

A photograph of a wall with a staircase and a small window. The wall is light blue and textured. The staircase is made of concrete steps with red-painted edges. A small, dark, rectangular window is set into the wall to the right of the staircase. The text "7 steps to more wellbeing" is overlaid on the image in a black serif font.

# 7 steps to more wellbeing

Andy Hunt

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by  
Andy Hunt

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For Karen, for more than words can say.

## The Legal Stuff

This is like the safety briefing that you get on a flight. It's not the most interesting stuff in the world, but it needs to be there just in case.

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# Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to pick up this ebook. It is designed to give you seven practical ways to increase your sense of emotional and mental well-being.

This is a 'things to do' ebook. You might find some great insights in the book while reading them, but my purpose is to give you some experiences and practices that will help you feel happier.

There are seven 'techniques' described here, seven ways to more wellbeing,

I'm not going to make grand claims for them: "These 7 State Of The Art Processes Will Make You Slim, Rich and Popular In An Instant", "Seven Secret Techniques For Fame And Fortune" or "7 Ways To Become Enlightened By Lunch Time". It's not like that. If that is what you need to know you are probably not going to enjoy this ebook

Well-being is a complex web of the physical, emotional , intellectual and spiritual. Anyone who tells you they can fix your wellbeing with just seven techniques probably needs to get out more.

I can make the modest claim that if you use these processes regularly then you will feel better for it.

The seven steps are practical tools for an internal evolution allowing you to become happier and more of the person you want to be. Like exercise and healthy eating they require practice to get the most benefit.

If the thought of practice is a bit off-putting you might get some comfort from the fact that four of the seven techniques are about how to feel good and to cultivate those feelings. So these techniques should feel enjoyable and rewarding rather than hard work. Think of them as chocolate without the calories.

Each of the processes is very simple and go on in the privacy of your own mind. Nobody will know what you are doing and you won't feel stupid, but you will feel better. For a few of them you will need nothing more complicated than pencil and paper.

### What to expect

Chapter 1: **Decide What You Don't Want** – most people have a long list of don't wants. Don't wants are a popular way of keeping track of being unhappy with your current situation and wanting to change. Unfortunately they have a hidden disadvantage – they tend to keep you focussed on where you are, not, where you want to be. In this chapter you'll get a very simple way to turn your don't wants into something more useful.

Chapter 2: **Write a Letter From The Future** – Everyone knows that 20-20 hindsight is a wonderful thing. What if , when faced with a challenge, you could have your hindsight in advance? In this chapter you'll learn a very simple trick of the imagination that lets you get free advice from your future self.

Chapter 3: **Accept Yourself** – When we are the problem, we have a problem. If you spend a lot of time criticising and finding fault with yourself it can eat into your wellbeing. Self blame and condemnation is a common problem. This chapter shows you a simple way to begin to soften self blame and condemnation even if you think you deserve it.

Chapter 4: **Sit In The Happy Chair** – A simple and unexpected alternative to affirmations that can help you change the way you feel. This approach lets you acknowledge the reality of your situation and have access to more resourceful feelings and states of mind.

Chapter 5: **Soak In Happy Feelings** – If you are the kind of person who brushes off the 49 good things that happened today to sink into the one bad experience and wallow in misery then this process is for you. Because of an innate tendency of the mind, many of us find it hard to resist feeling bad and it can be difficult to enjoy the good feelings that life brings us. This process gives you permission to dwell in pleasant experiences.

Chapter 6: **Enjoy Gratitude** - Gratitude and gratitude lists have been a popular part of spiritual practice and the self help literature. In this chapter you will learn a simple way to take advantage of gratitude and a new way to sink deeply into gratitude to really enjoy those feelings.

Chapter 7: **Direct Your Attention**. Where you focus your attention can have a big effect on your mental health and wellbeing. It won't come as a surprise to know that dwelling on negative experiences in our lives makes us feel bad. In this chapter you will learn a very easy to use technique that will help you focus on the good things in life and enjoy them.

### How to get the best from this book

Read the book, enjoy the pictures and quotes, find something you like and try it out. If you like the results, do it again, rinse and repeat.

### How not to get the best from this book

Read the book. Appreciate the pictures and quotes. Nod your head sagely at inspirational moments. Do nothing!

### Simple Steps For Getting Results.

1. Pick one of the processes
2. Try it out
3. See if it helps.
4. If it does, do it again!
5. Try another one.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating ... so, go on! Eat!



## Acknowledgements

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Finally, my deepest thanks to Karen for her continued and patient support, for which I am very grateful, and for her proofreading, for which you will be very grateful.

# 1. Decide What You Don't Want



*You can never get enough of what you don't want.*  
Wayne Dyer

It's late at night at the city airport and the rain is pouring down. A tired and exasperated traveller finally gets into the back of a taxi after a long wait in an impatient queue.

The driver turns to his fare and says *"Where to?"*

The traveller replies: *"Anywhere but here"*

*"OK",* says the driver, *"Where do you want to go"*

*"I just don't want to be here"* says the traveller.

*"Uhm ... "* says our taxi driver *" ... so where **do** you want to be? "*

*"I just don't want to be here"* says the traveller. *"I hate it here, it's cold and wet and I don't like it"*

Luckily the taxi driver (a trainee psychotherapist) is unusually patient.

