

THE EVERYBODY'S INVITED GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE



*From the folks at
Everybody's Invited*

EDITED BY APRIL GREENE

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INTRODUCTION

“The Good Life” means different things to different people. To one, it might mean leading a life of luxury: having access to the finest wines, multiple vacation homes, and swanky parties. To another, it could be the freedom to work from anywhere, travel at will, and not take orders. For some, The Good Life refers to living altruistically, being of service to others, and sacrificing material desires for spiritual fulfillment.

The Good Life we talk about at Everybody’s Invited is achievable with or without a lot of money. It’s independent of your life’s circumstances: whether you’re young and unencumbered, or you have a family and all the related responsibilities. Our Good Life requires work, but not that you give up your worldly possessions.

The Good Life we want is one in which we’re awake to all the feelings, experiences, and opportunities for adventure that life has to offer (even the bad ones). It’s one in which we’re able to increase our happiness by practicing the art of enthusiasm

A NOTE ON USING THIS GUIDE

We suggest you browse through each of the sections and note any Good Life skills you feel you’ve already mastered, as well as those you think you could work on. We recommend you focus on one or two skills at a time, spending four to six weeks implementing the suggested activities, journaling, and being mindful of your intention to master the skill. Then, revisit the guide to choose a new skill to focus on.

and the science of optimism. In our Good Life, our well-being is improved by strengthening our relationships with loved ones, and by finding moments of connection with strangers. Finally, our Good Life is defined by constant, intentional efforts to challenge ourselves and grow.

The key to living this Good Life is to master the 20 Good Life skills. This guide will introduce you to them and help you practice and incorporate them into your daily life with fun and engaging tips and activities.

Get ready to live the Good Life!

BIG CAVEAT

Though much of the material in this guide is drawn from psychology, it is not a substitute for seeking help from a doctor or counselor if needed. For example, a habit of ruminating (see the “**Action Hero**” chapter) or excessive thoughts about death (see the “**All Good Things**” chapter) can be symptoms of depression. If you think you might be depressed, for the love of god, put down this guide and seek professional help.

part 1:

BE AWAKE

BEGIN AT ONCE TO
LIVE, AND COUNT EACH
SEPARATE DAY
AS A SEPARATE LIFE.

—Seneca

THIS.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Savoring*

There's a reason we put this one first. The art of savoring just might be the most fundamental Good Life skill to master. Nothing else puts you in the moment as quickly, or lets you reap life's rewards as fully. It is the granddaddy of happiness hacks, the Rolls Royce of uplifters, a mammoth among meaning-makers.

If you choose to work on only one Good Life skill, make it this one.

The practice most associated with savoring is *mindfulness*. Slowing down. Meditating. If your reaction to the words 'mindfulness' and 'meditation' is a gigantic eyeroll, try to bury your skepticism for a minute. Meditation can help reduce pain, depression, and anxiety, for realies. And it doesn't require that you be on a spiritual journey (though it's fine if you are) —it works because meditation is simply mastering the art of paying attention, and there's nothing woo-woo about that.



DROPPING SCIENCE:


Seek the bittersweet

Seeking out the bittersweet can help you savor more. In her book *The How of Happiness*, Sonja Lyubomirsky describes a study where college seniors were asked to write about their experience while focusing on the fact that they had “only 1/10th of a year left.” A control group was given a similar task, but the time was framed as “1,200 hours of school left.” The students who focused on how little time they had were more likely than the control group to report an increase in happiness, and to demonstrate savoring behaviors like spending more time with friends and taking photos.¹



ACTIVITY:

Savor the past with a memory jar


 a few moments a week, for at least a month, and perhaps a lifetime

Begin the habit of writing down your favorite experiences on slips of paper and putting them in a memory jar. To help build the habit, place the jar, some blank paper slips, and a pen somewhere where you'll see them everyday, like the dinner table. You don't need to add to the jar every day; only when something special occurs. Revisit the memories whenever you need a quick happiness hit.



ACTIVITY:

Savor the present with a mindfulness meditation

 start with five minutes per session, work your way up to longer sessions

There's an abundance of useful information about mindfulness meditations out there. Here are some of our favorites:

For an easy introduction, we like [Sam Harris' guided meditations](#).


The Mindful Word has a great selection of [simple mindfulness exercises](#) like "worry surfing" and "mindful eating".

