

## **How to be Happier in 2020**

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There is a wonderful Ted Talk by Shawn Achor that I watched back in 2012 that changed my life called, “The Happy Secret to Better Work”. Shawn studies the science of happiness and human potential and he discussed a study he performed at Harvard University. He was able to identify five small actions that we can take every day to retrain our brains to scan for the positive, which promotes happiness, gratitude and optimism.

Achor discussed how our brains perform better when we are in a positive mindset - “Your brain at positive is 31 percent more productive than your brain at negative, neutral or stressed.” Dopamine, a hormone, floods your brain when you are positive, which makes you happier and turns on the learning centers of your brain. Achor found that happiness and optimism actually fuel performance and achievement.

How can we train our brains to be positive? His study showed that we can retrain our brains in just 21 days by doing five small exercises daily:

1. 3 Gratuities: List three things you are grateful for. This trains the brain to scan for the positives first rather than the negatives. The more you pick up on the positives around you, the better you feel. Get specific. “I’m grateful my daughter visited me today”.
2. Journaling: Journal one positive thing that happened to you in the last 24 hours, so that you relive it. “I was carrying a lot of bags and someone held the door open for me”.
3. Exercise: Get 10 minutes of exercise daily. It improves your mood by releasing pleasure inducing chemicals called endorphins - this

teaches your brain that your behavior matters. Try to walk around the block one time daily.

4. Meditation: Give yourself two minutes of mindful meditation daily. It teaches the brain to quiet down and focus.

5. Random Acts of Kindness: Do one intentional act of kindness every 24 hours. Do something kind for someone else in a deliberate conscious way. Consider shoveling your elderly neighbor's driveway, sending a thankful email to a colleague, or pay the toll of someone behind you on the highway, for example.

Doing these exercises can empower you to be happier, more optimistic and grateful for all that we have. Have a happy 2020 everyone!

*\*Mary Kay sees clients out of the St. Charles office\**