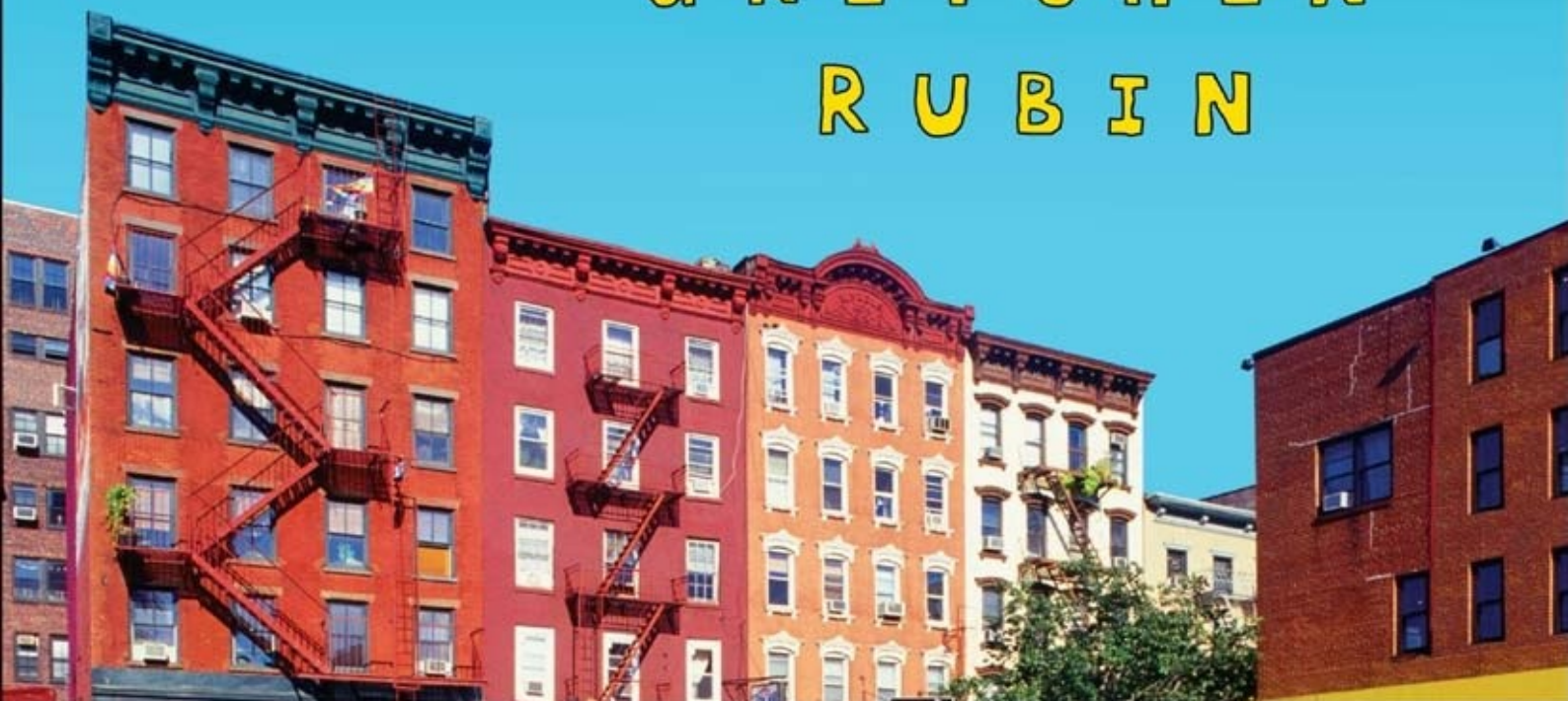


THE HAPPINESS PROJECT

Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to
Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets,
Fight Right, Read Aristotle,
and Generally Have More Fun



GRETCHEN RUBIN



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 HarperCollins e-books

FOR MY FAMILY

SAMUEL JOHNSON: “As the Spanish proverb says, ‘He, who would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry the wealth of the Indies with him.’”

