

Get Off Your Worry-Go-Round!

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Table Of Contents

Contents

Chapter 1: Stop Wasting Your Energy

Chapter 2: Stop Throwing Your Time Away

Chapter 3: Stop Following the Crowd

Chapter 4: Your Perspective — Your reality

Chapter 5: It's Not Personal It's Just Life

Chapter 6: How Much Control Do You Really Have

Chapter 7: What Really Makes Humans Happy

Chapter 8: How To Be The Hit Of The Party

**Chapter 9: No More Feeling Bad About a Life That is Pretty Damn Great
About Sharie**

This book is an abridged version of

Why We Are Wired to Worry
and How Neuroscience Will Help You Fix It.
Stop Stressing, Reduce Anxiety, Feel Happy Finally!

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Before you begin your journey, let me welcome you!
I applaud your efforts to improve your life.
You are going to learn things you never knew
before and if you put them to use your life is
going to change drastically for the better.
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Enjoy your journey!

Chapter 1

Stop Wasting Your Energy

I don't know about you, but I have always been pretty exhausted at the end of my day. Years ago if you asked me why, I often didn't have a definitive answer. However, I have come to realize that my exhaustion was mostly due to my incessant mental activity trying to prepare for problems and reassess events that were long over. I know, if you are reading this, that you are exactly as I used to be—burning through your emotional and physical resources everyday by hashing and rehashing the same presumptuous fears, hypothetical “what ifs”, and concerns from the previous day. Living in your virtual reality of possible disasters. Regardless of the fact that you have persevered through everything life has thrown at you, you still continue to waste your precious energy by reacting as though you are about to be crushed by the “next thing”.

So my first question to you is — if you have persevered thus far in your life, then why doesn't your brain recall those moments to reinsure your security, safety, and resources to handle what might be next? Because your brain's job is not to reassure you, but rather to prepare you, and that means prepare you for the worst! Your brain will react as if a crisis is already happening in real life, causing your body to release stress hormones. Stress does not happen to you, it is your reaction to these hypothetical “what ifs” stemming from your virtual reality. Let's see if this sounds familiar: You leave the office after a stressful day at work. You are so happy it is over and can't wait to get home. However, by the first traffic light you are back at work, going over discussions, comments, and attitudes from co-workers that ticked you off. Then the phone rings and you are asked to stop at the store. This should be no big deal, but because you are still dealing with work in your virtual reality, it feels like a total inconvenience, and that comes through loud and clear over the phone. This is not the atmosphere you want to come home to. You want to be greeted with open arms by those who love you! I mean, that is why you go to work in the first place, to provide for loved ones.

Seventy-seven percent of the US population suffers from physical symptoms related to stress. Stress is our reaction to disappointments and problems, both real and imagined. It originates from within us, so it is there that we have to begin to fix it, and thankfully science is offering us the tools to do just that. Stress and worry are the culprits robbing you of a happy life. Up until now, it has not been your fault, but rather your *default*. But you are responsible for what you know. So if you like being miserable, anxious, and feeling like a victim then don't read any further, because once you do you will have no more excuses. Here I will give you all the control you need to dissolve your stress. Maybe you have been promised this before, but now you will learn where that control has been hiding and how to use it to regain some of your energy and vitality.

Being wasteful with any resource is usually a direct result of ignorance. If you don't know that leaving a window open while running the air conditioner will raise your utility bill—you waste money; if you don't know that leaving your car running while you go into a store will waste gas—you waste money; and if you don't know that your brain will rehash 90% of the same information as you thought about the day before—you waste *precious* energy. But now you will learn how to break this vicious cycle so you can save your energy for more important tasks—like real problem-solving and creativity. I call this cycle the Worry-Go-Round™ because it gives you the illusion of making progress when in the end, you realize you haven't moved at all.

