Reaping the benefits of a positive mindset

By Shawn Achor

We’ve been taught by our parents, our schools, our employers and society in general that, if we work hard, we will be successful—and that our success will make us happy. We often think, “If only I could get that raise, hit the next sales target or even lose those five pounds, I’ll be happy.”

But a decade of groundbreaking research in the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience has shown, in no uncertain terms, that the relationship between success and happiness works the other way around. Happiness is more likely to be the precursor to success, not the result. Studies suggest that happiness and optimism actually fuel performance and achievement. That is, we become more successful when we are happier and more positive.

More than 200 studies of nearly 275,000 people have found that happiness leads to success in nearly every domain of our lives—marriage, health, friendships, community involvement, creativity and, in particular, our work.

The science of happiness

Scientists define happiness as the experience of positive emotions: pleasure combined with deeper feelings of meaning and purpose. Happiness implies a positive mood in the present and a positive outlook for the future.

Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, a pioneer in positive psychology, has identified three measurable components of happiness: pleasure, engagement and meaning. Another leading expert in this field, Barbara L. Fredrickson of the University of North Carolina, has described the 10 most common positive emotions as “joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love.”

Can positivity be overdone?

Yes, of course. As our recent history suggests, irrational optimism encourages the formation of market bubbles that inevitably burst. It can lead us to buy houses we can’t afford and live beyond our means. Pessimism can even come in handy at times, if it stops us from making a foolish investment or gambling with our health.

The key then is to have a reasonable, realistic sense of optimism. But we still need to have more positive than negative emotions—because positive emotions broaden our possibilities and make us more thoughtful, creative and open to new ideas.
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The broadening effect is actually biological. Happiness can give us a chemical edge on the competition. The way it works is that positive emotions flood the brain with chemicals that not only make us feel good but also “dial up” our learning centers to higher levels. They help us take in new information, make stronger connections, become more skilled at problem-solving and see new ways of doing things.

Happiness boosters

Happiness is not hereditary. We do have some control over our emotional well-being, and we can reap the benefits of what I call the “happiness advantage,” if we try.

One way to think of happiness is as a work ethic, not a mood. And while each of us has a “happiness baseline” that goes up and down daily, it is possible to raise that baseline. So, even when we’re going up and down, we’re doing so at a higher level.

With this in mind, here are some proven ways to boost your mood and raise your level of happiness. Of course, since happiness is subjective and not the same for everyone, we can pick and choose our own favorite boosters.

Meditate. Neuroscientists have found that monks who spend years meditating actually grow their left prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain most responsible for feeling happy. But we don’t have to spend years in silence to experience this boost. Take five minutes a day to breathe slowly and deeply. Or use another form of meditation that works for you. You’ll feel calmer, more aware and more content.

Find things to look forward to. Anticipating a future reward lights up the pleasure centers in the brain, much as the actual reward does. One study found that people raised their endorphin levels simply by thinking about watching their favorite movie.

Commit acts of kindness. Acts of giving to friends and strangers alike have been found to reduce stress and enhance mental health.

Get a breath of fresh air. Spending 20 minutes outside in good weather has been found to boost positive mood, broaden thinking and improve working memory. Studies have also confirmed that the less “negative TV” we watch, the happier we feel.

Exercise. Physical activity does more than release pleasure-inducing endorphins. It enhances our work performance by improving motivation, reducing stress and helping us get into “flow”—that feeling of total engagement when we’re most productive.

Spend but not on more stuff. The positive feelings that we get from material objects are fleeting. But money spent on experiences, especially ones with other people, can produce positive emotions that are more meaningful and lasting. Spending money on other people, called “prosocial spending,” also has been found to boost happiness.

Exercise a signature strength. We’re all good at something, and each time we use that particular skill—whatever it is—we experience a burst of positivity. Revisit a talent you haven’t used in a while. Or exercise a strength of character, a trait that’s deeply embedded in your sense of who you are. For example, I have a love of learning. So I decided that for each new place I visit, I will learn at least one historical fact.

Believe in yourself. The more we believe in our own ability to succeed, the more likely it is to happen. And there’s a lot of serious science to support this idea.