—JAMES BOSWELL, *THE LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON*

There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy.

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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A NOTE TO THE READER

A “happiness project” is an approach to changing your life. First is the preparation stage, when you identify what brings you joy, satisfaction, and engagement, and also what brings you guilt, anger, boredom, and remorse. Second is the making of resolutions, when you identify the concrete actions that will boost your happiness. Then comes the interesting part: keeping your resolutions.

This book is the story of my happiness project—what I tried, what I learned. Your project would look different from mine, but it’s the rare person who can’t benefit from a happiness project. To help you think about your own happiness project, I regularly post suggestions on my blog, and I’ve also created a Web site, the Happiness Project Toolbox, that provides tools to help you create and track your happiness project.

But I hope that the most compelling inspiration for your happiness project is the book you hold in your hands. Of course, because it’s the story of *my* happiness project, it reflects my particular situation, values, and interests. “Well,” you might think, “if everyone’s happiness project is unique, why should I bother to read about her project?”

During my study of happiness, I noticed something that surprised me: I often learn more from one person’s highly idiosyncratic experiences than I do from sources that detail universal principles or cite up-to-date studies. I find greater value in what specific individuals tell me worked for them than in any other kind of argument—and that’s true even when we seem to have nothing in common. In my case, for example, I would never have supposed that a witty lexicographer with Tourette’s syndrome, a twenty-something tubercular saint, a hypocritical Russian novelist, and one of the Founding Fathers would be my most helpful guides—but so it happened.

I hope that reading the account of my happiness project will encourage you to start your own. Whenever you read this, and wherever you are, you are in the right place to begin.

GETTING STARTED

I'd always vaguely expected to outgrow my limitations.

One day, I'd stop twisting my hair, and wearing running shoes all the time, and eating exactly the same food every day. I'd remember my friends' birthdays, I'd learn Photoshop, I wouldn't let my daughter watch TV during breakfast. I'd read Shakespeare. I'd spend more time laughing and having fun, I'd be more polite, I'd visit museums more often, I wouldn't be scared to drive.

One April day, on a morning just like every other morning, I had a sudden realization: I was in danger of wasting my life. As I stared out the rain-spattered window of a city bus, I saw that the years were slipping by. "What do I want from life, anyway?" I asked myself. "Well...I want to be *happy*." But I had never thought about what made me happy or how I might be happier.

I had much to be happy about. I was married to Jamie, the tall, dark, and handsome love of my life; we had two delightful young daughters, seven-year-old Eliza and one-year-old Eleanor; I was a writer, after having started out as a lawyer; I was living in my favorite city, New York; I had close relationships with my parents, sister, and in-laws; I had friends; I had my health; I didn't have to color my hair. But too often I sniped at my husband or the cable guy. I felt dejected after even a minor professional setback. I drifted out of touch with old friends, I lost my temper easily, I suffered bouts of melancholy, insecurity, listlessness, and free-floating guilt.

As I looked out the blurry bus window, I saw two figures cross the street—a woman about my age trying simultaneously to balance an umbrella, look at her cell phone, and push a stroller carrying a yellow-slickered child. The sight gave me a jolt of recognition: *that's me*, I thought, there I am. I have a stroller, a cell phone, an alarm clock, an apartment, a neighborhood. Right now, I'm riding the same crosstown bus that I take across the park, back and forth. This is my life—but I never give any thought to it.

I wasn't depressed and I wasn't having a midlife crisis, but I was suffering from midlife malaise—a recurrent sense of discontent and almost a feeling of disbelief. "Can this be me?" I'd wonder as I picked up the morning newspapers or sat down to read my e-mail. "Can this be me?" My friends and I joked about the "beautiful house" feeling, when, as in the David Byrne song "Once in a Lifetime," we'd periodically experience the shock of thinking

“This is not my beautiful house.”