Why we ride the Worry Go-Round™ to begin with used to be a mystery to the world of science, but now, thanks to technology, neuroscience tells us that it is part of an internal outdated warning system that was used to keep us alive thousands of years ago. This broken system leaves us exhausted at the end of our day with no sense of happiness or wellbeing in sight. Which is asinine when that is the reason behind everything we do; *If I hurry, I will get more done and **feel better**— If I stay up and finish this project, I will feel like I am **caught up**— If I only take a half hour for lunch and my boss notices, I will feel more **secure in my job**— If I run this yellow light I will shave minutes off my schedule, giving me a sense of **extra time***. We charge at the “next thing” like a linebacker trying to get past a blocker. It is our ass-backwards way of chasing happiness and peace. Now, here is the reason it doesn't work: Your brain does not care about being happy. It is not wired to seek happiness and does not even place it on your priority list. Of course, you may be thinking, “Wait a minute—I absolutely care about being happy; it's why I am reading this!” But that is your *mind* talking, not your *brain*, and your mind and brain are not the same. Your mind is the consciousness that resides within your brain. The part of you that chases happiness in all its forms. However, your brain's number-one job for the past ten thousand years has been your survival, and to this day its primary goal remains keeping you alive at any cost, even if that cost *is* your happiness. How it does this is by obsessively looking for danger, which to your brain is anything that might threaten your life in any one of these five areas: **love, money, status, health, and security**. Anything that can threaten these areas

can threaten your life as far as your brain is concerned. This has turned your brain into a magnet for problems both real and imagined. It is that constant echo of, “Careful, oh no, watch out!” ringing in your ears. That’s its job—your survival. It cares about danger, not about your emotional state of mind. So your pursuit of happiness winds up being you attempting to secure every one of the five areas I just mentioned, and by doing so you run your physical and mental health into the ground.

We Are Making Ourselves Sick

Even if you don’t feel overly stressed, don’t think for a moment that you aren’t at risk for health problems. The chemicals at play in your body are wreaking havoc with many of your systems; over time, that can do long-term damage. No amount of stress is OK on a long-term basis.

Sad to say, the majority of people know very little about that three-pound mass above their neck. We let it feed on any thoughts, images, or emotions it wants and we often disregard its need for sleep and nutrition. We walk around oblivious to the signs that it is in trouble until it is too late. Then we waste a whole day, lacking productivity, because of a bad mood that we will blame on outside events. We spend our days living for the weekend and vacations and hate the days in between. We waste precious energy trying to manage the awful feelings and physical effects of stress. It is why we overeat, crave comfort foods, drink too much, sleep too much or not enough, take risks, sleep with people we don’t know, and beg our doctor for prescriptions to stop the pain.

We perceive our moods as something mysterious, and believe if we can just figure out the magic recipe of behaviors, diet, and sleep, we will find happiness. We assume being happy should come naturally if we do the right things—but nothing could be further from the truth. It is time that human beings learn the fundamentals of how the human brain, the most sophisticated machine in the universe, works. In my book [Wired to Worry](#) I don’t get too technical with a huge vocabulary, but it would be nice to at least know how to use your own brain to be a happier person. Sure, there may be a few terms that you have not heard before, but that is part of learning something new. You had no idea what an iPad or GPS was fifteen years ago, but you know them now and understand how they work. It is no more logical to ignore new discoveries about the brain than to ignore new technology and expect to stay current with the world. We spend more time in a given year learning about our new smart phone than we ever do about our own brain. Well, it’s time. In [Wired To Worry](#) you will learn a few fundamentals about your brain that will change your life. No more living on autopilot, guessing at why you are in a good mood or assuming why you are in a bad one. You are going to learn how to make conscious decisions that

will control the performance of your brain and mind. This stuff is as basic as understanding why you turn your lights off and take your keys with you when you exit your vehicle.

Did you know surveys have shown that many healthy individuals are less happy than cancer patients and people in wheelchairs? In the absence of these difficulties, we should be waking up every morning singing to Pharrell Williams's song "Happy." Americans spend almost \$700 million per year on self-help books. The topics vary from becoming a better communicator, parent, or spouse to losing weight. Categorically, we can define our intention to feel better, act better, or be better together as the common goal—therefore reducing our stress level in some way and becoming a happier person.

