

The Happiness Advantage

The Seven Principles that Fuel Success
and Performance at Work



Shawn Achor

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About the Book

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Conventional wisdom holds that if we work hard we will be more successful, and if we are more successful, then we'll be happy. If we can just find that great job, win that next promotion, happiness will follow. But recent discoveries in the field of positive psychology show that this formula is actually backward: happiness fuels success, not the other way around. It is when we are positive that our brains become more engaged, creative, motivated and productive.

The Happiness Advantage is a must-read for anyone trying to excel in a world of increasing workloads, stress, and negativity. Using stories and case studies from his work with thousands of Fortune 500 executives worldwide, Shawn Achor explains how we can become more positive in order to gain a competitive edge. He isolates seven practical principles that have been repeatedly borne out by rigorous research in management, psychology and neuroscience, and in one of the largest studies of happiness and potential ever conducted. These principles show us how we can capitalise on the Happiness Advantage to not only maximise our potential at work, but also to maintain a more positive mindset about all aspects of our lives.

About the Author

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SHAWN ACHOR is one of the world's leading experts on human potential, having researched and lectured in forty-two countries working to bridge the gap between the science of happiness and performance in our everyday lives. Trained by some of the pioneers in the field of positive psychology, he served as the head teaching fellow to help design and teach the famed "happiness" course, the most popular at Harvard at the time. He now serves as the founder and CEO of Aspirant, a research and consulting firm that uses positive psychology to enhance individual achievement and cultivate a more productive workplace. Achor's lectures on the science of happiness and human potential have received attention in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, and *Wall Street Journal* and on CNN and NPR. Shawn Achor lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Happiness Advantage

The Seven Principles that Fuel Success
and Performance at Work

Shawn Achor



To my parents, both teachers,
who have dedicated their lives to the belief that we can all
shine brighter

PART 1

**POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY
AT WORK**

INTRODUCTION

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IF YOU OBSERVE the people around you, you'll find most individuals follow a formula that has been subtly or not so subtly taught to them by their schools, their company, their parents, or society. That is: If you work hard, you will become successful, and once you become successful, *then* you'll be happy. This pattern of belief explains what most often motivates us in life. We think: If I just get that raise, or hit that next sales target, I'll be happy. If I can just get that next good grade, I'll be happy. If I lose that five pounds, I'll be happy. And so on. Success first, happiness second.

The only problem is that this formula is broken.

If success causes happiness, then every employee who gets a promotion, every student who receives an acceptance letter, everyone who has ever accomplished a goal of any kind should be happy. But with each victory, our goalposts of success keep getting pushed further and further out, so that happiness gets pushed over the horizon.

Even more important, the formula is broken because it is backward. More than a decade of groundbreaking research in the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience has proven in no uncertain terms that the relationship between success and happiness works the other way around. Thanks to this cutting-edge science, we now know that happiness is the precursor to success, not merely the result. And that happiness and optimism

actually *fuel* performance and achievement—giving us the competitive edge that I call the Happiness Advantage.

Waiting to be happy limits our brain's potential for success, whereas cultivating positive brains makes us more motivated, efficient, resilient, creative, and productive, which drives performance upward. This discovery has been confirmed by thousands of scientific studies and in my own work and research on 1,600 Harvard students and dozens of Fortune 500 companies worldwide. In this book, you will learn not only why the Happiness Advantage is so powerful, but how you can use it on a daily basis to increase your success at work. But I'm getting excited and jumping ahead of myself. I begin this book where I began my research, at Harvard, where the Happiness Advantage was born.

DISCOVERING THE HAPPINESS ADVANTAGE

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I APPLIED TO Harvard on a dare.

I was raised in Waco, Texas, and never really expected to leave. Even as I was applying to Harvard, I was setting down roots and training to be a local volunteer firefighter. For me, Harvard was a place from the movies, the place mothers joke about their kids going to when they grow up. The chances of actually getting in were infinitesimally small. I told myself I'd be happy just to tell my kids someday, offhandedly at dinner, that I had even *applied* to Harvard. (I imagined my imaginary children being quite impressed.)

