that here; the emphasis will be on you, no soppy sloppy chicken soup stories.

**No general platitudes.** Many self-help books are filled with pages and pages of vague prescriptions to enhancing your mental well-being. “Think good thoughts and all will be well.” Which are neither very informative or useful.

No, this stripped down, lean book gets to the point quickly, and is filled with practical tips to increasing your happiness and efficiency. So judge the book by its **cover**, not its **size**.
“Happiness is a mental subroutine that has to be called more frequently from your daily program.”
--Steven Gordon

**Being Happy is a Choice**

Right now as you read this children somewhere are playing soccer on a field in gym class. Some of the are enjoying it, others are not. A group of people are working in small, windowless cubicles in an office somewhere; some of those are happy, while others are not. It's the same soccer game, and the same set of cubicles, yet different people have radically different reactions to the same set of external stimuli.

Now, it's true that some kids may like soccer, and some may not, and some may like working in cubicles, doing whatever kind of work one does there (cubicle work?), while others may not. But the ones who aren't happy could be happy, or at the least, less unhappy, if they looked at the situation differently. Unhappiness is generally a subjective state of mind. Unless you're talking about physical pain, it is usually possible to be happy or unhappy about almost any given experience, or at least, more happier than you would otherwise be.

Don't believe me? Haven't you ever had an experience where you were unhappy, and then a parent or spouse or friend or weird man with white handkerchiefs told you why you should be enjoying yourself, and then sure enough, you were? Your parent/spouse/friend/weird white handkerchief man didn't change your circumstances, but only your perception of the event.

You can do the same. If you tell yourself that something isn't so unpleasant, often times, you can make it less unpleasant, even likable. Here are some tips for increasing your happiness. This is the part of the book where you should start paying attention!

1) **Find hobbies you like**
Never Again Say “Hello, how are you?”

Ever have someone you barely know say, “How are you?” even though you know there’s no way in the world they could possibly care? Ever have someone say “How are you?” when walking past you at ten miles per hour, a rate allowing for an answer at most one second in length? What is that all about?

As a polite custom, people say hello to each other, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But then, to show that they’re especially sensitive, people at some point in the past started asking “How are you?”

Remember, you’re walking past someone else, and they’re walking past you, and you have no real time to respond—you’re have no chance to give a real answer. It’s not meant to be a real question. It’s just a nicety, meant to show the questioner cares, but the questioner usually has no time or interest to listen to a real answer; he just wants a bland one word answer to show he had the “caring conversation”.

This sort of phony behavior is not conducive to true happiness. If you say something you should generally mean it unless there is some important underlying entertainment value involved. Therefore, you should only say “Hello” to people and not “How are you?” unless you really mean it. If people say “How are you?” to you, here are possible responses you can give to insincere questioners: “Taciturn” (Silent), “Static” (Unchanging), “Variable” or my favorite, “Thank you for asking! Do you have a few minutes we can stop and talk about it?” When I was in college I used to have preprinted cards with the words “Fine” on them which I would hand out to questioners—form answers for form questioners. (At the time none of the superbright Yale students around me understood the irony of what I was doing. It was very sad.)

If you really want to know how someone is doing, ask a more probing question, such as “What is in your mind?” or “What are your feelings?” Such non-standard questions are more likely to provoke more thoughtful replies.
A note about seeking happiness through drinks and/or drugs

People who drink alcohol and/or take drugs are to be pitied. They take drugs or drink alcohol in order to feel good. That strongly implies that they can’t feel good without taking drugs or alcohol, that their own personality can’t make them happy. So by using drugs or alcohol they are telling the world that they have a flawed personality and they are unable to enjoy life without taking a mind altering substance.

But alcohol is a legal substance! True, and if you drink it only for an occasional taste, that’s all right. But if you drink it for the alcoholic effect, then you are taking a drug to change your personality, to make yourself silly and doopey and vomitish. In the doopey sci-fi novel Brave New World, the working class population were called “D’s” were portrayed as mindless, wrinkled little men, and they took an addictive drug called “soma” to make them happy, just like some people in our society take drugs and alcohol to do the same.

If you have any friends who drink or take drugs, you should pity them. Perhaps you should also give them a copy of this book, because where there’s life, there’s hope.
Chapter 2: How to Deal With Boring Experiences

“If you’re bored, you’re giving up way too easily.”
--Steven Gordon

Sometimes people have experiences that are just boring, such as sitting in a bus or train station for hours on end, or sitting in attendance at a social function that isn’t very interesting. Those are situations where the "glass is half full"--that is, you are not suffering, but at the same time, you are not enjoying yourself. What can you do about boredom?

