

# **The Gap and the Gain**

# **What's in it for me? Learn to stop chasing success and relish your achievements.**

When Thomas Jefferson wrote the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, he decreed that all Americans have the right to “the pursuit of happiness.” This wording suggested that happiness is something external to ourselves, something you have to chase after. And that's how most people see it to this day. Perhaps you think happiness will come with that promotion, or that increased wage, or, perhaps, when you have your perfect family. But your goalposts keep moving, and those achievements never really bring you what you seek. People's mindsets are all wrong here. Happiness isn't something to be pursued. It's something you can choose to have right now, no matter what your life is like. These blinks show you how to do just that. In these blinks, you'll learn

how to wake up refreshed and ready to tackle a new day; why positive thinking can make you live longer; and how to transform a difficult experience into an opportunity for growth.

## **Take ownership of your own happiness.**

Dan Jansen is one of the best speed skaters in the world. In 1984, when he was just 16, he took part in the Winter Olympics and nearly won a medal. Nearly – but not quite. For ten long years after that, he was plagued by bad luck. Despite his brilliance, a gold medal at the Olympics continued to elude him. In 1994, Jansen thought he'd give it one final go in Lillehammer, Norway – but he performed poorly in what were usually his strongest races. Soon, there was only one race left, the 1,000 meter sprint. Jansen knew his chances of winning were very slim. But instead of feeling sad about another looming defeat, he brought a different mindset to this event. As he took up his position at the starting line, he thought of everything he'd gained during his career; the coaches who generously mentored him, the places he'd seen, the enormous satisfaction he got from skating. The key message here is: Take ownership of your own happiness. Jansen decided that he'd dedicate his last race to expressing his gratitude to the world of speed skating. This was to be his goodbye to a long and fulfilling career. So he raced with a beaming smile on his face. And this turned out to be his career's best run. Jansen won the race, and broke a world record in the process. His positive thoughts brought about a positive result. Many high achievers struggle to adopt this way of thinking. They believe that they have to make themselves miserable in order to become motivated. Here's how their thinking goes: if you're too satisfied with your life, you'll have no desire to succeed. But that's not true at all. In fact, numerous studies have shown that when you're in a positive frame of mind, you actually perform better. You have more confidence, you think more creatively, you become better at adapting to changing circumstances. When you're feeling stressed and negative, on the other hand, you go into survival mode. This kills off any creative, lateral thinking. You also stop having fun at work – and your internal motivation dwindles. Jansen was so successful because he stopped needing to win in order to feel happy or fulfilled. Of course, he wanted to win. But his happiness became intrinsic. If you look for happiness outside yourself, you're

giving away all your power. Life becomes a treadmill of constantly hustling to get the things you believe you need. But you don't need anything or anyone else to be happy. You can choose happiness, right now, by learning to appreciate your life just the way it is.

## **Stop comparing yourself to others.**

Have you ever scrolled through Instagram feeling intensely jealous of your friend's holiday to Thailand or your cousin's sumptuous wedding? Then you're behaving exactly how the creators of platforms like Facebook and Instagram want you to. Social media is designed to make you constantly compare yourself to other people. Its purpose is to create the sense of FOMO – fear of missing out on all the things you think the others do. In fact, these platforms are built to make you feel like your life doesn't measure up. It's their job to put you in the GAP – to make you feel like your life doesn't measure up to the ideal. Why do social media sites do that? Well, because if you feel you're missing out, you'll probably start buying stuff in order to fill that gap. In other words, social media platforms manipulate your mental well-being in order to make you a more valuable consumer. The key message here is: Stop comparing yourself to others. The truth is that comparing yourself to other people is futile. It causes you to yearn for external symbols of success, like a big house or a flashy car. But no purchase, however expensive, can really nourish you. The only thing that can make you feel happy and fulfilled is living up to your own, internal standard of success. But what is this standard? If you don't have an immediate answer, you're not alone. Here's an educated guess: When you were in school, parents or teachers probably never asked you what you valued. Nobody wanted to know how you, personally, judged success. The focus was almost certainly elsewhere – standardized tests, perhaps, or winning that soccer game. As an adult, you have the unique opportunity to become self-determined. You get to decide for yourself what really matters. Take some time to reflect on this, and then write up a list of ten things that are present when you're being successful. Remember that your list won't be the same as anyone else's. And that's the whole point. Does your version of success look like having enough time with your family? Or is it about the flexibility to travel whenever you want to? Make sure that your list is as specific as possible. Next time a new job or other opportunity comes your way, ask yourself: Does this meet the requirements on my list? If the answer is no, then the opportunity isn't for you, no matter how prestigious it may be.

