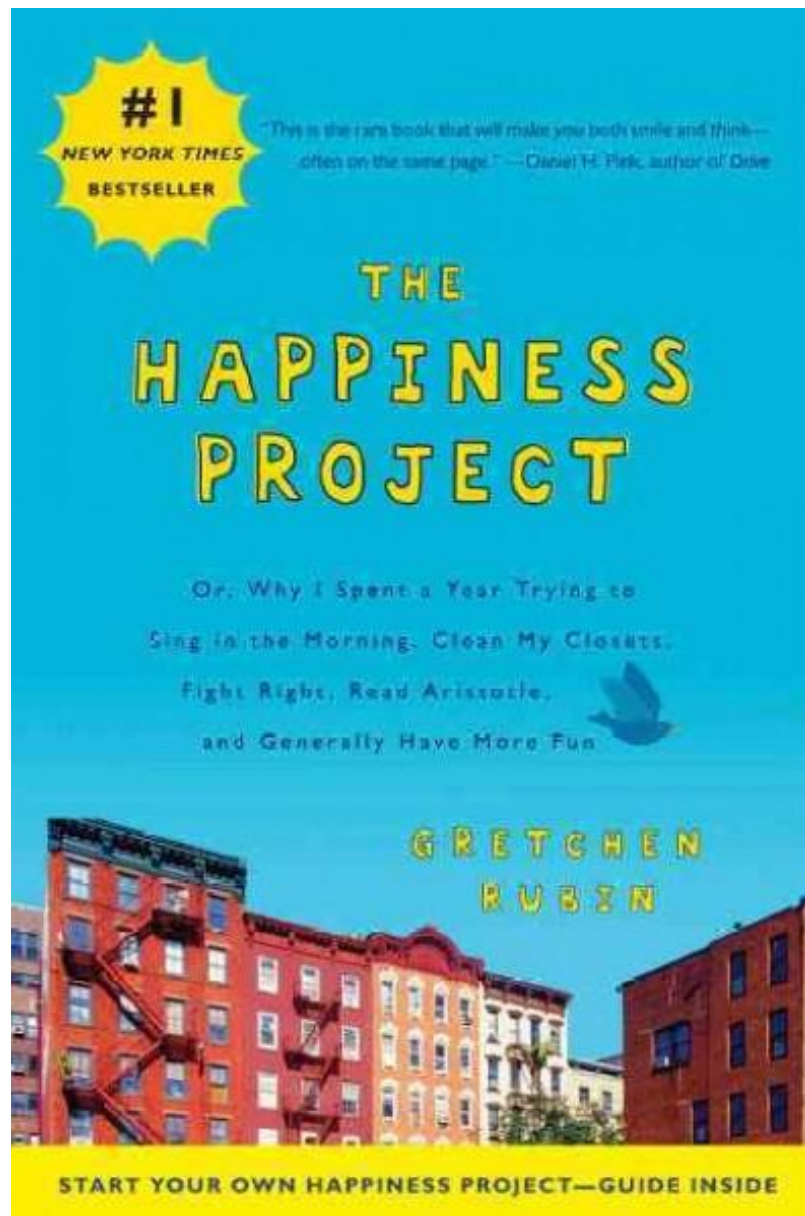


About the book...



Gretchen Rubin had an epiphany one rainy afternoon in the unlikeliest of places: a city bus. "The days are long, but the years are short," she realized. "Time is passing, and I'm not focusing enough on the things that really matter." In that moment, she decided to dedicate a year to her happiness project.

In this lively and compelling account, Rubin chronicles her adventures during the twelve months she spent test-driving the wisdom of the ages, current scientific research, and lessons from popular culture about how to be happier. Among other things, she found that novelty and challenge are powerful sources of happiness; that money can help buy happiness, when spent wisely; that outer order contributes to inner calm; and that the very smallest of changes can make the biggest difference.

About the author... (<http://www.harpercollins.com>)



Gretchen Rubin is the author of *The Happiness Project*, as well as the bestselling *Forty Ways to Look at **Winston Churchill***; **Forty Ways to Look at JFK**;

Power Money Fame Sex: A User's Guide; and *Profane Waste*. (She has three dreadful unpublished novels locked in a drawer.)

Her popular daily blog, *The Happiness Project*, appears on *Slate* and the *Huffington Post* and ranks in the prestigious Technorati "Top 2K." There, she recounts her adventures and insights as she grapples with the challenges of how to be happier. She also blogs for *RealSimple.com*.