*"OK. I understand that you don't like it here, it's all wrong, but where do you want to go to?"*

*"Anywhere but here!"*

(Puzzled) *"Anywhere but here? ... Where would that be then?"*

*"Somewhere else!"*

(Through gritted teeth) *"Where exactly?"*

*"Away from here?"*

(Exasperated) *"We are not going anywhere at the moment! Where do you want to go?"*

*"I don't care! Somewhere else?"*

Most taxi drivers would have thrown out the traveller by now with some colourful advice on where they should go!

The odd thing is that many of us think about what we want, and where we want to get to, in terms of what we are not liking about our present situation.

We obsess about how much we are not enjoying where we are, what we are not doing and what we haven't got. We are in a holding pattern around the problem.

We spend our time don't-ing instead of doing.

Unfortunately if we are focussing on what we don't want we:

- we get stressed.
- we don't move too far from where we are because it is occupying our attention.
- we tend to move at random to get away from the negative situation because anything is better than being stuck in the problem.

Fortunately there is an alternative. We are also able to think about goals. If I want a glass of milk right now I can create a plan, get up, go to the fridge, find the milk, pour a glass and drink it.

Rather than obsess about thirst, I can decide to get a drink. My response to the thought "I am thirsty" is to put my attention on what I want and take steps to get it.

This outcome orientation when engaged is very powerful. It has taken us across the world, up Everest and even to the moon.

When we are focussed on what we want:

- we have a clear outcome in mind.
- we are able to plan steps to achieve that outcome
- we have a direction to travel in, rather than anywhere else will do (Remember, nobody ended up on the top of Everest because they wanted to be somewhere else and anywhere would do).

You could say that you have several outcomes:

- I don't want to be fat
- I don't want to work in this job for the rest of my life
- I don't want to live in this part of town

If you are an accomplished “don't wanters” these sound like positive outcomes, but they are not.

It's a funny thing about language, when we think about what we don't want, we have to put our focus on the thing we don't want, to think the thought.

When we think the thought ‘I don't want to be fat’ our attention is on being fat and the problems that go with it.

When we think the thought ‘I don't want to work in this job’ our attention is on this job and how bad it is.

When we think the thought ‘I don't want to live in this part of town’ our attention is on living in this part of town and how much we don't like it.

When we think about what we don't want, we stay where we are or try to get away in any old direction.

Think of something you don't want.

For example: "I don't want to be fat" (if that is an issue for you)

Say that sentence out loud and notice the effect on your body and your feelings. You will probably find that you slip into some unresourceful thought patterns and feelings. The way you express the outcome affects your ability to act towards it.

Think of what you want instead.

For example: "I want to be at my ideal weight".

Say that sentence out loud and notice the effect on your body and your feelings. You will probably find you feel more resourceful and encouraged.

Notice that we are talking about the same thing - your weight. All we have changed is the focus of your attention from the problem to an outcome.

It's worth changing our don't wants into our wants. Fortunately there is a simple trick to change our attention to what we do want.

*I don't want to be fat.*

*If you don't want to be fat, what do you want?*

*I don't want to work in this job for the rest of my life*

*If you don't want to work in this job, what do you want to do?*

*I don't want to live in this part of town.*

*If you don't want to live in this part of town, where do you want to live?*

This seems very simple but if you are an accomplished “don't want” it can take a bit of effort to flip your thinking to what you want. The “don't want” frame of mind can be very insidious and persistent.

*I don't want to be fat*

*If you don't want to be fat, what do you want?*

“*I want to be slim*” is an outcome, it's a ‘place you want to be’ and it sets a direction for your thinking and acting.

or

“*I want to lose weight*” appears to be an outcome as well, but the focus is still on the weight you want to lose - so it is still oriented towards the problem.

Ask the question again: “So if you lose weight what will you be then” - “I'll be slim”. Now you have got to the outcome statement.

The test of an outcome is that it is something that you move towards rather than something you are trying to get away from.

If you are used to thinking about what you don't want then it will be familiar, easy. We get good at what we have practised and this way of thinking can become the default way of looking at the world.

Changing your habitual mode of thinking may take a little bit of practice.

## Exercise

- Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the centre of the paper.
- Make a list of some of the things you don't want on the left hand side of the line.
- Go through your list of don't wants.
- For each don't want, ask yourself the question "If I don't want this, what do I want?". (If the answer is another don't want, ask the question again)
- When you have an answer that is an outcome or goal write it down on the right hand side of the page.

This seems like a trivial exercise, but practising changing your don't wants into wants will give you a useful way out of your don't wants.

Any time you hear yourself or someone else say what they don't want ask them 'If you don't want that, what do you want?' or 'If you didn't have that, what would you have'. It's a small change but it sets the direction of thought and your attention on where you want to go.

After all, you would tell the taxi driver where you want to be taken wouldn't you?



## 2. Write Yourself A Letter From The Future



*"Well, the future for me is already a thing of the past."*

*Bob Dylan*

Many years ago, the great hypnotherapist Milton H Erickson had a very difficult client. He could not seem to find a way to help this client who resisted all his efforts to help.

Realising that he had run out of ideas he decided to 'cheat'.

He hypnotised the man putting him in a deep trance then suggested to him that he go to some time in the future, a time when the problem had been solved and everything was as the man had wanted.