“Is this really *it*?” I found myself wondering, and answering, “Yep, this is it.”

But though at times I felt dissatisfied, that something was missing, I also never forgot how fortunate I was. When I woke up in the middle of the night, as I often did, I’d walk from one room to another to gaze at my sleeping husband tangled in the sheets and my daughters surrounded by their stuffed animals, all safe. I had everything I could possibly want—yet I was failing to appreciate it. Bugged down in petty complaints and passing crises, weary of struggling with my own nature, I too often failed to comprehend the splendor of what I had. I didn’t want to keep taking these days for granted. The words of the writer Colette had haunted me for years: “What a wonderful life I’ve had! I only wish I’d realized it sooner.” I didn’t want to look back, at the end of my life or after some great catastrophe, and think, “How happy I used to be *then*, if only I’d realized it.”

I needed to think about this. How could I discipline myself to feel grateful for my ordinary day? How could I set a higher standard for myself as a wife, a mother, a writer, a friend? How could I let go of everyday annoyances to keep a larger, more transcendent perspective? I could barely remember to stop at the drugstore to buy toothpaste—it didn’t seem realistic to think that I could incorporate these high aims into my everyday routine.

The bus was hardly moving, but I could hardly keep pace with my own thoughts. “I’ve got to tackle this,” I told myself. “As soon as I have some free time, I should start a happiness project.” But I never had any free time. When life was taking its ordinary course, it was hard to remember what really mattered; if I wanted a happiness project, I’d have to *make* the time. I had a brief vision of myself living for a month on a picturesque, windswept island, where each day I would gather seashells, read Aristotle, and write in an elegant parchment journal. Nope, I admitted, that’s not going to happen. I needed to find a way to do it *here* and *now*. I needed to change the lens through which I viewed everything familiar.

All these thoughts flooded through my mind, and as I sat on that crowded bus, I grasped two things: I wasn’t as happy as I could be, and my life wasn’t going to change unless I made it change. In that single moment, with that realization, I decided to dedicate a year to trying to be happier.

I made up my mind on a Tuesday morning, and by Wednesday afternoon, I had a stack of library books teetering on the edge of my desk. I could hardly find room for them; my tiny office, perched on the roof of our apartment building, was already too crowded with reference materials for the Kennedy biography I was writing, mixed with notices from my daughter Eliza’s first-

grade teacher about class trips, strep throat, and a food drive.

I couldn't just jump into this happiness project. I had a lot to learn before I was ready for my year to begin. After my first few weeks of heavy reading, as I toyed with different ideas about how to set up my experiment, I called my younger sister, Elizabeth.

After listening to a twenty-minute disquisition on my initial thoughts on happiness, my sister said, "I don't think you realize just how weird you are—but," she added hastily, "in a *good* way."

"Everyone is weird. That's why everyone's happiness project would be different. We're all idiosyncratic."

"Maybe, but I just don't think you realize how funny it is to hear you talk about it."

"Why is it funny?"

"It's just that you're approaching the question of happiness in such a dogged, systematic way."

I didn't understand what she meant. "You mean how I'm trying to turn goals like 'Contemplate death' or 'Embrace now' into action items?"

"Exactly," she answered. "I don't even know what an 'action item' *is*."

"That's business school jargon."

"Okay, whatever. All I'm saying is, your happiness project reveals more about you than you realize."

Of course she was right. They say that people teach what they need to learn. By adopting the role of happiness teacher, if only for myself, I was trying to find the method to conquer my particular faults and limitations.

It was time to expect more of myself. Yet as I thought about happiness, I kept running up against paradoxes. I wanted to change myself but accept myself. I wanted to take myself less seriously—and also more seriously. I wanted to use my time well, but I also wanted to wander, to play, to read at whim. I wanted to think about myself so I could forget myself. I was always on the edge of agitation; I wanted to let go of envy and anxiety about the future, yet keep my energy and ambition. Elizabeth's observation made me wonder about my motivations. Was I searching for spiritual growth and a life more dedicated to transcendent principles—or was my happiness project just an attempt to extend my driven, perfectionist ways to every aspect of my life?

