

3 Things  
Happy People  
Know



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## Are You Happy?

When I was in high school, every student was asked to write what his or her goal was after graduation. Those answers appeared next to their senior photos in the yearbook. Next to most of the smiling faces were words like, “I want to be a teacher,” or “I want to be a business owner.” Mine was, “I want to be happy.”

People like to be happy. That’s why some of us chase after wealth or fame or romance. It’s all in the pursuit of happiness—something our forefathers believed in so strongly they even put it into our Constitution.

But at the age of eighteen, I had a limited knowledge of what happiness was or how to get it. For me, and most of the people I knew, happiness came with the perfect job or the perfect place to live.

Striving for work you love or a wonderful home is a noble quest—one I’ve pursued all my life. But as I studied and researched, I began to learn there were other ways to access happiness—ways that were more enduring and ultimately more important, and those include the 3 things I’ll share with you in this guide.

## What Is Happiness, Anyway?

There’s so much talk about happiness, but what is it, really? I didn’t know or understand the secrets to creating more happiness back in high school when I wrote that goal in my yearbook.

Some experts say that money can’t buy you happiness. While it’s true that having lots of money won’t necessarily make you a happier person, it’s also true that not having enough money can cause you a lot of pain. It’s important to have a roof over your head, food on the table, and good health care. But once you’re doing okay, a new flat screen television might not add much more joy to your life in the long term.

Others say happiness comes from inside us. That makes sense, but what exactly does that mean? And how do you apply that to your life? So many questions.

Let me start by telling you what happiness is *not*. Happiness is not:

- Thinking positive thoughts all the time
- Always feeling joyful
- Never feeling down

You and I both know it’s not possible to feel upbeat all the time. It’s not even desirable. And it’s not even human! So if you’re *not* aiming to morph into the happy face you see on the cover of this guide, then what are you shooting for?



## 3 THINGS HAPPY PEOPLE KNOW

Happy people do lots of different things to feel good, but I've selected three in particular because you can start doing them right away, and they don't require money or lots of time. I'm convinced—from my experience teaching these principles to thousands of students, interviewing people who use them, and using them in my own life--that these 3 strategies make people happier. And there's tons of research to show that's true too.

As I said earlier, if you do these 3 things, you probably won't be skipping through daisy fields with an eternal smile on your face. But they can bring you something that might be even better—a deeper feeling of satisfaction, gratification and contentment, all of which will boost your happiness.

Here are the 3 things happy people know.

### #1 Happy People Enjoy Simple Pleasures

Simple pleasures are all about those experiences that use your five senses. Remember those from biology class? They are: sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell. You're having a pleasurable experience when you use one or more of these senses in a way that makes you feel good.

Happy people know how to create and enjoy pleasurable experiences more than most people because they tune into their senses. When they eat a meal, they eat it slowly and savor each bite instead of checking their emails as they shovel food into their mouths.

To illustrate this point, I gave each of the students in my UCLA class a single candy kiss. With their eyes closed, I asked them to eat the candy slowly, noticing all of their senses, such as the *smell* of the chocolate, the creamy *feeling* of the candy in their mouths and the sweet *taste* of coco that lingered after they finished eating.

When everyone was done, one student shouted out, "That was the best candy kiss I ever had!" Another told me she used the technique to lose a significant amount of weight. Once she learned to savor her food, she realized that she could get the same satisfaction slowly eating one or two cookies that she did when she would quickly eat the whole bag.

So look for ways to heighten the pleasure of the simple things you do everyday by becoming aware of your five senses. Notice the minty smell of your toothpaste as you brush your teeth or the softness of your sheets when you lay your head on your pillow or the sound of the water in your morning shower. Becoming aware of these small moment-to-moment sensations can boost your good feelings and distract you from difficult ones. What sensations can you notice this very minute?



