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13 Ways to Instantly Be a More Positive Person

It really *is* possible to change your thinking.

By [Locke Hughes](#) and [Melissa Goldberg](#) Published: Sep 12, 2025 3:41 PM EDT



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Chances are you've probably had someone tell you to "just be positive" or "look on the bright side!" And while they may be well-intentioned, as anyone who has ever been [blindsided by a breakup](#), [taken care of a sick](#)

family member, or **laid off** from work will tell you, that's often an easier said than done scenario.

But here's the thing: Being a positive person may have less to do with staying positive *all* the time and more to do with having a resilient (not to mention realistic) response. "The most helpful definition of being positive is having hope and confidence in one's ability to handle what's tough, along with remembering that nothing is all negative all the time," explains **Jo Eckler, PsyD**, an Austin-based therapist and author of *I Can't Fix You—Because You're Not Broken*.

Instead, she defines positivity as the ability to identify sunnier takeaways or moments of relief from negative situations—which in turn may impact not only your quality of life (studies have shown optimistic individuals tend to have **better mental and physical health**) but also, possibly, your longevity. In fact, **a study published in 2019** found that people with the highest levels of optimism had an 11 to 15 percent longer life span on average than those who practiced little positive thinking.

Even better? If you're naturally prone to cynical thoughts, all is not lost. There are plenty of positive-thinking techniques that can help you train your brain to have a brighter outlook. Ahead, we asked a variety of mental health experts and psychologists to share their best strategies for how to be more positive—from reciting a **motivational affirmation** to spending time outdoors and **practicing gratitude**—all of which may also **make you happier**, healthier, and **more confident**.

Talk to yourself through self-affirmations

According to psychotherapist and certified sex and couples therapist **Lee Phillips**, relying on self-affirmations can help you rewire your brain to feel more positive when you're beating yourself up over a certain experience or situation.

"For example, some of these affirmations may sound like, 'It is okay if I have outgrown certain relationships in my life. It just means the changes and growth in our lives have taken us in different directions,'" says Phillips.

A few more to try that Phillips loves: "I deserve to show up for myself and set a boundary when I am getting frustrated"; "I am doing the best I can right now"; "I am human, and I will make mistakes. It is how I respond and move forward that

matters”; “Rejection is hard, but it just means there is something better waiting for me”; and “I deserve to use my voice and speak up about the things that matter to me.”

To be more positive (and confident!), pick a personal mantra—and repeat it

Similar to self-affirmations, you can choose a mantra that can help define your view of yourself. “We’re often harder on ourselves than we would ever be on someone else, so one trick is to talk to yourself like you would to your best friend,” says [Erin Parisi](#), a licensed mental health counselor in Orlando, Florida.

Yes, it might feel strange at first, but [studies have shown](#) that talking to yourself can influence your thoughts, feelings, and behavior—especially if you’re speaking to yourself in the second or third person (think: “You can get through this” or “Jane can get through this” instead of “I can get through this”).

Still not convinced? To feel more comfortable doing this, try reciting a personal mantra to start your day or when you’re [feeling hopeless](#). It could be anything from an empowering statement (“I’m allowed to take up space” or “I deserve to have joy in my life”) to a popular saying (“It is what it is” or “When one door closes, another one opens”). Or it could even be the words that inspire Oprah: “Everything is always working out for me.’ That’s my mantra—make it yours,” she said during [a 2019 commencement speech](#). Adds Parisi: “Mantras can bring you a smidge of relief and remind you that things will get better, even if they suck right now.”

Then, try to learn from your negative thoughts

Ever found yourself lost in a loop of worry and concern? Maybe you tend to [overanalyze everything](#). Perhaps you’re still churning over that not-so-stellar work presentation last month. That’s what’s known as rumination, a process in which we continually replay or dissect an upsetting event in the past or think about the possibility of negative situations in the future.