When I unexpectedly got accepted, I felt thrilled and humbled by the privilege. I wanted to do the opportunity justice. So I went to Harvard, and I stayed ... for the next twelve years.

When I left Waco, I had been out of Texas four times and never out of the country (though Texans consider anything out of Texas foreign travel). But as soon as I stepped out of the T in Cambridge and into Harvard Yard, I fell in love. So after getting my BA, I found a way to stay. I went to grad school, taught sections in sixteen different courses, and then began delivering lectures. As I pursued my graduate studies, I also became a Proctor, an officer of Harvard hired to live in residence with undergraduates to help them navigate the difficult path to both academic success and happiness within the Ivory Tower. This effectively meant

that I lived in a college dorm for a total of 12 years of my life (not a fact I brought up on first dates).

I tell you this for two reasons. First, because I saw Harvard as such a privilege, it fundamentally changed the way my brain processed my experience. I felt grateful for every moment, even in the midst of stress, exams, and blizzards (something else I had only seen in the movies). Second, my 12 years teaching in the classrooms and living in the dorms afforded me a comprehensive view of how thousands of other Harvard students advanced through the stresses and challenges of their college years. That's when I began noticing the patterns.

PARADISE LOST AND FOUND

Around the time that Harvard was founded, John Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost*, "The Mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

Three hundred years later, I observed this principle come to life. Many of my students saw Harvard as a privilege, but others quickly lost sight of that reality and focused only on the workload, the competition, the stress. They fretted incessantly about their future, despite the fact that they were earning a degree that would open so many doors. They felt overwhelmed by every small setback instead of energized by the possibilities in front of them. And after watching enough of those students struggle to make their way through, something dawned on me. Not only were these students the ones who seemed most susceptible to stress and depression, they were the ones whose grades and academic performance were suffering the most.

Years later, in the fall of 2009, I was invited to go on a month-long speaking tour throughout Africa. During the trip, a CEO from South Africa named Salim took me to

Soweto, a township just outside of Johannesburg that many inspiring people, including Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, have called their home.

We visited a school next to a shantytown where there was no electricity and scarce running water. Only when I was in front of the children did it dawn on me that none of the stories I normally use in my talks would work. Sharing the research and experiences of privileged American college students and wealthy, powerful business leaders seemed inappropriate. So I tried to open a dialogue. Struggling for points of common experience, I asked in a very clearly tongue-in-cheek tone, “Who here likes to do school-work?” I thought the seemingly universal distaste for school-work would bond us together. But to my shock, 95 percent of the children raised their hands and started smiling genuinely and enthusiastically.

Afterward, I jokingly asked Salim why the children of Soweto were so weird. “They see schoolwork as a privilege,” he replied, “one that many of their parents did not have.” When I returned to Harvard two weeks later, I saw students complaining about the very thing the Soweto students saw as a privilege. I started to realize just how much our interpretation of reality changes our experience of that reality. The students who were so focused on the stress and the pressure—the ones who saw learning as a chore—were missing out on all the opportunities right in front of them. But those who saw attending Harvard as a privilege seemed to shine even brighter. Almost unconsciously at first, and then with ever-increasing interest, I became fascinated with what caused those high potential individuals to develop a positive mindset to excel, especially in such a competitive environment. And likewise, what caused those who succumbed to the pressure to fail—or stay stuck in a negative or neutral position.

RESEARCHING HAPPINESS AT HOGWARTS

For me, Harvard remains a magical place, even after twelve years. When I invite friends from Texas to visit, they claim that eating in the freshman dining hall is like being at Hogwarts, Harry Potter's fantastical school of magic. Add in the other beautiful buildings, the university's abundant resources, and the seemingly endless opportunities it offers, and my friends often end up asking, "Shawn, why would you waste your time studying happiness at Harvard? Seriously, what does a Harvard student possibly have to be *unhappy* about?"