Dutifully the man started imagining this time in the future when he no longer had the problem. Then Erickson asked him what he, Erickson, had done to make this change possible. The man told him what Erickson had done in that imagined past that had made all the difference.

Erickson made detailed notes about what 'he' had done in the man's imagined past.

Then he brought the man 'back in time' instructing him to forget about their discussion when he came out of the trance.

When the man returned from trance with no memories of their conversation Erickson started the interventions that he had been told would work.

The therapy went well and the patient overcame his problems.

But what are you going to do if you haven't got a world famous hypnotherapist to get you into a future problem solving trance? Fortunately you don't need to be in a trance to make this work.

### Who Am I To Get An A Grade?

Students at any top level school are prone to anxiety about how well they will do. If they are anxious about their grades it will typically affect their performance.

Ben Zander conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and teacher at the New England Conservatory found that performance anxiety was interfering with his student's performance. With the help of his therapist wife he devised a neat solution. At the start of term he sends his students a letter of welcome including the following unusual requirement.

*Now I have one more piece of house-keeping to deal with. I like to get the issue of your grade out of the way as soon as possible. Your Grade is an A. It is divided into two parts, there is an A for the first Semester And an A for the second semester. When added together they make an A. You all got one.*

*There is, however, a condition to get the A. You may suppose that the condition is that you attend every class, but that is not the condition. If you do not attend the class, I cannot promise you the result of the class. What is the result of the class, you ask?: It is clarity and mastery in the art of the interpretation of the classical and romantic tradition of music, the ability to be a great teacher and also it promises a major break through in your music making and your life (including your marriage, present or future). These things can only be promised to those who attend the class regularly. The condition for your A is your fourth assignment for the coming week:. It is that you write me a letter, which is dated May 2003 and it must start with the following words: "Dear Mr. Zander I got my A because....." (those exact words must be used)*

*Since the letter is being written from the future, every thing must be in the past tense. There will be no I will....or I hope....or I intend.....I want you to imagine that you are standing one sunny, balmy day in May 2003, say the 4th of May, and you have just opened the envelope which tells you what grade you have received for the course.. Hooray! You say and you beam with delight. Then you say to yourself, "but OF COURSE he gave me an A, how could he have even contemplated any other grade, because after all I am....."*

*Then everything you say about yourself after that will already have happened. Every magnificent characteristic that you describe in the letter will already be in place.. So you will be taking a good look at yourself as you see yourself next May and then you will settle down and describe what you see. Now, here is the most important instruction for this assignment: Fall passionately in love with the person that you are describing in your "A" letter!*

*I will expect you to have your first draft ready by next Friday and hand it in to me. This class is mostly about transformation.*

*In this class you will learn to transform your playing, your teaching, your performing, your listening, your attitude, your relationships and your life.*

*A fifth assignment is to notice what it feels like to write the "A" letter and to come back and tell the class about it. I will begin next week's class by asking the question: "what did it feel like to write the A letter?" If you put up your hand to answer, you will already have become transformed.*

- Benjamin Zander

You don't need to be a hypnotherapist or a top class musician to take advantage of this approach.

A Letter From The Future is a simple method that you can use to help you get internal guidance on how to get out of problem situations or to get to where you are wanting to go.

## How to write A Letter From The Future

- Imagine you are five years in the future. Things have gone well and you are where you want to be.
- Write a letter from your future self to your current self
- In the letter describe where you are, what you are doing, what you have gone through to get there, and so on.
- Tell yourself the crucial things you realised or did to get there.
- Give yourself some sage and compassionate advice from the future

That's all there is to it. It might look ridiculously simple, but it can be powerfully helpful. Try it out and find out what your wiser future self has to tell you.

### 3. Accept Yourself



*'The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.'*  
- Carl Rogers

Imagine that you are in a relationship with someone who hates you and tells you so on a regular basis.

Imagine that they criticise every mistake and find fault with everything that you do.

Imagine they told you that all this criticism was for your own good even though it doesn't feel that way.

Imagine that this person had been with you for a long time, showed no sign of letting up, and would be with you until the day you died.

Wouldn't that be horrible, wouldn't you want that to be different?

What if that other person was you?

Compassionate self acceptance is the ability to honestly recognise our complete experience of being this human being in whatever situation we are in with kindness and courage rather than criticism or judgement.

### **What acceptance is not**

Acceptance is not the same as approval. The situation we find ourselves in may indeed be very difficult or painful. We might not like it at all. Acceptance is a clear eyed acknowledgement of the situation as it is warts and all.

Acceptance is not the same as resignation, a mute acquiescence to the situation. When you accept yourself and your situation you can devote your attention to doing something about it, and not using up your energy beating yourself up, obsessing how bad you are.

This isn't the way many of us have been taught to approach life. We've been taught to reject ourselves, our feelings, avoid the present moment and treat ourselves critically or harshly so that we can shape up to some standard.

Having some difficulty or problem can lead us to judgement and self criticism. It's a simple formula that goes something like this:

*Because I have this problem I am bad / unworthy / a failure / a disappointment (insert your favourite criticism here).*

*Because I made a mistake I am a failure.*

*Because I didn't get the job I don't deserve to succeed.*

*Because I lost my temper I am a bad person*

With practice you can generalise this to:

*Because I have any problem I am a problem.*

Repeat this mantra every time you hit a snag and you will probably find yourself becoming quite unhappy.