There are many apps you can download to your smartphone that will help you establish a daily practice. [Lucent is one we like](#) (it's currently only available for iPhones).



ACTIVITY:

Savor the future with journaling

 20-30 minutes, at least once

It might sound strange to "savor the future," but it's totally possible (plus, we think it would make a good bumper sticker). If you can hold a clear picture in your mind's eye of something that hasn't yet happened, but you hope will one day, you are savoring the future.

As a journaling exercise, write a detailed description of a perfect day you might have in the future. It could be the day you finally land your dream job, your wedding day, your 60th birthday, or just a normal day full of happy moments. Capture as many sensory details as possible: what do you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel? What emotions are coming up?

A NOTE FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN: Savoring the time you have with your kids is probably one of your top priorities. Good thing we can easily capture memories with smartphones nowadays! We recommend starting a private blog for family and friends with photos, quotes, and stories of all the adorable things your kids do. This is the stuff you don't want to forget, and being intentional about capturing the memories as they happen will solidify them in your mind.

I GET A THRILL.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Evaluating ideas*

A favorite decision-making trick we use at Everybody's Invited is the “does it thrill me?” gut-check. It's most useful when deciding whether to pursue a new project, though it also works well for deciding on a new tattoo. While other issues might be of concern—likelihood of success, financial investment required, what others will think—we believe the Most Important Factor is the thrill factor.

We ask ourselves: does the idea of doing this give us butterflies? Does it make us nervously excited? Does picturing the end result render us giddy? Does the idea thrill us?

We're looking for a resounding “Yes!” here, and when we get it, that's when we know we're on to something.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Leveling up your intuition

Really, the thrill test is just an easy way to tap into your intuition. In his book *Answers for Aristotle*, Massimo Pigliucci discusses recent research on intuition. He describes it as a “domain-specific” ability, meaning people might exhibit more accurate intuition in one area than another.² This makes sense given that intuition is really just the brain's ability to quickly notice patterns. The more we know about a particular area, the more likely we'll be able to pick up on those patterns. Just like everything else in life, good intuition is the result of effort and time.



ACTIVITY:

The Thrill List



10 minutes, once

Make a list of the top five best ideas you've ever had, as measured in thrills per minute. For inspiration, you might recall times you made a big change (moved to a new city, quit a lame job), times you took a big risk (asked someone amazing out on a date, sang karaoke sober), or times you put your whole heart into something (launched a new business venture, learned a difficult new skill).



ACTIVITY:

The Thrill Test



5 minutes, several times over a couple of weeks

The next time you're hit with a new idea, follow this simple plan:

1. Put it to the thrill test. Do you feel the butterflies??
2. Sit with it for a week or two, let it percolate, and run the thrill test again. Your initial enthusiasm may have died down or you may have discovered some problems with the idea, but if it still passes the thrill test, the idea is worth pursuing at least a little longer.
3. Naysayer Challenge. Ask a friend to poke holes in your idea. Listen to all their questions, challenges, and skepticism with an open mind. Then, run it through the thrill test one last time.

Notice that this last round isn't called "the practicality test." The reason for the naysayer challenge isn't to determine the objective value of your idea, but to see if the thrill has staying power or if it poofed into thin air. Because if you can't stay excited about your idea through early, friendly critique, you won't stand a chance when it really gets challenged.

FIVE WHYS.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Cultivating Curiosity*

Here at Everybody's Invited, we're on the front lines in the battle against boredom, and one of our best strategies is constantly dreaming up new ways to have a good time.

But amusing ourselves with frivolous parties and games is not the end of the story.

The real secret weapon in the war against ennui is curiosity.

Sure, it may have killed the cat, but it's also a kick-ass defense against the doldrums.

The next time you notice you're bored, ask yourself, "What questions do I have in this moment?" Even in the midst of a low-energy lecture on a topic you're less than interested in, you can become an active participant in creating a more scintillating experience by asking good questions.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

We are pattern-finding machines

Our brains come pre-loaded with superior pattern recognition software—a remnant from a time when we needed to recognize and respond to predators regularly. The modern day downside of this super-ability is that we look for information that supports what we already believe, while dismissing information that contradicts those established ideas. This means we've got to actively seek out counter arguments if we're really interested in getting to the truth.