My happiness project was both. I wanted to perfect my character, but, given my nature, that would probably involve charts, deliverables, to-do lists, new vocabulary terms, and compulsive note taking.

Many of the greatest minds have tackled the question of happiness, so as I started my research, I plunged into Plato, Boethius, Montaigne, Bertrand Russell, Thoreau, and Schopenhauer. The world's great religions explain the

nature of happiness, so I explored a wide range of traditions, from the familiar to the esoteric. Scientific interest in positive psychology has exploded in the last few decades, and I read Martin Seligman, Daniel Kahneman, Daniel Gilbert, Barry Schwartz, Ed Diener, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Sonja Lyubomirsky. Popular culture, too, is bursting with happiness experts, so I consulted everyone from Oprah to Julie Morgenstern to David Allen. Some of the most interesting insights on happiness came from my favorite novelists, such as Leo Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf, and Marilynne Robinson—in fact, some novels, such as Michael Frayn’s *A Landing on the Sun*, Ann Patchett’s *Bel Canto*, and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, seemed to be the careful working out of theories of happiness.

One minute I was reading philosophy and biography; the next, *Psychology Today*. The pile of books next to my bed included Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink*, Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Elizabeth von Arnim’s *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, the Dalai Lama’s *The Art of Happiness*, and “FlyLady” Marla Cilley’s *Sink Reflections*. At dinner with friends, I found wisdom in a fortune cookie: “Look for happiness under your own roof.”

My reading showed me that I had to answer two crucial questions before I went any further. First, did I believe it was *possible* to make myself happier? After all, the “set-point” theory holds that a person’s basic level of happiness doesn’t fluctuate much, except briefly.

My conclusion: yes, it is possible.

According to current research, in the determination of a person’s level of happiness, genetics accounts for about 50 percent; life circumstances, such as age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, income, health, occupation, and religious affiliation, account for about 10 to 20 percent; and the remainder is a product of how a person thinks and acts. In other words, people have an inborn disposition that’s set within a certain range, but they can boost themselves to the top of their happiness range or push themselves down to the bottom of their happiness range by their actions. This finding confirmed my own observations. It seems obvious that some people are more naturally ebullient or melancholic than others and that, at the same time, people’s decisions about how to live their lives also affect their happiness.

The second question: What is “happiness”?

In law school, we’d spent an entire semester discussing the meaning of a “contract,” and as I dug into my happiness research, this training kicked in. In scholarship, there is merit in defining terms precisely, and one positive psychology study identified fifteen different academic definitions of happiness, but when it came to my project, spending a lot of energy exploring the distinctions among “positive affect,” “subjective well-being,” “hedonic tone,” and a myriad of other terms didn’t seem necessary. I didn’t want to get

stuck in a question that didn't particularly interest me.

I decided instead to follow the hallowed tradition set by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who defined obscenity by saying "I know it when I see it," and Louis Armstrong, who said, "If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know," and A. E. Housman, who wrote that he "could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat" but that he "recognized the object by the symptoms it evokes."

Aristotle declared happiness to be the *summum bonum*, the chief good; people desire other things, such as power or wealth or losing ten pounds, because they believe they will lead to happiness, but their real goal is happiness. Blaise Pascal argued, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end." One study showed that, all over the world, when asked what they want most from life—and what they want most for their children—people answered that they want *happiness*. Even people who can't agree on what it means to be "happy" can agree that most people can be "happier," according to their own particular definition. I know when I feel happy. That was good enough for my purposes.

