

The Happiness Handbook (Excerpts) – By Jenn Flaa

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What I Know for Sure – About Men

Of this I am certain, most normal, healthy men are hardwired to make women happy. When they get it right, all is well in their world and they feel like winners ... and that translates to everything they do.

If they get it wrong or don't get any feedback that they succeeded in delivering happiness, that disappointment, dejection and futility translates to the rest of their world. They feel like the opposite of a winner – a loser – and that's a big deal for them.

What that Means for Us Chicas

If you take the premise that men want to make us happy and need feedback that they got it right, that means we have only three responsibilities in our relationships:

1. **Decide** what makes us happy.
2. **Communicate** that clearly and precisely to the other

person(s).

3. **Happy dance** when they get it right. Men are visual and a happy dance speaks louder than words. That little shaking of your booty actually breaks through and signals the inner cortex of “man brain” and rings the “I’m a winner” bell for them!

The One Thing I Want You to Know

This next story is huge, a big peek into the male psyche. I hope it provides you with the insight and an a-ha moment that helps you understand the “man brain” and gives you the motivation to work the three steps above (Decide, Communicate, Happy Dance) so that you can provide your sweetie with this amazing gift!!

“One thing I know for sure about men is they want to make you happy - and feel impotent when you complain rather than tell them what would make you happy.” – Deborah Lynne Lombardo, Sales Consultant

Once upon a time, a spunky young rocker/aspiring author had some construction done in her back yard. Yes, hot, sweaty men doing manual labor. At the end of a hard day, she appeared; one of the workers looked at her while gesturing to the completed work and said, “Are you happy?”

Are you happy?

Not, “Do you like it?” Or,

"How'd I do?" But, "Are you happy?"

Hmm, that's interesting, she noted. Then she proceeded to "ooh and ahh" over the work, to comment on the little details she noticed and to do a little happy dance, smile and sparkle a bit.

"Thank you," the man said. "Your smile gives me energy."

Your smile gives me energy.

A tear came to my eye – yes ... of course, the story is mine – and I got it. I really got the gift that we give men.

Do you get it too? Our smile gives them energy.

Great! Now work this book and the three steps (Decide, Communicate, Happy Dance) so you can give this extraordinary gift to the fellas around you. And how ironic is it that we give this gift by receiving!

Many of us work hard to pay attention to what everyone else needs and wants, and what makes them happy, and sometimes it feels selfish for us to be happy. It's time to reframe that old belief!

The truth is, when we are happy, we are still giving.

We give to others by allowing ourselves to receive. Our happiness and our smiles give them energy.

The Road to Happiness

The *Happiness Handbook* is your personal user's manual, a tool to facilitate your own journey and to help you communicate with your loved one(s). On the following pages, I've listed several categories for you to define what makes you happy – whether you are alone or with a partner. Each section has introductory remarks and an example or two. I've included blank pages where you can write lists and stories about what makes you happy. If you are reading this book on an electronic device, consider creating your own Happiness Handbook Journal where you can easily write and share your answers. Don't freak out about the "homework" ... I've also got some instructions for how to figure out what makes you happy, as well as troubleshooting techniques if you get stuck or are starting from a place of being really unhappy.

A Word on Terminology

I use the term "happiness bringer" to identify the person who provides that which makes you happy (sometimes it's yourself). Some folks may get upset about using the terms "makes you happy" and "happiness bringer" as if this takes away someone's power or implies that they *need* someone else to make them happy. That's not what I mean at all.

Happiness is a choice – *your* choice. Each person needs to know what instills happiness inside of them. Once you know

what makes you happy, you can communicate that to others so they can more fully participate in the enrichment of your life.

"What makes me happy is a walk in the park, a massage, a good book/movie, an unexpected act of kindness, good conversations with friends, and fun things with my girl friends, especially when they drive miles to spend time with me." – Nandini Rao, Technical Writer

For example, if getting flowers makes you happy, you'll need someone to be the "bringer" of the flowers. You're still in your power. You defined it, and you received it. None of that diminished you or made you *need* the flower bringer in an unhealthy manner. In fact, the exchange was probably circular and complete. When you received the flowers, smiled, inhaled their scent and said "thanks," the flower bringer received a moment of feeling good; he or she succeeded in providing you with a happy moment. (You are also free to bring yourself flowers and still do the happy dance!)

I'll make a deal with you. If those terms really push your buttons, feel free to cross them out and write in something else. I'm OK with that. Whatever makes you happy works for me.