The first step is to turn your rumination into a useful problem-solving task: Instead of fixating on the problem itself (for example, “I can’t believe I tanked that job

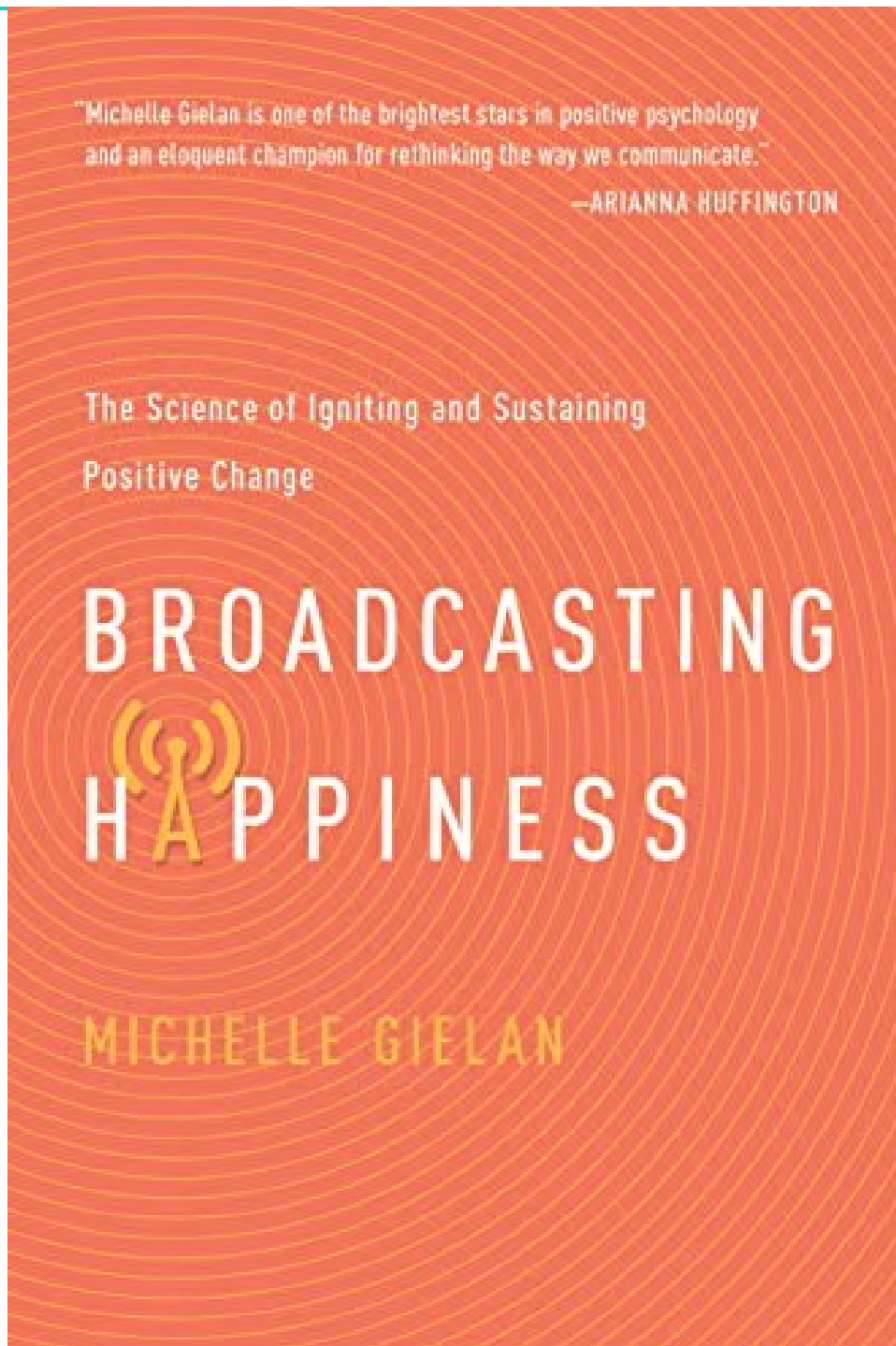
interview!”), focus on the solution (in this case, “What can I do to avoid tanking the *next* job interview?”).

When painful situations do arise, be kind to yourself

One thing we know for sure: You’re bound to encounter some bumps in the road, and that’s just part of being a human on this planet. When you do, cut yourself some slack and allow yourself to feel your emotions—whatever they may be, says Eckler.