Thinking in this way has four disadvantages:

- resistance - you are struggling against reality to avoid thinking this way.
- self-condemnation - you are struggling against yourself.
- it's stressful - it's no fun at all feeling this way.
- it doesn't set you up for success - being criticised probably does not put you in a good state to resolve the difficulty.

One way of re-writing this painful script is to change the mantra

*"Because I have this problem I am a problem"*

to

*"Even though I have this problem, I accept myself and how I feel."*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Students of Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) will recognise this form of words from the setup part of the process

In this format we are acknowledging the situation for what it is and then substituting a simple statement of self acceptance for the self rejection statement that was there before.

*"Even though I made a mistake, I accept myself and how I feel."*

*"Even though I didn't get the job, I accept myself and how I feel".*

*"Even though I lost my temper, I accept myself and how I feel. "*

In this form of words we are acknowledging the problem as a problem but we are making it clear that the problem is something we have, not something we are, and that the problem and the person holding the problem can be treated with acceptance.

With acceptance the problem is just a problem. Thinking this way has three advantages:

- accepting things the way they are makes it more likely that you can make good choices.
- accepting yourself means you are not wasting energy giving yourself a beating.
- you can put more energy and resources into working to resolve the difficulty.

## Resisting Acceptance - Accepting Resistance

If you are used to rejecting yourself on a regular basis then saying to yourself 'Even though I have this problem, I accept myself and how I feel' may provoke a reaction like: "You are a bad person and don't deserve to accept yourself" or "you can't accept yourself".

If that happens simply feed the objection into the acceptance statement.

*"Even though I tell myself I am a bad person and don't deserve to accept myself, I accept myself and how I feel"*

or



*“Even though I tell myself that I can’t accept myself, I accept myself and how I feel”*

If you are worried that those statements don’t make logical sense - relax - if humans were logical we would have thought ourselves happy years ago. The purpose of the statement is to begin to embrace all our experience with acceptance, even if the experience is contradictory.

### Taking Action From A Place Of Acceptance.

I have a Sat Nav system in the car. I tell it where I want to go and a pleasant young lady tells me which way to go. Every time I follow her directions she guides me towards my destination. If I make a mistake and take a right instead of a left, she doesn’t harangue me and call me a fool. She ‘thinks’ for a bit and then suggests a way to get back on course. I’m grateful for her patience. Just imagine what it would be like if Sat Navs spoke to us the way we speak to ourselves – parking areas would be full of drivers crying their eyes out and promising a talking box, never to be so stupid again.

It’s all very well accepting yourself in this problem but what are you going to do about the situation?

One of self judgement’s tricks is telling you that giving you a hard time about the problem is going to get you to take action. If you don’t have the spur of criticism how are you ever going to change things?

After acknowledging the situation ask yourself “How do I want to be in this predicament? What qualities or attributes will help me deal with this situation”?

For example:

*I made a mistake - I want to do better next time*

*I didn’t get the job - I want to be more persistent and resilient*

*I lost my temper - I want to be more patient*

Note that these are qualities in ourselves that are under our control. Here are some answers to these questions that won't work so well.

*I made a mistake - I never want to make a mistake again.*

Mistakes are a part of the human experience and necessary for learning. How do you want to respond to the inevitable difficulties of life? I want to do better next time gives you room to improve but does not require you up to be perfect.

*I didn't get the job - I want to get the next one*

You might want to get the next job, but that is not directly under your control. Although you can influence them you can't control the environment and other people. You can decide to persist in the face of a challenge until you become the right person for the job for someone else.

*I lost my temper - I want them to stop annoying me*

Once more, you can't control other people. However, you can choose to respond in a more resourceful way so that you can influence the outcome.

Now that you have an idea of how you would like to be in this situation you can create a statement that accepts the situation and affirms a choice about how to respond.

*Even though I [problem] I choose to [response]*

*Even though I made a mistake, I choose to do better next time<sup>2</sup>*

*Even though I didn't get the job, I choose to be more persistent and resilient*

*Even though I lost my temper, I choose to be more patient*

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2 Students of EFT will recognise the wording from the Choices Process by Pat Carrington Ph.D.

Now the original problem can direct you towards the solution.

## Practice

Accept the problem and yourself

*Even though I [problem] I accept myself and how I feel.*

Then acknowledge the problem and choose where you want to go and how you want to be.

*Even though I [problem] I choose to [response].*

## 4. Sit In The Happy Chair



*“A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin; what else does a man need to be happy?”  
Albert Einstein*

Affirmations are widely promoted as a simple way of changing how you feel or how you are. Many self help books recommend affirmations as **the** way to change your life.

Affirmations are positive present tense statements of what you want to have, do or be.

- I am happy
- I am confident
- I feel great

You are supposed to repeat these statements to yourself many times in the hope that the affirmation will burrow down into your subconscious and neutralise all the conditioning that has led you to your current state and begin to draw you to the desired state.

But there is a problem with affirmations like these.

If you are reasonably mentally stable there is a part of your mind that checks your reality. Does what I am thinking fit with my understanding of what is going on in the external world?

If what you are thinking about is not matched by your circumstances this part of your mind will be unhappy and complain about the discrepancy between what you actually have and what you are affirming you have.

Insisting on the affirmation in the face of the evidence will cause stress and struggle as you consciously try to overwhelm the objections by repeating your positive thought.