## **How you see your life shapes how you live.**

Here's something you might not know. Your mindset has the potential to affect your physical health and even your longevity. One study proved this by studying an unusual cohort: nuns. Scientists analyzed admissions letters which 180 would-be sisters wrote to their future monasteries when they were all still young women. And guess what: There was a direct link between the tone of these letters and the nuns' lifespans. Those who described themselves positively lived an average of ten years longer than nuns whose letters were negative. Ninety percent of this positive group survived to at least 85, compared to only a third of the nuns in the other group. The way people described their lives in their 20s had an enormous effect on the rest of their lives. The key message here is: How you see your life shapes how you live. The link between mind and body is

well documented. Unhappy people are less resistant to viruses and take more time off work. Those who have a positive mindset, on the other hand, can improve their health with no behavior changes at all. For example, one study worked with a group of 84 women who cleaned hotel rooms for a living. Half of the group was told that their cleaning activities were good exercise which could improve their health. The other half - the control group - wasn't told anything at all. After four weeks the group who'd received the positive message lost weight and lowered their blood pressure. The others saw no improvement. When you perceive your life negatively, you're living in the GAP. You become self-critical; you feel like your life isn't good enough. This has an impact on your body. It makes you chronically stressed, angry, and anxious. Over the course of many years, the effects of GAP thinking will leave your system overwhelmed and run down. But there is an alternative to living in the GAP, and that is to live in the GAIN. This means, giving yourself credit for the progress you've made, and seeing every experience as valuable. If you view your life in this positive light, it'll make you happier and healthier. But how do you start to actually live in the GAIN? Well, it takes practice. To start with, enlist trusted people around you to be accountability buddies. Their job is to let you know when you've slid back into GAP thinking. And another thing you need to do is practice the GAIN mindset. You can do this, for example, by listing your achievements so far, or by thinking of all the things you're learning from an unpleasant situation. With time, a GAIN perspective will become as habitual as the GAP once was.

## **Don't forget to track your progress and celebrate your accomplishments.**

Rosie is a child with a severe brain disorder called lissencephaly. Doctors told her parents that she'd never learn any new skills. But thanks to hours of work with her dedicated physical therapist, Rosie has proved them wrong. In only one year, she learned to walk on grass and other uneven surfaces. In fact, she's become so confident that everyone completely forgot it even used to be a problem. This change is why her therapist keeps detailed notes and schedules regular progress calls with Rosie's parents. Consciously celebrating her progress makes everyone more motivated to keep going. The key message here is: Don't forget to track your progress and celebrate your accomplishments. It's easy to forget your remarkable achievements because they soon start to seem normal. In fact, human brains are wired to forget. Once you've mastered a new skill, your brain allows you to use it unconsciously, on autopilot. Too often, you're not even aware that you're doing something new. That's why it's so essential to keep detailed notes of your progress. Journaling allows you to record challenges you encounter and your solutions to them. Reading through your journal allows you to appreciate the progress you've made. Many people make the mistake of measuring their progress against a future ideal they have in their heads. But that's a recipe for disappointment. The future hasn't happened yet, so it isn't real. But the past is. Measuring your specific results against the past allows you to really understand how far you've come. Take a moment to think about where you were in your life ten years ago. How were you spending your time? What did you think was important? What's happened over the course of those years? Make a detailed, specific list of everything you've achieved in that time. Make sure that you don't only include progress in material wealth or social stature - remember to also focus on how your mindset has developed. Were there difficult or stressful events that taught you valuable lessons? What were those lessons? Now repeat the exercise, examining the gains you've made in the last three years, and even the last 90 days. Doing this exercise consciously will fire you up

with confidence and motivation. It'll also give you a clearer sense of where you want to go.