Our misery starts with a false belief that our natural emotional state is *supposed to be one of happiness*, with happiness defined as a sense of well-being and contentment. Most of us believe that if all of life's problems just left us alone, we would be happy. We believe it is only because we are disrupted by the everyday pressures of life that we are stressed out. Therefore, we spend most of our time trying to fix the "next thing" in an effort to find some peace. When we believe this, we could not be more mistaken. Science has now revealed that it is the opposite. **Being happy is not our default state of mind!** What is our default state? After about four years of age, our default state starts to evolve into one of **shyness, insecurities, caution, and defensiveness**. So genuine happiness can only be found on the inside because that is where our perception of problems start. Otherwise, most of our efforts toward self-improvement are akin to giving our car a new paint job when it really needs a tune-up.

We come hardwired to be prepared for the worst-case scenario, and this negative focus has all of us walking on eggshells, waiting for the crap to hit the fan 24/7. It never allows us to relax or be too happy, and it even downplays good events with the proverbial, "Yeah, but..." or "What if?"

All your misery or lack of joy and happiness is due to your brain's five basic fears. These control 90 percent of your brain's thoughts; loss of **love, money, status, health, and security**. Did you catch the key word here? Fear, an extreme emotion over what *might* happen! We live in fear of losing any of these five things even when we have an ample supply of them. We all know that rich guy who is always saying he's broke. So we chase more love, more money, more status, more health, and more security so that we can finally be happy. Some of us even try to reject these comforts and riches in the hopes that doing so will free us from this chase. The problem with trying to accumulate more and more is that the brain will never, ever tell us that we have enough! Never. This is the harsh reality that smacks most rich and famous people in the face, causing them to spin out of control. After they travel down this illusionary road for the promise of bliss, they discover that their brain is still not satisfied and continues to torture them with the fear of loss... which, to the brain, means loss of life. This is all part of our survival instinct; it is

hardwired into the most primitive area of the human brain, not a switch we can just turn off. In essence, the brain is obsessed with chasing misery/problems both real and imagined in every area of our life—present, future, and past—in an effort to preserve love, money, status, health, and security. To your brain anything at all that could or might even graze those areas is reason to panic.

Until you understand how this happens, you will continue wasting precious energy chasing happiness, where it can't be found. But hang in there, it will make sense soon.

The Proverbial "Panic Button"

So which part of your brain actually sounds this alarm warning you of impending doom? It is a small, almond-sized area in your brain that evolved over thousands of years called the amygdala, also known as your lizard brain. Pronounced **ah-mig-da-la**. This part of the brain has been around forever, and every animal has it. The amygdala is no bigger than your fingernail, but it is the hub, or control center, for your emotions and determines what emotions to trigger, from elation to temper tantrums and worrying yourself sick. It is the switch for FIGHT or FLIGHT. It also does several other jobs, though, so unfortunately you can't just cut it out and go on your merry way. It helps you determine whether the face you are looking at is sad or happy, motivates you to find food when you are hungry, and helps you decide whether Eggplant Parmesan or a big steak will put a smile on your face. This little almond-shaped area helps you understand and process emotion both in you and around you. People who have been exposed to any kind of childhood trauma are likely to have a larger amygdala, with thicker connectivity to the areas around it, making it even more prone to emotional outbursts.

Something no bigger than your fingernail is responsible for all of this. You may hear some call it your lizard brain because it is in the oldest area of your brain, the part called the reptilian brain. These are all terms used to make it easy for you to remember it. However, the focus of this book is its role as your ALARM BELL. This personal warning system alerts you to problems real or imagined by making you feel horrible, by triggering stress-related hormones, such as cortisol (a hormone that, in excess is bad for your heart but good for adding belly fat—YUK!) and adrenaline. These hormones' job is to bring you to a heightened state of UH-OH or OH CRAP! along with sensations of muscle tension, anxiousness, sweaty palms, heavy breathing, and rapid heartbeat. That is your brain's way of telling you to STOP doing whatever it is you are doing!