ACTIVITY:

Diversify your inputs



30 minutes to research and subscribe to new content, at least once

Have you been listening to the same music or podcasts for awhile? Reading the same news sources? Clicking on the same people's tweets? If you want to shake up your thoughts, try switching up the information you're feeding your brain. Add five new inputs to your rotation.



ACTIVITY:

Things to Learn list



20-30 minutes, at least once

Once you start treating your brain to all those juicy new inputs, you'll likely be inspired to go deep into some new topics. Make a list of at least 20 subject areas and skills you're interested in learning. They could be big things like "learn to speak, read, and write Mandarin" or smaller things like "learn the names of all the trees in my neighborhood."

Once you have a solid list, focus on one to three topics you want to work on first. Identify a first action step you can take for each—e.g. sign up for a free online class, or check out a book from the library.

MOMENTS.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Creating Lasting Memories*

Aside from theme parties and scavenger hunts, another passion of ours at Everybody's Invited is the design of special, hand-crafted (and yes, you could also say local and artisanal) moments.

What do we mean by moments?, you ask.

Well, we mean those one-of-a-kind experiences that fill up the memory jar of your life. The kinds of experiences you replay in your mind innumerable times after the fact, because each time it gives you a boost of happiness.

You, too, can be a world-class moment-maker. Yes!

The first thing we did on our quest to become expert moment-makers was learn to recognize opportunities for magical moments. Of course, there are the obvious reasons to celebrate: birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, graduations, and the like. But there are also more unusual occasions. Personal victories, such as overcoming a challenge, doing something brave (even if it didn't work out), or celebrating someone who isn't typically recognized for their work are other great occasions rife with potentially magical moments.



ACTIVITY:

Give a toast



at least once in your life

We think giving a toast should be on everybody's bucket list. Your palms may be sweating just thinking about it, but toasts are really special opportunities to shine a spotlight on someone you care about or admire. Pro-tip: Think of a toast as a gift you're giving, not a performance!

Here's some other advice:

- It's okay to be nervous. The best toasts are genuine.
- Explain your relationship to the person, but don't make the toast all about you.
- Think of an anecdote or two that highlight something special about the honoree. (Just be sure it's something the person would want shared publicly! You know, maybe save those college drinking stories for a more intimate reminiscence.)
- Keep it simple and short, and end on a light note.

There are also difficult life experiences like breakups, divorces, and getting laid off from a job. While the dominant feeling around them is often, understandably, “This Sucks,” they are also events that create unexpected fresh starts. Depending on the circumstances, you can use the power of a well-curated moment to flip perspectives and see the positive in these trying times. (Our favorite quote from *Steel Magnolias* is Dolly Parton’s, “Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion.”)



ACTIVITY:

Create a magic moment for someone



time varies

Use the following guiding questions to plan a memorable moment for someone you love:

- Who and what are you celebrating?
- Why is it worth celebrating? (Remember, it doesn't matter how significant the occasion might seem to others. Explain in your own words why you believe it matters.)
- What do you want the person to feel during the moment?
- Who should be involved? Who is important in the celebrant's life? Who helped inspire you to create the moment?
- What symbols come to mind when you think of the person or the occasion? These could be visual, or musical, or food-related, or anything else. Jot down five or more symbols that come to mind.
- What mementos could you build into the moment to help reinforce the memory? What takeaways will the celebrant have? This could be an actual token, like a homemade card or bouquet of flowers, or just high-fives and photos.

ALL GOOD THINGS

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Being Okay With Endings*

Part of being awake and alive is recognizing the fleeting nature of all things, including your own time in the world as well as others. While it's tempting to avoid thinking about this, and certainly not healthy to dwell on it, incorporating the acceptance of inevitable change into your worldview is important for maintaining perspective.



ACTIVITY:

It's your funeral



20-30 minutes, once

How do you want to be remembered after you've kicked the bucket? Take some time to write out what you'd most like people to say about you at your funeral. Try not to focus on specific accomplishments, but rather, on what you'd want to hear about *how* you lived your life. What were the habits or practices you committed to that could inspire others? You might want to get ideas by reading the eulogies of public figures you've admired or people in your life who have passed on.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Mode switch-a-roo

In *Staring at the Sun*, psychiatrist Irving D. Yalom writes about the German philosopher Heidegger's two modes of existence: the *everyday* mode where you're absorbed in your surroundings and consider *how* things are in the world, and the *ontological* mode where you appreciate *that* things (including you) are in the world. Most of us spend the majority of our time in the everyday mode, with occasional forays into the ontological. Yalom writes that in the ontological mode you are "more aware of existence and mortality," and, "prompted to grapple with your fundamental human responsibility to construct an authentic life of engagement, connectivity, meaning, and self-fulfillment."³ Don't you love that word, grapple? Let's get grappling!