I came to another important conclusion about defining happiness: that the opposite of *happiness* is *unhappiness*, not *depression*. Depression, a grave condition that deserves urgent attention, occupies its own category apart from happiness and unhappiness. Addressing its causes and remedies was far beyond the scope of my happiness project. But even though I wasn't depressed and I wasn't going to attempt to deal with depression in my framework, there remained much ground to cover—just because I wasn't depressed didn't mean that I couldn't benefit from trying to be happier.

Having determined that it was possible to boost my happiness level and that I knew what it meant to be "happy," I had to figure out *how*, exactly, to make myself happier.

Could I discover a startling new secret about happiness? Probably not.

People have been thinking about happiness for thousands of years, and the great truths about happiness have already been laid out by the most brilliant minds in history. Everything important has been said before. (Even that statement. It was Alfred North Whitehead who said, "Everything important has been said before.") The laws of happiness are as fixed as the laws of chemistry.

But even though I wasn't making up these laws, I needed to grapple with them for *myself*. It's like dieting. We all know the secret of dieting—eat better, eat less, exercise more—it's the application that's challenging. I had to create a scheme to put happiness ideas into practice in my life.

Founding Father Benjamin Franklin is one of the patron saints of self-realization. In his *Autobiography*, he describes how he designed his Virtues Chart as part of a “bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection.” He identified thirteen virtues he wanted to cultivate—temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity, and humility—and made a chart with those virtues plotted against the days of the week. Each day, Franklin would score himself on whether he practiced those thirteen virtues.

Current research underscores the wisdom of his chart-keeping approach. People are more likely to make progress on goals that are broken into concrete, measurable actions, with some kind of structured accountability and positive reinforcement. Also, according to a current theory of the brain, the unconscious mind does crucial work in forming judgments, motives, and feelings outside our awareness or conscious control, and one factor that influences the work of the unconscious is the “accessibility” of information, or the ease with which it comes to mind. Information that has been recently called up or frequently used in the past is easier to retrieve and therefore energized. The concept of “accessibility” suggested to me that by constantly reminding myself of certain goals and ideas, I could keep them more active in my mind.

So, inspired by recent science and by Ben Franklin’s method, I designed my own version of his scoring chart—a kind of calendar on which I could record all my resolutions and give myself a daily ✓ (good) or X (bad) for each resolution.

After I designed my blank chart, however, it took me a long time to determine which resolutions should fill the boxes. Franklin’s thirteen virtues didn’t match the kinds of changes I wanted to cultivate. I wasn’t particularly concerned with “cleanliness” (though, come to think of it, I could do a better job of flossing). What should *I* do to become happier?

First I had to identify the areas to work on; then I had to come up with happiness-boosting resolutions that were concrete and measurable. For example, everyone from Seneca to Martin Seligman agreed that friendship is a key to happiness, and sure, I wanted to strengthen my friendships. The trick was to figure out *how*, exactly, I could accomplish the changes I sought. I wanted to be specific, so I’d know exactly what I was expecting from myself.

As I reflected on possible resolutions, it struck me again how much my happiness project would differ from anyone else’s. Franklin’s top priorities included “Temperance” (“Eat not to Dulness. Drink not to Elevation”) and “Silence” (less “Prattling, Punning and Joking”). Other people might resolve to start going to the gym, or to give up smoking, or to improve their sex lives, or to learn to swim, or to start volunteering—I didn’t need to make those particular resolutions. I had my own idiosyncratic priorities, with many items

included on the list that other people would have omitted and many items omitted from the list that other people would have included.

For example, a friend asked, “Aren’t you going to start therapy?”

“No,” I asked, surprised. “Why, do you think I should?”

“*Absolutely*. It’s essential. You have to go to therapy if you want to know the root causes of your behavior,” she answered. “Don’t you want to know *why* you are the way you are and *why* you want your life to be different?”

I thought those questions over for a good while, and then I decided—well, no, not really. Did that mean I was superficial? I knew many people for whom therapy had been invaluable, but the issues I wanted to tackle were right there for me to see, and at this point, I wanted to discover what approach I’d take, on my own.