For thousands of years, our amygdala functioned very well at keeping us alive in the wild by sending waves of these stress hormones such as adrenaline, cortisol, and epinephrine through our bodies as soon as we saw a lion in the bushes or a dangerous snake. It did that so we would do one thing... run like hell. Not worry, evaluate, or analyze it.

Back then, people's lives were in constant jeopardy, either from physical harm or from becoming a social outcast. Ten thousand years ago, if a woman's mate seemed unhappy with her, the woman's alarm bells would scream because if the man left, her family would have no food or protection and her offspring would die. The same happened when people were shunned by the other members of their tribe, causing them to become outcasts. That was a death sentence within hours. So it was not only the lion in the bushes but also the treatment they received from their inner social circle that meant life or death.

Now, here you are today with a brain that is still interpreting any problem as a life-threatening situation! Your superior annoyed with you, a fight with your spouse, car trouble, or being late for a meeting—all of these are often interpreted as life threatening as far as this little amygdala is concerned. It focuses on what will kill you—not on what keeps you happy—and therefore, so do you as you board the Worry-Go-Round™ trying to **stop, prevent, hold off or hang onto whatever it is you “think” you need to be content.**

Although 90 percent of our problems in the twenty-first century are NOT life threatening, they trigger our amygdala. We need to reprogram the brain so that it doesn't hit this panic button simply because we received one hundred e-mails or because someone decided to do forty miles per hour in the fast lane. The human brain doesn't know that the coworker who gets snippy with us isn't life threatening. It senses a violation and sounds the alarm so that we come out swinging. Just knowing that we won't die from a dirty look is not enough to stop the alarm bell from telling us to prepare to pounce. We all see people overreacting to the slightest irritation—fights breaking out at sporting events, road rage, and so on—and we all know a hothead. The problem with employing common sense during these events is that this much older area of the brain responsible for emotion does not understand words and thoughts because it does not process language. It sees images and then judges, according to our past experiences, whether they are good for us, dangerous, or simply threaten any of those five areas I mentioned earlier. Once the brain sounds the siren, telling ourselves to calm down is pointless.

Like a gladiator jumping over a wall into the middle of a battle, that uneducated, ancient part of your brain has the final say regarding what you need to do to survive. Simply trying to think your way out of a panic or temper tantrum will not help. Once the amygdala releases those fight-or-flight hormones into your system, it is all systems go! Have you ever tried telling someone who was yelling to calm down? A lot of good that did, right? While these chemicals are in play, you will feel very justified as you yell or have a tantrum, but then when they dissipate, you wonder, “Why did I react like that and get upset over something so trivial?” You did it because your brain thought your life was in danger, and in the blink of an eye, you reacted instinctively. How many

times a day or week do you overreact because of situations that did not really warrant it? Can you see now the amount of energy you are wasting?

We all have genuine situations to deal with, but at those times, when your brain pushes the panic button over something small, I can assure you there is something else going on in your mind, and probably something unrelated. At the early stage of getting upset, you generally have an inaccurate perception of what is angering you. Underlying thoughts and memories from the past often attach themselves to the things happening in the present, causing you to overreact. You may be ruminating on something upsetting that took place yesterday when you suddenly spill something and let out a stream of expletives. All the while, you are completely unaware of what really triggered your outburst.

Wired To Worry will teach you to separate an upsetting event from your ongoing undercurrent of worrisome thoughts. Only then will you be able to figure out what you are *really* feeling, and therefore how to feel better. Because that's your brain, a never-ending stream of what *ifs* and *worry* about how life did or will go wrong. Welcome to the **Worry-Go-Round™**

Worry-Go-Round™—*The time you waste going in circles rehashing the same fears, concerns and memories you had yesterday with no change. — Painted horses optional.*

Here is a quick trick for you: The next time you are ready to explode before you slip into a rage stand on one foot, close your eyes, and count. Even if you don't count, try to maintain your balance, and your mind's attention being drawn to keeping your balance will calm down the release of cortisol and adrenaline. Open your eyes each time you feel yourself losing your balance. When you regain it, close your eyes again. This is like "force quitting" a frozen program on your computer. When a program just gets stuck you have to take control and shut it down. That is what you are doing here.

