

Gretchen Rubin's



THE HAPPINESS PROJECT

GROUP STARTER KIT

WHAT'S INSIDE:

A NOTE FROM GRETCHEN RUBIN • TIPS FOR STARTING A GROUP
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS • IDEAS FOR MEETINGS • SUGGESTED READING LIST

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A Note from Gretchen Rubin

Hello!

Thanks so much for your interest and enthusiasm in starting a Happiness Project group. Many people find that launching their happiness projects as part of a group is more effective and fun than doing it on their own. Group members encourage each other, share ideas, and hold each other accountable – plus, just being in a group boosts your happiness.

Organizing a group is hugely rewarding, but it does take thought and effort. This Starter Kit is meant to make your job easier. However, there's no right way to do it. Do what's right for your group.

Please keep me posted—I'm very eager to hear how your group is doing. Write to me on the Facebook Page, or email me at grubin@gretchenrubin.com. Good luck!

Warmly,
Gretchen

Tips & Suggestions

If you're the group organizer, congratulations! That work takes thought, effort, and discipline— but will be very rewarding for you and for your group. Here are some tips for organizing your group and running good meetings.

First Things First.

Find a location that has the right vibe. Many groups take turns meeting in each other's houses. If you're in a public space, it helps to be in a separate room or to have some kind of identifying sign, so people don't wander around, unsure of where to find the group.

Arrange chairs in a circle. You want people to be able to see and talk to one another.

Consider having food and drink. People enjoy eating and often meet when they're hungry. If you're meeting at someone's house, consider taking turns providing all the food – organizing potlucks can be a big logistical challenge.

Be a Good Leader

Prepare for meetings. Having an agenda helps keep a meeting on track, and may help you relax.

Show up. As the organizer, you need to be there, even when you don't feel like it.

Start on time and end on time.

Make Everyone Feel Welcome

Be the first to arrive. Newer, shyer members tend to show up promptly or even early. Make them feel welcome and give them a positive first impression.

Greet people as soon as they enter. Greeting people and getting to know their names makes them feel included.

Introduce everyone. Give plenty of time for people to introduce themselves to the group.

Be a good host. Meet and greet, introduce people to each other, keep the discussion flowing, encourage everyone to speak up, and remain open and friendly to everyone.

Get people talking. Consider warming up the group with an ice-breaker question, such as “What’s a movie, song, or book that makes you happy?” During group discussions, give everyone an opportunity to speak, especially quieter

people. If this is difficult, consider forming smaller discussion groups of twos and threes, with one member reporting the small group’s conclusions to the larger group. People are happier when they contribute more, but some people aren’t comfortable speaking in a crowd.

Other Suggestions

Name your group. Suggest to everyone that you pick a name for the group; it’s more fun to belong to a group that has a name.

Frequently Asked Questions

How often should we meet?

The more often a group meets, the more quickly people will get comfortable with each other, and the more accountable they'll feel. However, people have a limited amount of time, and they may drop out if they miss a lot of meetings. Take the temperature of your group. At a minimum, a group should probably meet at least once every six weeks.

Why belong to a Happiness Project Group?

You can have a very successful happiness project on your own, but joining a group offers many advantages:

Structure and accountability. Having an appointment to focus on something makes it more likely you'll do it, and it won't slip to the bottom of the pile. Also, once you've told someone else your resolution, you'll have someone asking whether you're keeping it!

New perspectives and ideas. When we think by ourselves for too long, our thoughts become stale. A group reveals new

insight into old issues by providing opinions, asking good questions, and listening and repeating back what they hear.

Support. People often feel isolated. Just hearing that other people may experience the same difficulties can be very reassuring. Also, while it's helpful to receive support, providing support to others is also a powerful source of happiness.

Something fun and different. It's fun to do something new and to meet new people—and it's especially rewarding when you're talking about a topic as important and intimate as happiness.

What should we do during our meeting?

There are no rules! Do what seems right for your group!

Many groups use the meeting to talk about their own happiness projects—what resolutions they've made, whether they've kept their resolutions. Some groups discuss their personal resolutions at every meeting; some discuss a

different happiness book; some discuss a chapter and theme from The Happiness Project; some have an open discussion on a happiness question.