A graduate of Yale and Yale Law School (where she was editor-in-chief of the *Yale Law Journal*), Rubin started her career as a lawyer, and she was clerking for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor when she realized she really wanted to be a writer. Raised in Kansas City, she lives in New York City with her husband and two young daughters.

Reviews

Library Journal

For this chatty and intriguing little book, Rubin, a lawyer-turned-writer (*Forty Ways To Look at Winston Churchill*), undertook a yearlong quest for happiness. A "Resolution Chart" with specific activities for each month (e.g., "Ask for help") helped her define happiness and become happier with her very good life, as did interesting facts from her scholarly research (though there are no footnotes or formal bibliography). Peppering the text are quotes from a vast array of people who have considered happiness, including Aristotle, St. Thérèse, and Viktor Frankl. VERDICT This whole process might have come off as frivolously self-centered but for the excellent points Rubin highlights. Although the excerpts from her blog (www.happinessprojecttoolbox.com) begin to feel like filler, librarians will particularly like how she loves her local library, and self-helpers will be fascinated by her process.

Publishers Weekly

Rubin is not an unhappy woman: she has a loving husband, two great kids and a writing career in New York City. Still, she could-and, arguably, should-be happier. Thus, her methodical (and bizarre) happiness project: spend one year achieving careful, measurable goals in different areas of life (marriage, work, parenting, self-fulfillment) and build on them cumulatively, using concrete steps (such as, in January, going to bed earlier, exercising better, getting organized, and "act[ing] more energetic"). By December, she's striving bemusedly to keep increasing happiness in every aspect of her life. The outcome is good, not perfect (in accordance with one of her "Secrets of Adulthood": "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good"), but Rubin's funny, perceptive account is both inspirational and forgiving, and sprinkled with just enough wise tips, concrete advice and timely research (including all those other recent books on happiness) to qualify as self-help. Defying self-help expectations, however, Rubin writes with keen senses of self and narrative, balancing the personal and the universal with a light touch. Rubin's project makes curiously compulsive reading, which is enough to make any reader happy.

Discussion questions

(<http://www.harpercollins.com/>)

1. Gretchen argues throughout *The Happiness Project* that striving to be happy is a worthy, not selfish, goal. Do you agree? Do you think that Gretchen was right, or not, to devote so much time and attention to her own happiness? Do you spend much time thinking about your happiness?
2. *The Happiness Project* is packed with quotations. Which quotation resonated most with you? Do you have a quotation that has been particularly meaningful in your own life—that you've included in your email signature or taped to your desk, for example?
3. One of Gretchen's resolutions is to "Imitate a spiritual master." Do you have a spiritual master? Who is it? Gretchen was surprised to realize that St. Therese of Lisieux was her master. Do you know why you identify with your spiritual master?
4. Gretchen observes that "Outer order contributes to inner calm," and many of her resolutions are aimed at clutter-clearing. Do you agree that clutter affects your happiness?
5. One of Gretchen's main arguments is that "You're not happy unless you think you're happy," and she

spends a lot of time thinking about her happiness. However, many important figures have argued just the opposite; for example, John Stuart Mill wrote, "Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so." What do you think? Does striving for happiness make you happier? Or does it make happiness more elusive?

6. Did reading this book make you want to try one of the resolutions? Which one?

7. A criticism of *The Happiness Project* might be that writing a "year of..." book is gimmicky. Did you like the "experiment for a year" approach, or did it strike you as a cliché? Why do you think so many authors are drawn to this structure?

8. Many memoirs recount the author's struggle to be happiness in the face of a major challenge like cancer, divorce, an unhappy childhood, massive weight loss, and the like. In the book's opening, Gretchen admits that she has always been pretty happy. Did you find her reflections on happiness helpful, nevertheless? Or do you think it's more valuable to read an account by someone facing more difficulties?

9. Gretchen writes, "Everyone's happiness project will be different." How would your happiness project be different from Gretchen's? How might it be the same?

10. What was the one most valuable thing you learned from *The Happiness Project* about happiness—for yourself?

Readalikes

Emotional Equations: Simple Truths for Creating Happiness and Success by Chip Conley, (2012)

The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being by Derek Bok (2011)

The Art of Happiness: a handbook for living by the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler (1998)

The Art of Happiness in a Troubled World by the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler. (2009)

The Essence of Happiness : a guidebook to living by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler

(2010)



Ann Arbor District Library