Simply end it.

From a practical perspective, consider that there are and will be many, many times in your life when you will be bored--standing in line, waiting for a lecture or meeting to begin, sitting in traffic, waiting for someone to give you something, or standing in line at a cash register, among other examples.

**Boredom kills as many people as smoking.** A not insignificant portion of your life is spent being bored. Let's hypothesize that if you add up all the minutes and seconds you are bored, it adds up to 20 years of your life. That's 20 lost years of your life! It would little different than if you died 20 years before your time!

What's the solution, then? To change your life to avoid these boring times? Unfortunately, many times we simply cannot avoid boring stretches of time, unless all traffic disappears from the roads and all people become interesting and quick and efficient. Therefore, since not all boring situations can be changed or avoided, it is only logical that you work on coping strategies. If you cannot avoid the boring situation, change your perception of it so that it becomes more interesting (or, at least less uninteresting) to you.

You are probably thinking that this suggestion does not sound realistic. But if you have a firm control of your mind and you think creatively, it is quite possible. What follows are some tips for turning the boring into the interesting:
If you are a woman, imagine that you are shopping not just in any store but one of the fanciest stores in New York or Paris. Imagine doormen, plush carpeting, and other fancy things you would find in the fanciest store. Imagine that each item you are buying is a very expensive item. A bag of potato chips can become a Ming vase. A blank notepad can become an impressionist French painting (not much imagination required there). Enjoy the act of shopping for such expensive luxury items.

Driving a Car. If you have to drive a car for some distance, pretend you are the navigator on a large boat, or airplane, or spaceship, and you are in command of your speed and direction. Don’t just drive to your destination, pilot your way there, enjoy the journey. And marvel at what you’re controlling. Imagine all the thousands of tons of steel under your control, so responsive to your every direction, and the great responsibility you have to carefully control your vessel. Always keep in mind that you are a small person with a giant vehicle around you—if you turn the wheel to the right, this giant metal thing all around you turns to the right. It’s like being in an army tank or a giant Japanese metal walking robot. Think of the tremendous power you have!

But always remember to drive responsibly!

Cleaning Up. If you have to clean up an area, you can use variants of the fantasy tactics mentioned above—pretend you are fighting a battle, or beautifying a palace, or you can take a Sim City approach. Pretend your are an urban planner going to clean up an area of “urban blight”. Take a small part of the area that requires cleaning and make it your own. Subdivide the area that has to be cleaned—if you have to clean four rooms, lie down in a quarter of one room, on the floor. Just lie there and look around you for a moment or two. Say to yourself that everything around you is under your control and command, and that as the person in charge of this small region, you want to make it as best looking as possible. Don’t worry or think about the rest of the house or even the rest of the room right now. Tell yourself you are only responsible for that piece of the room in your view right now, that for now this and this alone...
you yourself, knowing that this is a very small price to pay for all the worry you are leaving behind.

Learn to think that way and your life will be happier and more stress free too.

**Perfectionism in shopping decisions**

Perfectionism can also rear its head in shopping. You see something you are thinking of buying, but it doesn’t perfectly fit what you are looking for. You think if you look in one or two or five other stores you may find exactly what you are looking for.

Most times this is a bad strategy. Imagine if you went to five stores to comparison shop every time you wanted to buy something. You would spend a lot of time in your life shopping. Unless you like to shop, this is days and weeks of your life that could really add up to years of your life that are wasted shopping. While pursuing the “perfect product” you don’t realize that there is a cost, your time, and you are losing time from your life that could better be put to use pursuing enjoyment.

For example, say you want to buy a five foot tall white fan. You go to two stores and see small fans, black fans, but only one white fan that is four feet tall. Should you go looking in additional stores to locate a fan that might be one foot taller?

If you find something that is almost perfect you should stop right there. You should have pressing uses for your time, such as work, being with your family or friends, or playing important computer games, that you should want to spend your time on. Recognize that these goals are being delayed by your excessive shopping. Buy the slightly smaller fan and tell yourself it won’t matter. Tell yourself that if it really, really bothers you in a few months, you will go out and buy a bigger fan.