I wanted to focus on a different subject each month, and twelve months in the year gave me twelve slots to fill. Research had taught me that the most important element to happiness is social bonds, so I resolved to tackle “Marriage,” “Parenthood,” and “Friends.” I’d also learned that that my happiness depended a great deal on my perspective, so I added “Eternity” and “Attitude” to my list. Work was crucial to my happiness, and also leisure, so I included the topics “Work,” “Play,” and “Passion.” What else did I want to cover? “Energy” seemed like a basic ingredient for the success of the entire project. “Money” was a subject I knew I wanted to address. To explore some of the insights I’d come across in my research, I added “Mindfulness.” December would be a month in which I would try to follow all my resolutions perfectly—so that gave me my twelve categories.

But what subject should come first? What was the most important element in happiness? I hadn’t figured that out yet, but I decided to tackle “Energy” first. A high level of energy would make keeping all my other resolutions easier.

Just in time for January 1, when I planned to start my project rolling, I completed my chart with dozens of resolutions to try in the coming year. For the first month, I’d attempt only January’s resolutions; in February, I’d add the next set of resolutions to the January set. By December, I’d be scoring myself on the whole year’s worth of resolutions.

As I worked to identify my resolutions, some overarching principles started to emerge. Distilling these principles turned out to be far more taxing than I expected, but after many additions and subtractions, I arrived at my Twelve Commandments:

TWELVE COMMANDMENTS

1. Be Gretchen.

2. Let it go.
3. Act the way I want to feel.
4. Do it now.
5. Be polite and be fair.
6. Enjoy the process.
7. Spend out.
8. Identify the problem.
9. Lighten up.
10. Do what ought to be done.
11. No calculation.
12. There is only love.

These Twelve Commandments, I predicted, would help me as I was struggling to keep my resolutions.

I also came up with a goofier list: my Secrets of Adulthood. These were the lessons I'd learned with some difficulty as I'd grown up. I'm not sure why it took me years to embrace the notion that over-the-counter medication actually would cure a headache, but it had.

SECRETS OF ADULTHOOD

People don't notice your mistakes as much as you think.

It's okay to ask for help.

Most decisions don't require extensive research.

Do good, feel good.

It's important to be nice to *everyone*.

Bring a sweater.

By doing a little bit each day, you can get a lot accomplished.

Soap and water remove most stains.

Turning the computer on and off a few times often fixes a glitch.

If you can't find something, clean up.

You can choose what you do; you can't choose what you *like* to do.

Happiness doesn't always make you feel happy.

What you do *every day* matters more than what you do *once in a while*.

You don't have to be good at everything.

If you're not failing, you're not trying hard enough.

Over-the-counter medicines are very effective.

Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

What's fun for other people may not be fun for you—and vice versa.

People actually prefer that you buy wedding gifts off their registry.

You can't profoundly change your children's natures by nagging them or signing them up for classes.

No deposit, no return.

I had fun coming up with my Twelve Commandments and my Secrets of Adulthood, but the heart of my happiness project remained my list of resolutions, which embodied the changes I wanted to make in my life. When I stepped back to reflect on the resolutions, however, I was struck by their small scale. Take January. “Go to sleep earlier” and “Tackle a nagging task” didn’t sound dramatic or colorful or particularly ambitious.

Other people’s radical happiness projects, such as Henry David Thoreau’s move to Walden Pond or Elizabeth Gilbert’s move to Italy, India, and Indonesia, exhilarated me. The fresh start, the total commitment, the leap into the unknown—I found their quests illuminating, plus I got a vicarious thrill from their abandonment of everyday worries.

But my project wasn’t like that. I was an unadventurous soul, and I didn’t want to undertake that kind of extraordinary change. Which was lucky, because I wouldn’t have been able to do it even if I’d wanted to. I had a family and responsibilities that made it practically impossible for me to leave for one weekend, let alone for a year.