## #2 Happy People Use Their Signature Strengths

The second thing happy people do is they use their *signature strengths* as often as possible. A signature strength is anything you're naturally good at. It's the activities or qualities that come easily to you. These can include: a love of learning, kindness, humor, an appreciation of beauty or the ability to organize things. That's my friend's big strength—organization—which is why all of his books are organized in alphabetical order and by genre.

We all have strengths and the more you use your strengths in your work, your relationships, and your day-to-day life, the happier you'll be. People often ask me, "How do I find my signature strength?"

One clue to your strengths is to look at your childhood. You've probably been using your natural talents since you were a kid, and maybe you don't even know it. For example, my friend, the organizational whiz, started organizing his baseball cards just for fun when he was only a little boy, and over the years he's been drawn to activities that let him use that ability—both personally and professionally—over and over again.

Another woman I know loves to sing. From her earliest memories, she recalls being drawn to music. Her signature strength is her creativity because she gets pleasure not only from playing her music, but also from writing poetry and stories. She loves to create and be expressive. The more she uses this strength in her day-to-day life, the happier she is. And when she doesn't get to be creative, she feels stressed and more easily overwhelmed by life's demands.

So ask yourself, what is the ability that comes naturally and easily to you? Another clue is that time often flies by when you use this ability. This is called *flow*. You may find time fly by when you plant a garden, work on your car, have a great conversation, or solve a difficult problem. Discover your strengths and use them as often as you can.

If you'd like help identifying your natural strengths, you can take a free online assessment of your signature strengths by visiting the University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness website at [www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu). This site is a wonderful resource created by the co-ordinator of the signature strength concept, psychologist Martin Seligman. The test is called the *VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire*. There's also a version for children, which can be an invaluable tool for parents and teachers.

## #3 Happy People Use Their Signature Strengths For A Greater Good

So now you know what your signature strength is, and you're using it as much as you can. But what if you used that strength not just for yourself, but also in service of something greater than yourself? You might use your great people skills to nurture your children or other children. You might use those great organizational abilities to plan a fundraiser for your church or temple. Or you might use your strengths for the greater good in your work. Think of an architect who works only for the prestige or the paycheck. She probably enjoys the money and all that it buys.



### 3 Things Happy People Know

But she'll never be as happy as the architect who also uses her creative talents to bring communities together through design.

That was the case for one man with a high level executive job in advertising. He loved his work because he got to use his signature strengths: curiosity, logic and a desire to make others happy (yes, you can have more than one). But his life satisfaction got a huge boost when he decided to use his signature strengths to make a difference in the world. He travelled to a remote village and used his strengths to help residents build their own homes. The sense of satisfaction he got from using his natural abilities for a greater good was a joy I could see written all over his face.

Using your signature strengths for a greater good need not involve money or long hours or time away from home. You can start with your own family and friends. Help your friend decorate her new home (signature strength: love of beauty), help your child settle an argument with a classmate (signature strength: social intelligence), assist your partner with a difficult problem (signature strength: critical thinking), or cheer up a sick friend (signature strength: humor). How can you use your signature strength for a greater good?

### Now You Know

Think about the 3 things happy people know and how you can use them in your own life:

1. Enjoy simple pleasures
2. Use your signature strengths
3. Use your signature strengths for a greater good

Don't rush to add all three of these into your life at once. Pick the one you find most appealing and start there. And as you savor the simple pleasures in your life, cultivate the best of yourself and offer your gifts to others, don't be surprised if you get happier too.



### 3 Things Happy People Know

#### About The Author

**Dr. Darlene Mininni** is the author of *The Emotional Toolkit* (St Martins Press) and creator of UCLA's undergraduate happiness course, *LifeSkills*.

As a speaker, Darlene's clients have ranged from The Juilliard School to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and her advice has been featured on CNN, PBS, NPR, *SELF*, *Marie Claire*, *Woman's Day*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Prevention*. She is also a contributing writer for Mallika Chopra's *Intent* and *The Daily Love*.

Darlene consults with organizations and also maintains a private mentoring practice dedicated to showing women how to create happy lives by developing their inner wisdom.



#### For more information

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