

The Art and Science of Happiness Study Guide



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Introduction

Summary:

In the introductory session to “The Art and Science of Happiness,” Professor Arthur C. Brooks explains why studying happiness is essential. He highlights how happiness leads to success, better leadership, and improved relationships. While happiness may not come naturally, it can (and should) be learned through practice. The video series will cover various topics, including understanding happiness vs. unhappiness, managing emotions, building enduring relationships with people, the concepts of money, power and prestige, as well as how to create a strategic plan for long-term happiness.

Main Ideas:

1. Studying happiness is crucial because it leads to success and better leadership. Compare this to conventional thinking that says success leads to happiness.
2. Happiness can be learned through practice and understanding the science of happiness.
3. The video series will cover topics like defining happiness vs. unhappiness, managing emotions, building better relationships, and creating a strategic plan for lasting happiness.

Introduction

Questions:

Why and how does happiness lead to success?

How does Professor Brooks compare learning happiness to learning mathematics?

What topics interest you the most in this video series?

Session 1: What is Happiness?

Summary:

So what exactly is happiness? In Session 1, Professor Brooks introduces the concept of happiness and shares his own journey toward studying the science of it. He challenges the common misconception that happiness is merely a feeling and explains that it consists of three main elements: enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose. He emphasizes the importance of understanding happiness, practicing habits that promote happiness, and sharing these ideas with others to achieve a more fulfilled and meaningful life.

Main Ideas:

1. Happiness is often misunderstood as a fleeting feeling, but it consists of three essential elements: enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose.
2. You have to work at happiness.
3. Happiness is determined by three things: genetics (50%), circumstances (25%), and habits (25%).
4. Teaching happiness to others enhances your own happiness.
5. Your happiness portfolio comprises four key aspects: faith, family, friendships, and work (with earned success and service to others).

Session 1: What is Happiness?

Questions:

What are the three macronutrients that make up happiness?

How does Professor Brooks emphasize the importance of habits in achieving lasting happiness?

What are the four key aspects of the happiness portfolio, and why are they crucial for a fulfilling life?

Session 2: Happiness vs. Unhappiness

Summary:

What if your thinking about happiness and unhappiness is all wrong? Session 2 discusses the difference between happiness and unhappiness, emphasizing that they are not opposites like most people think. Professor Brooks explains how modern neuroscientific research suggests that happy feelings predominantly come from the left side of the brain, while unhappy feelings come from the right side. He also explores the concept of the Duchenne smile, which reveals the elements of genuine human happiness. Additionally, the session covers the sources of unhappiness, including mental illness, blockages in sources of happiness, and daily aggravations. Finally, Professor Brooks introduces the concept of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) survey, which helps individuals understand their unique blend of positive and negative emotions.

Main Ideas:

1. Happiness and unhappiness are not opposites.
2. Modern neuroscientific research suggests that happy feelings predominantly come from the left side of the brain, while unhappy feelings come from the right side.
3. The Duchenne smile, associated with authentic happiness, involves specific muscle activity in the face.
4. Sources of unhappiness include mental illness, blockages in sources of happiness (faith, family, friends, and work), and daily aggravations.
5. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) survey helps individuals understand their unique blend of positive and negative emotions.

Session 2: Happiness vs. Unhappiness

Questions:

Why do we need both happiness and unhappiness in our lives?

What did Duchenne's research reveal about smiles and genuine human happiness?

What are the four types of people described in the PANAS survey, based on their levels of positive and negative emotions?

Session 3: Emotional Self-Regulation

Summary:

In Session 3, we explore the topic of emotional self-regulation and how to effectively manage negative emotions. Professor Brooks begins by explaining that emotions are necessary for survival, but they should not rule us. This session also examines the basic theories explaining human unhappiness, and introduces the concept of metacognition—the awareness of our own thinking—as the most powerful technique for emotional self-management. Metacognition allows us to move the experience of emotions from the limbic system (primitive part of the brain) to the prefrontal cortex (executive center), empowering us to decide how to react to our emotions. Additionally, the session touches on how physical and emotional pain are processed in the brain and how over-the-counter pain relievers can influence the effective component of pain.

Main Ideas:

1. Emotions are natural and serve essential functions like survival and learning.
2. Human unhappiness can be explained by the mismatch theory, distress as a vital survival mechanism, and the idea that nature doesn't prioritize our happiness.
3. Emotional self-management is crucial for personal growth and well-being, and metacognition is the key technique to achieve it.

Session 3: Emotional Self-Regulation

Questions:

What are the three basic theories explaining human unhappiness?

How would you describe the idea of metacognition, and how does it separate us from animals?

What affect can over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen have on our emotions and empathy?