Trying to squash your stress or **[grief](#)** is not only unhelpful but can also be harmful. A **[12-year study](#)** conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Rochester found that those who suppressed their emotions were at a higher risk of premature death, while **[a 2017 study](#)** published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* concluded that “individuals who accept rather than judge their mental experiences may attain better psychological health, in part because acceptance helps them experience less negative emotion in response to stressors.”

Broadcasting Happiness



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Start conversations with a positive thought

Words make a big difference not only in terms of how you feel but also in the way others perceive you. “One of the biggest ways we transfer stress is verbally,” explains [Michelle Gielan](#), a happiness researcher and author of the book [Broadcasting Happiness](#). “So jump-starting a conversation with a positive

statement can set a more optimistic tone.” For example, the next time someone at work asks how you are, try saying something lighthearted, like “I just had the best turkey and avocado sandwich for lunch. How’s your day going?” instead of saying, “I’m so stressed and busy!” This will naturally lead the conversation—and your mind—to a more positive place.

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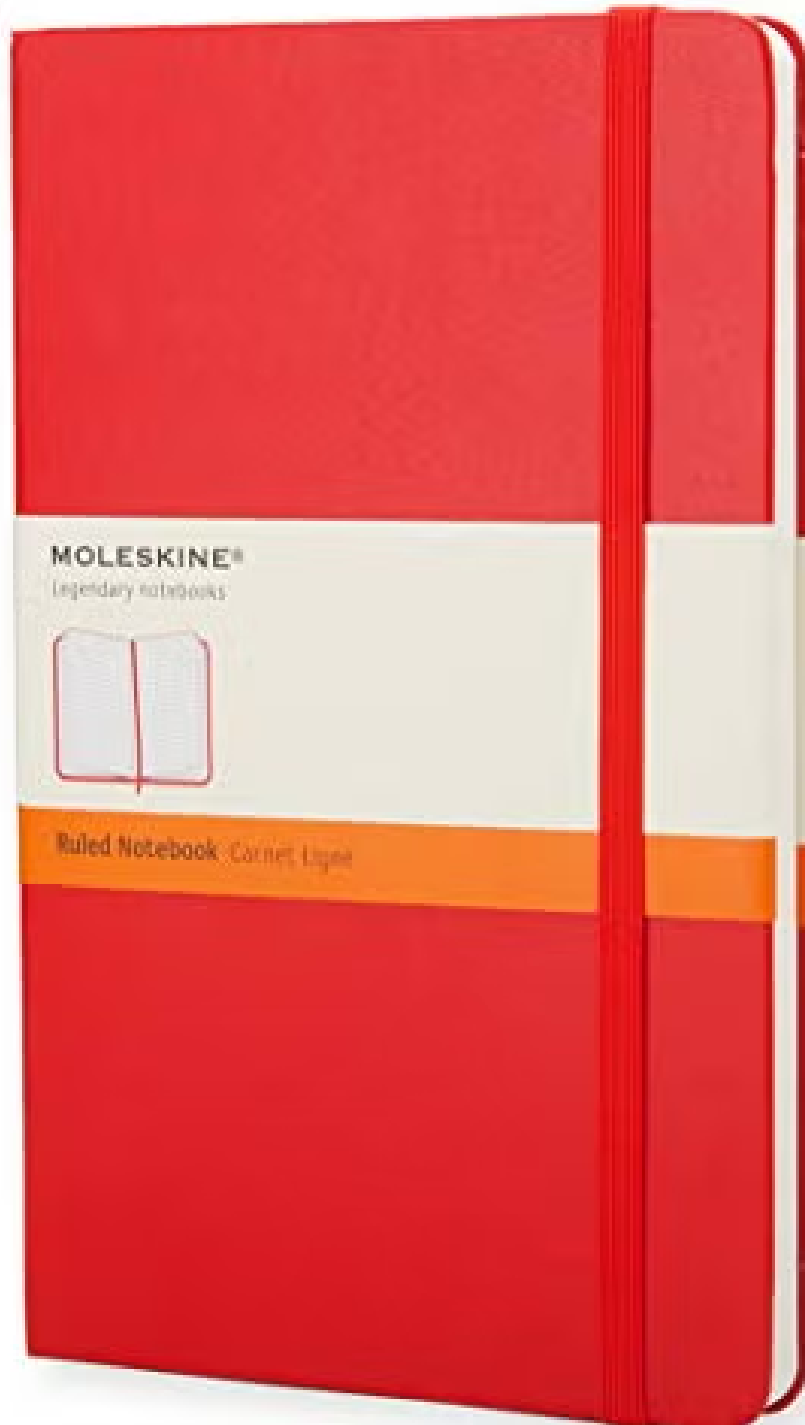
THE ENERGY WE PUT OUT IN THE
WORLD IS THE ENERGY WE GET BACK.