But guess what? Typically within a day or two of making your purchase you stop thinking about the imperfections of whatever you bought and focus on another problem. But by a) telling yourself that you have more important things to do with your time, telling yourself that b) it doesn’t matter if the product is not perfect, and by c) promising yourself to buy another product in a few months if you’re really unhappy, you can
3) Distract yourself and compartmentalize your stress

Try to distract yourself. First tell yourself that you are going to take a "time out" from whatever is bothering you. Do something you really consider to be fun.

Having and successfully enforcing "time outs" is a great way to get rid of stress. Simply say that during a certain time of the day that you will not think about your problems. This can be called “compartmentalizing”, or separating, your problems from the rest of your problems. Former President Clinton was a great master at compartmentalizing his problems. When he got impeached for having inappropriate contact with Monica Lewinsky, his Oval office intern, he became a national disgrace and international laughingstock. But despite this, President Clinton was still mentally capable of focusing on running the government because he was said to have "compartmentalized" his problems--only thinking about his girl troubles at certain times, leaving other times free to attempt to solve crises in the Balkans and tinker with education policy.

You should deal with your problems in the same way. Say there will be certain "off limits" times you will not think about your problems. And during this time you should distract yourself, do something you find very pleasurable. It can be a book, a movie, a friendly game of dodge ball, a computer game, crawling in the grass, squeezing open tubes of toothpaste, a conversation with a friend, or anything you find stimulating.

If you find yourself thinking about a problem during an “off limits” time, tell yourself sternly that this isn’t the time to be thinking about it. Get angry at yourself for thinking about this during an “off limits” time. In effect, you should often become more concerned about thinking things at inappropriate times than in thinking about the problems themselves.

4) Dealing with physical discomfort caused by stress

Sometimes (though by no means always!) physical discomfort in the arms, legs, stomach or head are the result of stress. If your doctor tells you that your physical discomfort’s underlying cause is psychological and not
Chapter 5: Dealing with Small Irritations

Why a chapter on small irritations? If they are so small, why are they worth writing about? Well, as it turns out, small irritations tend to be quite common, and if you constantly let small problems upset you, you will be generally unhappy.

Irritations In General

Almost every experience you have in life has some positive and negative aspects mixed in with it. Have you ever watched a great movie when you were slightly hungry, or taken a walk in a beautiful forest when you were a little too cold or a little too hot? In such situations, you can easily allow yourself to become distracted by the minor discomfort and ruin your enjoyment of the greater experience.

Ignore the irritation. Ignore the fact that you're a little cold or a little hungry or a little hot, and focus on the great movie or great view you're seeing. If you practice at it and get good at it, you will ignore those minor negative stimuli. Keep in mind that by letting a "lesser negative"--feeling a bit cold or hot or a bit hungry--distract you, you are losing out on a very positive experience. Say to yourself that it doesn't bother you. If you let it bother you, you will lose out on the positive experience. Focus on the great experience you are having. If you can really, really focus on it, you may find that you will forget about whatever is bothering you.

For example, if you go to a movie theater, how often do you see an annoying light from the side of the theater, or a head in front of you that obscures, say, 5% of the screen? How often do you worry that such things will reduce your pleasure from watching the film? And yet, when the film starts, you quickly forget about these minor distractions and only at the end of the film when the lights come on do you notice, with amazement, the minor distractions you forgot about. This is an example of how focusing on something you really like can help you forget minor distractions which can interfere with your pleasure.

Fix it if it’s easy and quick. If the source of the irritation can be fixed very easily, in just a minute or two, it might be worth it to fix it—
a blind person says you are ugly, you also aren't offended because you also know the blind person has no basis for saying that. Now transfer that knowledge to the split second decision that a coarse coworker or fellow student or stranger makes about your abilities and realize that they, too, haven't spent the time and effort to evaluate your skills and that anything that comes out of their mouth in this regard is equally meaningless, just as if it had come from a blind or mentally challenged person.

b) Even if the insulter is trying to judge you, he may have had no opportunity to do so. If you spill a little bit of water from a cup and a complete stranger calls you “Clumsy!” do you think the complete stranger knows you well enough to know whether you are a clumsy person? Of course not. One incident like that is not enough to base such an opinion on. So if a stranger who clearly doesn't know you insults you, you can just ignore it because you know he or she hasn't had an opportunity to judge you. If he obviously can’t be judging you, whatever he’s saying is meaningless, as if a stranger came up to you in an airport and said, “You’re a terrible golf player!”

c) Even if the insulter is trying to judge you and has had opportunity, he may have biases. If a coworker or student has seen you for weeks or months and he insults you, you may feel the insult is a correct judgment of your abilities because they have had clear opportunities to see how clumsy or maladroit you are. But you also need to take into account biases. Do most people who insult you really intend to give an objective analysis of your abilities? Or did they dislike you before they made their comment and have a clear inclination to try and offend you? If the latter, you cannot trust their judgment, therefore you shouldn't be offended by it, because once again, it's not a judgment, it's merely an attempt to offend.

