8 keys to happiness, according to experts

Is "the pursuit of happiness" even possible? This roundup of books, videos and websites — along with a reflection by IESE's Santiago Álvarez de Mon — will give you plenty of food for thought as you contemplate your life and set goals for the year ahead.



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For centuries, philosophers have been reflecting on what happiness means and how to achieve it. Today's authors, many of whom hail from the field of positive psychology, borrow from the classical idea that happiness should not be pursued as an end in itself. Instead, happiness comes from having a purpose that gives meaning to your life and improves the

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lives around you. The lesson applies to the personal as well as professional realms. Consider what these experts have to say.

Bill Baker: be kinder

Does the world seem to be getting angrier and meaner? It doesn't have to be so! In *Organizations for People: Caring Cultures, Basic Needs and Better Lives*, the Distinguished Professor of Media & Entertainment at IESE and the industrial psychologist Michael O'Malley demonstrate that "kind leadership" is possible. Happiness and well-being arise from social, human nourishment. As their research shows, treating people with kindness and respect can and does pay off.

Tal Ben-Shahar: embrace your humanity

"Give yourself permission to be human," the former professor of psychology at Harvard and co-founder of the Happiness Studies Academy told IESE's Global Alumni Reunion 2019. The key to happiness is not to suppress painful emotions: "The first step to happiness is allowing in unhappiness." So, embrace the full range of emotions: happiness flows from being human. For more, read "A realist's guide to happiness."

Paul Dolan: rewrite your own happy ever after

As someone who seems to have "made it," this self-described working-class kid turned university professor should be extremely happy, having achieved all the trappings of professional success. Yet it's not so simple, as the title of his book attests: *Happy Ever After: Escaping the Myth of the Perfect Life*. Drawing from his field of behavioral science, Dolan unpicks the psychology behind "happy ever after" to reveal a more authentic narrative based not on "having it all" but on having "just enough."

Angela Duckworth: show true grit

The author of the book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, and the wildly popular TED talk of the same name, insists that, beyond being smart and talented, "grit" is a key determinant of success in achieving long-term goals. And being "grittier" can make us happier while pursuing meaningful goals.

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Daniel Gilbert: find happiness in unexpected places

Professor of psychology at Harvard, Gilbert is the author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, in which he explains why people fail to see what will make them truly happy. In "The surprising science of happiness," a TED talk that has attracted more than 18 million views, Gilbert refers to a study of lottery winners and others who become paraplegic. One year later, the happiness levels of the two groups were similar: the winners were not as happy as they expected, while the latter group was not as unhappy.

Jonathan Haidt: realize your potential

Haidt's book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, is a search for modern truths in the ancient wisdom shared by several of the world's civilizations — from China, India, Greece, and so on. Through the HappinessHypothesis.com website, many of the book's best ideas can be explored online, such as "the felicity of virtue," echoing Aristotle's belief that "a good life is one where you develop your strengths" and "realize your potential."

Martin Seligman: know your strengths

The author of *Authentic Happiness* says happiness lies in knowing your strengths and virtues and in making sense of both good and bad times. He directs the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, where he has developed various questionnaires to measure happiness and signature strengths. You can find them here.

The happiness paradox: a final reflection by Santiago Álvarez de Mon

Are you happy? Universal question, personal answer. The more we obsess about it, the more it eludes us. The French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky wrote about this in his book *Paradoxical Happiness*. In our "hyperconsumption society," as he called it, we are driven to expect instant gratification, always, effortlessly and by all means — and yet "none of this has opened the doors to the joy of living."

Happiness is as much a matter of interpretation as it is a fact. The attitude we adopt in the face of adversity is crucial. Helen Keller, deaf and blind since she was 19 months old, had this to say: "Most people measure their happiness in terms of physical pleasure and material possession... If happiness is to be so measured, I who cannot hear or see have every reason

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to sit in a corner with folded hands and weep." But she didn't do that. In spite of her deprivations, she embraced an optimism "so deep that it is a faith, so thoughtful that it becomes a philosophy of life."

The human adventure of living requires moving in two directions. First, *inward*, exploring our inner world, untying personal knots, and keeping our insecure, envious egos at bay, until, through training in solitude and silence, we unveil the best version of ourselves. From that cultivated personal epicenter, our heart widens and projects us *outward*. Then, the idea of serving the community arises. In thinking of others, life makes sense, and we caress the face of happiness.

I'll finish with what the Slovenian artist and Jesuit theologian, Marko Ivan Rupnik, told me when I asked him if he was happy: "I'd say I'm a cheerful person who feels a confluence of peace and energy inside ... If (happiness) means having serenity; a sense of harmony that satiates or satisfies; a certainty that, no matter what happens, I'm at least taking the right steps — then, yes, I am deeply happy." His body language agreed.

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