Chapter 2

Stop Throwing Your Time Away

The average person has between 32 and 48 thoughts per minute, according to the Laboratory of Neuro Imaging at the University of Southern California and the National Science Foundation. That can add up to a total of 70,000 thoughts per day! Several studies have also shown that 80 percent of those thoughts are negative, and 90 percent of which are similar to the ones you had the day before!

The only way to overcome thoughts is with feelings. Thoughts are no match for feelings! But everyday we try to talk ourselves up, down, in and out of emotions. Once again we have a pattern of behavior steeped in habit born out of ignorance. If we were to add up the amount of time we waste trying to control our emotions in a given week it would equate to hours. The amount would differ among each person, with women wasting even more than men, but regardless, even if we went with the lowest estimate of only three hours (although estimates are higher), think about what you could do with three wonderful hours just for you. And for those of you reacting with even more stress, what could you do with 4 or 6 hours a week just for you? There are so many new activities or practices you could engage in to bring lasting health and happiness.

Feelings are to thoughts what water is to a flame. **We can't talk our way out of emotional pain; we have to feel our way out.** You can't be happy. Happy is not something you become. *You have to feel happy.* Until you learn how to *feel* happiness all around you, the majority of those negative seventy thousand thoughts per day will win out. If you were to try—and millions do every day—to just change your thoughts, how effective would you be even if you managed to fit in just 10,000 positive thoughts among, say, 50,000?

Saying you want to be happy is like saying you want to be rich. To accomplish either one takes understanding and learning beyond what you can figure out from reading books or magazines. You won't become rich just by avoiding financial losses; you have to actually make money at some point. Similarly, you will never become happy just by protecting those five areas of loss. You have to *accumulate feelings of happiness.* The first step toward feeling better is to teach

your mind to begin focusing on all the good facts around you, exactly the way it has been focusing on the negative. Until you understand some concepts, your reality is distorted, meaning two things: You think you *do see* all the good and it pales in comparison to your problems, or you don't think you have much good around you. Trust me, both are wrong.

Thus far, your brain is programmed to overlook most good things, except those that relate to preserving your life, so that is the first thing we are going to change. This may seem trite or silly. Most people think they are aware of all the good around them. We count our blessings, as they say. However, acknowledging that something is good is very different from learning to *feel* it on an emotional level.

You can't talk your way into a good mood; you must feel your way. You will learn to deliberately seek and hold onto the positive things around you, allowing these observations to become amazing feelings that sink into your whole being.

Quick even by today's standards, all it takes is waiting 10 to 20 seconds for a positive feeling to sink in. Then, like magic, your brain will release all of your feel-good brain chemicals completely altering your mood for the better. You do this now all day long by ruminating on mere potential problems and then feeling like your life is a potential powder keg. Why? Because reality and fiction are irrelevant to the brain; it can't tell the difference—which is why you get upset way before stuff actually happens.

Take twenty seconds right now to envision a person or pet showering you with love; Yes, that means *you*. Imagine the sounds, the feel of their arms around you, the words they are saying, or in the case of a pet, imagine the feel of their fur and the look in their eyes. Bring to mind how unconditional their love is. Now put this down and really feel their love filling you. Did you feel the emotional lift? Did you see how your brain responded as quickly as it does when you are just thinking about upsetting events? Now imagine carrying that feeling around most of the day. Can you picture how different you would feel if you did this regularly? Well, I will teach you how to train your brain to do this instinctively all day long.