It’s also important to be aware that the beliefs we have about our own abilities are not fixed. They can change. So when you’re faced with a challenge, give yourself a competitive advantage by focusing on the reasons you will succeed. Remind yourself of the relevant skills that you have, rather than on those you lack. This doesn’t mean to ignore your weaknesses. It just means to focus on what you’re good at.

Believe in your ability to grow. Studies by Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck have shown that whether or not we believe our intelligence is changeable directly affects our achievement. It’s a difference that she explains in terms of having either a “fixed mindset” or a “growth mindset.” With a growth mindset, we can recognize our innate abilities but can also believe in our potential for growth and change through application and experience.

Spot new opportunities. Training your brain to notice potential opportunities takes practice. Kick-start the process by making a mental list every day of the good things in your life and your work. It’s a simple exercise with staying power.

In one study, participants who wrote down three good things a day for a week were happier and less depressed at one-month, three-month and six-month follow-ups. A variety of this activity is to write a short journal entry daily about a positive experience.

Regain control. Sometimes our brain hits a panic button and reason goes out the window. When this happens, the quickest way to recover is to identify how you feel and put those feelings into words.

Having verbal information can diminish the power of negative emotions, improve well-being and enhance decision-making. Tease apart those stresses that are beyond your control. Identify areas where your efforts will have a real impact, and refocus your energy accordingly.

Strengthen your relationships. The community of people you can count on—your family, friends and coworkers—can multiply your emotional, intellectual and physical resources. Having good people in our lives can also help us bounce back faster from a setback, accomplish more and feel a greater sense of purpose.

When researchers looked at the “happiest 10 percent” of people among us, just one characteristic distinguished them from everyone else. It wasn’t wealth, health or a pleasant climate. It was the strength of their social relationships. Again and again, studies have found that the more social support you have, the happier you are. And the happier you are, the more advantages you accrue in nearly every domain of life.

Shawn Achor is an author and researcher on happiness and human potential. This was adapted from his book “The Happiness Advantage” (www.shawnachor.com). See WFL Recommends on page 8.

Exercise class is a great place to meet people and make new friends.

Physical activity does.

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Impact of media on girls’ self-esteem

Q: In your excellent front-page article raising girls (March 2012), you didn’t talk about the impact of the media on girls’ body image and self-esteem. If you look at any fashion magazine or music video, you’ll see that expectations for a girl’s appearance are wildly unrealistic. And when girls compare themselves to celebrities, they feel like they don’t measure up. Their self-confidence is shaken and they become obsessed with changing the way they look.

—E.P., Bloomfield Hills, MI

A: You make an important point. Parents and other adults can help girls understand that movie stars and models have teams of people making them look perfect.

Here are some more tips from Common Sense Media:

- **Watch what you say.** When you talk about dieting or criticize your own body, your daughter is listening. You are her role model.

- **Share your own insecurities** and how you dealt with them. Let kids know that you understand.

- **Keep girls active.** Get them involved in sports and healthy lifestyles. Stress health, not weight.

- **Help girls value** themselves in broader ways. Compliment talents like creativity and thoughtfulness. Point out and comment positively on girls with different body types.

Keep an eye on social networks, texts and other online comments. Our kids live in a constant feedback loop, and many of them take advantage of their anonymity and online distance to insult each other’s weight and appearance.

Help your daughter become a media critic. Talk about the images and messages she sees in ads, magazines and on billboards. Check out the YouTube short film “Evolution” from the Dove Real Beauty Workshop for Girls. It shows how much work goes into making a magazine cover shot.

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More people living alone, a global trend

You may be surprised to hear that living alone encourages people to be more, not less, socially active. In fact, it even makes it easier, says New York University sociologist Eric Klinenberg, Ph.D., author of Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone.

“Compared to their married counterparts,” he says, “single people are more likely to spend time with friends and neighbors, go out to eat, and attend classes and lectures.”

A new General Social Survey, based on a representative sample of the U.S. population, found that single people 35 and older were “more likely” than those who lived with a spouse or romantic partner to spend a social evening with neighbors or friends.

In his study on “The Social Connectedness of Older Adults,” published in American Sociological Review, Cornell University sociologist Benjamin Cornwell, Ph.D. found that single seniors had as many friends and discussion partners as their married peers and were even more likely to socialize.

One explanation is that new media technologies have made living alone a more social experience. Being home alone does not feel involuntary or like solitary confinement.