Example: Joseph Stalin says, “You’re ugly!” Does that offend you? You know Joseph Stalin is a very bad person. He would say anything to offend you. Since he’s not giving you an honest appraisal, there is no need to believe anything he says, and no need to be offended.
So how should you react when you're insulted? Just laugh, knowing that most likely you're not being fairly judged by someone, you're just being insulted by someone trying to get a reaction from you. If the person is obviously biased against you, and obviously doesn’t even care whether what he is saying is true or not, why should you? You shouldn’t.

Why do you care what a nasty person thinks? How very odd!

On a broader level, why should you care what a nasty person thinks of you? If the insulter is a family or friend or someone you care about, you may care what they think of you. Their opinions may matter to you. But why should you care what a nasty person thinks of you? Their opinion surely shouldn’t matter to you. If you think about it, it is completely illogical to care what a nasty person believes about you. Do you really want to please your enemies or complete strangers? Do you rely on their opinions of you? Why would you want to? If you want to, there is something a little odd about you.

Some people feel an instinct to want to be liked and complimented by everyone. It’s ok to be polite to people, but you shouldn’t seek the approval of the entire race of mankind. If you are like that you really need to deactivate that part of your brain. Tell yourself that feeling the need to seek the approval of the whole of mankind is an odd desire and try to avoid feeling that need.

Feel pity for the insulting person

If you can, you should feel pity for the insulting person. Pity? Why?

If you’ve read the Lord of the Rings, you should know why. There was a Hobbit in the story named Bilbo Baggins. (For those of you who haven’t read the books, Hobbits are vertically challenged people in denial about their severe eating disorders.) Anyway, Frodo Baggins once asked Gandalf why Bilbo just didn’t just perforate a creature named Smeagol with his Elvish sword. Smeagol, if you remember, was the sniveling creature who tried to eat Bilbo at the end of a riddle guessing contest.
defend yourself. My first instinct in the rare situation where this happened to me was to say that Yale University and Harvard Law School didn’t think so when they admitted me. But I realized sometime later that I was playing the game of the insulter by agreeing to debate his premise. I knew it wasn’t true, so why did I need to debate it with him?

**It shouldn’t upset you because it isn’t true.** For reasons described above (you’re not really being judged), you shouldn’t get upset. Don’t have doubt about this.

**Defend yourself with psychobabble.** Respond to this line of attack by raising an eyebrow and say something like, “I notice you feel a need to label people and compare yourself to others. Tell me about your childhood. Did you feel something lacking when you compared yourself to the other children? Did your parents not give you enough praise when you did something well? How did that make you feel?” This is a classic self-defense mechanism you can use—showing you’re not upset, and changing the subject to your insulter’s mental flaws.

**Silly Voice Defense Mechanism**

If someone makes a nasty comment, an effective retort can often be to repeat the offending remark, word for word, in a parody of the insulter’s voice. Is the insulter’s voice deep? Make it very deep, like a football player who has taken too many steroids. Is the insulter’s voice high pitched? Make it even higher, like a parrot. Is it nasal? Is it slow? Exaggerate whatever tendency there is to the voice, and then repeat it in an exaggerated fashion. For example, if someone with a deep voice says, “You are very stupid!” Then repeat it, in a deep Frankenstein-like voice, boom, “YOU... ARE... VERY... STUPID...” and laugh.

What does this accomplish?

