HEALTH & HAPPINESS

Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence

by Rick Hanson

Your brain grabs the bad and drops the good. Hanson's method teaches you to keep the good and grow happier.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Your brain is Velcro for the bad and Teflon for the good.**

Hanson's name for the negativity bias: to keep our ancestors alive, the brain grabs threats and insults instantly, while good experiences slide off unless you deliberately hold onto them.

02 **Most of your happiness is built, not born.**

Hanson estimates only about a third of a person's inner strengths are innate; the other two-thirds are developed over time. You grow them by growing them.

03 **A good moment changes nothing until you install it.**

Learning has two stages: activating a positive state, then installing it as a lasting trait. Passing pleasures that are never absorbed leave the brain unchanged.

04 **Take in the good with the HEAL steps.**

Have a positive experience, Enrich it, Absorb it, and optionally Link it to negative material. The first three steps are the core; each takes only 10 to 30 seconds, a few times a day.

05 **Enrich the good five ways so it sinks in deeper.**

Make the experience last longer, feel stronger, engage more senses, notice what is fresh or novel in it, and feel why it matters to you personally.

06 **You don't have to wait for good experiences — you can create them.**

Call a good fact to mind, find the good in an ordinary situation, or do something kind or satisfying. The brain installs felt experiences, not just things that happen to you.

07 **Hold the good in front and old pain behind it, and the good will soothe the bad.**

The optional Link step: keep a positive feeling big and strong in the foreground of awareness while a painful memory sits at the back, so positive and negative wire together and the pain gradually loses its grip.

08 **Peace, contentment, and love are your brain's home base.**

Ch. 3: when your core needs feel met, the brain rests in responsive 'green' mode. When they feel threatened, it flips to reactive 'red' mode — stress, grasping, and friction. Practice moves the base setting toward green.

09 **Feed the need that is actually starving.**

Inner strengths serve three core needs: safety, satisfaction, and connection. If you feel unsafe, take in protection and strength; if you feel unseen, take in feeling cared about. Match the medicine to the lack.

10 **The 21 Jewels: grow seven strengths for each core need.**

Ch. 10 offers 21 short practices — for safety: refuge, feeling all right right now, peace; for satisfaction: enthusiasm, fullness of the moment, contentment; for connection: feeling cared about, feeling like a good person, love.

11 **Tend your mind like a garden: let be, let go, let in.**

Hanson's three ways to work with the mind — be with what's there, pull the weeds of the negative, grow the flowers of the positive. This book is about the third, because lasting gains come from letting good in.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

Neuropsychologist Rick Hanson starts from an unfair fact about the brain: it evolved to keep us alive, not happy. Because missing a threat could be fatal while missing a pleasure could not, the brain developed a negativity bias - it is like Velcro for bad experiences and Teflon for good ones. One insult echoes for years, while a warm compliment fades by lunch.

But the brain is not fixed. Hanson points out that only about a third of our inner strengths are innate; the other two-thirds are developed, and the way to develop them is through experience-dependent neuroplasticity: neurons that fire together wire together. His method is called taking in the good - turning a passing good moment into a lasting inner resource by actually staying with it instead of letting it slide off.

He organizes the method into the HEAL steps. Have a beneficial experience, whether you notice one or create one. Enrich it: stay with it for 10 to 30 seconds and make it bigger through duration, intensity, your senses, novelty, and personal relevance. Absorb it: intend for it to sink into you. Then,

only if you like, Link it: hold the good feeling in the foreground while an old painful one waits in the background, so the good gradually soothes and replaces the bad - flowers pulling weeds.

All of this serves three core needs - safety, satisfaction, and connection. When these needs feel met, the brain rests in its responsive green mode: peace, contentment, and love. The book closes with 21 Jewels, seven guided practices for each need, from refuge and feeling all right right now to gratitude, enthusiasm, and feeling cared about. Hanson stresses this is not fake positive thinking; it is leveling a tilted playing field, a few seconds at a time.

DO THIS WEEK

This week, pick one jewel you need - say, feeling all right right now, or feeling cared about. Then, a few times a day, catch one small good moment, stay with the feeling for 10 to 30 seconds, breathe it in, and imagine it soaking into you like water into a sponge. That pause is the whole practice.

By Rick Hanson, first published 2013 (Harmony Books); full title: Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence. Read it if your mind broods on the bad and lets the good slip away, and you want a daily, seconds-long method to change that.