In Milton's time, Harvard had a motto that reflected the school's religious roots: *Veritas, Christo et Ecclesiae* (Truth, for Christ and the Church). For many years now, that motto has been truncated to a single word: *Veritas*, or just truth. There are now many truths at Harvard, and one of them is that despite all its magnificent facilities, a wonderful faculty, and a student body made up of some of America's (and the world's) best and brightest, it is home to many chronically unhappy young men and women. In 2004, for instance, a *Harvard Crimson* poll found that as many as 4 in 5 Harvard students suffer from depression at least once during the school year, and nearly half of all students suffer from depression so debilitating they can't function.^{[1](#)}

This unhappiness epidemic is not unique to Harvard. A Conference Board survey released in January of 2010 found that only 45 percent of workers surveyed were happy at their jobs, the lowest in 22 years of polling.^{[2](#)} Depression rates today are ten times higher than they were in 1960.^{[3](#)} Every year the age threshold of unhappiness sinks lower, not just at universities but across the nation. Fifty years ago, the mean onset age of depression was 29.5 years old. Today, it is almost exactly half that: 14.5 years old. My

friends wanted to know, Why study happiness at Harvard? The question I asked in response was: Why *not* start there?

So I set out to find the students, those 1 in 5 who were truly flourishing—the individuals who were above the curve in terms of their happiness, performance, achievement, productivity, humor, energy, or resilience—to see what exactly was giving them such an advantage over their peers. What was it that allowed these people to escape the gravitational pull of the norm? Could patterns be teased out of their lives and experience to help others in all walks of life to be more successful in an increasingly stressful and negative world? As it turns out, they could.

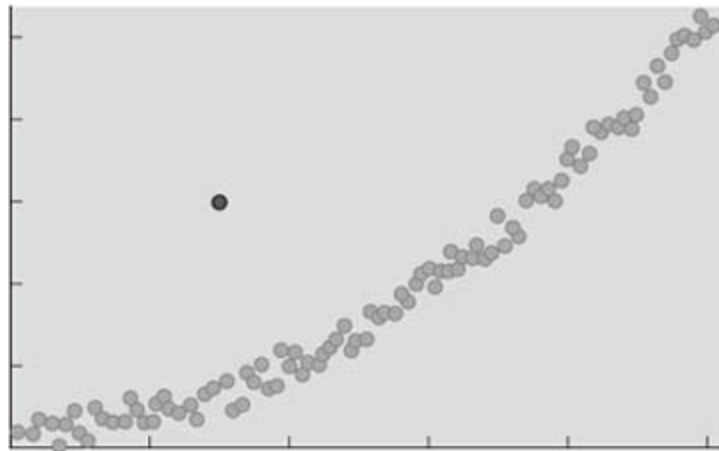
Scientific discovery is a lot about timing and luck. I serendipitously found three mentors—Harvard professors Phil Stone, Ellen Langer, and Tal Ben-Shahar—who happened to be at the vanguard of a brand new field called positive psychology. Breaking with traditional psychology's focus on what makes people *unhappy* and how they can return to "normal," these three were applying the same scientific rigor to what makes people thrive and excel—the very same questions I wanted to answer.

ESCAPING THE CULT OF THE AVERAGE

The graph below may seem boring, but it is the very reason I wake up excited every morning. (Clearly, I live a very exciting life.) It is also the basis of the research underlying this book.

This is a scatter-plot diagram. Each dot represents an individual, and each axis represents some variable. This particular diagram could be plotting anything: weight in relation to height, sleep in relation to energy, happiness in relation to success, and so on. If we got this data back as researchers, we would be thrilled because very clearly there is a trend going on here, and that means that we can

get published, which in the academic world is all that really matters. The fact that there is one weird red dot—what we call an outlier—up above the curve is no problem. It's no problem because we can just delete it. We can delete it because it's clearly a measurement error—and we know that it's an error because it's screwing up our data.



One of the very first things students in intro psychology, statistics, or economics courses learn is how to “clean up the data.” If you are interested in observing the general trend of what you are researching, then outliers mess up your findings. That’s why there exist countless formulas and statistics packages to help enterprising researchers eliminate these “problems.” And to be clear, this is not cheating; these are statistically valid procedures—if, that is, one is interested only in the general trend. I am not.

