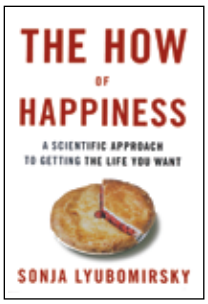
The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want

BY SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY

The Penguin Press, 2007, 366 pages



A REFERENCE BOOK disguised as a self-help book, *The How of Happiness* is far more credible than most other books whose titles promise you help "getting the life you want."

It may be more useful, too. Sonja Lyubomirsky's book makes the case that your happiness is largely under your own control, and that the benefits of happiness are available to just about anyone. Drawing upon years of research, including many of her own studies, Lyubomirsky argues that happiness is like a sport: Practice the right exercises and you are very likely to improve. She emphasizes that happiness practices must fit your personality, and so each of the 12 science-tested, happiness-inducing activities she presents also come with several different ways they can be implemented, along with diagnostic tests to help you decide which activities are right for you.

No one is really meant to read this manual straight through, which is clear from its repetitive format. But I'd be surprised if it fails to convince you that you can make yourself happier. **—Christine Carter**

Forgive For Love: The Missing Ingredient for a Healthy and Lasting Relationship

BY FRED LUSKIN

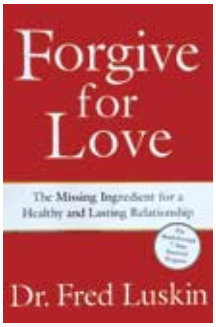
HarperOne, 2007, 240 pages

A FRIEND'S BETRAYAL, A PARENT'S abandonment, a lover's deceit—these injustices are hard to forgive, especially if you believe forgiving means condoning bad behavior and giving up the right to seek redress.

And yet forgiveness has many benefits for our health and well-being. In this persuasive book, forgiveness researcher Fred Luskin lays out a seven-step program designed to help long-term partners learn to forgive each other for simply being human.

Luskin's forgiveness regimen, which includes guided meditations and instructions for creating statements of positive intention, draws on the research and trainings he has led as the director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project in Palo Alto. He emphasizes that forgiving your partner doesn't deny your right to feel hurt, but it does require you to acknowledge that the slights you've suffered are inevitable in our world.

Luskin asks his readers to begin by trying to forgive small everyday offenses, such as when your partner ignores the dirty dishes. Just as athletes gain strength and prepare for competitions by running regularly, Luskin argues that "forgiveness training" with life's minor miseries can help you calm down and be more forgiving. It can also prepare you for bigger traumas.

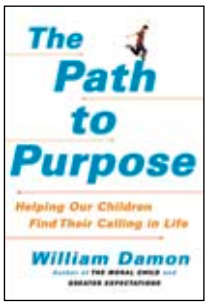


Although Luskin does cite studies to support his case, those interested in a rigorous treatment of the science of forgiveness should look elsewhere. *Forgive for Love* is a practical, hands-on guide for couples wishing to infuse their relationships with more serenity and compassion. **—Meera Lee Sethi**

The Path to Purpose: Helping Our Children Find Their Calling in Life

BY WILLIAM DAMON

Free Press, 2008, 240 pages



IN HIS LATEST BOOK on the importance of moral development, William Damon, a professor of education at Stanford University and the director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, argues that children today—far more than children in the past—are floundering for lack of direction. While society at large focuses on practical concerns like good grades and secure jobs, Damon argues that children want to know how to find true fulfillment. *The Path to Purpose* looks at how children are hampered in their search for meaning, and how concerned adults can help them find it.

The book's important message is often lost in dense, academic language, but it still shines through real-world examples. It's hard not to be encouraged by children such as 12-year-old Ryan Hreljac, who in the past six years has raised enough money to build 319 drinking wells in 14 different countries. Ryan was inspired in first grade after learning that children in Africa were dying for lack of clean water. He raised his first 70 dollars on his own by doing chores around the house. When he learned this wasn't enough to build a new well, he didn't get discouraged; instead, he redoubled his efforts by seeking donations from the people around him. With help from his parents, he built a website to further his project.

To be sure, kids like Ryan share an unusual combination of personal traits: optimism grounded in realism, ambition, and humility. But Damon argues that these are qualities we should nurture in every child, not just high achievers such as Ryan. "Their experiences offer lessons that are wholly relevant to all other young people growing up today," he writes. "Anyone can find a purpose and pursue it with rich benefits to themselves and others." **—Dawn Friedman**

Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World

BY BILL CLINTON

Knopf, 2007, 256 pages

BILL CLINTON'S NEW BOOK READS MUCH like one of his political speeches: long, folksy, full of sentimental stories, but ultimately inspiring. "We all have the capacity to do great things," he writes.

Although the book mostly focuses on individual efforts—ranging from superstars like Bono to an 85-year-old washer woman—it is most interesting when it takes a broader, more macroeconomic look at philanthropy. For example, Clinton reports there is an "explosion of citizen activism" because more people are living under stable governments where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can work. At the same time, globalization and information technology allow us to witness the world's problems more easily. These two forces do have their downsides: Though they have generated incredible wealth, they have also widened the chasm between rich and poor. But as globalization and information technology help attune more people to global problems, NGOs can provide a voluntary mechanism for redistributing at least some of this wealth.

Clinton is a politician, not a scientist or philosopher. He never explores the deeper questions of why giving is good for the giver, or how philanthropy might, in some cases, reinforce inequalities of wealth and power. But in *Giving*, Clinton does his best to bring people together in order to create a more just and equitable world. **—Leif Hass**