1) Showing you’re not offended
2) Changing the subject from you to the offender.
Chapter 11: The Big Picture

The big picture: The emotional balance sheet at the end of the day

This is going to be a reeeeally short chapter, but it’s a really important point, so I decided to give it its own chapter, in case you’ve just skimming this entire book while you’re half awake or watching TV or throwing socks at your cat. **Wake up for this part!**

One of the most important points of this important book is to minimize your unpleasant feelings (fear, anger, irritation, anxiety) and maximize your positive feelings (happiness). You should constantly be evaluating your success at doing this. At the end of every day, you should evaluate whether you were successful at maximizing your happiness and minimizing your unhappiness. If you felt you could have done better, you should think of strategies to improve next time—remember, this is one day of your life that is gone, and will never return again. It’s all the more important that you get higher utilization out of the next day. Think about why you were unhappy (or insufficiently happy) and think of mental strategies you could use to increase your happiness if similar events occur.

**Example 1:** Reviewing the past day, you realize you spent most of the day worrying about an evaluation you were to receive at 4 PM. The evaluation wasn’t bad, but you realized you spent hours being upset about what might happen. Corrective solution: In the future, tell yourself not to worry about something like this until it actually happens, that you are torturing yourself for hours without purpose every times this happens and reducing your quality of life.

**Example 2:** You couldn’t sleep well last night because you were worried about a big assignment you had to start the next day. Remember how I told you that you have to compartmentalize and “wall off” your worries from your thoughts when you go to sleep? Try to be firmer with yourself; when you go to sleep and feel thoughts of worry coming to your mind, sternly tell yourself that this is not the permitted time to think about such things, that “tomorrow’s you” will handle them.
Example 3: You had a really great meal at a Japanese restaurant, but afterwards you realize that you have little memory of the food. You may have fallen into the trap of noticing the first bite and the second bite and then, becoming accustomed to the taste, paying no attention to the third or fourth bite. Resolve to eat more slowly and mentally focus on your most pleasurable foods when eating to increase your happiness.

Remember, your goal should be to keep track of your success in maximizing your happiness and minimizing your unhappiness and constantly readjusting your mental strategies to accomplish both these things. Note that you shouldn’t be obsessing about doing these things, but rather thinking rationally, from time to time, how to do these things better.
Pay Attention!

Now that you’ve gotten to the end of this book, you’re probably breathing a sigh of relief. You’re done!
Or are you?

NO, YOU’RE JUST BEGINNING!

It’s not enough to simply read my words and hope they sink into your unconscious. There is no way you are going to remember all the things I have taught you in one reading. So, to make it easier on you, below I have summarized the main points in this book. You can photocopy the following pages and put them on your refrigerator. No, on second thought, you won’t read it if you put them there. How often do you stand next your refrigerator and read things on it? Better yet, make copies of these summary pages and put them wherever you linger—the dining room table, your favorite seat next to your television, your desk, under your pillow, etc. And actually look at them, from time to time.

How to increase your happiness
1) Get better or more hobbies
2) Improve your job or get a better one
3) Experience small joys constantly in life
4) Be happy with your understanding and abilities
5) Get yourself a Pomeranian
6) Enjoy pleasurable experiences slowly

How to deal with boredom
1) Make lists
2) Write plots to favorite movies
3) Do exercises
4) Observe people
5) Radical fantasizing
6) Notice colors and patterns
7) Daydream about happy events
8) Imagine yourself in a movie
Afterwards: Was reading this book a total waste of your time?
There are three kinds of people on this planet:

1) People who don’t realize they have a problem. There are many people out there who are unhappy, and don’t even realize it as a problem. They are bothered by their unhappiness but don’t see it as a problem that can be fixed. Many, many people are like this. Such people, unaware that this is a problem or a problem that can be fixed, are undoubtedly not even reading this book. So all we can do is pity them unless and until their level of self-awareness reaches a new self-actualized threshold.

2) People who realize that they have a problem, but don’t do very much about it. Many people correctly identify their unhappiness as a problem but, either don’t do anything to find a solution, or do search for a solution, but don’t implement it. Regrettably, some of the people reading this book fall into this category. There can be a variety of reasons why people, even handed the solutions to their problems on a silver platter, do not implement them. They many feel that such solutions do not work. More likely, however, is that they do not have the mental energy to bring change about. They don’t have the push to try to change themselves. Unfortunately, this is a motivational and emotional flaw, and no one can easily give this motivation to them. But it is somewhat humorous that many people, having taken the time to read this book, will think their mission is done and do no more. Simply reading this book will not improve your situation.

3) People who realize they have a problem, and who do something about it. This category describes not only the most intelligent people but also the most effective ones. Intelligence and effectiveness are actually very closely related. Intelligent persons do not allow problems in their lives to fester—that is not a smart thing to do. Therefore, the most