The nationwide Pew Internet Personal Networks and Community Survey found that Web use leads to a more social life. And communications scholar Keith Hampton of Rutgers University has reported that frequent Web users were more likely than others to have large, diverse social networks, more likely to visit parks, cafés and restaurants, and were more likely to meet people with different perspectives and beliefs.

The latest Census report estimates that nearly 33 million Americans live alone now, up from 27 million in 2000. This includes 5 million 18-to-34-year-olds and 15 million people ages 35 to 64.

Living alone is a global trend as well, and 10 countries have an even higher percentage of single-occupant households than the U.S. They include Sweden (highest at 47%), Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Britain, France, Ukraine, Japan, Poland and Italy. The U.S. and Canada are tied at 28%.

While it’s true that many young adults have moved in with their parents because they can’t find jobs, living alone has become more common in both absolute and proportional terms.

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Study asks, ‘How old are today’s older workers?’

Conceptions of “who is old” vary greatly across cultures, historical periods and by industrial sector, according to researchers at the Sloan Center on Aging and Work. For example, a professional tennis player can be “old” at 30, an airline pilot at 50, and a judge at 85.

These days mid-career workers tend to become “older workers” when they start planning for retirement. And many adults are now working well past retirement age.

A Sloan Center survey reported that 1 in 5 employers said their employees are asking to work past retirement age and, in most cases, they are happy to oblige, for the following reasons:

- Older workers offer intellectual capital (65%).
- Older workers help train and mentor younger employees (61%).
- Older workers know how to weather a tough economy (42%).
- Older workers give employers more time to transition responsibilities to newer employees (36%).

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Adapted from The New York Times
If you’re traveling with an older relative

Travel isn’t easy for anyone these days, much less older people, many of whom move slowly and have trouble getting around. But it’s still doable, and the rewards of seeing family and friends who live far away or of visiting new sites can make it worth the effort. The trick is to plan ahead and do research. Here are a few suggestions:

Think about what you want from your trip. Do you just want a little quiet time away from home? Are you looking for some quality time with an older relative? Attending a family reunion? Whatever it is, be sure to set realistic, achievable goals for the trip, for yourself and for the older person.

Book flights carefully. If you travel by air, make any special requests when you book your flights. Will your relative need expedited boarding, extra legroom or wheelchair service? For an older flier who has trouble walking a long distance, you might request a ride on an electric cart. And for a bulkhead or other desirable seat, your relative may need a doctor’s note.

It’s possible to make all of these arrangements online, but it can be time-consuming. You may prefer to pay a fee (usually around $25) to talk to a real live agent and do your booking on the phone.

In any case, you can’t just show up and say, “Mom needs this or that because she’s old or has a disability.” But you probably do not need to book an older or disabled flier in first or business class. Passengers receive the same in-flight assistance wherever they are seated.

Surf the Web. The Internet has become an indispensable resource for travel planning. You can find out which hotels, cruises, theme parks or airlines will best accommodate you. Ask about elevator service and whether rooms are easily accessible. How long is the walk from the parking lot to the lobby? You can take advantage of online bargains. Just be sure to involve your relative in the planning, if possible. For many older people, the planning is almost as much fun as the trip. But be aware that, for others, it can be overwhelming and stressful. Use your judgment as to how much information to share.

Make contingency plans. Let your relative’s doctor know about your travel plans. Prepare medications so they’re readily available throughout the trip. Bring a list of phone numbers of doctors, pharmacies, relatives and neighbors as well as a list of the meds your relative is taking (and dosages). This will allow professionals to better assist you if you have a problem.

Be prepared for security. Inform transportation security officials about any medical conditions or anything that might set off a metal detector. Be aware too that passengers do have rights. For example, no one should be asked to remove a back brace and put it through an X-ray machine.

An elderly flier can be escorted through security by one caretaker, as long as the escort provides his or her full name, birth date, and government-issued ID. Just be sure to call the airline after booking your relative’s reservation if you wish to accompany him or her to the gate.

Don’t overdo it. Traveling by any mode can be exhausting, however, and people tend to be cranky when they’re tired and away from their normal routines. Plan regular rest stops. Try to make restaurant reservations in advance. If there’s something your older relative enjoys every day that is comforting, try to allow for this on the road.

Careful planning in advance is the key to arranging a smooth journey for an older traveler. But that should not rule out spontaneity or an adventure during your journey. Stay open to new possibilities. Relax and have fun.