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Not to mention that if you put out positive energy, you might also be more likely to receive it. As Oprah says in [The Wisdom of Sundays](#), “The energy we put out in the world is the energy we get back.” That means if you are continually sending out negative energy—through either your thoughts or feelings—you will attract that same energy back to you, according to Oprah’s Super Soul conversation with [Michael Bernard Beckwith](#). On the flip side, though, if you are able to shift your energy, you’ll also attract more positivity.

Practice gratitude daily

Never underestimate the power of giving thanks. In [a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#), participants were asked to write a few sentences each week—one group wrote about the things they were grateful for, another group wrote about the things that had displeased them, and a third wrote about the events that had affected them with no emphasis on them being positive or negative. After 10 weeks, researchers found that those who kept gratitude journals were happier and more optimistic.



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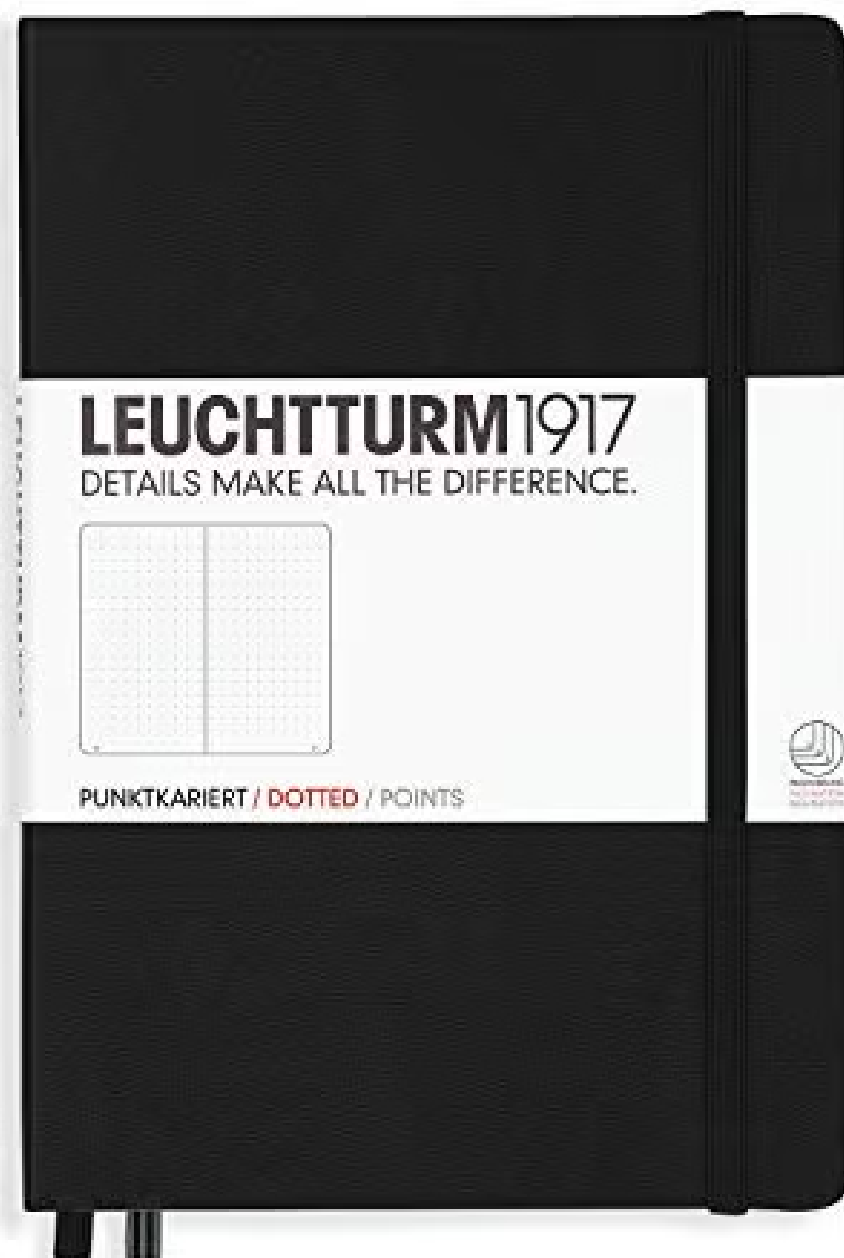
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To try this out yourself, spend five to 10 minutes each night writing down five things you're grateful for—from having a supportive group of friends to the decadent dessert your partner cooked—in a note on your phone, a daily calendar, or a **special notebook**. Additionally, you could try writing a letter to someone who has been particularly kind to you, which has also been **shown to enhance happiness**,