Have you ever noticed how making an effort to think positive thoughts often provokes objections?

The problem is that we are ascribing a state, feeling, or mood to ourselves when there is evidence against it.

Fortunately there is a trick, a verbal sleight of hand that lets us feel the feelings we want to feel without triggering the resistance.

The trick takes advantage of our tendency to ascribe the way we feel towards objects in the world.

You have probably heard people talking about 'miserable' weather, a 'peaceful' view and an 'invigorating' day.

Is weather really miserable? Or is it the feeling we have when confronted with particular local climatic conditions?

Is the view feeling peaceful? Or is it the way we feel when looking on that scene?

Is the day itself feeling invigorated? Or is that the response we bring to it?

We can think quite comfortably in these terms, although weather, views and days are all inanimate we can accept their 'feelings' as real. We ascribe to them the feelings that we feel in ourselves.

Here's the trick. If we can ascribe internal feelings to inanimate objects out there, can we 'give' inanimate objects the feelings of our choice and have them returned to us in a way that is quite natural to us without resistance.

Vikas Dikshit an NLP Practitioner from Pune, India took this idea and used it in a clever way when working with a depressed client.

*About 18 months ago a young lady asked me for help for her depression. She was visiting a psychiatrist and taking some medicine for depression for preceding few months.*

*I suggested to her to look around and mentally say... "I am sitting on this happy chair. There is this happy table. And these are happy windows with happy curtains." I made her do this for about ten minutes. I suggested she does this every day for about ten or fifteen minutes. (A happy person leaves in a happy world, a sad person lives in a sad world.)*

*After fifteen days she called to say that she was feeling great now. After about two months she visited the psychiatrist and he stopped her medicine. She continues to call occasionally and reports that she feels great now. The most recent one was when she was in my town about ten days ago.*

*I am not suggesting it will work with every patient of depression. I am not even suggesting one should use it with every patient. I am only saying I found that it worked with my patient and it is very easy to do.*

He reported later that his client still felt great one year after using this technique and that he has used it with other clients.

If he had suggested to the woman that she repeated to herself “I am happy” she would have undoubtedly rejected the suggestion because it was obvious to her that she wasn’t. The chair, curtains, windows could all be as happy as they liked and it would not be untrue, however their ‘happiness’ was contagious and the state she ascribed to those objects began to develop in her.

Because to understand the word happy we need to access our own ideas of happiness to make sense of the word. Touching on our internal representations and memories of happiness, triggers a little drop of happiness to enter our system (however fleetingly), repetition turns the drop into a trickle and then a stream.

Not only that, by directing her attention to ‘happy’ things in her environment her attention was diverted from whatever ruminations were fuelling her depression to being aware of the present moment.

This process is not limited to helping depressed people feel happy. You can use it to elicit a useful state in yourself, by choosing the opposite of what you are feeling.

For example , switching from:

depressed to happy

angry to accepting

anxious to safe

### How to use this process

- Become aware of the feeling or state you want to change
- What is the positive opposite of that feeling or state?
- Scan your environment for inanimate sights or sounds.
- Assign the state to the objects in your awareness.
- Example: for the transition from anxious to safe
- I am sitting in the safe seat
- I am looking out of the safe window
- My feet are resting on the safe carpet
- I am wearing my safe shirt
- I can hear the ticking of my safe clock
- Continue this process for as long as you like and use it during the day to change the way you feel.

Note: it is important to choose inanimate objects when you are assigning feelings. If you call other people happy or calm you may start to compare yourself to them and feel inadequate in some way, this will not help you to feel happy. It's unlikely that you will become jealous of a chair, window, cloud or some other inanimate object.



## 5. Soak In Good Feelings



*“We have a mind like Velcro for negative experiences and a mind like Teflon for positive experiences.”  
- Nick Hanson, neurobiologist and author*

Just imagine. The bath is filled with hot soapy water, the room is warm and comfortable, the door is locked, the phone is off the hook. You have all the time in the world.

Do you?

a) Jump into the bath, quickly soap your important places, dunk and rinse, then leap out as quickly as you can.

Or

b) Slide gratefully into the water. Sigh ... Relax ... allow yourself to wallow in the warmth and relaxation. Just lie there inhaling the delicious aromas of your favourite bubble bath. Perhaps you read a book, drink a glass of wine or cup of tea. Perhaps you just lie back, eyes closed waiting for your skin to prune.

Most people I know prefer the second technique. It's funny in our external experience we want to wallow in what feels good, enjoy it for as long as possible. For our internal experience we can do the opposite.

How often have you had a great day, 49 great experiences and 1 difficulty? But, instead of enjoying the 49 great experiences you go to bed and lie awake worrying about the 1 difficulty. It's as if we are tugged towards the negative.

We are, and it's not our fault.

## The Negativity Bias

Through most of our long evolution our ancestors have had to play close attention to their environment to avoid mishap or death. On the savannah under threat from predators, starvation, dehydration and attack, it made sense to be very mindful of danger. If you kept away from trouble then you stood a chance of living another day. To do that you needed to pay particular attention to what is bad, uncomfortable, frightening and dangerous.

Through a long process of natural selection our brains were wired to attend to the negative more readily than the positive. So, it's not surprising that our attention is drawn to problems and potential threats.