If you are traveling with a relative who has dementia, be sure to leave a list of destinations and contact information with family members at home. If you’re driving, use automatic locks and have your relative sit in the front seat.

Carry a recent photo and have your loved one wear a Safe Return bracelet that is available through the MedicAlert Foundation/Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return Program. For more information, call (888) 572-8566.

All three generations enjoy a walk in a scenic State park.
Fairness does not mean the same or equal

By Nancy Samalin, M.S.

Many parents believe that being fair means that everything should be equal with our children. And if we treat kids the same, they’ll stop arguing about who got more, who gets to go first, or who’s the favorite. But they won’t—probably not even when they get to be adults.

Fairness doesn’t mean equal or the same. Trying to treat children “equally” is a little like trying to get out of quicksand: the harder you try, the deeper you sink.

The truth is, your kids don’t really want to be treated the same at every moment, no matter how much they clamor for it. The message behind the fairness complaint is really this: “Am I special?” “Do you love me?” “Am I worthy of your attention?”

Trying to treat kids identically tends to backfire anyway, because you end up depriving them of what they really want, which is to be valued for who they are. We need to celebrate children for their achievements. We need to notice and reward their efforts.

Changing the focus

Parents can change the focus from a child’s comparison to his or her individual need. For example:

Matt: He got more cereal than me.

Mom: You sound like you’re really hungry.

Matt: I am!

“I love it when my boys are sharing their toys so nicely!”

Mom: Okay. Show me how much more you want.

Not all inequities are as easy to solve, of course. If there’s one piece of cake with a rose decoration and three kids want it, you can’t make everyone happy. But kids have to deal with the unavoidable lesson that life isn’t always fair. There’s nothing wrong with saying, “Next time, it will be your turn.”

To avoid spats over daily issues such as who had what last and whose turn it is next, let children work out a schedule: whose turn it is to sit in the front seat or choose the TV channel. Post the rotation on the refrigerator.

“You love her more”

Few things push a parent’s guilt button more than, “You love her more.” Complaints of favoritism can put you on the defensive, but remember: Your children do not need to be treated the same.

Allow yourself to respond to them according to their ages, personalities, abilities and moods. The trick is to explain this in a way that they can understand.

For example: “I love you both very much. The baby needs me to feed her and change her. You need me to read stories and tuck you in at night. I want to spend more time with you. As soon as I put the baby down for a nap, let’s play a game together.”

If you feel closer to one child

The fact is, feelings of favoritism exist in almost every family. Some children are more agreeable, less whiny or have a temperament more like our own. It’s hard not to favor the child who is easier to handle.

Try to separate what you feel from how you treat your kids. Don’t overlook the child you have less of an affinity for—and avoid making comparisons.

Even a compliment can backfire if it’s phrased as a comparison: For example: “Your sister is the brains in the family and you’re the comedian.” Statements like these can spark rivalries and resentments among children. They give kids the impression that you do prefer one over the other.

Keep in mind that feelings of favoritism will ebb and flow as your children grow and change. The adorable toddler can become a demanding four-year-old. The hard-to-please preschooler blossoms into a confident and adaptable first-grader. The child who is difficult one year may be a real pleasure the next. ♦

—Nancy Samalin

It’s more than just a sibling issue

All children compare themselves with other kids and even TV characters. To handle complaints of unfairness, acknowledge your child’s feelings of disappointment but stand your ground. For example:

Your child says: “Everyone else’s mom lets them watch TV after school.”

Don’t say: “I’m not everyone else’s mom.

As long as you live here, you’ll obey my rules.”

Do say: “In our house, the TV stays off until after homework is done.”

Your child says: “All my friends wear those sneakers.”

Don’t say: “You don’t have to copy everything your friends wear.”

Do say: “I can see why you would want those sneakers. I wish they were not so expensive.”

Your child says: “Julie’s mom lets her have cookies anytime.”

Don’t say: “So go live at Julie’s house.”

Do say: “You would like that, too. But in our house, cookies are for after dinner.”

Your child says: “Joey’s mom lets him stay up till 10 o’clock.”

Don’t say: “Maybe Joey doesn’t wake up grumpy like you do.”

