

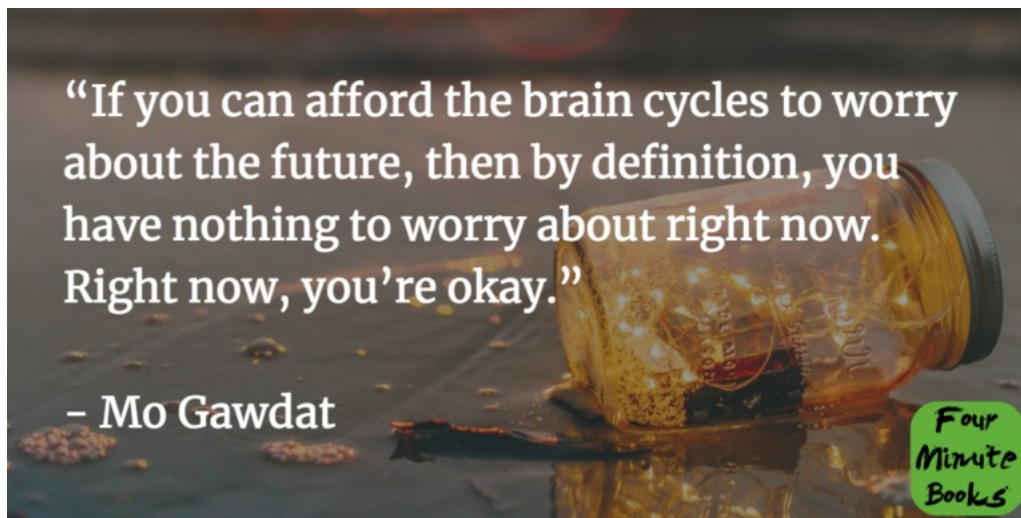
Solve For Happy Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Solve For Happy* lays out a former Google engineers formula for happiness, which shows you not only that it's our default state, but also how to overcome the obstacles we face in remaining in it.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



One of the scenes I remember most distinctly from the Lord of the Rings movies is the one in which King Théoden of Rohan finds out his son fell in battle. After his funeral, he breaks down in front of the family grave, saying: *"No parent should have to bury their child."* It's heartbreaking, but I think the reason it stuck with me is that for the first time, I realized there are much scarier, worse things in life than death.

Mo Gawdat would know. The former chief business officer of Google [X] went through the same tragedy as King Théoden. During a routine medical procedure while they were on vacation, his 21-year-old son Ali suddenly passed away. Since then, he's had a million reasons to be sad, which is exactly why he chose happiness instead. He and Ali had been working on a formula for years: ***"Happiness is equal to or greater than the events of your life minus your expectation of how life should be."***

Shortly after his son's death, Mo began to write, which is how *Solve For Happy* started. Besides the equation, which shows happiness is really our default state, he also shares six grand illusions and seven blind spots, which ruin this state, as well as five ultimate truths.

Here's one from each category:

1. Your inner voice is not the real you.
2. Many cognitive filters prevent you from seeing the whole world around you.

3. No matter if life is good or bad, staying in the present always makes you feel more content with it.

Life is short. There's no time to waste. So let's solve for happy!

Lesson 1: The voice inside your head is not you.

Every single person on earth has an inner monologue that runs 24/7/365. It's a stream of thoughts that uses the I- or You-form when addressing us, for example "I should stop partying so much," or "you can never be a professional at basketball." The first big illusion Mo wants to help us shatter is the belief that this voice is not just talking to us, it *is* us.

In the 1930s, Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky found out that the larynx, the part of our body that contains the vocal cords, occasionally shows the slightest of movements, even when we we're not actually talking. He later built an entire theory around thinking and speech, indicating our inner monologue is nothing but an internalization of the external speech we use to talk to others. This means **we're not really talking to ourselves, our brain just happens to use the best tool it knows to talk to us.**

Our minds process the outside world and then try to make sense of it as best as possible. But the resulting inner speech is just a flow of suggestions they make to help us decide what to do. That doesn't mean you have to listen. You can question these ideas. Say no. Do something different.

If you strip away everything, what you own, your friends, your body, even your identity, the only thing that's left is the invisible observer of the world. That's the real you, and no one can take it away from you. If you expect nothing but to keep observing, life always exceeds your expectations.

Lesson 2: Your brain's automatic filters keep you from observing everything around you.

Humans are built on heuristics. They're little if-then rules for automatic behavior in certain situations. Shortcuts, if you will. For thousands of years, these heuristics have allowed us to survive, find food, and reproduce. However, over the past 2,000 years of somewhat modern civilization, they've become a lot less useful.

In the modern world, little threatens to kill us, while much of what escapes us makes us unhappy. What used to ensure our survival now seems like a long list of errors standing in the way of us and happiness. Mo calls these errors blind spots, psychology refers to them as cognitive biases. There's a long list of them in a variety of categories, but the first, and biggest, may be filters.

Filters select what sensory information is passed on to your brain to process, because taking it all would be too much to handle. For example, while our eyes are very powerful, they can't visualize everything in our view, so whatever is missing the mind fills in from memory and imagination. Similarly, you'll feel the fabric on your skin when you first put on your socks in the morning, but throughout the day, you stop noticing they're even there.

It's impossible to turn these filters off completely, and that's a good thing, because they help us function. But if you try to remain aware of their presence, you can get more out of life by remembering to observe the world more mindfully and soak in every detail.

Lesson 3: Living in the present always makes you happier, even if bad things happen.

Matt Killingsworth has been researching happiness at Harvard and Berkeley for several years. As part of his work, he runs a large-scale happiness study through the Track Your Happiness app. Over 15,000 people have joined and the results clearly show one thing: **the more we focus on the present moment, the happier we are.**

Irrespective of whether what's going on in our lives is negative or positive, as long as we are mindful and stay in the now, we tend to be content. However, we spend about half our time doing the exact opposite: mind-wandering. We think about the past and what we would change, or worry about the future, wishing for some perfect outcome. But as with filters and inner speech, if we can turn off the projectors and just focus on right now, we'll feel calmer and less anxious.

Once again, it's about awareness and going with the flow. This is the first ultimate truth Mo shares, and he wraps it all up in the Taoist concept of wu-wei. Wu-wei simply means that sometimes, doing nothing is the best option, and that if you remain aware, acting will be effortless.

Solve For Happy Review

Solve For Happy is not a revelation, but it's a solid compendium of what we know about happiness. Given the mission of the man behind the book, I think it's a cause well worth supporting by helping to spread the word. May we all solve our own happiness equations.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- More about Mo's definition of happiness
- The five remaining grand illusions
- Which other six blind spots keep you from staying present
- How the rest of Mo's ultimate truths can help you become happier

Who would I recommend the Solve For Happy summary to?

The 29 year old upstart, who's trying too hard to chase success, the 53 year old accomplished professional, who's become a multitasker through modern technology, and any parent who lost a child.