In modern times worrying about sabre tooth tigers isn't so vital, but our nervous system hasn't yet caught up with our new circumstances, so we have a 'negativity bias', an inbuilt tendency to dwell on the negative.

Fortunately for us the negativity bias is only a bias. We can consciously do things to even up the balance by choosing where to focus our attention and how to get the best out of good feelings when they arise.

There are four reasons that make lingering on a good experience worthwhile.

1. Feeling good is good for you. Dwelling in positive experiences boosts your immune system, makes your cardiac system more resilient to stress, lifts mood, increases optimism, resilience and resourcefulness, and decreases the effects of painful experiences.
2. It feels good! (It is not often that something this good for you feels good. Why not enjoy it?)
3. It gives our system practice in feeling good - the more you practice something the better you get and the easier it is to do. Getting good at feeling good is a skill worth learning.
4. You can develop a reservoir of emotional resources that can carry you through difficult times.

### Taking A Tip From Squirrels

By attending to what feels good in our lives we can enjoy and benefit from good feelings, enjoying these memories and creating a reservoir of resourceful experiences to draw on in difficult times. Squirrels gather nuts for winter for a good reason.

We can gather and enjoy good experiences for ourselves in a variety of ways.

## Notice and Appreciate

To enjoy a good experience we need to know that it has happened. We need to attend to the experiences of the day that felt good.

Go through your memory of today and notice the moments when you felt good feelings. These don't have to be momentous feel good moments - being proposed to, the birth of your first child, winning a race, being elected president.

Daily life can give us lots of very modest experiences that feel good: the first cup of tea in the morning, hearing birdsong on the way to work, a kind word from a friend. being smiled at, sharing a joke.

Pick one of the good experiences.

Remember it now. Go back to that moment in the day

What makes it feel good to you?

What are you seeing?

What are you hearing?

What are you feeling?

Allow yourself to soak in these feelings for at least 30 seconds. Let yourself sink into them. Allow them to wash over and through you.

Note: You may notice a certain resistance to doing this process or to feeling the good feelings that come from it. Perhaps part of you feels you don't deserve it or it isn't safe to feel good or some other objection. Notice the objection, acknowledge it with a kindly "Thank you for sharing" and continue to feel good. It's quite possible that those parts of you are very much in need of good feelings for themselves.

## 7 steps to more wellbeing

Doing this practice, and it is a practice, a couple of times a day will help you store up good memories with resourceful feelings and will help you train your nervous system to be able to feel them more easily.

You are not trying to hang on to the experience, feelings will come and go, it's the natural rhythm of things. You are practising being able to access the feeling when you need it. Squirrels don't carry their store of hazelnuts with them, they put them away and retrieve them when needed.

## 6. Enjoy Gratitude



*He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has.*  
- Epictetus

When I was growing up my Mum and Dad often used to say to us kids: “You should count your blessings”.

I think they were right, in that I had a lot of blessings to count. Now that I’m older and more aware of what’s going on in the world I can see that my ‘cup runneth over’ in ways that would boggle the mind of some people in the developing world.

I also think my Mum and Dad missed a golden opportunity. “Count your blessings” was good advice, at least it tells you what to do. Unfortunately they weren’t very specific about how I should do it.

If they had said “You should count your blessings, and here’s how ...” then shown me a simple way to do that then they would have set me up for life. At the time I never thought at the time to ask “How exactly do I do that?”

We have lots of opportunities to be grateful through our day. Not just for the big things but the small pleasures that can lighten your day. It is an abundant world, people are kind to us, we can eat good food, watch the play of light and shade on the hills as clouds race across the sky, hear the sound of a child’s laughter.

Reflecting on the good things in our lives or cultivating a sense of gratitude is advice as old as the hills and the sages who lived in them. There is now good evidence that cultivating gratitude has a large number of mental (and physical) health benefits.

In a study by Martin Seligman<sup>3</sup> more than 400 volunteers took part in the following exercise:

Three good things in life: Participants were asked to write down three things that went well that day every night for a week. In addition they were asked to provide a causal explanation for each thing.

They were followed up for six months. Those who ‘counted their blessings’ in this way for just one week became happier and less depressed and stayed that way for at least six-months after the experiment.

Not surprisingly they found that those participants who enjoyed the gratitude exercise and continued with it past the official time period were the ones that felt the happiest

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3 Positive Psychology Progress, Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, American Psychologist, July-August 2005

What would it be like if you integrated this process into your daily routine?

One way of looking at this is that you are training your brain to look out for the good things in your experience. To become the person who sees the glass being half full rather than half empty. People who habitually 'sort for good' tend to be happier, healthier and more resilient.

Unfortunately for us our culture and media are strongly encouraging us to 'sort for bad', to notice what is wrong and unsatisfactory. Often so they can sell us something to make you feel better. By being more grateful and cheerful you may be going a little against the tide. There might not be as many people swimming in that direction but the company is good.

**Here are the instructions again.**

Every evening make a written list of at least three enjoyable or satisfying experiences you had during the day. They don't have to be extraordinary events, something as simple as enjoying the first cup of tea of the day would do. Write this down and write a sentence explaining why you are grateful for this. That's it. Nothing complicated. Do this regularly and notice what you notice.

### Deeper Gratitude

You could do the 'Three Good Things' exercise in a very perfunctory way, speeding through your list of three good things like a check-list that has to be completed before moving onto something more important.