Harnessing the power of your imagination will change your life. It is one of the tools you will use throughout [Wired To Worry](#) to rewire your brain to create long-term feelings of wellbeing. If it seems silly to use your imagination or to waste ten seconds waiting to have a good feeling about something, consider this: Most of us cherish the thousands of hours we spend watching movies and TV shows just so we can feel a whole host of emotions. We love our emotions, and we seem to like them even more when we can feel them without having to go through the actual trials that the actors portray. Right now you are allowing emotions to come and go as they wish, all day long, giving them no direction, but now you will learn the skill to move them in the direction you want them to go so you can start feeling happy in any moment you want.

The Power of Your Brain to Change Your Mind

Does it sound incredible to be told you can “rewire” your brain? Well, the reason behind this is due to something called neuroplasticity. In 1996, neuroplasticity was finally proven. This monumental breakthrough meant that the long standing belief that the human brain did not change after adolescence was all wrong. Neuroplasticity meant that the brain is not static and can change daily and even moment to moment according to what we are doing or learning. Brain areas can switch jobs, grow new cells, and even enlarge, depending on how much we use them. This discovery is the foundation of all hope regarding the brain’s ability to repair damaged areas and improve itself. Now neuroscientists understand that every time we learn something new or even practice a skill repeatedly, the brain changes accordingly. Someone who has played piano or a stringed instrument will have a larger volume of area in their brain dedicated to finger movement than the average person will have. This is neuroplasticity. On a grander scale, this process occurs in the brain of a blind person whose hearing develops way beyond what the normal range would be. Neuroplasticity is the light at the end of the tunnel in your search for happiness and wellbeing. It is how you will redirect your brain’s attention toward a truly positive perspective and away from its normal diet of doom and gloom. This change in focus will completely alter your emotional landscape to one of peace, contentment, and security. As you learn to see and think differently, your brain will rewire itself, causing your perception and various beliefs to change as well. Changing your brain's focus is similar to deciding to buy a specific car, then seeing that car everywhere. There isn’t suddenly more of that car, but rather your brain now searches for them since you have a new interest in them. Much of this work takes place in the back of your mind, so you will not have to give up anymore of your precious time than just a few minutes a day.

As I am sure you understand, old technology always takes more time and more energy than the newer version, and it's the same with this old program of ours. It triggers the amygdala and sends constant distress signals (SOS) at the slightest provocation to rob us of our peace and happiness. When that happens, we allow our overreaction and stress to suck the energy right out of our very soul.

All of this happens on an underlying level involving our chemical states. We human beings are just like addicts, making decisions from one moment to the next based on 2 questions: What will give me the greatest amount of pleasure right now or the least amount of discomfort? Every situation—physical, emotional, or social—is fueled, directed, and regulated by the drug effect we are seeking from the brain’s own chemical pharmacy, and this pharmacy is open twenty-four hours a day! The timely release of the “feel good” chemicals in the brain underpins a healthy emotional balance.

In [Wired To Worry](#) you will learn how to use this understanding to cut negative chemical signals off at the pass, restoring you to a sense of wellbeing. You will also, for the first time, be able to really know what is triggering your moods, anger, frustration, and fears. You waste valuable time every day trying to figure this stuff out from a psychological standpoint, but everything will be clear when you realize what brain chemicals you are chasing.

You will learn three new names, and if you can understand the difference between octane levels at the gas pump, you can understand these. Consider these brain chemicals like a light switch in a room. Different rooms control different moods. When you feel a certain way, you will be able to walk down the hall and see which light went out (brain chemical) in what room—and then you will know what to do to get it turned back on. This is where you will really start to gain control.

The first time you heard the term endorphins was likely back in the '80s. Endorphins are a brain neurotransmitter (just a big word for the way your brain sends and receives messages). This particular brain chemical is responsible for the natural high that runners can experience. But it is also associated with drugs such as heroin or morphine. Everyone was abuzz back then about how it was the reason cigarettes were so hard to quit. “Cigarettes are like morphine to your brain,” people were saying.