And more important, I didn’t want to reject my life. I wanted to change my life without changing my life, by finding more happiness in my own kitchen. I knew I wouldn’t discover happiness in a faraway place or in unusual circumstances; it was right here, right now—as in the haunting play *The Blue Bird*, where two children spend a year searching the world for the Blue Bird of Happiness, only to find the bird waiting for them when they finally return home.

A lot of people took issue with my happiness project. Starting with my own husband.

“I don’t really get it,” Jamie said as he lay on the floor to do his daily back and knee exercises. “You’re already pretty happy, aren’t you? If you were really unhappy, this would make more sense, but you’re not.” He paused. “You’re *not* unhappy, are you?”

“I *am* happy,” I reassured him. “Actually,” I added, pleased to have an opportunity to show off my new expertise, “most people are pretty happy—in a 2006 study, eighty-four percent of Americans ranked themselves as ‘very happy’ or ‘pretty happy,’ and in a survey of forty-five countries, on average, people put themselves at 7 on a 1 to 10 scale and at 75 on a 1 to 100 scale. I just took the Authentic Happiness Inventory Questionnaire myself, and on a range of 1 to 5, I scored a 3.92.”

“So if you’re pretty happy, why do a happiness project?”

“I *am* happy—but I’m not as happy as I should be. I have such a good

life, I want to appreciate it more—and live up to it better.” I had a hard time explaining it. “I complain too much, I get annoyed more than I should. I should be more grateful. I think if I felt happier, I’d behave better.”

“Do you really think any of *this* is going to make a difference?” he asked, pointing to the printout of my first blank Resolutions Chart.

“Well, I’ll find out.”

“Huh,” he snorted. “I guess so.”

I ran into even more skepticism soon after, at a cocktail party. The usual polite chitchat devolved into a conversation more closely resembling a Ph.D. dissertation defense when a longtime acquaintance openly scoffed at the idea of my happiness project.

“Your project is to see if you can make yourself happier? And you’re not even depressed?” he asked.

“That’s right,” I answered, trying to look intelligent as I juggled a glass of wine, a napkin, and a fancy version of a pig in a blanket.

“No offense, but what’s the point? I don’t think examining how an ordinary person can become happier is very interesting.”

I wasn’t sure how to answer. Could I tell him that one Secret of Adulthood is “Never start a sentence with the words ‘No offense’”?

“And anyway,” he persisted, “you’re not a regular person. You’re highly educated, you’re a full-time writer, you live on the Upper East Side, your husband has a good job. What do you have to say to someone in the Midwest?”

“I’m from the Midwest,” I said weakly.

He waved that away. “I just don’t think you’re going to have insights that other people would find useful.”

“Well,” I answered, “I’ve come to believe that people really can learn a lot from each other.”

“I think you’ll find that your experience doesn’t translate very well.”

“I’ll do my best,” I answered. Then I walked away to find someone else to talk to.

This guy, discouraging as he’d been, hadn’t actually hit on my real worry about my project: Was it supremely self-centered to spend so much effort on my own happiness?

I gave this question a lot of thought. In the end, I sided with the ancient philosophers and modern scientists who argue that working to be happier is a worthy goal. According to Aristotle, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” Epicurus wrote, “We must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed toward attaining it.” Contemporary research shows that happy people are more altruistic, more productive, more helpful, more likable, more

creative, more resilient, more interested in others, friendlier, and healthier. Happy people make better friends, colleagues, and citizens. I wanted to be one of those people.

I knew it was certainly easier for me to be good when I was happy. I was more patient, more forgiving, more energetic, more lighthearted, and more generous. Working on my happiness wouldn't just make me happier, it would boost the happiness of the people around me.

And—though I didn't recognize this immediately—I started my happiness project because I wanted to *prepare*. I was a very fortunate person, but the wheel would turn. One dark night, my phone was going to ring, and I already had a notion about one particular phone call that might come. One of my goals for the happiness project was to prepare for adversity—to develop the self-discipline and the mental habits to deal with a bad thing when it happened. The time to start exercising, stop nagging, and organize our digital photos was when everything was going smoothly. I didn't want to wait for a crisis to remake my life.

