

# The Happy Mind Summary

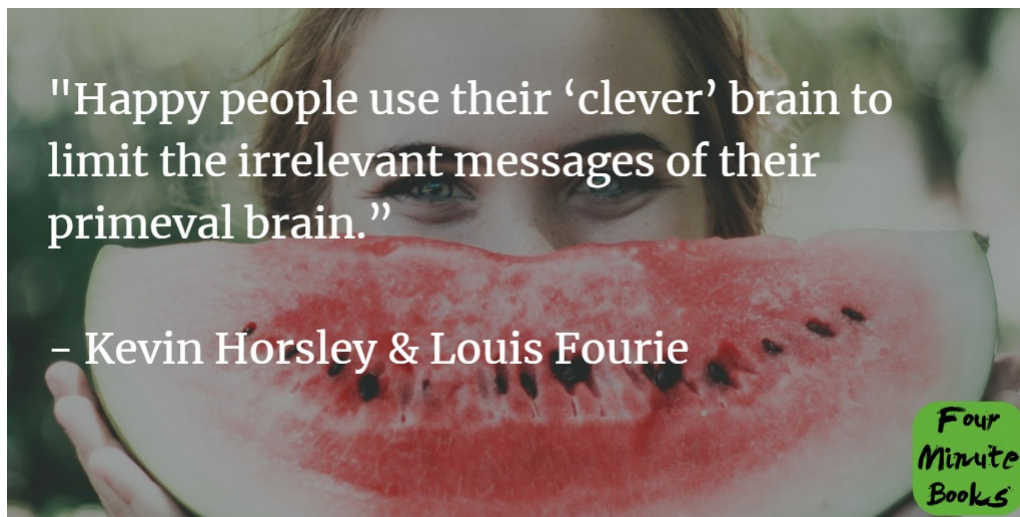
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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Happy Mind* shows you what science and experience teach about how to become happier by assuming responsibility for your own well-being.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Initially, I approached *The Happy Mind: A Simple Guide to Living a Happier Life Starting Today* as just another book on happiness. Since I've read a lot of self-help content, I wasn't expecting to learn anything new. But I was pleasantly surprised by what the authors had to offer.

The value of this book is not so much in discovering brand new lands of knowledge about happiness. Kevin Horsley and Louis Fourie constantly point towards the fact that we all have what it takes to be happy inside of us. In *The Happy Mind*, they assemble the characteristics that happy people have in common. They build their signposts towards happiness on these traits.

The authors touch upon various angles from which we can look at happiness. You will find a blend of neuroscience and evolutionary background, the social and financial dimension of happiness, and even a bit of a spiritual lookout.

Some of the points shed light on your mental processes that are always going on just beneath the surface of your consciousness. Others will come as reminders of what you may have once known about happiness but forgot over the years of a busy, stressful, and demanding life.

Here are the 3 biggest reminders about happiness that I took away:

1. Unhappiness comes from the misalignment of our “old brain” with today’s realities.
2. Happiness isn’t something that magically falls upon us.
3. When you change your own conduct, the behaviour of others around you also changes.

Are you willing to do the ever-satisfying work required for happiness? Then let’s dive right into it!

## Lesson 1: **One big reason for our unhappiness resides in the “reptilian brain.”**

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Even though this book is about happiness, the authors concluded that understanding the origin of unhappiness is vital. The short answer for “why are people unhappy?” is that happiness was not evolutionarily important.

This is akin to each of us having two brains. The “old one,” also called the reptilian brain, is primarily oriented to grant us survival. The famous “fight or flight” mechanisms reside here, as do our unconscious instincts.

The “new brain,” or neocortex, is the location of our intellectual capacity and rational decision-making capabilities. This is evolutionarily the more sophisticated part of the brain. The problem is that in many life situations, this “new brain” is still a servant to the old, instinctual one, and not the other way around.

**The consequence is that, even though our physical survival is more certain now, we still act upon our fears and perceptions of lack as if they were life-threatening.** For example, we may experience a stressful period at work, which is not a survival threat. However, our reptilian brain doesn’t “know” that and causes us to experience feelings as if we were in real danger.

In short, we are biologically wired to be unhappy. The good news is that we can deliberately train our “new brain” to override the old instincts.

## Lesson 2: **Happiness requires intentional effort.**

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The underlying belief many of us have is that happiness either happens to us or doesn’t and that there’s not much we can do about it. If we want to be happy, we need to change this assumption.

Horsley and Fourie try to disrupt this statement throughout the whole book by teaching that happiness is something that you create with applying deliberate effort. You need to stop waiting around until it falls upon you and take your fate in your own hands.

**You need to assume responsibility for your own happiness, rather than playing the role of a victim of your life circumstances.**

Sure, some people seem to be more predisposed to happiness than others. It may be due to their genes or the excellent parenting they received as children. But if you were not fortunate enough to have those gifts, that doesn't mean you cannot work on your own happiness.

The critical mindset shift here is to see happiness as a practical, manageable affair that you can take control over. You can work on it one day at a time. Gradually identify and then transform these behaviours, thought patterns, and emotional responses that don't serve your well-being.

In the second part of *The Happy Mind*, Horsley and Fourie provide you with a bucket of practical ideas on how to do just that. I will share with you the one that stuck with me the most.

## Lesson 3: Transform your own behaviour instead of trying to change others.

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People mirror us. As much you think that what someone else does annoys you, their actions should rather be seen as part of your interaction together.

Whatever you do or say impacts how others respond and vice versa. This simple and unquestionable observation is what Horsley and Fourie draw on when giving this tip:

**Rather than trying to make people change their conduct, focus on improving your own.**

Once you realize the basic rules underlying human interactions, the above prompt becomes the only reasonable strategy to influence your environment. For example, consider that the best way to get people to listen to you may be to speak *less*. Similarly, by offering your uninterrupted and non-judgemental attention, you may encourage another to share their views more honestly.

It is impossible to control someone else's behaviour. You can only create the conditions for them to act in a certain way by adjusting your own manner of being.

## The Happy Mind Review

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*The Happy Mind* is what I can truly call a "no-bullshit" guide to happiness. It doesn't claim to reveal any "magic trick" to happiness by making it clear that there is no such thing. Instead, the book offers actionable advice on how to get into practising happiness in all areas of life.

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## **Who would I recommend The Happy Mind summary to?**

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The 40-year-old chronically ill person who wants to find a way to enjoy life regardless of what it throws at them, the 55-year old parent who is experiencing the “empty nest” syndrome, and anyone who senses that their potential for happiness is greater.