but this belief stemmed from a bad experience he'd had in the water as a child, which led to his brain creating the false belief that he *couldn't* do it.

Another trick our minds like to play on us is that we can often convince ourselves that we don't actually want to do that activity, creating a second barrier that's often attached to the first.

The author told himself plenty of reasons that kept him out of the water: it's a waste of time, there are many other ways to get exercise, and more.

Having these preventative thoughts do nothing but prevent you from experiencing so much of what life has to offer. Fortunately, it's possible to break through these barriers, bringing us to the seventh secret of happiness.

While it might be hard to picture yourself doing something unfamiliar and perhaps scary, imagining it is an important part of overcoming your fear. Through being able to imagine actually doing the thing you're afraid of, your brain will eventually get used to the idea.

The next step is to just dive in and do it. When the author met his wife, a woman who loved swimming, he decided that he had to learn how and overcome the barrier. He eventually stopped searching for excuses and signed himself up for swimming lessons. Once he'd done this, he never looked back.

Remarkably, once he got in the water, his thinking shifted and a new belief took shape: he *could* swim. Soon thereafter, he realized that he actually *wanted* to swim.

## **THE HAPPINESS EQUATION KEY IDEA #7: BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF, ENSURING THAT YOU DON'T RELY ON THE ADVICE OF OTHERS.**

If you've ever attempted to be friends with someone who's rude and hurtful, then you're probably familiar with the pain and discomfort that comes with not honouring your true emotions.

Which brings us to the eighth secret of happiness: be yourself!

In life, the most important relationship you'll ever have isn't with another person — it's with yourself!

Even though this is true, so many people have a tendency to neglect this important relationship and fail to live in line with their authentic selves. As human beings, we tend to put on an act, doing things we wouldn't do otherwise, either to earn respect from others or to move up in our careers.

To help improve this relationship and be your authentic self, take the *Saturday morning test*.

Ask yourself, “What would you enjoy doing on a Saturday morning, when there are no other obligations?”

Do you love going to the gym? Then maybe you could become a personal trainer. Do you love writing? Do what the author did and start a blog or start submitting articles to a magazine.

Whatever your answer is, think it over and start working toward a path to your true self. You’ll eventually figure out that the more Saturday morning activities you do, the happier you’ll be in the long run.

Finally, there’s the ninth secret to happiness: be trusting of your own thoughts and emotions, ensuring that you don’t live a life according to the advice and wishes of other people.

Not a day goes by when we don’t come into contact with ads, articles, experts, and even friends who are trying to give their advice on how we should be living our lives and achieve happiness, and it’s super common to run into contradictions.

Let’s say your partner cheats on you, a friend might advise you to immediately file for a divorce, while your mom might tell you to try couples therapy and work things out. Even clichés like “the early bird catches the worm” and “good things come to those who wait” contradict each other!

The truth is, you’re the only person who can know your true hopes and desires, which means that you’re the only one who can come up with the best solution for the situation. To be happy, you can’t rely on the advice of others – you have to ask yourself what you really want and trust how *you* feel.

## **IN REVIEW: THE HAPPINESS EQUATION BOOK SUMMARY**

The key message in this book:

**In order to achieve true happiness, it’s necessary to stop chasing external goals, like that new car or promotion, and instead adopt a healthier mindset and habits. Happiness lies in realizing that you already have everything you need. Once you start shifting your life toward the things you truly love and being yourself, you’ll be able to start enjoying your life and living it to the fullest.**

Actionable advice:

### **Try a seven-day challenge.**

If one of these practices resonates with you, it might be a good idea to challenge yourself to try it out for seven days and see how it changes your daily life. Keep track of your progress in a calendar. Once you do this for seven days, you’ll be able to then convince



yourself to keep practicing it for another seven, and then another, on and on until it becomes part of your daily life.

<https://consciused.org/books/the-happiness-equation-neil-pasricha-review-summary>