The typical approach to understanding human behavior has always been to look for the average behavior or outcome. But in my view this misguided approach has created what I call the “cult of the average” in the behavioral sciences. If someone asks a question such as “How fast can a child learn how to read in a classroom?” science changes that question to “How fast does the *average* child learn to read in the classroom?” We then ignore the children who read faster or slower, and tailor the

classroom toward the “average” child. This is what Tal Ben-Shahar calls “the error of the average.” That’s the first mistake traditional psychology makes.

If we study merely what is average, we will remain merely average.

Conventional psychology consciously ignores outliers because they don’t fit the pattern. I’ve sought to do the opposite: Instead of deleting these outliers, I want to learn from them. (This concept was originally described by Abraham Maslow as he explains the need to study the growing tip of the curve.)

TOO FOCUSED ON THE NEGATIVE

True, there are psychology researchers out there who don’t just study what is average. They tend to focus on those who fall only on one side of average—below it. According to Ben-Shahar in *Happier*, this is the second mistake traditional psychology makes. Of course, the people who fall below normal are the ones who tend to need the most help—to be relieved of depression or alcohol abuse or chronic stress. As a result, psychologists understandably have spent considerable effort studying how they can help these people recover and get back to normal. Valuable as such work is, it still only yields half the picture.

You can eliminate depression without making someone happy. You can cure anxiety without teaching someone optimism. You can return someone to work without improving their job performance. If all you strive for is diminishing the bad, you’ll only attain the average and you’ll miss out entirely on the opportunity to exceed the average.

You can study gravity forever without learning how to fly.

Extraordinarily, as late as 1998, there was a 17-to-1 negative-to-positive ratio of research in the field of psychology. In other words, for every one study about happiness and thriving there were 17 studies on depression and disorder. This is very telling. As a society, we know very well how to be unwell and miserable and so little about how to thrive.

A few years back, one event in particular really drove this home for me. I had been asked to speak at the “Wellness Week” at one of the most elite New England boarding schools. The topics to be discussed: Monday, eating disorders; Tuesday, depression; Wednesday, drugs and violence; Thursday, risky sex; and Friday, who knew? That’s not a wellness week; that’s a sickness week.

This pattern of focusing on the negative pervades not only our research and schools but our society. Turn on the news, and the majority of airtime is spent on accidents, corruption, murders, abuse. This focus on the negative tricks our brains into believing that this sorry ratio is reality, that most of life is negative. Ever heard of Medical School Syndrome? In the first year of medical school, as students listen to all the diseases and symptoms that can befall a person, many aspiring doctors become suddenly convinced that they have come down with ALL of them. A few years ago, my brother-in-law called me from Yale Medical School and told me that he had “leprosy” (which even at Yale is extremely rare). But I had no idea how to console him because he had just gotten over a week of menopause and was very sensitive. The point is, as we will see throughout this book, what we spend our time and mental energy focusing on can indeed become our reality.

It is not healthy nor scientifically responsible only to study the negative half of human experience. In 1998, Martin Seligman, then president of the American Psychological Association, announced that it was finally time to shift the traditional approach to psychology and start to focus more on the positive side of the curve. That we needed to study what works, not just what is broken. Thus, “positive psychology” was born.

GOING HUNGRY AT HARVARD

In 2006, Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar asked if I would serve as his head teaching fellow to help design and teach a course called Positive Psychology. Tal was not yet internationally well-known; his best-selling book *Happier* wouldn't be published until the following spring. Under the circumstances, we thought we'd be lucky to lure in a hundred undergraduates brave enough to risk a hit on their transcripts by foregoing a credit in, say, advanced economic theory for one in happiness.

Over the next two semesters, nearly 1,200 Harvard students enrolled in the class—that's one in every six students at one of the most hard-driving universities in the world. We quickly began to realize that these students were there because they were hungry. They were starving to be happier, not sometime in the future, but in the present. And they were there because despite all the advantages they enjoyed, they still felt unfulfilled.

