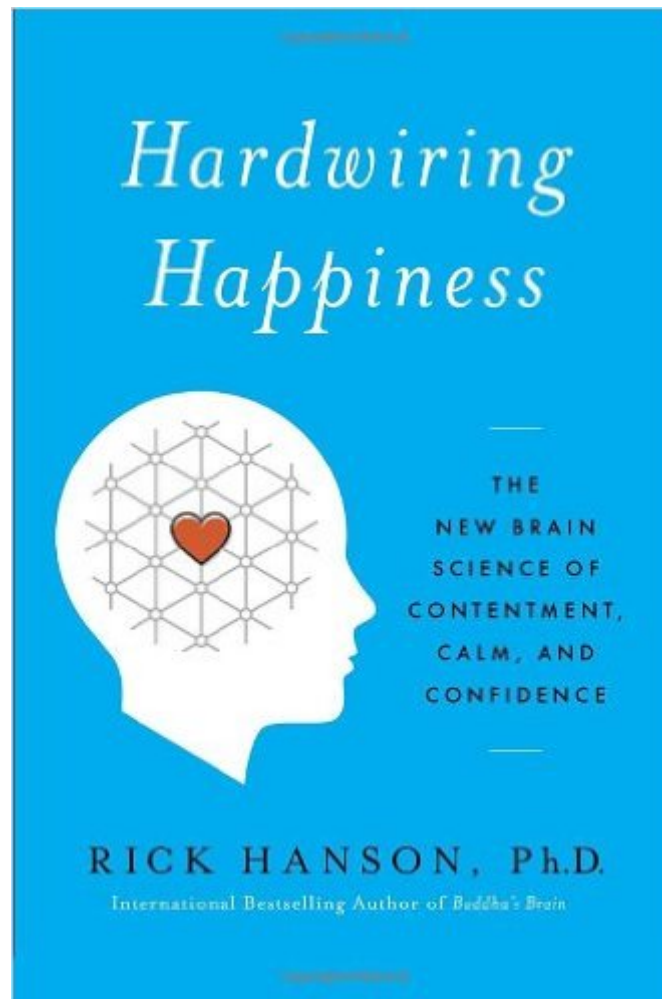


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Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science Of Contentment, Calm, And Confidence



Synopsis

Why is it easier to ruminate over hurt feelings than it is to bask in the warmth of being appreciated? Because your brain evolved to learn quickly from bad experiences but slowly from the good ones. You can change this. Hardwiring Happiness lays out a simple method that uses the hidden power of everyday experiences to build new neural structures full of happiness, love, confidence, and peace. Dr. Hanson's four steps build strengths into your brain, balancing its ancient negativity bias, making contentment and a powerful sense of resilience the new normal. In mere minutes each day, we can transform our brains into refuges and power centers of calm and happiness.

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Customer Reviews

Ever wonder why we live in the most affluent society in the history of the world, and yet so many people are still unhappy? Dr Rick Hanson explains this baffling fact in "Hardwiring Happiness" and offers us some potent remedies for the negativity bias of the human brain. In simple terms, being a little jumpy and fearful had survival value for our ancestors for millions of years. So now, even though no predators roam the range and we're not likely to be bludgeoned by a neighboring tribe, we're the descendants of those nervous souls and our brains still have "Velcro for negativity and Teflon for positivity." Which means that many of us are pointlessly jumpy and stressed. So how do you switch this around so more of the positive sticks and more of the negative slides off? How do we take our brains from reactivity (stressful!) to responsivity (much better)? Here Dr Hanson's book

excels and may be the most practical manual of its genre. His central premise is that good stuff is happening all the time - e.g. you're breathing, heart's beating, sun's shining. All you have to do is take in more of the good. To help us take in the good, he's devised a 4-step protocol with the acronym HEAL: 1) Have a positive experience. 2) Enrich it. 3) Absorb it. Let it really sink in! Now you practice this HEAL protocol on a regular basis, which can take less than a minute. The more you do this, the more you're training your brain to stay in the happy, responsive "green zone" all the time, even in stressful conditions. If that were all I got out of the book, it would already be far more than my money's worth.

Hardwiring Happiness is all about focusing on the little things. It is not, however, just another one of those books telling you "live in the moment" which are so popular these days. Instead, it focuses on events and feelings that you can pay attention to in order to build up the inner strength you need to face specific challenges. By focusing on positive experiences, you help yourself remember positive feelings more strongly, despite our brain naturally remembering negative experiences better. At times this book reads like a piece of fluff. It's rooted a lot in the author's own experience and clearly had the illustrative stories I think are so important in self-help books. It was less clear that the author was going to offer actionable advice or back his claims up with science. Initially, a lot of the advice sounded kind of new-agey and silly to me. Fortunately, the author includes explicit directions for performing exercises that will help you feel better about specific challenges. Even better, for me, they worked! For instance, I sometimes feel stressed about running late, so the other day when I was early, I took a moment to savor being on top of things. When I woke up the next morning feeling like I should be somewhere already, I was able to remember the feeling of being on top of things and relax. It might sound silly, but I really think I'm already feeling happier as a result of this and several other little practices from the book. In terms of scientific backing, I think the author used a paraphrase of "research has shown" maybe twice in the whole book. He is well credentialed and does eventually get into some of the interesting theories of evolution of the brain underlying his ideas. He also occasionally mentioned other credible sources that influenced his theories.

I read Rick Hanson's book Buddha's Brain and enjoyed that, I've read some of his online articles, and I listened to some of the unabridged audio of Hardwiring Happiness (a gift) before getting an uncorrected proof of the book for review purposes. I really like Hanson's approach to the subject matter of happiness and the brain (and I generally prefer hard copies of books to audio and digital copies, so I'm really glad I have a hard copy of Hardwiring Happiness). I've always tended to be a

"glass is half empty" kind of person, and I've always rationalized that by saying that I'm "realistic." I thus created a false dilemma for myself, where one is either realistic and has a rather dark albeit "realistic" vision of the world, or is happy at the expense of seeing things clearly. It was as if I believed that there's a necessary correlation between happiness and seeing the world through rose-colored glasses. While it's true that some people who seem happy may indeed see the world through rose-colored glasses, it doesn't follow that happiness requires seeing the world in a distorted way. But I seemed to believe otherwise until I became exposed to material like what Hanson writes about (and after studying philosophy of mind and hopefully getting a better understanding of the relationship between mind and brain). Rick Hanson gently and without any flaky "new agey" overtones shows clearly that it's eminently realistic to understand and practice happiness as he explains and possible for even "glass is half empty" types to be happy.

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