The Three Steps of Happiness

Before we dive into what makes you happy, let's explore each of the three steps you'll be taking on your journey to

happiness. Remember, we said they were to:

1. **Decide** what makes you happy
2. **Communicate** clearly and precisely
3. **Happy Dance**

STEP 1: Decide What Makes You Happy

Let's assume, for the moment that you are currently not at your happiest. Sitting down and saying, "What makes me happy is x, y and z," may feel unachievable or foreign. I remember when I was so sad that thinking about what makes me happy actually made me cry. I'd had happiness once and it got ripped away; it just didn't feel like I could ever get there again.

Deep breath, please. We're going to aim a little lower at first. You are currently experiencing a "happiness deficit." It's OK, it's normal and it's curable!

The Happiness Deficit

When you are just plain unhappy or at a loss for where to start to "be happy," you may have a happiness deficit. You could be so unhappy that you'll first need to take a look at what will get you to neutral before you can focus on happy-making things.

If your basic human needs are not being met for whatever

reason, it will be nearly impossible for you to get to “happy.” For example, if you hadn’t eaten in four days and someone gave you flowers, you’d probably think, “That’s nice, but how about a sandwich?!”

If you can relate and feel like you’re in a happiness deficit, then skip ahead and start with the *What Makes Me Tick* section. That section focuses on your basic needs. You can use the *How To Figure Out What Makes Me Happy* section as a resource. Once you’ve got that figured out, come back to *What Makes Me Happy* and try figuring out that section.

If you’re like me, you may need to have your basic needs met for a while before you can take a breath and dream about what actual happiness would be like! This is what I meant when I said that happiness could be a process. For some of us, it takes time and that’s OK.

Forgiveness

Ironically, when someone hurts you, the first thing other people often say is, “Oh, you need to forgive him or her.” Excuse me? Really? Shouldn’t the first step be for the perpetrator of unhappiness or hurt to say he or she is sorry? I’m just saying!

With that little venting out of the way, we can get back to the platitude that “forgiveness is the gift you give yourself.” It also ties in nicely with my theory of not feeding “the crap” that happened to you. Once you forgive someone, your brain lets it go –and you don’t dwell on it so much anymore. So,

you feel better and move on with your life and allow happiness to seep back into your mind, heart and bones.

OK, that's the goal. But I'm pretty sure we all agree that sometimes reaching a goal takes practice or a little work!

Here's where I think "forgiveness" goes sideways these days. I have a friend who was married for 20 years to a person who suffered from bipolar disease (manic depression). Her life would be going great, he'd go off his meds and life would spiral out of control. He'd ask for forgiveness, she'd take him back and eventually this cycle just kept happening over and over again.

At one point, near the end of their marriage, they were in therapy together and the therapist asked her if she could forgive him for ALL 20 years of crap, right there, right now. Just do it ... bam!

Clearly, this "therapist" was clueless. Those of us who have been *really, deeply* hurt know that forgiveness doesn't happen in an instant. It's a process and often starts with the statement, "one day, I may be willing to forgive." That's enough to get you started down the road.

Forgiveness may be a byproduct of your work in this book. That'd be cool. Just don't put too much pressure on yourself and think that forgiveness must come before happiness. Boy, that would be terrible if we all had to wait for that! Nope, just work on the happiness and allow yourself to one day be willing to forgive. Just that little bit can help soften your

heart and mind enough to allow you to explore what being happy might look like again.

And please, always remember, you are not alone. So many of us have wrestled with how to forgive people who have made bad choices. And sometimes, we have to learn how to forgive ourselves, too.

Defining Happiness in Terms of Others

As I “tested” this book, I found that many people defined their happiness by focusing on others; what makes someone else happy.

For example, what makes me happy is:

- “Cooking *the foods you like*” or
- “*Keeping the house clean for you*”

It’s true we can find happiness by making others happy, but

[L][SEP]I’d like to encourage you to think a little more selfishly.

[L][SEP]Defining what makes you and you alone happy doesn’t mean that you are a selfish person. In this exercise, I give you permission to think just about yourself and what pleases you for a few moments. Need a jumpstart? What about the simple things like these:

What makes me happy is:

- A gentle breeze on my face

- The sun on my back as I lay on the sand at the beach
- Shopping for a new outfit
- Receiving flowers
- Eating chocolate
- Being organized so I can find things right away
- Reading a good book
- Watching my favorite show [L][SEP]

While working through these exercises, keep in mind the [L][SEP]construction story from the previous chapter. When we're happy, it gives them energy and it makes them happy. So, a little foray into "selfishness" is a good thing and worthy of experimenting with! (By the way, did you notice how many things in my list above were things that I can provide for myself, being my own happiness bringer?)