Take a moment to imagine one of these students: By age one, many were lying in their cribs wearing a onesie saying “Bound for Harvard” or maybe a cute little Yale hat (in case something terrible happened). Since they were in pre-pre-kindergarten—which in some cases they were enrolled in even before being conceived—they were in the top 1 percent of their class, and then the top 1 percent of those

who took standardized testing along the way. They won awards, they broke records. This kind of high achievement was not just encouraged, it was expected. I know one Harvard student whose mother would keep every handwriting exercise and restaurant placemat drawing he ever did, because “this is going to be in a museum someday.” (That was a lot of pressure on me, Mom.)

And then they get into Harvard, walk confidently into that Hogwarts-like freshman dining hall on the first day of college, and have a terrible realization: *50 percent of them are suddenly below average.*

I like to tell my advisees: If my calculations are correct, 99 percent of Harvard students do not graduate in the top 1 percent. They don’t find that joke very funny.

With so much pressure to be great, it is no surprise to find that when these kids fall, they fall hard. To make matters worse, this pressure—and the depression that follows—pulls people inward, away from their friends, families, and social supports, at a time when they need the support most. They skip meals, shut themselves in their rooms or the library, emerging only for the occasional kegger (and then in an attempt to blow off steam they get too drunk to even enjoy themselves—or at least remember enjoying themselves). They even seem too busy, too preoccupied, and too stressed to reach out for love. Based on my study of Harvard undergraduates, the average number of romantic relationships over four years is less than one. The average number of sexual partners, if you’re curious, is 0.5 per student. (I have no idea what 0.5 sexual partners means, but it sounds like the scientific equivalent of second base.) In my survey, I found that among these brilliant Harvard students, 24 percent are *unaware* if they are currently involved in any romantic relationship.

What was going on here was that like so many people in contemporary society, along the way to gaining their superb educations, and their shiny opportunities, they had

absorbed the wrong lessons. They had mastered formulas in calculus and chemistry. They had read great books and learned world history and become fluent in foreign languages. But they had never formally been taught how to maximize their brains' potential or how to find meaning and happiness. Armed with iPhones and personal digital assistants, they had multitasked their way through a storm of résumé-building experiences, often at the expense of actual ones. In their pursuit of high achievement, they had isolated themselves from their peers and loved ones and thus compromised the very support systems they so ardently needed. Repeatedly, I noticed these patterns in my own students, who often broke down under the tyranny of expectations we place on ourselves and those around us.

Brilliant people sometimes do the most unintelligent thing possible. In the midst of stress, rather than investing, these individuals *divested* from the greatest predictor of success and happiness: their social support network. Countless studies have found that social relationships are the best guarantee of heightened well-being and lowered stress, both an antidote for depression and a prescription for high performance. But instead, these students had somehow learned that when the going gets tough, the tough get going—to an isolated cubicle in the library basement.

These best and brightest willingly sacrificed happiness for success because, like so many of us, they had been taught that if you work hard you will be successful—and only then, once you are successful, will you be happy. They had been taught that happiness is the reward you get only when you become partner of an investment firm, win the Nobel Prize, or get elected to Congress.

But in fact, as you will learn throughout this book, new research in psychology and neuroscience shows that it works the other way around: We become more successful *when* we are happier and more positive. For example,

doctors put in a positive mood before making a diagnosis show almost three times more intelligence and creativity than doctors in a neutral state, and they make accurate diagnoses 19 percent faster. Optimistic salespeople outsell their pessimistic counterparts by 56 percent. Students primed to feel happy before taking math achievement tests far outperform their neutral peers. *It turns out that our brains are literally hardwired to perform at their best not when they are negative or even neutral, but when they are positive.*

Yet in today's world, we ironically sacrifice happiness for success only to lower our brains' success rates. Our hard-driving lives leave us feeling stressed, and we feel swamped by the mounting pressure to succeed at any cost.