The value in feeling grateful is the feeling of it. By going against the mind's negativity bias, its tendency to slide off the positive into the negative, we can redress the balance by tapping into the feelings of gratitude and staying there for a little while.

Here's one way of being able to feel deeply grateful and enjoy it.

1. Think of something that you are grateful for.



## 7 steps to more wellbeing

It can be as simple as you like, the first cup of coffee in the morning, the greeting of a friendly neighbour, the fact that someone else has done the washing up. The thing you bring to mind can be as big or small as you like.

I'll use a cup of coffee as an example of how this process works.

2. As you think about what you are grateful for, let whatever feelings you have about it be there in your awareness. We often glide over these feeling in our hurry to get to the next moment. Take a moment to savour this experience.

3. Whilst feeling the feeling, ask yourself: "What does having (whatever it is) give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?"

4. The answer to this question may be another feeling or a thing or activity of some sort. If the answer is a feeling, allow yourself to enjoy this new feeling for half a minute or more – the only thing you need to do is immerse yourself in this feeling and enjoy it for a while. If the answer is a thing or activity let yourself enjoy the feeling that this gives you.

Question: What does having the first cup of coffee in the morning give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?

Answer: It lets me know I am in a safe place and starting a new day.

Please note that what your first cup of coffee in the morning might mean to you is probably going to be completely different to mine and that's fine. There are no right and wrong things to feel in this exercise.

The only right answer to these questions are your answers.

5. When you have enjoyed the feeling, put this feeling into the question: "What does having (this feeling) give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?" Enjoy the feeling of the answer to this new question for half a minute.

Question: What does knowing I am in a safe place and starting a new day give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?

Answer: Contentment

6. When you have enjoyed this feeling for half a minute or more, ask yourself the question “What does having (this feeling) give me that I wouldn’t otherwise have?”. Enjoy the feeling of the answer for half a minute.

Question: What does contentment give me that I wouldn’t otherwise have?

Answer: Peace

7. As you continue putting the answer to the last question into the next question you will probably find the answer having a deeper more profound feeling. Repeat the process acknowledging and enjoying each feeling that arises as you go through this process.

At some point the answer to the question will probably be a core feeling: love, peace, oneness or some other feeling that is deeply important to you.

Enjoy that core feeling for as long as you like. Taking the time to enjoy the feeling allows it to become more familiar. The more familiar it is, the easier it will be to access that feeling at other times (like everything else we get good at what we practice).

While savouring that deep feeling, bring to mind whomever or whatever you feel grateful to for making this feeling possible. It might be a person or people, your Higher self, Guardian Angel, God, Nature, Life, whomever or whatever resonates for you.

From within this feeling thank them for making this possible for you. Feel the feeling and feel the gratitude for this feeling.

From within this feeling of peace I think of all the circumstances and people who got me to this point, starting with my parents & family and all people who have been good for me up to this present moment and life itself for having brought me along for the ride.

Continue to enjoy this process for as long as you like and as often as you like. Being able to enjoy gratitude has been shown to lessen depression and increase well being – what’s more, it’s enjoyable!

## Deepening Gratitude Worksheet

*Use this worksheet to explore the deeper layers of feeling beneath gratitude*

I am grateful for: .....

What does having [what I'm grateful for] give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?

Answer: ..... *(savour the feeling of the answer for a while)*

What does having [previous answer] give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?

Answer: ..... *(savour the feeling of the answer for a while)*

What does having [previous answer] give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?

Answer: ..... *(savour the feeling of the answer for a while)*

What does having [previous answer] give me that I wouldn't otherwise have?

Answer: ..... *(savour the feeling of the answer for a while)*

**Note:** When you have reached a very satisfying and meaningful answer for this question continue to savour the feeling for as long as you like.

## 7. Direct Your Attention



*“You have to pay attention to the moment and make it the best it can be for you.  
I’ve been trying to do that. It’s really made a major difference for me. I’m a happier person.”*

*Tracy Chapman*

As sentient beings we have both awareness and the capacity for attention. Awareness is just noticing what is going on in our environment and ourselves. What we are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting and what we are thinking. Our awareness is our radar system alerting us to what is going on, what is around us and in us, what may be good for us and what may be bad for us. It provides 24 hour surveillance on our behalf.

Attention is our ability to direct our awareness wherever we intend. We may be aware of our environment but we can filter out all of the unnecessary detail to focus on what is important to us. For example: following the progress of our child in the school Nativity play, paying particular attention to the chocolate éclairs in the bakery window, being enthralled by a scene from a movie, watching our team score the winning goal. We can pour our awareness into something specific.

If we put our attention on something enjoyable and satisfying we can feel very good, all our other difficulties and problems fade into the background as we focus on this good thing.

If we put our attention on something unpleasant or difficult we can feel very bad. All the difficulties and problems associated with this thing can be brought forward and the things that are going well for us can be forced into the background as we dwell on this problem.

It wouldn't be so bad if it was a fair fight between attending to the pleasant and attending to the unpleasant.

But it's not.

Because of the negativity bias, our danger detector, it is much easier to focus on the unpleasant than the pleasant.

And ... it gets worse.

Because of our abilities to remember and imagine we can dwell on the unpleasant aspects of an experience and have that trigger other unpleasant recollections and imaginings. Our attention is captured by the unpleasant and off we go skipping from one disaster to the next.