There are many of these chemical messengers, but in my book [Wired to Worry](#) you are going to learn about the three that drive almost every decision you make! Dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin. They are the “WHY” behind all of your behaviors, the drive behind what you call instincts and base desires. I refer to them as DOS. In the book, there are pages of examples of each chemical and what the corresponding behavior would be to increase it or decrease it. These lists are invaluable, as I have never seen anything like these in print anywhere. They will give you insight into *your* drives, instincts, behaviors, moods, and emotions, as well as of those around you.

These brain chemicals are how messages are sent and received in your brain. When your brain learns that donuts can put a smile on your face or a banana split can make you feel almost euphoric, it builds networks to reinforce these behaviors so that you never forget them. Therefore you will learn to make use of the rule that **what fires together, wires together**. You will use new good and powerful experiences to alter your mood, emotions, and even your feelings about past events.

Chapter 3

Stop Following the Crowd

To begin gaining control over our negative bias and redirect it toward the positive, we must understand first that we humans like to make sense of our behavior, and sometimes at any cost. So, for thousands of years, we have dreamed up some good reasons behind our overwhelming obsession to worry and stress out. These so-called good reasons can stand in our way until we see them for the illusions they are. In [Wired to Worry](#) you will come to understand the three most powerful obstacles to overcome in developing this new mind set. Having a detailed understanding of them will unlock the door to overcoming your own bad habits, not to mention moods. They are:

Human habits and beliefs

Psychological obstacles

Physiological barriers

Myth One: I would be happy if ...

Most people believe that our environment and events control our moods. Our culture teaches us that we need a reason to be happy. That little uptight, responsible voice in our heads says, “What right do you have to feel happy if your life is so hard?” Or “You can be happy when you —get a promotion, lose weight, get married/or become single, or have more money.”

Waiting until we have a reason to be happy is like chasing the proverbial carrot at the end of the stick or waiting for tomorrow, which never actually arrives. This is not just a faulty belief system, but one of the most wasteful lifestyles one can lead. Wasting days, weeks, and years for everything in your life to be just the way you want it so you can finally sit back and say “Ahh I can relax now.” Here is a cornerstone truth: **Your brain does not need a reason to be happy; it only needs your mind’s permission to do so!**

Myth Two: Money

Many of us believe money would solve most of our problems. We all have the dream of hitting the lottery and having our money problems disappear, assuming that will make us happier. However, a very well known study was done to find out how true that was for people. What they found was that those who won the lottery described themselves as being “less happy or as happy” six months later than they were before they won. They then researched people who were left paralyzed after an accident. Many of those people were actually as happy if not happier than they had been the day before their accident. How could that possibly be? **Because our situations do not determine our happiness.** Your amygdala will look for problems regardless of how much money you have. Lottery winners are still obsessed over every problem, real or feared. You will learn to internalize this scientific truth so you will see your whole world differently. No longer trusting the images coming from your virtual reality, but rather testing them against what you know to be facts.

Psychological Obstacles (Misery Loves Company)

As we will dig deeper into human behaviors, you will see how being calm might be perceived as not caring, leaving you feeling disconnected. The reason is rooted once again in our brain chemicals and something called mirror neurons. When your boss is yelling at you from across his desk and wants to see you tremble, sitting there too calmly could backfire. There is a stigma with being too chill. If people are freaking out, they expect you to jump on that emotional roller coaster and ride it with them. It validates their outburst and gives them comfort that they are not alone with the problem. Mirror neurons are behind our love of watching movies or TV shows and reading a juicy novel. It is why we can get lost in them as the same emotions well up in us, along with the corresponding neurochemicals: dopamine, serotonin, and even oxytocin. This is also the enjoyment behind watching sports. Our brains are firing as if we were running down the field, all the while triggering our dopamine. If there is painful contact with one of the players, everyone says, “Ohhh,” as if we somehow feel it.

Once you see this obstacle all around you, I will then teach you how to stop its influence in your life so you are not sucked into the drama of those around you.

Physiological Barriers— Threats Trump Happiness

For the past ten thousand years, the threat of danger had more impact on our survival than good experiences; therefore, our amygdala was primed to label most experiences as dangerous and has continued to do so right up until present day. We were built to last, not for lasting happiness,

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