LISTENING TO POSITIVE OUTLIERS

The more I studied the research emerging from the field of positive psychology, the more I learned how wrongheaded we are (not just the Harvard students, but all of us) in our beliefs about personal and professional fulfillment. Studies conclusively showed that the quickest way to high achievement is *not* a single-minded concentration on work, and that the best way to motivate employees is *not* to bark orders and foster a stressed and fearful workforce. Instead, radical new research on happiness and optimism were turning both the academic and corporate worlds upside down. I immediately saw an opportunity—I could test these ideas out on my students. I could design a study to see if these new ideas indeed explained why some students were thriving while others succumbed to stress and depression. By studying the patterns and habits of people above the curve, I could glean information about not just how to move us up to average, but how to move the entire average up.

Luckily, I was in a unique position to conduct this research. As a freshman proctor, I'd been blessed for a dozen years with an incredible close-up view of these students—what their habits are, what makes them tick, and what we can learn from their experiences to apply to our own lives. I'd been able to read all the admissions files, see the admissions committee's comments, watch the students progress intellectually and socially, and see what jobs they received after college. I also ended up grading a large percentage of them in the classroom as a teaching fellow for sixteen different courses. To get to know the students beyond just their exams and transcripts, I began meeting with students at my “coffice” in Starbucks to hear their stories. By my calculation, I have sat for more than a half hour individually with over 1,100 Harvard students—enough caffeine to get an entire Olympic team disqualified for decades.

I then took these observations and used them to design and conduct my own empirical survey of 1,600 high achieving undergraduates—one of the largest studies on happiness ever performed on students at Harvard. At the same time, I continued to steep myself in the positive psychology research that was suddenly exploding out of my own institution and out of university laboratories all around the world. The result? Surprising and exciting conclusions about what causes some to rise to the top and thrive in challenging environments while others sink down and never become what they have in them to be. What I found, and what you're about to read, was revealing, not just for Harvard, but for all of us in the working world.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Once I'd finished gathering and analyzing this massive amount of research, I was able to isolate seven specific,

actionable, and proven patterns that predict success and achievement.

The Happiness Advantage—Because positive brains have a biological advantage over brains that are neutral or negative, this principle teaches us how to retrain our brains to capitalize on positivity and improve our productivity and performance.

The Fulcrum and the Lever—How we experience the world, and our ability to succeed within it, constantly changes based on our mindset. This principle teaches us how we can adjust our mindset (our fulcrum) in a way that gives us the power (the lever) to be more fulfilled and successful.

The Tetris Effect—When our brains get stuck in a pattern that focuses on stress, negativity, and failure, we set ourselves up to fail. This principle teaches us how to retrain our brains to spot patterns of possibility, so we can see—and seize—opportunity wherever we look.

Falling Up—In the midst of defeat, stress, and crisis, our brains map different paths to help us cope. This principle is about finding the mental path that not only leads us up out of failure or suffering, but teaches us to be happier and more successful because of it.

The Zorro Circle—When challenges loom and we get overwhelmed, our rational brains can get hijacked by emotions. This principle teaches us how to regain control by focusing first on small, manageable goals, and then gradually expanding our circle to achieve bigger and bigger ones.

The 20-Second Rule—Sustaining lasting change often feels impossible because our willpower is limited. And when willpower fails, we fall back on our old habits and succumb to the path of least resistance. This principle shows how, by making small energy adjustments, we can reroute the path of least resistance and replace bad habits with good ones.

Social Investment—In the midst of challenges and stress, some people choose to hunker down and retreat within themselves. But the most successful people invest in their friends, peers, and family members to propel themselves forward. This principle teaches us how to invest more in one of the greatest predictors of success and excellence—our social support network.

Together, these Seven Principles helped Harvard students (and later, tens of thousands of people in the “real world”) overcome obstacles, reverse bad habits, become more efficient and productive, make the most of opportunities, conquer their most ambitious goals, and reach their fullest potential.

OUT OF THE IVORY TOWER

While I loved working with students, what I really wanted was to see if these same principles could also drive happiness and success in the real world. To bridge the gap between academia and business, I formed a small consulting firm, called Aspirant, to deliver and test this research at companies and nonprofit organizations.