Do say: “On school nights, you need your sleep. You can stay up later on weekends.” ♦

—N.S.
BY ANNE PERRYMAN

You hear people say, “I’m not good at small talk.” And it’s probably true. Making a comment to a stranger at a party or even while you’re waiting with someone for an elevator can feel awkward.

“Some people are so smooth—and I’m just not,” says Emma. “Once I commented to my boss about a really stupid reality show on TV, and I’m sure he thinks I watch it all the time.”

Joe replays in his head past lapses: “Like when I shared a taxi from the airport with the president of our company and didn’t say a word. He talked to the driver who, unlike me, was funny and had interesting things to say.”

At the first meeting of a new task force, employees from several divisions sat around a table waiting to get started. “We all buried our heads in our smartphones—and no one said a word to anyone,” says Alice. “A little small talk would have gone a long way to loosen things up.”

WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL ANYWAY?

All of us have failed at small talk at one time or another. We said something embarrassing or we froze at the wrong moment. In the scheme of things, it’s just not that important.

But maybe it could be. “I used to think if you had talent and skill, you didn’t have to make nice with everybody,” says Ada. “But no matter how good you are, you can’t just be Johnny One Note, slaving away at your job. You need to be comfortable in different kinds of situations.”

Says Kate: “I want to be seen as an individual with interests, as someone who has a life and who can be fun to talk to.”

SMALL TALK NEED NOT BE TRIVIAL

Some people think of small talk as office gossip, insincere flattery, a reaction to the day’s headline or mindless chatter about something you saw or overheard—in other words, a distraction from more important matters.

But successful small talk at the workplace is neither trivial nor a way to curry favor. It can help you create rapport with the people you work with—whether they are coworkers, your supervisor or the VP in charge of your division.

It’s hard to generalize, but women seem to feel a little more comfortable sharing family information. “Before I start a training session, I like to say something about my family or how things have changed since I was a kid,” says Rita, a grandmother who runs training workshops. “It helps people relax and say things that give me insight into their thought processes, which can be helpful.”

YOU CAN LEARN HOW TO DO IT

You may not be able to learn how to sing on key, but the social skill you acquired with a little practice. “You may not be able to learn how to do it, but the social skill can be easily acquired with a little practice. Here are some suggestions:

THINK MORE ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON

If you know you’re going to see someone new outside the work- place, for example, you might find out a little something about his or her background and interests ahead of time.

BE A GOOD LISTENER

Let other people talk about themselves. Ask for details and offer a few words of encouragement. And if someone shares information with you, don’t be too quick to blab every word of it to the next person you run into.

BALANCE SELF-DISCLOSURE WITH PRIVACY

Be sensitive to timing, and let the social side of your work relationships develop naturally. Don’t try to “jump start” a more intimate connection. And if you share a particularly juicy tidbit with someone, don’t expect or demand reciprocity.

THINK BEFORE YOU WRITE

These days we can also make small talk via e-mail, but some things you might say in person don’t come across as well in writing. Before you hit Send, ask yourself: Will I be comfortable sharing this no matter who ends up reading it?

And though the business world is more informal today than ever, don’t get overly casual in your comments. For example, says business etiquette author Barbara Pachter: Don’t address colleagues as “guys” in e-mail or use “Hey” or “Yo” as a salutation.

10 TOPICS TO STEER CLEAR OF AT THE WORKPLACE

Based on what you hear and see on TV and social media these days, you might assume that our work world has gone completely casual—and that no subject is off-limits anymore. But there is such a thing as being too open, says Beverly Langford, author of “The Etiquette Edge.” She suggests avoiding the following topics in your workplace conversations.

Health problems. Resist the urge to graphically describe your symptoms.

Details of your sex life.

Problems with your spouse or partner.

Your personal finances, either positive or negative.

Your religious views.

Highly charged political topics.

The personal lives of your coworkers.

Jokes that disparage ethnic, racial or religious groups—or any specific individual or group of people.

Gossip about the boss.

Lavish purchases that you have recently made.

Wall Street Journal columnist Sue Shellenger notes that “talk taboos” may be different for men and women, especially on subjects such as miscarriage or menopause.

Older workers may also be more reticent to hear as well as share highly personal information.
Common myths about exercise

Popular misconceptions can undermine your efforts to get in shape. Here are some of the most persistent myths—and the facts, from Consumer Reports on Health.