says [Jane Gruber, PhD](#), associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Colorado and director of the Positive Emotion and Psychopathology Laboratory. To take it a step further, expand the cycle of gratitude and kindness by [texting daily positive affirmations](#) to loved ones.

Go outdoors

Spending time in nature [has been](#) shown to boost positive thinking and [reduce stress](#), as well as increase [creativity](#) and [cognition](#). Even better? You don't need to take a half-day hike for nature to work its magic on you. [A 2019 study](#) found that spending 120 minutes a week (or just over 17 minutes per day) exploring your neighborhood or [walking around](#) your local park greatly enhanced a person's overall sense of well-being.

You can also bring the great outdoors indoors by adding [plants to your home and office](#) or even watching [nature scenes on YouTube](#), which has been shown to have similar effects. In one [study](#), people who viewed a stress-inducing film were later exposed to either shots of nature or urban life. The result: Those who spent time taking in Mother Nature's beauty recovered from stress more quickly.

To be more mindful and positive, consider meditation

Meditation won't solve all your problems (it won't pay your bills or take care of that three-foot-tall pile of laundry), but it may help with [stress](#), [anxiety](#), and [sleep issues](#). "Being mindful for just a few minutes a day teaches us that everything changes, making it easier to have hope in dark moments," Eckler explains. "This will also help strengthen your practice of observing—but not always giving into—the negative thoughts your brain likes to conjure."

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PRACTICING MINDFULNESS PLAYS A BIG PART IN BECOMING MORE POSITIVE.

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Not sure where to start? You could read these [six simple tips](#) from [Black Girl in Om](#)'s Lauren Ash or download one of [these meditation apps](#)—or you could follow Oprah's recommendation: "My advice is to start small," she wrote in the August 2016 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*. "When you're in the shower or tub, simply *be* with the water. Appreciate the fragrance of the soap. The other day, I had a moment of transcendence just fully taking in the scent of my shower gel. The pleasure of the warm water and the privilege of cleanliness filled me to the point of tears."

I Can't Fix You-Because You're Not Broken

I CAN'T FIX YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT BROKEN



Eight Keys to Freeing Yourself from
Painful Thoughts and Feelings

JO ECKLER
PSY.D., RYT

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To feel more motivated, try journaling about your “best self”

In addition to jotting down the things that fill you with gratitude, you may also find it helpful to write about your best possible self.

To get started with this writing exercise, grab a journal and start thinking about your life in the future. (Pro tip: It may be helpful to select a specific time period, whether that's six months or five years from now.) Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could, and consider what that might look like in all the relevant areas of your life, including your career, your relationships, and your health. "Once you have that image in mind, take 10 to 15 minutes to write about it in detail, zeroing in on the characteristics you'll need to achieve that ideal," says Eckler.