[L][SEP]*The Happiness Layer Cake* [L][SEP]

When I started to write this book, I brainstormed [L][SEP]my big list of what makes me happy, with no categories, priorities or organization (yet). Upon closer look, I realized there were basically three layers – like a three-tiered cake – and there was [L][SEP]an order of priority. [L][SEP]

The bottom layer, the foundation, is the absolute basics we don't want to live without; the stuff you'll write down in the

[L][SEP] *Top Five Must Haves* section. You'll find that many of these things are things that you provide for yourself, like food, water or enough sleep.

The middle layer is filled with the things that people do; the qualities in people that make you love to be around them. Here are a few examples from my list:

- Having integrity
- Being honest
- Being a cheerleader that supports and encourages me
- Paying attention and helping me out – seeing what needs to be done and jumping in and doing it
- Being a gentleman, i.e., opening doors and attentiveness [L][SEP]

The top layer is made up of the things you like to do [L][SEP] together as well as by yourself. Here are a few examples from my list:

- Singing
- Going to the theatre, symphony, concerts and clubs to [L][SEP] hear live music
- Starting and completing projects (not so much the middle part)
- Playing "the best part of the day" game before bed [L][SEP]

What's "the best part of the day" game? Ooh, I love this. Ask each other, "What was the best part of your day?" It gives you a moment of reflection over your day and a chance to share the best part. You end your day on a positive note. Plus, I gotta tell ya, when they respond authentically with, "being here with you right now," boy does that feel good! L
SEP

That should give you a context for starting your own lists. Remember, if you're stuck, flip to the Troubleshooting and Resources sections. There are lots of exercises that help you with "writer's block" or to move through anger and resentment and get to neutral and beyond. L
SEP

STEP 2: Communicating What Makes You Happy

Once you've figured out what makes you happy, the next step is to either provide that for yourself, if you're in an alone phase of your life, or communicate it to others.

What I Know for Sure – Mind Reading

It's not good enough to just figure out what makes you happy ... you actually have to tell people! I know for sure that 99.99% of people do not read minds. Do you read your loved one's minds? See, I didn't think so. Why do we think they can read ours? It's a funny little trap so many of us fall into. "If you really loved me ... you'd just know." Hello ... Santa loves us and we still write him a letter and spell out exactly what would make us happy! (Um ... when we were kids!)

Hints

Hints don't work, either. Men are pretty easy to work with when you figure this one out. If you tell them something, they tend to do it. If you hint, they tend to mess it up. In general, girls get hints and boys don't. Boys respond to clarity. They want to get it right, so tell them exactly what "right" is so that their aim is on target. Think sports; they need to see the hoop, goal line, and home plate. When they see that, they can win!

When you spell it out for them, it doesn't mean that they are stupid. Making you happy is the new game in town. Tell them the rules, show them the goal, and get out of the way so they can win!

Timing Is Everything

Rule 1: Don't Overwhelm

There's so much information, where should he begin? And he'll probably wonder if this means he's done it all wrong and now you are "correcting" him. (Which tends to make guys want to NOT do it!)

There's a much more gentle and effective way.

Tip 1: Don't give him the list yet, but start happy dancing when he accidentally gets stuff right. He's probably been with you for a while and has paid attention. Odds are he'll get a few things right. Remember though, you may have shut him down (like I did when I was married) by not having a happy dance when he got it right in the past.

Tip 2: Start with one section. Make it an easy one where he's already getting a lot right. "Look honey, I did this happiness book and I'm so happy to find out that you're already doing a lot of stuff that makes me happy!" <Insert smile or happy dance here. > He may start asking what else makes you happy.

Tip 3: Watch for natural places in life that you can insert a "happiness statement." For example, if he was leaving for the store to pick up eggs, you could say, "Oooh, you know it'd make me really happy if you brought some raspberries. I just love them." Then do the little dance when he remembers it. If he forgets, don't make a big deal out of it; he's still learning.

You're so excited; you just worked on this book and figured out what makes you happy in all the categories. So, wham, you pop it down into your sweetie's lap. Whoa, poor fella.

"What makes me happy is characters and objects of beauty." – Ayesha Mathews-Wadhwa, CEO of PixInk Design

Of course, it's got to be something that actually makes you happy. Telling him that bringing home the paper towels would make you happy ...that's a little...weird. (Well...unless there's another use for paper towels I'm not aware of!)