ACTIVITY:

All the endings



20 minutes, once

Make a list of all of the prominent endings in your life: schools, jobs, relationships, the loss of loved ones, etc.

Next, write down how each of those endings has contributed to the person you are today. Not all the contributions need to be positive ones—perhaps some made you fearful or bitter or resentful. But for the purposes of this exercise, concentrate more on identifying the ways the endings made you stronger, or how they directly or indirectly led to new opportunities. Some of the endings may have prodded a beneficial change in perspective, or made you realize how much you learned from the person or pursuit. Consider how every ending has helped to shape your path.

part 2:

BE HAPPY



HAPPINESS MAKES UP
IN HEIGHT FOR WHAT
IT LACKS IN LENGTH.

—*Robert Frost*

CAN'T HARDLY WAIT.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Anticipation*

Did you know that people enjoy the time leading up to an exciting experience nearly as much as the experience itself? If that doesn't ring true, think about the joy you felt as a kid during the month leading up to a favorite holiday or your birthday. Think about how you feel at work the week before your vacation starts. Anticipation is a powerful gadget in our happiness toolbox.




DROPPING SCIENCE:

Double your pleasure

Shawn Achor, author of *The Happiness Advantage*, explains that our brains can't tell the difference between visualized experiences and actual lived experiences. So, if you're visualizing something fun you expect to happen in the future, your brain is experiencing it as if it's really happening.⁴ Just by taking the time to anticipate, you can double the positive effects of enjoyable experiences in your life. Wild, huh?



ACTIVITY:
Morning routine

 about one minute, daily

Make a habit of starting the day by identifying one thing you're looking forward to. Take a moment to visualize it happening (in as much rich detail as you can muster before you've had caffeine).



ACTIVITY:
Anticipation horizon


 about 30 minutes, at least once

For this exercise, you may want to grab a cup of tea and get cozy, because it takes a little more thought and care than the morning routine. Grab a journal or your laptop, and dig into these forward-looking questions:

- What are the three things you're most looking forward to in the short term (three-month horizon)?
- For each, write down a few thoughts about how the anticipation makes you feel. Savor those feelings.
- Next, what are three things you're looking forward to in the medium term (12-month horizon)?
- Repeat the step about writing down your thoughts.
- Now, what are three things you're looking forward to in the longer term (one- to three-year horizon)?
- You know the drill. Commit those thoughts and feelings to the page.



ACTIVITY:
Forward to a friend

 time varies

Because anticipation is so critical to enjoyment, we recommend incorporating it into any experiences or surprises you plan for other people. Do you know what's even more awesome than surprising your partner with a trip to Paris? Letting them *anticipate* that something wonderful is going to happen (though you can keep the details a surprise).

The next time you're planning something special for someone else (and, hey, you should be every now and then!), see if you can incorporate an element of anticipation to maximize their fun.

YOU'RE A NERD.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Enthusiasm*

These days, it's high praise to be called a nerd. I'm sure we all remember when the word called to mind images of plaid pant-sporting, socially awkward kids with well-protected pockets. Now a 'nerd' can just be anyone with an enthusiastic appreciation for something. It often refers to a niche area, but it can really be applied to any interest or hobby. You can nerd out about comic books, movies, music, politics, food... Just about anything.

As far as we're concerned, the nerd renaissance is a good thing.

Enthusiasm is a critical ingredient for living The Good Life. It's like a magic elixir that, when added to whatever opportunities come your way, becomes a potent potion for catalyzing a meaningful life. Forget *The Secret*. We believe enthusiasm is the real attractive force in anyone's life. So, try it on. It looks good on you.



DROPPING ETYMOLOGY:

Apparently, it's hard to explain scientifically why enthusiasm is so contagious (we know because we really tried!). But we can at least understand it a little better etymologically if we trace back its linguistic roots. Business relationship expert Andrew Sobel says, "The word enthusiasm comes from the Greek enthousiasmós. It means, literally, 'possession by a god' or 'having a god within.'⁵ Doesn't that say it all? When you are truly enthusiastic about what you do, you have such excitement, zeal, ardor, and passion that it's as if you are possessed!" If we accept the line of reasoning that god represents an ideal being, and being enthusiastic means embodying god, then being enthusiastic is ideal. 'nuff said.