Session 4: Work-Family Balance

Summary:

Work-life balance is something humans have been striving to regulate for generations. Session 4 explores the importance of balancing work and family to achieve maximum happiness. The session begins with the recognition that many ambitious individuals may overemphasize work in their happiness portfolio. The detrimental effects of overworking on family relationships are explored, emphasizing the need for intentional management of these relationships. The concept of workaholism and its impact on family life are also discussed, along with the importance of intrinsic goals in achieving long-term happiness. The session encourages self-reflection and strategic planning to ensure a balanced happiness portfolio.

Main Ideas:

1. Family relationships require intentional management and cannot be assumed to self-manage.
2. Workaholism, driven by the pursuit of success and external rewards, can harm personal relationships.
3. Success addicts may prioritize extrinsic goals over intrinsic rewards and jeopardize their happiness.
4. Intrinsic goals centered around love, family, and friendship are vital for long-term happiness.
5. Balancing work and family requires strategic planning and equal attention to both areas.

Session 4: Work-Family Balance

Questions:

What does your happiness portfolio currently look like?

Why is it essential to manage family relationships actively, and what happens if they are left unattended?

How does success addiction (workaholism) affect your relationships and overall happiness?

Session 5: Friendships & Romantic Relationships

Summary:

In Session 5, Professor Brooks discusses the topic of romantic love and friendships in the context of happiness. He explores the neurophysiological aspects of falling in love, the different types of love according to the ancient Greeks, and the importance of understanding love beyond just feelings. He also highlights the significance of companionate love in long-term relationships and the value of complementarity over compatibility. Additionally, he emphasizes the need for real friendships and the potential loneliness that can arise from having only utilitarian "deal" friends.

Main Ideas:

1. Romantic love involves a neurochemical cascade, including attraction, anticipation, euphoria, and infatuation, driven by hormones like dopamine, norepinephrine, and oxytocin.
2. Love should transcend feelings and be based on commitment.
3. Companionate love, marked by deep friendship and oxytocin-rich bonding, is the goal of stable long-term relationships.
4. Complementarity, rather than excessive compatibility, fosters ongoing attraction in relationships.
5. Aristotle's three levels of friendship are: utility-based, pleasure-based, and perfect friendships based on love for a common goal.
6. Many leaders have only utilitarian "deal" friends, leading to loneliness and isolation. They lack "real" friends, which can be described as "useless" because they're not transactional.

Session 5: Friendships & Romantic Relationships

Questions:

Why should love not be based on feelings?

What is the benefit of being in a complimentary romantic relationship over one focused mainly on compatibility?

How does having only utilitarian "deal" friends affect a person's sense of loneliness, especially in leadership roles?

Session 6: Money, Success, Happiness

Summary:

Culture today is filled with conversations on money. Increasingly, though, people are learning that money and happiness are not intrinsically related. Session 6 explores the complex relationship between money and happiness, delving into the concept of materialism and how it can affect our well-being. The session also introduces the four "idols," or worldly distractions: money, power, pleasure, and honor/prestige. It discusses research on the correlation between money and happiness, highlighting that while money may alleviate unhappiness, it doesn't necessarily lead to lasting happiness. The session then suggests ways to spend money that can genuinely enhance well-being, such as investing in experiences, buying time, and giving to others. Finally, the session concludes with the "Maranasati" meditation that can be used to confront the fear of failure that often underlies materialism.

Main Ideas:

1. Money and happiness have a complex relationship, and materialism can affect our well-being.
2. The four "idols," or worldly distractions, that seduce people are: money, power, pleasure, and honor/prestige.
3. Research shows that while money can alleviate unhappiness, it doesn't necessarily lead to lasting happiness.
4. Spending money on experiences, "buying time," and giving to others can bring authentic and lasting happiness.
5. The fear of failure often underlies materialism, and the "Maranasati" meditation can help confront and overcome this fear.

Session 6: Money, Success, Happiness

Questions:

Which of the four idols to you struggle with the most?

What is the difference between increasing happiness and decreasing unhappiness?

How can money actually "buy" happiness?

Session 7: Power and Prestige

Summary:

Social media has created a world of instant comparison. Session 7 discusses the dangers of social comparison and the pursuit of prestige in the quest for happiness. It explores the neuroscience behind social comparison, the negative effects of envy, and how social media exacerbates these issues. The goal is to understand social comparison without being controlled by it and to focus on inner happiness as the path to success.

Main Ideas:

1. Social comparison and the pursuit of prestige can lead to unhappiness and envy.
2. Evolutionary factors drive our need for social comparison to establish social standing.
3. Envy is a painful emotion that arises from unfavorable social comparison.
4. Social media can intensify feelings of inadequacy due to unrealistic comparisons.
5. To avoid the negative effects of social comparison, one should limit exposure to competitive environments, especially on social media.
6. True success comes from finding inner happiness first.