1

JANUARY

Boost Energy

VITALITY

- **Go to sleep earlier.**
- **Exercise better.**
- **Toss, restore, organize.**
- **Tackle a nagging task.**
- **Act more energetic.**

Like 44 percent of Americans, I make New Year's resolutions—and usually don't keep them for long. How many times had I resolved to exercise more, eat better, and keep up with my e-mail in-box? This year, though, I was making my resolutions in the context of my happiness project, and I hoped that would mean that I'd do a better job of keeping them. To launch the new year and my happiness project, I decided to focus on boosting my energy. More vitality, I hoped, would make it easier for me to stick to all my happiness-project resolutions in future months.

In a virtuous circle, research shows, being happy energizes you, and at the same time, having more energy makes it easier for you to engage in activities—like socializing and exercise—that boost happiness. Studies also show that when you feel energetic, your self-esteem rises. Feeling tired, on the other hand, makes everything seem arduous. An activity that you'd ordinarily find fun, like putting up holiday decorations, feels difficult, and a more demanding task, like learning a new software program, feels overwhelming.

I know that when I feel energetic, I find it much easier to behave in ways that make me happy. I take the time to e-mail the grandparents with a report from the pediatrician's checkup. I don't scold when Eliza drops her glass of milk on the rug just as we're leaving for school. I have the perseverance to figure out why my computer screen is frozen. I take the time to put my dishes in the dishwasher.

I decided to tackle both the *physical* and *mental* aspects of energy.

For my physical energy: I needed to make sure that I got enough sleep and enough exercise. Although I'd already known that sleep and exercise were important to good health, I'd been surprised to learn that happiness—which can seem like a complex, lofty, and intangible goal—was quite influenced by these straightforward habits. For my mental energy: I needed to tackle my apartment and office, which felt oppressively messy and crowded. Outer order, I hoped, would bring inner peace. What's more, I needed to clear away metaphorical clutter; I wanted to cross tasks off my to-do list. I added one last resolution that combined the mental and the physical. Studies show that by acting *as if* you feel more energetic, you can *become* more energetic. I was skeptical, but it seemed worth a try.

GO TO SLEEP EARLIER.

First: bodily energy.

A glamorous friend with a tendency to make sweeping pronouncements had told me that “Sleep is the new sex,” and I'd recently been at a dinner party where each person at the table detailed the best nap he or she had ever had, in lascivious detail, while everyone moaned in appreciation.

Millions of people fail to get the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep a night, and one study revealed that along with tight work deadlines, a bad night's sleep was one of the top two factors that upset people's daily moods. Another study suggested that getting one extra hour of sleep each night would do more for a person's daily happiness than getting a \$60,000 raise. Nevertheless, the average adult sleeps only 6.9 hours during the week, and 7.9 on the weekend—20 percent less than in 1900. Although people adjust to feeling sleepy, sleep deprivation impairs memory, weakens the immune system, slows metabolism, and might, some studies suggest, foster weight gain.

My new, not-exactly-startling resolution for getting more sleep was to *turn off the light*. Too often I stayed up to read, answer e-mails, watch TV, pay bills, or whatever, instead of going to bed.

Nevertheless, just a few days into the happiness project, although I practically fell asleep on Eliza's purple sheets as I was tucking her in, I wavered for a moment when Jamie proposed watching our latest Netflix DVD, *The Conversation*. I love movies; I wanted to spend time with Jamie; 9:30 P.M. seemed a ridiculously early hour to go to bed; and I knew from experience that if I started watching, I'd perk up. On the other hand, I felt exhausted.

Why does it often seem more tiring to go to bed than to stay up? Inertia, I suppose. Plus there's the prebed work of taking out my contact lenses,