

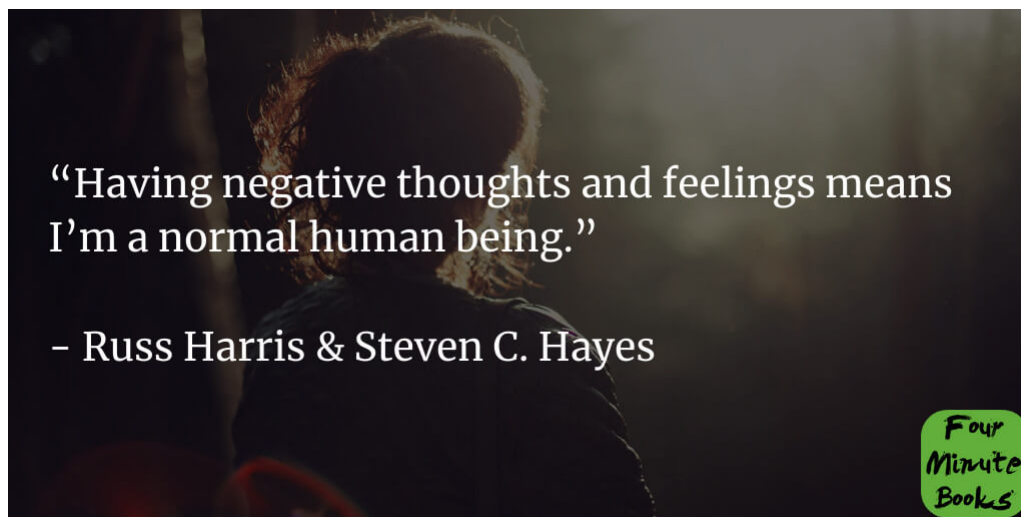
The Happiness Trap Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Happiness Trap* offers an easy-to-follow, practical guide to implementing Acceptances and Commitment Therapy (ACT), an effective method for loosening the grip of negative emotions so you can follow your values in life.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Mindfulness is in fashion right now, and it seems like basically everyone recommends it. Downloading a meditation app to your phone or dropping into a yoga class might feel cool. But sporadic and isolated efforts at mindfulness are not likely to work very well.

Especially if you're already in the thick of negative emotions, as so many people are. You need concrete steps to take in order to apply mindfulness tools to yourself. It must become a habit and a way of approaching life generally. It can't just be a mere hobby or you won't reap the rewards.

The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living: A Guide to ACT may sound like just another overblown self-help book. But it really does provide a specific guide to action for people who need to find a way to soothe themselves as soon as possible when things go wrong.

It's based on empirically-validated Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a technique for learning to live with negative emotions instead of fighting them.

Here are the 3 most important lessons from the book:

1. Fighting against your emotions is the best way to get *stuck* in them.
2. Sometimes ACT techniques can make you feel happier, but that's a pleasant side effect and not the goal.
3. Even though you can't choose how to feel, you can choose how to act.

Ready to stop fighting to feel happy, once and for all? Let's give ACT a spin!

Lesson 1: People tend to make negative emotions much worse than they have to be by fighting against them.

It's bad enough to feel stressed, sad, or angry in the first place. Unfortunately, most of us heap lots of additional stress, sadness, and anger on ourselves by trying, and usually failing, to make that bad feeling go away as soon as possible. We believe, on some level, that we should have a high level of control over our emotions. We then find, repeatedly, that we have far less control than we ever thought.

Even worse, negative emotions don't just come up randomly every once in a while. Since humans evolved under dangerous conditions, our brains are constantly, actively, on the lookout for threats of all shapes and sizes. Your mental "don't get killed" detector will even invent threats out of thin air. And this is despite the fact that our species has never been safer in the past than we are now.

So, if you've decided to stop struggling against your emotions, what do you do instead? Here's where *The Happiness Trap* has many specific tips and tricks to offer.

For instance, you can try simply reminding yourself that your mind has a life of its own and that you don't endorse all of its thoughts. When your inner critic generates a thought like "you're a failure!" just think "thanks, mind!" and keep doing what you were doing.

You can also try practicing "expansion." This visualization technique involves observing the sensations in your body and breathing into them. This makes "space" inside you for big emotions to come for a visit, instead of trying and failing to force them out.

Lesson 2: Learn to enjoy pleasant feelings when they do arise while realizing that it doesn't work to pursue them directly.

Telling yourself "thanks, mind!" and expanding into tough emotions might actually work to make you feel happier. However, it's important to remember that ACT is *not* just another attempt to closely control your emotions.

According to ACT experts, emotional control methods are doomed to fail. And they often make you feel worse in the process. When these mindfulness tips do actually cause happiness, it's just a lucky byproduct and not the goal.

Instead of actively chasing happiness, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy recommends thoughtfully enjoying pleasures, especially small ones, just for what they are, however long they last. Don't try to make the good feelings come or stay and don't try to make the negative emotions leave, just ride them all like a surfer on a wave.

If you've ever tried the Headspace app you know how this can work. The meditation sessions within teach you how to begin your mindfulness practice by centering your mind on your breathing. Then, you count your breaths, letting thoughts and emotions come and go as you do. When a feeling comes, you don't engage with it but instead just note it and move on.

Try it yourself right now! The next time negative emotions or thought patterns creep in, you'll be prepared to just let them slip right on by!

Lesson 3: Don't try to design how you feel, just act on your values .

You can't count on feeling any particular way because emotions are uncontrollable. But you can choose how to act each day. Now that you've learned to stop struggling against your emotions and ride them out instead, what will you do with your newfound emotional freedom?

The Happiness Trap wraps up with some exercises for determining what you really value in life, underneath your previous fears of social judgment or failure.

Even if you can't always feel happy, you can grow a greater, deeper sense of satisfaction with your life. Do this by establishing your values and taking incremental steps towards realizing them in your chosen goals.

The Happiness Trap Review

The Happiness Trap is a realistic and practical breath of fresh air compared to most shallow discussions of mindfulness and happiness. Because it offers many specific techniques that you can practice at your own pace, *The Happiness Trap* is more like a useful personal development reference book than a one-time read. Even its author, Russ Harris, admits to falling off the ACT wagon sometimes. But with practice, we can all learn to "stop struggling and start living."

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Who would I recommend The Happiness Trap summary to?

The emotionally turbulent 22-year old college graduate facing the “real world” and its disappointments for the first time, the 65-year old retiree who expected to enjoy this new phase of life more than he is, and anyone who scoffs at happiness-related advice but doesn’t know what to do instead.