

DR. MOM®

*Happiness and Stress: Change Your Mindset*

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**“Happiness is a lasting sense of emotional well-being and contentment.”**

**Martin Seligman, Ph.D.** is the founder of Positive Psychology, Director of the Positive Psychology Center at University of Pennsylvania, and the author of more than 20 books, including *Authentic Happiness* and *Flourish*. ([www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org))

**Positive Psychology**, founded by Dr. Seligman, is a new branch of psychology that involves the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and positive institutions that help people find greater meaning in their lives and experience greater happiness, satisfaction, optimism and joy. Simple life-giving insights, attitudes and practices can help us create more positive energy and live at the upper end of our inborn level of happiness.

Happy people are: mentally, emotionally, and physically healthier; have better relationships, greater energy, and a better work outcome; and are more active, cooperative, and charitable. *Happiness is like a muscle; the more we exercise it, the happier we are.*

1. **The Happiness Formula** (Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*)

$$H = S + C + V$$

**H = Your Current Level of Happiness**

**S = Your Happiness Set Point--Based on Your Innate Personality (contributes 50%)**

(Whether fortune or misfortune occurs, our happiness thermostat tends to pull us back to our set range of happiness over time).

**C = Your Life Circumstances—Including Recent Life Events (contributes 10%)**

(The “Hedonic Treadmill” refers to the tendency to rapidly adapt to good things by taking them for granted, so that positive circumstances tend to raise happiness only transiently.)

**V = Factors Under Your Voluntary Control (contributes 40%)**

**V is the single most important issue in Positive Psychology!**

## 2. **Take 100% Responsibility for Your Life and Your Actions**

Happiness is often associated with fortunate circumstances (happenstance). However, we can learn to be content, even in unfavorable circumstances, by changing our attitude and outlook.

**Events** (things that happen in your life) + **Responses** (your thoughts, beliefs and actions) = **Outcomes** (how you feel, the actions you take, the way you decide to show up for life each day)

Stress does not come from the events in our lives. *Stress comes from the story we choose to tell ourselves to give meaning to the events in our lives.*

Our thoughts and inner dialogue create our reality. Learn to listen to your inner voice and recognize how it impacts the way you “show up” for life. Ask yourself, “Am I aware of my present attitude toward this situation?” “If necessary, am I willing to change my attitude?”

Think of a recent challenging situation in your personal or work life. Pause, reflect, stretch your imagination, and write down ten positive things that *did result or could result* from this potentially negative situation. (Alex Pattakos, Ph.D., *Prisoners of our Thoughts*) Now, let the positive become possibilities in your thinking about the situation.

We can learn to stop seeing ourselves as victims of our circumstances. We can choose to stop complaining, blaming, and gossiping. (Will Bowen, *A Complaint-free World*) “Be impeccable with your word,” is the first of *The Four Agreements* (Don Miguel Ruiz).

**What are some examples in your life where you are not taking 100% responsibility?**

**What are the personal costs and the payoffs you reap for not taking 100% responsibility for your life?**

Despite the pain that our “default settings” cause us, we derive some benefit from our persistent negative patterns. For example, we get to confirm our view of the world, to preserve a familiar—if uncomfortable and ineffective—*identity*... whether as *enabler*...or *victim*...or *dependent*...or a *failure*. We get to *remain in our comfort zone*, instead of venturing to try new experiences or new ways of thinking or being.

When we venture out of our comfort zone, our baseline happiness increases, as we aspire to more lofty goals and continue to grow and learn.

### 3. **PSM—Experience Pleasure, Use Your Strengths, Find Meaning**

Dr. Martin Seligman defines **The Full Life** as living all three of the following lives:

- 1) **The Pleasant Life** -- Experiencing positive emotions about the past and future and savoring life's pleasures in the present moment.
- 2) **The Good Life** – The Pleasant Life is elevated to the Good Life by using your signature strengths and core virtues in as many life arenas as possible to experience authentic happiness and abundant gratification.
- 3) **The Meaningful Life** – The Good Life is elevated to the Meaningful Life by using your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something larger than yourself that gives your life a fulfilling sense of purpose and meaning.

**What is pleasurable for you? What do you enjoy doing?**

**What are your signature strengths? What are you good at? What can you lose yourself in doing?** [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org)

**Six core virtues** are valued in every culture and religion across time: 1) Wisdom; 2) Courage; 3) Love and Humanity; 4) Justice; 4) Temperance; 5) Spirituality; and 6) Transcendence

Each of the six virtues can be achieved through multiple moral attributes, or strengths of character. Strengths differ from innate talents in that they are voluntary choices and have a greater potential for being developed. The particular strengths that are deeply characteristic of us represent **our signature strengths**. **The highest success in living and our deepest emotional satisfaction come from building and using our signature strengths.**

When you are using your signature strengths, you may create a **state of “flow,”** an extremely gratifying experience where you are so absorbed that you lose all track of time and are completely immersed in your activity.

(Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*).

**What is meaningful to you? What gives you a sense of purpose? What are your highest values?**

**How can you use your signature strengths in more life arenas (or re-craft your work and life to use them more) and in service to a higher purpose?**

#### 4. *Experience Satisfaction about Your Past and Hope for Your Future, While Living Intentionally in the Present Moment*

**Positive emotions about our past:** Satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride, serenity

**Negative emotions about our past:** Bitterness, anger, regret, remorse, guilt

- Positive memories about our past help us judge our lives as good.
- Coming to terms with painful memories helps make our past more usable to us in the present. If we keep re-living old mistakes, hurts, and losses, and dwell on past negative events, we remain trapped in our negative emotions.
- Forgiveness is the only way to heal the wounds of the past that we cannot forget or change. **Forgiving moves the focus from the hurting to the healing.**
- **By remembering, reframing, and reinterpreting past events, we can “rewrite” our past to make it more usable to us today.**

*(The Art of Growing Old: A Guide to Faithful Aging, Carol Saussy)*

**What painful event(s) in your past has held the seed of something positive?**

**Positive emotions about the future:** Faith, trust, confidence, hope, optimism, anticipation, expectation. The most significant events of our lives may occur at any age.

**Describe your ideal future,** assuming that everything goes as well as can be expected.

**Change Your Thinking to Create More Positive Emotions:** In many instances, our thoughts (often distorted) trigger our emotions, which influence our attitude, and spur our actions.

**Optimists view the positive events in their lives as due to enduring traits and abilities** (“I’m intelligent and a hard worker”) that predict future positive events. Optimists view the negative events as transient, circumstantial, and subject to change: “I made a bad choice, and I have learned from my mistake.” “It’s a temporary setback.” “I always bounce back.”

**Pessimists view the positive events in their lives as due to chance, luck, or transient circumstances:** “The boss was in a good mood today.” “I just got lucky.” **Pessimists view life’s negative events as permanent, pervasive, and beyond their control:** “I always end up in a dead-end job.” “I have an addictive personality, just like my father.” “I’m just not very smart.”

**Dispute your pessimistic thoughts:** Learn to vigorously argue with your negative thoughts by asking: “What is the evidence that my pessimistic thoughts are accurate?” “Is it really true that I can *never* break this destructive habit, find love again, earn my degree, achieve financial security, work at my dream job?” When you successfully dispute your distorted pessimistic thoughts, your negative emotions will diminish and be replaced by more optimistic feelings.

## Resources:

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