In reality, our experience will usually be an ever changing mix of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral events.

What we attend to will influence our subjective response to that experience. If we can influence what we attend to we can influence our subjective experiences.

Fortunately, we have a very useful technique at our disposal for influencing attention - Questions!

*When is your birthday?*

*What is your favourite colour?*

Even if you don't answer these questions out loud you will be answering them internally. It's almost impossible to resist a question.

Try this little experiment.

I'm going to ask you two questions.

*1. How cold are you right now?*

What do you notice?

*2. How warm are you right now?*

What do you notice?

As I write this it is early morning in December, the temperature outside is a few degrees below zero and the ground is frosted.

When I answer the question "How cold am I?" I notice the coldness in my feet and ankles.

When I answer the question "How warm am I?" I notice the warmth in my shoulders from the reading lamp that is on behind me.

Answering the first question makes me feel the cold, answering the second 'makes' me feel the warmth. My temperature is the same regardless of which question I ask, but my experience depends on the question I answer.

In a study in the post operative department of a hospital, nurses were asked to change a question that was routinely asked of patients coming round from surgery.

To gauge the patients requirements for pain relief medication nurses usually asked their patients - “How much pain are you in?” and based the medication on the answer to that question.

The researchers had the nurses change the question, they now asked the patients “What is your level of comfort?” The medication requirements for these patients dropped significantly. They used two different questions to ask about the same thing, the question used had a significant effect on the level of comfort for the patient because the questions directed the patient’s attention to different aspects of their experience.

So, if questions can change the way you feel about your experience, what questions can I ask?

Where is your attention right now?

Are you enjoying the present moment or dwelling on past mistakes or future difficulties?

You can make the questions more specific to help direct your attention in useful ways. Here are two very useful questions to ask yourself on a regular basis.

- **What else can I enjoy right now?**
- **What else can I feel grateful for right now?**

Ask yourself these questions as often as possible to tune in to what you are enjoying or are grateful for and savour the feeling.

Put them on a post-it note on the fridge, write them on the top of your shopping list, put them at the front of your diary.

The more you focus your attention on what you are enjoying and are grateful for the more you will notice when these experiences are present and the happier you will become.

## About Me



I'm a Master Practitioner and Trainer of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), and a Practitioner and Trainer of Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT). I've been practising NLP since 2000 and EFT since 2004. I'm a member of the Neuro Linguistic Psychotherapy and Counselling Association ([NLPtCA](#)) my professional body and follow their code of conduct. I'm also a member of the Association for the Advancement of Meridian Energy Techniques [AAMET](#)

Since leaving university (gasp!) 30 years ago, I've had a variety of jobs including: milkman, assistant steward on an Irish Sea ferry, Residential Social Worker at a centre for delinquent teenagers, Assistant Head of Youth Centre in Brixham, grape picker in Switzerland, spring grinder(!) in Germany, night porter, barman, software engineer, and now therapist and trainer living the North East of England.

I specialise in working with people who give themselves a hard time, judge themselves harshly, feel bad about themselves or spend far too much time having a problem with themselves.

I've been an undisciplined student of yoga for 20 years, and a practising Buddhist (meditating on and off) for 20 years.

If you'd like to get in touch you can do that by

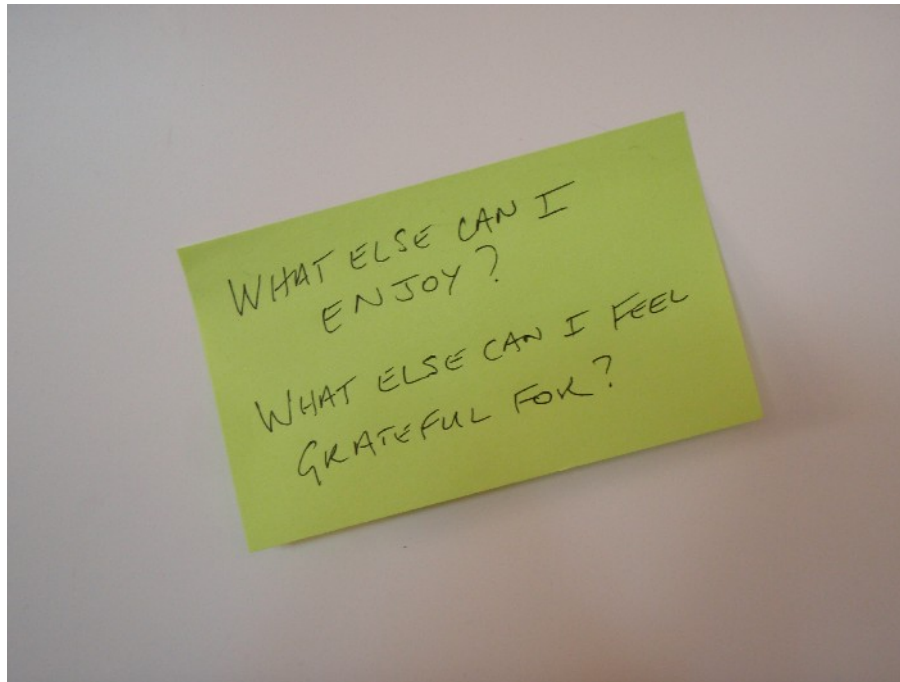
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# The Next Step



*Go on, what are you waiting for?*

*- Andy Hunt*