Give back to others

Volunteering doesn't just benefit the recipient. According to research published in [*the Journal of Happiness Studies*](#), people who had volunteered in the past year were more satisfied with their lives and rated their overall well-being as better than those who didn't volunteer. Not to mention that people who volunteered more frequently experienced greater gains.

That's exactly why Parisi recommends getting involved with a local animal, homeless, or domestic violence shelter, or a nearby school or hospital. "Find the one that's right for you and you'll be routinely face-to-face with problems bigger than your own," she says. If in-person volunteer activities may be too out of your comfort zone, there are plenty of meaningful [virtual volunteer opportunities](#) you can do from your couch. For example: You can provide on-demand linguistic support to refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers via [Tarjimly](#); you can write thoughtful cards to residents of assisted living facilities through [Letters Against Isolation](#); or you can assist visually impaired people with everyday tasks (think: reading an expiration date) via the [Be My Eyes](#) app.

Practice random acts of kindness

Can't commit to a regular [volunteer job](#)? Even [a small act of kindness](#) can have a similarly uplifting effect. In a [study published in the Review of General Psychology](#), researchers asked college students to perform either five acts of kindness a day or five acts of kindness per week over the course of six weeks. "We found that when people carried out three to five acts of kindness a day, they experienced significant increases in happiness," Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD, professor of psychology at the

University of California, Riverside, told us. “And it didn’t have to be a big gesture. It could be almost anything, from giving a friend a ride to letting someone at the grocery store get in line ahead of you.”

Need some more ideas? You could offer to pick up groceries for an elderly neighbor, put a coin in an expired meter, randomly [send flowers](#) to a friend, compliment the first person you speak to each day, [donate blood](#), leave a thank-you note for your mail carrier, run an errand for an extremely busy family member, pay for the cup of coffee of the person behind you in line, or leave a generous tip for a pleasant waiter. “By doing something kind for a stranger, you’re proving to yourself that kindness exists in the world,” Parisi says. “You never know when you’ll be on the receiving end.”

Exercise regularly

[A sweaty workout](#) doesn’t just enhance your athletic performance—it can also [boost your mood](#). In fact, a study published in the [Journal of Happiness Studies](#) found that people who worked out for as little as 10 minutes per week tended to be more cheerful than those who never exercised.

Plus, the link between exercise and greater levels of happiness doesn’t appear to be exercise-specific, meaning you can expect to reap the benefits whether you do [an online workout video](#) or a quick [yoga class](#) while [working from home](#), or run a 5K.

