

Hardwiring Happiness Reading Guide

Chapter One: Growing Good

1. Of the following inner resources – calm, determination, gratitude, contentment, sense of accomplishment, feeling cared about, self-compassion, confidence, self-worth, love, resilience, and insight – which are already strong inside of you, and which are especially important these days to develop further?
2. What do you think about the idea of positive experience-dependent neuroplasticity: deliberately using your mind to change your brain to change your mind for the better?
3. What did you think about the author's belief that there are just three basic ways to engage the mind (letting be, letting go, and letting in)? Can you give an example how you used each one of these approaches to your own mind?
4. Think of something positive in your life, perhaps something you're grateful for or someone who you love. For a dozen seconds or more, open to a positive experience. What's this like for you?

Chapter Two: Velcro for the Bad

1. What do you think about the idea that our brain has evolved a negativity bias? What does the author mean by your brain being like "Velcro for bad experiences but Teflon for good ones."
2. Do you agree with the author when he says, "We routinely overestimate threats and underestimate opportunities and resources?" How do you do this yourself?
3. What's a personal situation that had many positive features but you focused on the one bad thing about it? (Like a job performance review that had nine compliments for you and one area for improvement.)
4. What are some good facts in your life that you don't usually notice? What are some positive facts that you do notice but don't usually have a positive experience about? Even when you do notice a good fact and have a good experience as a result, how often do you stay with that good experience for a dozen or more seconds?

Based on, and for use with *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm and Confidence*. Hanson, Rick, PhD. New York: Harmony Books, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, a Penguin Random House Company, 2013.
www.crownpublishing.com. <http://www.rickhanson.net/books/hardwiring-happiness>

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Chapter Three: Green Brain, Red Brain

1. What's it like to realize that your brain is the product of 600 million years of evolution – that it has been built to solve the survival problems faced by ancient reptiles, mammals, primates, and early humans?
2. What do you think of the author's framework that we have three fundamental needs – for safety, satisfaction, and connection – that are managed by the Avoiding, Approaching, and Attaching systems in our brains? Can you give an example of one of your needs for safety, satisfaction, and connection?
3. What's the difference between the *Responsive* (green) mode and *Reactive* (red) modes of the brain? How do each of these feel for you?
4. What are some internal factors that tip you into the "red zone?" What are some internal factors that help you stay in the "green zone?"

Chapter Four: HEAL Yourself

1. The author says, "when you tilt toward good, you are not denying or resisting the bad. You're simply acknowledging, enjoying and using the good." What are your thoughts about this statement?
2. What, if it were more present in your mind these days, would really help you? In other words, using the author's metaphor, what's your "Vitamin C?"
3. Bring to mind a recent positive experience and then practice the three basic HEAL steps:
 - i. Have a positive experience
 - ii. Enrich it
 - iii. Absorb it
4. Make a list of some things that help you feel calmer, happier, or more loved when you think about them.
5. Complete the practice of *Being on Your Own Side* (p. 66) and write about and/or discuss your experience. What feelings come up for you in this exercise? Ease? Joy? Resistance? Forgiveness? Sadness?

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Chapter Five: Take Notice

1. What's the difference between *liking* and *wanting*? How might it benefit you to be able to enjoy things without getting caught up in wanting them?
2. Think of a recent positive experience and reflect on and write about and/or discuss the different aspects that composed the "song" of the experience: thought, perception, emotion, desire, and action.
3. Name something positive in the *background* of your awareness right now and use the practice on page 86 to bring it to the *foreground*.

Chapter Six: Creating Positive Experiences

1. Complete the practice on page 92 – "From Idea to Embodied Experience" – and write about and/or discuss your experience with the practice.
2. For one or more of the following, create (Have) a positive experience, and then practice the next two steps of HEAL, Enriching and Absorbing:
 - a. Current Setting
 - b. Recent Events
 - c. Ongoing Conditions
 - d. Your Personal Qualities
 - e. The Past
 - f. The Future
 - g. Sharing Good with Others
 - h. Finding the Good in the Bad
 - i. Caring about Others
 - j. Seeing Good in the Lives of Others
 - k. Imagining Good Facts
 - i. Things That Could Be True
 - ii. Things That Couldn't Be True
3. In what ways do you already practice creating good facts and evoking positive experiences? Write about and/or discuss your methods.

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Chapter Seven: Brain Building

1. What are the benefits of *enriching* an experience?
2. Using a good experience that you brought to mind in one of the previous chapters, or a new one, explore one or more of the following approaches for enriching it:
 - a. Duration
 - b. Intensity
 - c. Multimodality
 - d. Novelty
 - e. Personal Relevance
3. Describe your own personal methods for *absorbing* a good experience. What images or feelings come to mind?
4. Practice the meditation on *Peace, Contentment* and *Love* (p. 121) by yourself or with a partner, and write about and/or discuss your experience.

Chapter Eight: Flowers Pulling Weeds

1. What are one or more examples in which you already do the Link step in HEAL, in which you are aware of both positive and negative material at the same time, and help the positive ease, soothe, and even replace the negative.
2. Are you able to be aware of both positive and negative material at the same time? Practice doing this a few times with something that is strongly positive alongside something that is mildly negative.
3. Talk about your experience of doing the Linking step.
4. Using Table 5 (p. 137) as a guide, identify one or more key “antidote experiences” for yourself.

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Chapter Nine: Good Uses

1. Create your own “Hardwiring Your Happiness” chart and fill in the column headings with the experiences you’d like to take in.
2. Which (if any) blocks do you identify with? Make a list of your blocks and the specific ways you can work with them.
3. Consider a current situation in your life that you would like to be more responsive to rather than reactive to. Imagine, write about, and/or discuss the potential benefits for you of “going green” (the Responsive mode) in this part of your life.

Chapter Ten: 21 Jewels

1. Of the 21 strengths the author names, or thinking of additional ones that he doesn’t name, what are your own “top ten” strengths that you’d most like to reinforce or develop?
2. How are you going to use the 21 Jewels? Practicing one a day for 21 days? Practicing three a day for a week? How are you feeling called to use these strengths in your life?
3. After practicing with one, many, or all of the strengths, write about and/or discuss your experience and how you feel and imagine your life changing as a result.