On the next few pages are some suggested topics. Remember, though, there's no right or wrong way to run a meeting. These are just ideas to get you and other group members thinking. Pick and choose, or ignore all together.

Have fun, and good luck with your group.

Suggested Topics

Topic 1: Your first set of resolutions

First half of the meeting:

Introductions.

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Each person identifies three or four resolutions to tackle.

The core of a “happiness project” is to... identify elements of your life that you want to change find concrete, measurable resolutions that, if kept, will help you bring about that change hold yourself accountable for keeping your resolutions decide whether you want to adjust, toss, or re-commit to a resolution

One tip: resolutions work best when they’re very specific, so you know whether you’ve kept your resolution or not. Accountability is key!

Resolutions tend to fall in certain major categories. Here are some common resolutions, with a few examples:

Attitude: Give positive reviews. Don’t talk about my irritations.

Clutter: Put dishes in the dishwasher immediately. Make my

bed each morning.

Find more joy in life. Rent a movie once a week. Make Saturday plans with a friend.

Appreciate the present. Keep a one-sentence journal.

Be a more loving parent. Go to sleep by 10:30 p.m. to avoid morning grouchiness.

Lose weight. No more doughnuts for breakfast. Eat a big salad for lunch.

Creativity & writing: Write a novel in a month. Keep “morning pages.” Take a photograph each day.

Diet, exercise & health: Take a 20-minute walk each day. Eat protein at breakfast.

Family & children: Make my children dissolve in laughter at least once a day. Read a chapter out loud every night.

Friends: No gossip. Show up.

Fun: Try a new restaurant each time I eat out. Go to a game instead of watching it on TV.

Gratitude: In the shower, count my blessings. Sincerely thank

two people each day.

Helping others: Volunteer at the thrift shop. Sign up for the breast-cancer walk-a-thon.

Memories & traditions: Organize all the photos in tidy boxes. Take a 5-minute video of my kids each Sunday night.

Mindfulness: Don't listen to my iPod on the way to work.

Money: Pay down twice the minimum on my credit card debt each month. Buy needful things.

Relationships & marriage: Don't expect thanks. Think of small treats.

Religion & spirituality: Read the Bible every day. Meditate each morning.

Work: Go to a professional conference. Sign up for training on the new computer program.

Happiness projects—what resolutions they've made, whether they've kept their resolutions. Some groups discuss their personal resolutions at every meeting; some discuss a different happiness book; some discuss a chapter and theme from The Happiness Project; some have an open discussion

Topic 2: Personal Commandments

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

The entire group, or the group divided into twos and threes, discusses their success in keeping their resolutions since the last meeting. Remember, be specific! Vague generalities like "I saw a lot of movies, and it was great" or "I didn't do a good job with the walking, I just didn't find the time" won't cut it! Ask each other:

How often did you manage to stick to your resolution?

If you stuck to your resolution, did it make you happier? Do you want to tweak it?

If you didn't stick to it, what got in the way? Do you need to find a different resolution to help you make the change you're seeking?

Second half of the meeting:

Your "Personal Commandments" are the overarching principles that you want to guide your actions and thoughts.

Activity: write your list of personal commandments. Aim to have more than five but no more than twelve.

For example, my Twelve Commandments are:

1. Be Gretchen
2. Let it go
3. Act the way I want to feel
4. Do it now
7. Spend out
8. Identify the problem
9. Lighten up
10. Do what ought to be done

5. Be polite and be fair

6. Enjoy the process.

11. No calculation

12. There is only love

What are your Personal Commandments? You can record them online at the Happiness Project Toolbox, www.happinessprojecttoolbox.com.

Topic 3: The First Splendid Truth

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Discuss the First Splendid Truth:

To be happy, think about feeling good, feeling bad, and feeling right, in an atmosphere of growth.

Do you agree that this is a helpful framework to think about happiness? What aspects of life are covered in the four elements? Do your resolutions focus on a particular element – such as eliminating bad feelings?

Topic 4: The Second Splendid Truth

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Discuss the Second Splendid Truth:

One of the best ways to make yourself happy is to make other people happy.

One of the best ways to make other people happy is to be happy yourself.

Most people emphasize the first half; do you believe the second half is also true? Does the Second Splendid Truth mean that we have a “duty to be happy?”