## **Use the last hour of the day to celebrate your wins and plan for future achievements.**

You might not know this, but the hour before you go to bed is one of the most important of your whole day. How you spend that time impacts your sleep and influences your productivity over the following 24 hours. But most people squander those 60 minutes, thoughtlessly scrolling through their smartphones. It's been well documented that smartphones overstimulate the brain at night, and that makes it harder to get to sleep. So, if you use your phone before bed, you'll most probably wake up groggy and anxious. But it's not all bad news. With just a few simple changes, you can turn that pre-bed hour into a powerful opportunity to transform how you sleep and to better plan your days. The key message here is: Use the last hour of the day to celebrate your wins and plan for future achievements. It all starts with putting your smartphone away at least half an hour before bedtime. Instead, take out a pen and a sheet of paper and reflect on the day you've just had. Specifically, think of three wins from the day, and write them down. Remember, these are your subjective wins, nobody else's. If doing laundry is usually an obstacle for you, then washing a load of clothes is definitely a win. When you've jotted down your achievements, think of three wins you want to get tomorrow. This simple practice will transform your days – and your nights. Capturing your wins for the day puts you in a GAIN mindset and boosts both your confidence and your sense of well-being. This makes for more peaceful sleep. Clearly articulating your goals for the next day allows your brain to start processing them subconsciously, so you wake up feeling a sense of purpose. Instead of merely reacting to whatever comes your way, you'll have a clear, actionable plan. This practice also trains your mind to look for GAINS throughout the day. Everyone has selective attention – this allows you to screen out most of the world's stimuli and only focus on what's important, interesting, or relevant. Well, why not use this trait to your benefit. If you learn to focus on the three wins, your brain will automatically start looking for more and more achievements. That'll boost your confidence and give you more energy to continue pursuing your dreams. Keep at it and soon getting out of bed will no longer be a challenge. Instead, you'll be eager to start your day, ready for the big wins.

## **You can turn any seemingly negative experience into a GAIN by reframing what happened to you.**

September 29, 2008, was a day that changed Howard Getson's life. Overnight, he lost \$2 million on the stock market. Getson was shaken. It seemed like his trading had completely spun out of control. But then he thought about it some more. He'd had a terrible loss that day, sure. But not everyone had. On the contrary, some traders had earned enormous fortunes overnight. Why had their strategies worked and his hadn't? What could he learn from them? Getson kept thinking about this overnight and, by



morning, he'd completely shifted his thinking. Instead of getting upset about his loss, he now saw this experience as a chance for transformation. Getson's engineers started developing new, innovative software that used AI to adapt to changing market conditions. Losing \$2 million could have haunted Getson for the rest of his life. But he didn't let that happen. The key message here is: You can turn any seemingly negative experience into a GAIN by reframing what happened to you. Getson was displaying a trait that's called psychological flexibility. It's the ability to manage your emotions and proactively shape the meaning of your experiences. Psychological flexibility is what allows you to bounce back after a setback. Instead of becoming stuck when things don't go to plan, you accept what happened and find creative, new ways to reach your goal. Not everyone's born with psychological flexibility, but everyone does have the capacity to develop it. This journey starts with taking ownership of everything that happens to you - good and bad. You can't control the entire world around you. But you can choose how you respond to it. One of the coauthors, Dan Sullivan, created a powerful exercise in his coaching practice, which he calls The Experience Transformers. It's a thought experiment that allows you to reframe what happens to you. Here's how it goes: Grab a pen and paper and answer the following questions: What did you gain from this experience that could help you in the future? What do you want to do differently next time? And what are you grateful for? The exercise gives you the space to process the experience instead of running away from it. And it empowers you to create your own narrative about what happened to you. You'll be able to face the world head-on and choose what you want to take from it. Seen this way, any experience can be a GAIN.

## Final summary

The key message in these blinks: No one needs to pursue happiness. You can choose to be happy right now. Instead of comparing yourself to others, define your own intrinsic criteria for success. You can't measure your progress against a future ideal because the future is always illusory. Instead, measure your progress against your past. And celebrate your enormous achievements. This is GAIN thinking, and it'll fill you with energy and motivation. It may not come naturally, but it's something you can practice by doing simple exercises. Actionable advice: Allow yourself five minutes to be in the GAP. It's normal to be sad or disappointed when life doesn't go your way. Don't expect yourself to suddenly become permanently happy just because you've discovered the power of positive thinking. Instead, allow yourself five minutes to be really sad, to sulk, to beat yourself up after a disappointment. In other words, use those five minutes to really embrace the GAP. But then, reflect on how you've benefited from the experience and how much progress you've made - and consciously shift into GAIN thinking.