

# Stumbling On Happiness Summary

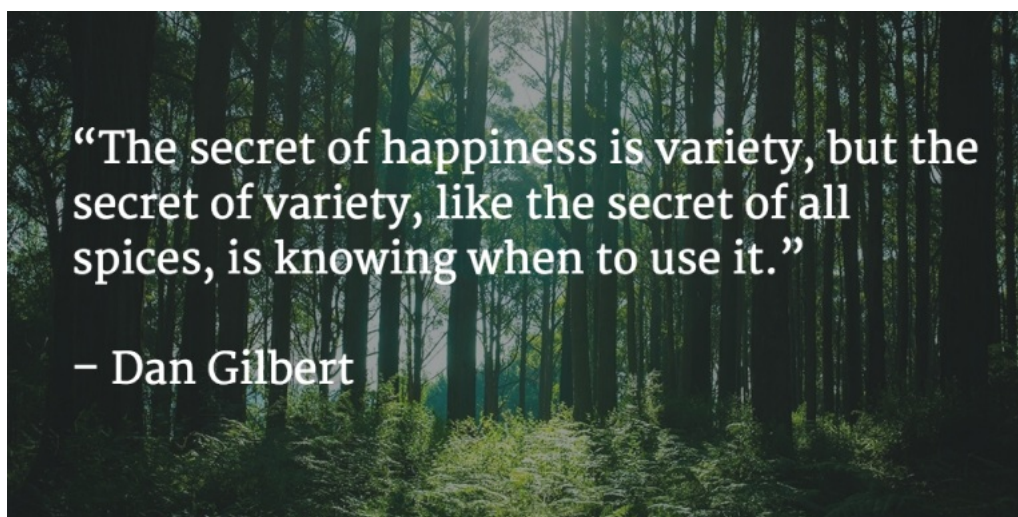
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 [fourminutebooks.com/stumbling-on-happiness-summary](https://fourminutebooks.com/stumbling-on-happiness-summary)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Stumbling On Happiness* examines the capacity of our brains to fill in gaps and simulate experiences, shows how our lack of awareness of these powers sometimes leads us to wrong decisions, and how we can change our behavior to synthesize our own happiness.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Daniel Gilbert is a Harvard psychology professor, whom I learned about a few years ago, when watching his fantastic TED talk.

Very eloquently, he explains the science of happiness, based on our brain's ability to simulate the future.

His 2006 New York Times bestseller, *Stumbling On Happiness*, provides lots of scenarios, in which simulations lead us to making the wrong decisions and false assumptions about ourselves.

The book tries to help you become self-aware of these tricks your brain plays on you, so you can avoid them in the future and thus create your own happiness.

Here are my 3 major takeaways:

1. Your brain is really bad at filling in the blanks, but it keeps on trying.
2. You should always compare products based on value, never on past price.
3. Bad experiences are better than no experiences.

Time to double check!

## Lesson 1: Your brain is really bad at filling in the blanks, but it keeps on trying.

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Did you know you have a blind spot? It's a certain area of your vision that's basically blank – you can't see what's there, due to your nerve fibers blocking your retina where they leave the eye.

Why have you never noticed any black spots on photographs then?

Because your brain **fills in the missing information**.

It guesses what needs to be there and adds the remaining pieces to the image. If you stop to think for a second, you'll notice that this means **your brain completely invents a part of your vision and therefore your reality in any given moment**.

Not only is this an incredible trick your brain plays on you, **it does so all the time, and is often wrong**.

For example **your memories**. You might be at a party and have the time of your life, but right before going home, someone throws up on your new shoes.

Chances are your brain won't store this in your memory as the greatest night of all time, but **exaggerate the bad part of the experience** at the end, leaving you to remember it as a bad party.

Similarly, you only need to think about wanting to eat pizza at a new restaurant (which I do a lot), and your brain instantly conjures up the perfect experience, smell and taste in your head.

Naturally, you believe in this **best-case scenario of the future** and are disappointed at anything less than that, neglecting the millions of alternative scenarios – the place could have burned down for all you know.

Your brain is not so great at filling in those blanks, but it will keep trying, so just **be aware of when it's doing it**.

## Lesson 2: Always compare products based on value, never on past price.

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Dang it! How could that coffee place raise the price again?

We usually compare products based on prices we're used to, so if your espresso now costs \$1 instead of \$0.50, you're annoyed and think it's a rip-off.

Instead of comparing it to previous prices or other coffee, **try thinking about what you could get for the money elsewhere**.

Once you realize that \$1 won't even buy you a carrot, maybe a single sock, and 10 minutes of parking tops, the espresso will seem like a much better deal, in spite of the higher price.

Similarly, people will rather buy a \$500 TV that was reduced from \$600, instead of getting the same TV for \$400, if the price went up from \$300.

**Always judge based on value for the money, never make price comparisons.**

## Lesson 3: Bad experiences are better than no experiences.

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Speaking of comparisons, consider this paradox: You are introduced to someone you find attractive and then given the choice between one of two options:

1. Marry them. In this case, the person will become a pyromaniac down the road (someone who sets fires on purpose for personal enjoyment, and might light up your house).
2. Not marry them. In this case, the person will become a billionaire.

**Which one would you regret more?**

Astonishingly, Gilbert says it's the latter.

Because even if your spouse turns out to be a complete maniac, your brain can still learn something from the experience, and **see the positives in it**.

You'll probably walk away from this experience thinking: "Ha, anyone that comes now will be better, the worst is behind me." or "Now I can really assess people a lot better."

But it's hard for your brain to come up with **a positive view of something that never happened**. Since you don't even know what it's like to be married to a billionaire, you kick yourself for not going for it in the first place, and thus end up unhappier.

So whatever you do, **do something**. Action beats inaction, every time.

**Note:** I personally believe that action is the cure to anything. Thinking is great, but we should do it much less.

## Stumbling On Happiness Review

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Just like yesterday's book, it's almost impossible to pull out only 3 good things here. It's fascinating how we make bad decisions and wrong assumptions, not because of being overconfident or smug, but simply because of the way our brains are wired.

I think the consequences have a much bigger impact on our lives than even the book suggests. Considering our brains manipulate both our past and future to such an extent is mind-blowing.

Then again, sometimes these qualities help us see the good in bad situations. According to this book, the only truly bad thing you should avoid at all costs is **doing nothing**.

So instead of doing nothing, go read the summary of this book on Blinkist

Given *Stumbling On Happiness* already touched on the subject of choice and its impact on our happiness, I think I know what book to read next...

## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- How your brain makes bad memories even worse
- Why shopping groceries on a full stomach will lead you to underestimating how much food you need for the week
- What your brain does to make your memories hard to trust
- When false beliefs spread, and why that can be a good thing
- Why you don't think other people's advice can work for you
- What makes most people still rather do nothing than something
- The reason why a chipped nail can feel worse than your house burning down
- How much happiness choice really gives us
- Which events are best left unexplained
- What your brain does to make your friends seem so great

## Who would I recommend the Stumbling On Happiness summary to?

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The 18 year old, slightly spoiled girl, who's often disappointed when things don't go her way, the 43 year old stay-at-home Dad, who saves a lot with \$1 coupons, but might lose it all again on investment fees, and anyone who's afraid of taking action towards something that might be dangerous.

Learn more about the author

Read the full book summary on Blinkist

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