**The Myth** If you’re not losing weight, your exercise routine isn’t working.

**The Facts** Exercise alone can cut body fat, make you firmer and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. But it has a small impact on actual weight loss over the short term. If you want to lose weight in addition to getting in shape, try cutting calories and stepping up your workouts.

**The Myth** A pedometer is all you need to track your exercise.

**The Facts** Pedometers are a good way to monitor your daily activity and keep you motivated. But they are not a reliable measure of exercise quality or intensity. To do that, you need a heart-rate monitor. Aim for a target rate for a set number of minutes rather than a specific number of steps.

**The Myth** It’s OK to be a couch potato at times, as long as you get regular exercise.

**The Facts** Sitting for long periods causes upticks in heart disease, type 2 diabetes and possibly cancer—even among people who meet recommended levels of daily exercise. Find ways to spend less time sitting. Cut your screen time. Walk more or just spend more time putting around your home or office.

**The Myth** You can lose fat from specific parts of your body.

**The Facts** There’s no such thing as “spot reduction,” according to the American Council on Exercise. The calories you expend during exercise will help burn fat from your entire body. Concentrating on a specific body part may even limit the benefits of training, if other muscle groups are neglected.

**The Myth** You should stretch before a workout to avoid injuries.

**The Facts** Researchers have discovered that muscles benefit more from stretching after your workout, when they are warm.

**The Myth** A sports drink is better than plain water during exercise.

**The Facts** For most people who engage in a moderate-intensity workout, water provides all the hydration you need. Drink before, during and after your workout.

**The Myth** Exercise before bedtime and you’ll sleep better.

**The Facts** The National Sleep Foundation discourages bedtime exercise because it has a stimulating effect and it elevates body temperature, both of which can make it harder to sleep.

**The Myth** Calorie counters on exercise machines are reliably accurate.

**The Facts** Don’t count on it, says the American Council on Exercise, especially if the machine does not ask for your weight, height and gender. Try to burn at least 1,000 calories a week through exercise, although less can still have benefits—and any exercise that you do regularly is better than none.

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**‘Will lifting weights make me muscle-bound?’**

That’s the conventional wisdom—and another myth. It may also explain the claim that for better muscle tone, you should go lighter on the weights and do more reps instead.

But this approach is not supported by science. Producing bulky muscles requires both lifting heavy weights and consuming far more than the 2,000 calories daily recommended for many adults. In a 2002 study, a group of participants performed various resistance exercises at different weights and repetitions (for example, 85% of their maximum ability for 8 reps, versus 45% for 15 reps).

Study participants who lifted heavier weights fewer times burned more energy and had a greater metabolic boost after exercise.

Another study, in Canada, of a group of women who did strength training with challenging weights twice a week found similar effects on body and belly fat.

So the bottom line is: try heavier weights and fewer reps. But, as always, talk to your doctor before you launch a new workout program.
WE RECOMMEND

How happiness can help us thrive and excel

Hard work, success, happiness. That’s the normal path, right? Wrong. It turns out that happiness actually drives success. And when we’re feeling positive and happy, our brains become more engaged, motivated, efficient, resilient, creative and productive.

This “happiness advantage,” says author Shawn Achor, has been confirmed by rigorous research in psychology, neuroscience and management studies (see front page story).

The author, who helped design and teach the famous “happiness” course at Harvard University, uses stories and case studies from a large body of research and from his own extensive work with company executives.

For example, says Achor, doctors who are in a positive mood use more intelligence and creativity and make accurate diagnoses 19 percent faster than doctors in a “neutral” state. Optimistic salespeople outsell their pessimistic counterparts. Students primed to feel happy before taking math achievement tests outperform their “neutral” peers.

Achor identifies seven principles that can improve our performance and maximize our potential. Among them are:

**When our brain gets stuck** in a failure pattern, we can retrain it to spot patterns of possibility so that we can see—and seize—opportunity wherever we look.

**When challenges loom** and our rational brain gets hijacked by our emotions, we can learn to channel our efforts on small, manageable goals and gain the leverage we need to gradually conquer bigger ones.

**When things become stressful**, we may feel like retreating into ourselves. But if we turn to our friends, peers and family members, they can help propel us forward. Using this principle, we can learn to invest in one of the greatest predictors of success and excellence—our social support network.