One of my friends is in her 60s and she'd never spent a moment thinking about what makes her happy. She's a very loving person and always focused on making others happy. She sat in on one of my talks and did the exercise to brainstorm a list of 13 things that made her happy (lucky

#13)! She went home and gave her sweetie the list and – wham! – within days he’d done six of them. (Yes, she happy danced, too!) She called me three days later in tears; so grateful that she’d had an opportunity to figure it out and have a tool or mechanism to convey it to the man she’s deeply in love with.

Rule 2: Watch the Focus

You may have noticed that men are really good at focusing on one thing at time. This is great because when they are focused on us, we have their utter and complete attention.

What we need to pay attention to is when they are *not* focused on us, so we don’t tell them things or ask them to do things while they are focused on something else. This, accidentally, sets them up for failure and they are unable to “win.”

This is important. Remember, they want to “win” at making us happy, so we need to give them a fighting chance at it.

Here’s what it’s like for them: What if Sam was rushing to catch an airplane to Atlanta, and his sweetie, Sally, yelled, “It’d make me happy to go to New York for my birthday in six months.” Now Sally is thinking, “Cool, I’ve told Sam what makes me happy and given him plenty of time to plan it. This is going to be a great birthday.” Nope, all Sam was thinking was “catch the plane, catch the plane, catch the plane.” At some point he may think, “Huh, what was that about New York?” But he won’t even remember who said

"New York" let alone in what context.

Rule 3: It's In His Eyes

"What makes me happy is those moments with just my husband where we connect, listen, talk, and just be." – Lori Fuller, Photographer

How do you know you have his attention? Remember when you were dating? He'd look into your eyes and drink in everything about you. He was paying really close attention to what made you happy. So, if he's not looking at you ... forget it. You do not have his focus.

Now, you could get hurt or you could just train yourself to speak:

- Clearly
- Concisely (get to the point; think short attention span –
[L][SEP]it's not a bad thing—it just is)
- Only when you have his focus [L][SEP]

Seriously, if you were a guy, wouldn't you want a woman [L][SEP]who "got you" and set you up to win? That's not manipulation [L][SEP]— it's basketball – handing off the ball to your teammate so they can score and you (both) can win. [L][SEP]

Are You Mystery Dating?

There are a couple sections that are just gold for you (no, not the sex part just yet). *What Makes Me Tick* and *Who You (My*

Happiness Bringer) Are sections can help you sift through the dating rabble a bit faster. Once you know someone is meeting your basic needs and that they have the minimum characteristics you require in a sweetie, you can start sharing the *What Makes Me Happy* sections and eventually ... other sections, too.

Probably not a good idea to lay it all on them on the first date, or even all at once. Take your time. A little mystery never hurt and it's always nice to leave them wanting more!

OK, caveat here: I'm divorced and still dating, so clearly I have no handle on this! Hehhhehe

Are You in a Relationship?

Give it a try. See if defining and communicating your needs and desires adds a little spark to your relationship.

What if it doesn't? Your relationship is still where it was, but now you've got some clarity. The rest is up to you. There are resources in your Yellow Pages and Google for counseling and facilitating change if you want some help.

Communicating with Family and Friends

You can use sections of this workbook to help initiate conversation with your family and friends. Of course, you'll want to edit certain sections. Personally, I can't imagine sharing the spicy sections with anyone other than my sweetie.

STEP 3: Happy Dance

When I was married, my husband gave me a wonderful anniversary present. On a sunny warm weekend, we stayed along the Sonoma coast and hiked, camped, spent a night in a cute little bed and breakfast, ate amazing meals and capped it all off with an Eric Clapton concert at Oakland Arena with *really* good seats. The whole anniversary “event” was so fun and memorable, just perfect, and yes, made me happy.

But during our (amicable) divorce process he said, “Did that trip even make you happy?”

WHAT!!!??? How could he not have known? Where did that snafu?

Thank heavens he said that because it really got me thinking about how I communicate what makes me happy and how I receive it. Clearly I was doing something wrong!

That’s when I realized that saying “thank you” (vertically or horizontally) isn’t enough. There needs to be a more immediate, visible and visceral connection to get through “man brain.” And once I understood that ... the fun really began!

The Face of Happiness

Now take a moment to think about how you look and behave when you are happy.

How does happiness show up in your body? How would the bringer of happiness know that they did a good job?

This exercise may coax you into behavior changes. That's how it worked for me. When I reflected on this, I realized that in the past, most happy-making events were a surprise. So, I responded with shock and disbelief, but to the happiness bringer, I appeared stoic. If a gift was involved, I'd squirrel it away because it was a precious treasure. To the gift bringer, it looked as though I didn't like it and was hiding it away.