Session 7: Power and Prestige

Questions:

Why is social comparison considered a curse, especially for ambitious individuals?

How does social media contribute to feelings of inadequacy and social comparison?

What is the relationship between happiness and success according to the video?

Session 8: Finding Meaning & Purpose

Summary:

For as long as humans have been alive they have been searching for the meaning of life. In Session 8, we explore the concept of meaning in life and its significance for happiness. Meaning is one of the core elements of happiness, alongside enjoyment and satisfaction. Philosophers and social scientists have broken down the concept of meaning into three subcategories: coherence, purpose, and significance. Coherence deals with understanding why things happen and finding patterns in life. Purpose involves identifying the direction and goals in life, and answering the question of what you were created to do. Significance pertains to whether one's life matters and to whom it matters. Professor Brooks relates this to our career paths, which can take on many patterns. Ultimately, the pursuit of meaning requires self-discovery and discernment, and it can be achieved through concentrated meditation and contemplation.

Main Ideas:

1. Meaning is a crucial component of happiness, and it consists of coherence, purpose, and significance.
2. Coherence involves understanding why things happen and finding patterns. Purpose is about identifying the direction and goals in life, answering the question of what one is alive to do. Significance pertains to whether one's life matters and to whom it matters.
3. Pursuing meaning requires self-discovery and discernment.
4. There are different career path patterns: linear, expert, transitory, and spiral.
5. Understanding your career path pattern helps in finding your passion and purpose.

Session 8: Finding Meaning & Purpose

Questions:

How would you define the meaning of your life?

How can the paradox of choice affect one's passion and purpose in a career?

What are the four different career path patterns discussed in the video, and how can understanding them help in finding one's passion and purpose?

Session 9: Your Changing Strengths

Summary:

As we mature, our strengths change. In Session 9, Professor Brooks discusses the concept of going from strength to strength in life by embracing changing strengths and characteristics. He explains the transition from fluid intelligence, which tends to peak in one's late 30s or early 40s, to crystallized intelligence, which becomes more valuable and continues to increase as one gets older. He encourages students to understand and accept the natural process of change and shares three key insights for embracing change and finding greater happiness as they age.

Main Ideas:

1. Fluid intelligence – the ability to innovate, focus, and solve problems – tends to peak in one's 30s and 40s and then decline. However, as fluid intelligence declines, crystallized intelligence, which involves wisdom, teaching, and recognizing patterns, increases and remains high into old age.
2. Change is a normal part of life, and resisting it stems from evolutionary survival instincts. However, embracing change and understanding its natural lecan lead to greater happiness and growth.
3. As people age and become more successful, they should focus on subtracting clutter from their lives rather than constantly adding new things. By letting go of attachments to materialistic desires, they can find their true selves and achieve greater happiness.
4. The happiest and most successful individuals value love and prioritize building strong and functional relationships with family, friends, and partners.

Session 9: Your Changing Strengths

Questions:

How have you seen your strengths change as you have gotten older?

Why do many people struggle with embracing change as they grow older, and how can they become more comfortable with it?

What is the "chipping away" exercise, and how does it relate to revealing one's true self?

Session 10: Your Happiness 401(k) Plan

Summary:

In the tenth and final session, Professor Brooks discusses the investment strategy for increasing happiness as we get older. He presents data on how happiness and unhappiness change with age and explains that unhappiness tends to decrease as people get older due to increased emotional resilience and better emotional management. Research shows happiness takes a U-shaped curve, dipping in middle age and then increasing again as people enter their 50s and beyond. Professor Brooks highlights the importance of understanding the right formula for happiness, which involves focusing on faith, family, friendship, and meaningful work rather than pursuing material possessions or comparing oneself to others. He presents seven key investments for greater happiness in life, which include avoiding harmful habits, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, engaging in adaptive coping, continuous learning, and, most importantly, fostering loving relationships.

Main Ideas:

1. Unhappiness tends to decrease with age due to increased emotional resilience and better emotional management.
2. Happiness shows a U-shaped curve, declining in middle age and then increasing again in the 50s and beyond.
3. The right formula for happiness involves focusing on faith, family, friendship, and meaningful work rather than material possessions or comparisons with others.
4. Seven key investments for greater happiness include avoiding harmful habits, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, engaging in adaptive coping, continuous learning, and fostering loving relationships.

Session 10: Your Happiness 401(k) Plan

Questions:

How can you decrease your unhappiness as you age?

What is the right formula for happiness?

In evaluating your own life, which of the seven key investments do you need to focus on most right now?