A month later, the global economy began to collapse.

THE HAPPINESS ADVANTAGE AT WORK

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FLYING OVER THE savannahs of Zimbabwe in the fall of 2008, I suddenly began to feel nervous. How could I lecture to people on happiness research in a country that had just been devastated by the complete implosion of their financial system, not to mention one ruled by a dictator, Robert Mugabe? When I landed in the city of Harare, I was taken to dinner by some local business leaders. In the dim candlelight, one of them asked me, “Shawn, how many trillionaires do you know?” I said jokingly, very few. He then said, “Raise your hand if you were a trillionaire.” Everyone sitting on the floor at the dinner table raised their hands. Seeing my shocked response, another person explained, “Don’t be impressed. The very last time I used a Zim dollar, I spent a trillion to buy a chocolate bar.”

Zimbabwe had just been devastated by the complete collapse of its currency. All the financial institutions were struggling to survive; the country had even moved to a barter system for a while. In the midst of this, I worried that my research would fall on ears deafened by the concussions of repeated crisis. But to my surprise, I found people more eager than ever to hear about the research behind the principles. They wanted to bounce back from this challenge stronger than before, and they knew they needed a whole new set of tools to do so.

THE REAL WORLD

While I've since found that my seven principles of positive psychology have extraordinary applications in the workplace in both good times and bad, the economic collapse very quickly crystallized the need, not just to help businesses and professionals preserve their well-being, but to help them maximize their energy, productivity, and performance when they needed it the most. They recognized it, too, for I suddenly found many once invincible businesses reaching out their hands for help.

Within one year, I had spoken to businesses in forty countries across five continents and found that the same principles that predicted success at Harvard worked everywhere I went. For a boy from Waco who hadn't traveled much, it was a humbling experience to meet so many people across the world, each with a different story of happiness, hardship, and resilience. It was also a time of great learning. I learned more about happiness during my travels to Africa and the Middle East in the midst of a crisis than in twelve years of sheltered study. The fruit of that labor and research is this book. From Wall Street traders to Tanzanian schoolteachers to salespeople in Rome—they all could use the now crisis-tempered principles to propel themselves forward.

In October 2008, I was brought in to American Express to speak to a group of vice presidents. AIG had just become a ward of the Federal Reserve. Lehman Brothers had gone under. The Dow was at a record low. So when I walked into the room at AmEx, the mood was grim. Tired-looking executives looked at me ashen-faced, and their Blackberries, usually chirping incessantly at the start of these events, had fallen silent. Massive layoffs, leadership reorganization, and a decision to restructure into a bank had been announced 30 minutes before my 90-minute talk on happiness. This was *not* going to be a receptive audience. Or so I thought.

I assumed, just as I had in Zimbabwe, that the last thing a group of people so distraught and unnerved would be interested in hearing about was positive psychology. Yet again, it turned out to be one of the most engaged and receptive groups I have ever encountered. The 90 minutes turned into nearly three hours as executives canceled appointments and postponed meetings. Like the nearly thousand students who showed up for that first Harvard class on the subject, these highly sophisticated financiers were hungry to understand the new science of happiness and how it could bring them success in their jobs and careers.

The earliest adopters of the Happiness Advantage were the world's largest banks, as they were the first to get hit. I began researching and teaching the principles in this book to thousands of senior leaders, managing directors, and CEOs at some of the world's biggest (and most battered) financial institutions. Then I began to branch out to people and companies in all other sectors who had been hit hard by the meltdown. These were not happy times nor happy audiences. But regardless of their industry, company, or rank in the organization, rather than resistance, I found people almost universally open to learning how to use positive psychology to re-think the way they did their work.

INOCULATING AGAINST STRESS

Meanwhile, positive psychology researchers had finished a "meta-analysis," a study of nearly every scientific happiness study available—over 200 studies on 275,000 people worldwide.¹ Their findings exactly matched the principles I was teaching—that happiness leads to success in nearly every domain, including work, health, friendship, sociability, creativity, and energy. This encouraged me to apply the principles to other populations.