Topic 5: The Third Splendid Truth

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Discuss the Third Splendid Truth:

The days are long, but the years are short.

Do you agree? What does that mean for happiness? I did a little internet movie on this theme, The Years Are Short (<http://www.theyearsareshort.com/>) that you might enjoy.

Topic 6: The Fourth Splendid Truth

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Discuss the Fourth Splendid Truth:

You're not happy unless you think you're happy.

Do you agree? Or do you agree with John Stuart Mill, who said, "Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you shall cease to be so?" Or Vauvenargues, who wrote, "There are men who are happy without knowing it"?

Topic 7: Inspiration

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Talk about your sources of inspiration – books that you loved, songs that lift you up, movies that resonate with you, quotations that you remember.

Everyone will leave with a long list of happiness-boosting

books, music, and movies to check out.

Topic 8: Your Manifesto

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Write your Happiness Manifesto. What are your basic beliefs about the nature of happiness?

To get the ball rolling, here is part of my Manifesto:

Your body matters.

Happiness is other people.

Think about yourself so you can forget yourself.

"It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light." – G. K. Chesterton

What's fun for other people may not be fun for you, and vice versa.

Best is good, better is best.

Outer order contributes to inner calm.

Happiness comes not from having more, not from having less, but from wanting what you have.

You can choose what you do, but you can't choose what you like to do.

"There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy." – Robert Louis Stevenson

You manage what you measure.

Topic 9: Happy memories

First half of the meeting:

Resolutions report – how is everyone doing?

Second half of the meeting:

Activity: Remembering happy times in the past is a great way to boost happiness in the present, so brainstorm ideas for preserving happy memories.

Some suggestions:

Keep a one-sentence journal

Take one photograph each day

Make photograph albums

Take videos

Get professional photos of your children

Celebrate holidays in a colorful way

Keep traditions, big and small

Future topics

Other discussion topics might include:

Can money buy happiness?

Is it more important to be authentic or to be enthusiastic and positive? Is it possible to be both?

Is it true that "A house can only be as happy as the least happy person in it"?

Does accepting yourself bring some sadness?

If you're having a terrible day, how do you give yourself a quick happiness boost?

What do you know about happiness now that you didn't know when you were 18 years old?

Does today's technology make you happier or less happy? What steps can you do to help it make you happier?

What songs always make you happier? What memories are associated with them?

Is there one incident in your life that always makes you glow with happiness when you remember it? What happened?

It seems as though some people don't want to be happy.

Why might that be?

Suggested Reading List

Some groups enjoy discussing a book in a meeting. Here are some of my favorites. Better yet, group members might propose their own favorites.

Some interesting books on the science and practice of happiness

Gilbert, Daniel. *Stumbling on Happiness*.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis*.

Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness*.

Nettle, Daniel. *Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile*.

Nettle, Daniel. *Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are*

Nhat Hanh, Thich. *The Miracle of Mindfulness*.

Schwartz, Barry. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*.

Seligman, Martin. *Authentic Happiness*.

Dalai Lama. *The Art of Happiness*.

Examples of other people's happiness projects

De Botton, Alain. *How Proust Can Change Your Life*.

Frankl, Victor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Gilbert, Elizabeth. *Eat, Pray, Love*.

Jacobs, A. J. *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*.

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*.

Kremer, Anne. *Going Gray: What I Learned About Sex, Work, Motherhood, Authenticity and Everything Else That Really Matters*.

Lamott, Anne. *Operating Instructions*.

A few helpful books about relationships

Demaris, Ann. *First Impressions: What You Don't Know About How Others See You*.

Faber, Adele. *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*.

Fisher, Helen. *Why We Love: the Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*.

Gottman, John. *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*.

Sutton, R. *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*.

Some of great novels about happiness

Colwin, Laurie. *Happy All the Time*.

McEwan, Ian. *Saturday*.

Patchett, Ann. *Bel Canto*.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Gilead*.

Stegner, Wallace. *Crossing to Safety*.

Tolstoy, Leo. *Anna Karenina*.

Some of great movies about happiness

Junebug

Boogie Nights

All That Jazz

Hannah and Her Sisters

Groundhog Day

The Piano

Saturday Night Fever

Fight Club

After the Wedding

Terms of Endearment