

# Hardwiring Happiness Summary

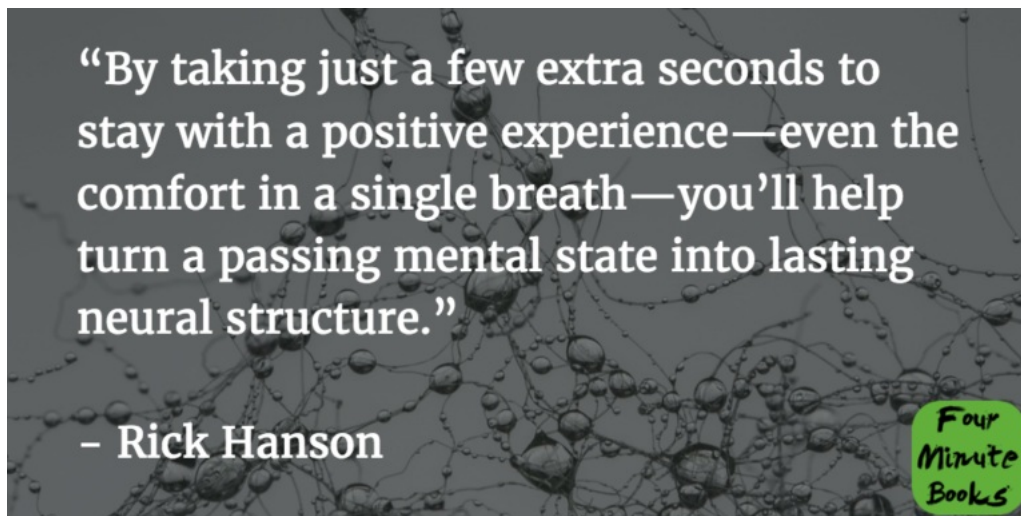
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 [fourminutebooks.com/hardwiring-happiness-summary](https://fourminutebooks.com/hardwiring-happiness-summary)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Hardwiring Happiness tells you what you can do to overcome your negativity bias of focusing on and exaggerating negative events by relishing, extending and prioritizing the good things in your life to become happier.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Rick Hanson is impressive. I don't know why, but that word comes to mind, in spite of his very modest, calm and rather introverted nature. He's not a showman, but there's something profound about the things he talks about and how he talks about them, which I can't help but to admit has left a bigger impact on me than I thought it would.

The second darts idea from one of his earlier books, *Buddha's Brain* is one of the best practices to control your reactions to bad events I know of. That book was about accepting the things you can't change. This one, *Hardwiring Happiness*, is about how to proactively battle negativity and overcome your tendency to exaggerate the negative.

It explains why we obsess about the bad stuff and what we can do to change that.

Here are three lessons to help you kick your negativity bias to the curb:

1. The reason you react stronger to bad things is that you (might) have a "sad amygdala."
2. Start a "Good Year Box" to remind yourself of positive events all the time.
3. Create an infinite stream of positivity from your memories, small details and being generous.

Ready to hardwire happiness into your brain? Let's do it!

## Lesson 1: If you have a “sad amygdala” you react stronger to negative events.

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There’s a scene in *How I Met Your Mother* when Ted sees his ratings as a professor on a website. The words fly across the screen, all compliments across the board – “knowledgeable”, “fun”, “cool guy” – and then it hits “BORING.”

His world is shattered, the day ruined. For the remainder of the episode, he ends up chasing better reviews, trying way too hard, until he eventually realizes it’s stupid to obsess over one bad review in 50 great ones.

I’m sure you know the feeling. Think of the moments in school you remember the most. Are they happy ones? Or the times when you got bullied, when you were hurt, when you got your first F?

**The tendency to disproportionately focus on the negative is built into us.** It’s a remnant from times when most negative things could kill you. Today most “threats” won’t, but your brain doesn’t know that.

However, there are still differences among us. The fear center of your brain, the amygdala comes in two variants.

1. A “happy amygdala” will stimulate your nucleus accumbens the goal-fulfilling part of your brain that sparks motivation, ambition and optimism.
2. A “sad amygdala” will instead base your actions more on fear by releasing cortisol, adrenaline, and other stress-inducing hormones, making you feel rather anxious and worried.

Most of us have a “sad amygdala,” but luckily, it’s not set in stone.

## Lesson 2: Keep reminding yourself of positive events with a “Good Year Box.”

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Your brain never stops growing, which means it’s never too late to change its structure. By exposing it to more positive experiences and making a conscious effort to do so on a regular basis, you can tone down your sad amygdala and even turn it into a happy one.

A great way to start this practice is to simply remind yourself of the good things in your life more often, for example by starting to use what Rick Hanson calls a **“Good Year Box.”**

Here’s how it works: Keep a shoe box or other storage container in your bedroom. At the end of each day, before you go to bed, go through everything you’ve done and experienced again, and pull out at least one positive thing that happened. Write it down on a piece of paper and put it in the box.

This way, you'll acknowledge good things in your life as they happen, while simultaneously training your brain to recognize those things more.

## Lesson 3: Create an infinite stream of positivity from your memories, small details and being generous.

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Honestly, the supply of happiness you can experience is endless. Just look at these three ways of eliciting positive experiences and I'm sure you'll agree with me:

1. **Spend some time in a happy memory.**
2. **Notice a small, positive detail right in front of you.**
3. **Be generous in helping others.**

Even if you're just 15 years old, you already have a lifetime worth of happy memories. Rewiring your brain can be as simple as digging out one of them – a fun afternoon playing in the sand, a beautiful movie, a tasty pizza, a great date or awesome fireworks – and taking a few minutes to dwell in it in your mind.

The laptop I'm typing these words on is nothing short of a miracle. It's the equivalent of an entire company 50 years ago. How can I not be grateful for it? The beautiful quality of images on the screen. The soft touch of the keys. The magnetic charger that safely unplugs, even if I stumble over the cable. What breathtaking mini miracle can you be grateful for that's right in front of you this very second?

Lastly, your brain's reward centers will fire more often if you're generous. Don't be cheap. Give awesome gifts. Not just when they're "required" like on Christmas, but any time of the year. Donate every once in a while. Offer to help your neighbor in the garden. Being generous always leads to a shared moment of happiness. And there's no limit to how generous you can be.

## Hardwiring Happiness Review

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Just reading about this stuff makes me happier already. That's what I meant by saying Rick Hanson is impressive. He creates an impression that lasts. *Hardwiring Happiness* reinforced that. I highly recommend his work.

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- What brain scans of London cab drivers reveal
- Why fighting in WWI or WWII was still better than living 10,000 years ago

- How you really perceive negative news
- What you can do to savor positive experiences more
- How Rick used a happy moment to battle a childhood trauma of his

## **Who would I recommend the Hardwiring Happiness summary to?**

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The 52 year old miser, who always bickers with everyone in her community, the 72 year old, who thinks there's no chance his brain is still evolving, and anyone who doesn't keep track of their happy memories at all.