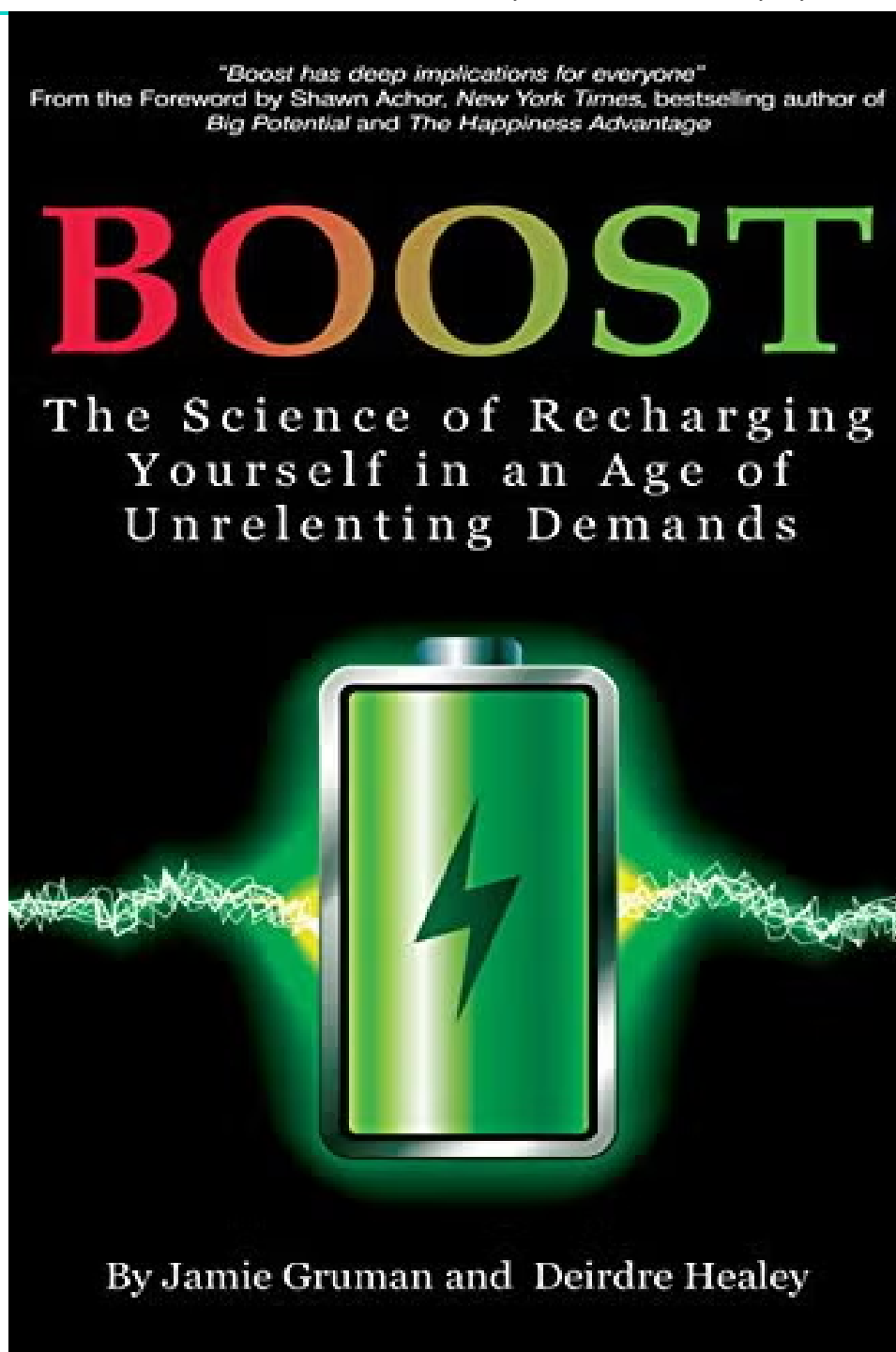
Don’t try so hard!

We realize this might sound like a contradictory point to end on, but according to Jamie Gruman, PhD, professor at the University of Guelph and author of [Boost](#), when people place great pressure on themselves to feel happy, it can actually result in feeling unhappy.

Gruman developed the Need for Happiness Scale, which measures the degree to which people make happiness a priority by presenting them with statements like “Compared to other people, I am more concerned about being happy” and “I tend to think about ways to increase my happiness.” In general, those who scored higher on the Need for Happiness Scale not only felt less satisfied with life but also experienced higher levels of negative emotions.

But there is one caveat. According to Gruman, there are two types of statements included in the Need for Happiness Scale: those that focus on how people think about increasing their happiness and those that focus on the actions people take to make themselves happier. “In our study, the damaging effects of trying to promote happiness were restricted to the items that concerned the thoughts people had about fostering happiness,” he said [in a Psychology Today post](#). “But when we examined only the questions about actions people take to be happy, we found that they actually had beneficial effects, such as promoting life satisfaction and reducing depression.” That means engaging in activities that have been shown to boost happiness (like the ones we’ve listed above) can indeed do just that.

Boost



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Bottom line:

Think of [happiness](#) as a by-product of living an engaged life, Gruman suggests. “Unlike making money, which can be fostered by analyzing one’s finances and trying to develop a plan to improve them, thinking about making ourselves happy can backfire,” he explains. “Don’t think about it so much—just do it.”

“Look at negative thoughts like reruns of a TV show you’ve seen a million times,” Eckler says. “Let them play in the background while you shift your focus to something else.” She adds: “I like to tell my mind, *Thanks for sharing!* in a slightly sarcastic tone to acknowledge the thought. Then I move my attention elsewhere.”



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