After contemplating this topic, I realized my behavior didn't encourage the happiness bringer to repeat the action or take another risk to solicit happiness. No wonder I was so surprised when it happened!

How about you? Do you smile, squeal or giggle? Do you gush profuse praise? Do you sit or stand in an open, receptive posture (i.e.: not crossing your arms or legs)? Do you take a deep breath and soak it all in? I recommend trying this one, it feels really good.

What about a happy dance? Do you have a happy dance? Do you let the happiness tingle and energize your whole body? What's a happy dance, you ask? It's pretty much however you choose to shake your booty. Mine is kind of the Tom Cruise, *Risky Business* slide across the kitchen floor with shaking and hoopin' and hollerin.' (Except I usually leave my pants on.) Go on; give it a try when no one's watching ... you know you want to!

A happy dance may not feel "authentic" and "real" to you

(yet). So, start small and keep paying attention to the response it has in the other person and how the feeling changes in your body as you let the happiness seep through to all your cells! Before you know it, you'll have a booty-shaking version of your own happy dance!

You may not want to do the full on happy dance at the meat counter of the local grocery when the fella hands you a steak, so, feel free to explore a couple different varieties for different occasions!

Happiness as Manipulation

As I was telling people about this book, I received a response from a woman that threw me for a loop. She said, "Yes, but if I tell him [her husband] what makes me happy, what will I have to hold over him?" I went mute and gave her my deer-in-the-headlights look as my brain struggled to comprehend what she had just said. Luckily, she continued on with her explanation. "If I don't tell him what makes me happy then he'll keep trying. I'm afraid that if I tell him what makes me happy, he'll stop trying. I won't be a challenge anymore." I asked her how her marriage was and if she was happy; she replied "strained" and "no." I don't think her strategy is working for her.

People need positive reinforcement. They need to know they are succeeding or winning at the opportunity to please you. I know I need it.

"One thing I know for sure about men is they need us more than we need them!"

– Alicia Dunams, Publisher and Speaker

Here's how happiness bringing went awry for me in the past. I once had a boyfriend. Wait ... let me rephrase that so I don't sound like a complete loser ... I had this one boyfriend for whom I once went all out on his birthday. I planned for weeks, cooked for days and took him on an amazing, romantic trip filled with lots of little touches and his favorite things. His response? He gave me the deer-in-the-headlights look, left and went for a walk. What! I was shocked ... and alone in the room. Turns out, no one had ever paid attention to what he liked and gave him a gift like that before. He was so shocked; he didn't know how to receive this gift.

And my response? OK, let me just say that I wasn't the most mature person on the planet. I had done so much work for him; to have him not take it in, smile, say "thanks," and do a happy dance or some other juicy gratitude action, really hurt my feelings. Did I ever do anything like that for him again? Oh, honey, please ... you've got to be kidding!

The whole relationship began to unravel for me from that point. I swooped down into a happiness deficit and it became more difficult for him to make me happy.

Remember, I fessed up to not handling this maturely.

Would I do better now? Let's hope I don't have to find out!

If you are withholding happiness from yourself for any reason, consider this:

□ What benefit are you getting (or do you think you're

getting) by withholding your own happiness?

- ☐ Is that a bigger payoff than actually being happy would be?
- ☐ Which makes you happy: having your sweetie “try” harder or having your sweetie actually “do” the right happy-making actions? (

I’d like to encourage you to do a little experiment. You do NOT have to change. I’m not asking for that. I’m just asking you (to conduct your own experiment and see how it goes for you. If the results are positive, you can draw your own conclusions (about whether or not changing your mind (and your behavior) would be a good thing for you. (

An Experiment (

Start paying close attention the next time your happiness bringer does something to make you happy; instead of withholding your happy response, bring it on. It doesn’t have to (be big, grand, gushing or dramatic. Authentic is good, really (good, in fact. Just remembering to say “thank you” is good. Maybe add in a deep, receptive breath or a “you’re so thoughtful.” Better yet, name it, “Thanks, __blah *blah*__ makes me happy.”

Now, keep paying attention. Does your happiness bringer cease all happy-making actions? Or did their face light up and did they continue more happy-making actions? (I’m laying money down on this result for you.)

If you’ve been withholding your happiness, your happiness

bringer may now be in a state of shock. So, don't stop the experiment. Try it a couple more times and watch their response. Who knows, by continuing the experiment, you may just be softly implementing a relatively painless, happiness- receiving behavior for yourself.

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