ACTIVITY:

The nerd list



10-15 minutes, at least once

This is a fun one! Create a list of topics you nerd out about. Revel in your nerdery. Get proud.



ACTIVITY:

Embodying enthusiasm



a few moments, whenever you're feeling unenthusiastic

Know how they say “fake it ‘til you make it”? That can be good advice. For example, we can often create a genuine feeling of enthusiasm simply by acting enthusiastic. The next time you're feeling unenthused, try smiling broadly. Practice vocalizing some enthusiasm. Pretty soon, you'll probably find those metaphorical cubic zirconias sparkling like real blingy diamonds.



ACTIVITY:

Who's your enthusiasm hero?



a few moments, whenever the occasion arises

You probably know someone you'd describe as an enthusiastic person. Someone who greets people at the airport with gigantic hugs, someone whose face lights up when they receive a gift, someone who sings loudly and with gusto, even (maybe especially?) when they're off-key.

Take a moment to appreciate this person for their enthusiasm; maybe even tell them you admire them for it. And the next time *you* meet someone at the airport, get a gift, or find yourself humming along to the dance music at the deli, try to channel your enthusiasm hero and turn your ebullience up a notch.

BRIGHT SIDE.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Optimism*

Ah, optimism. The trait that launched a thousand Pinterest quote boards.

Those who possess this Good Life skill run the risk of being seen as naive or downright foolish. Debbie Downers will make harsh accusations involving rose-colored glasses, and others will mock the Eternal Optimist for endeavoring to see an upside. But there's plenty of evidence to support the benefits of the optimist's worldview. For example, optimists are more able to recover from setbacks and are less likely to suffer from depression than pessimists.

It may feel like some people are born with a sunny outlook, while others are doomed to wallow in their pessimism (which is sometimes dressed up as the more respectable "realism"). But the truth is that optimism is a serious skill that can be honed just like any other. So, get your proverbial glass ready—we're about to fill it up halfway.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

You got some 'splainin' to do

In *Learned Optimism*, psychologist Martin Seligman introduces the concept of “explanatory styles,” a framework for understanding optimism. Optimists explain negative events as external, isolated, and temporary. On the other hand, they think of positive events as personalized, pervasive, and permanent.⁶ Seligman writes that people can change their explanatory styles through cognitive therapy—but if you want a free test run before you lie back on the leather sofa, try the following activities.



ACTIVITY:

Take a BITE out of bad events

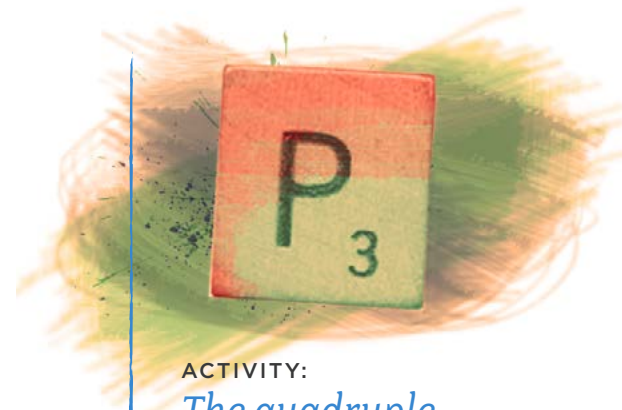
This activity uses a mnemonic:

BITE: Bad events = **I**solated, **T**emporary, and **E**xternal

To develop your optimism skills, consider a recent negative experience and how you explained it to yourself or others. Did you describe it as isolated, temporary, and external; or pervasive, permanent, and personalized? How could you have explained it differently?

Here are some examples:

- “I’m a terrible friend” is an example of pervasiveness—assuming that one failing is indicative of a larger failing. **Optimists isolate problem areas.** “I may have forgotten her birthday, but I did help her move last month.”
- “My boss will never trust me again” is an example of permanence—assuming a single negative event will last forever. **Optimists think of bad events as temporary.** “My boss didn’t love my ideas this time, but he’s sure to dig what I’m cooking up next.”
- “I’m unlikeable” is an example of personalization—assuming you’re the cause of the problem. **Optimists identify causes outside of themselves.** “He said he had a lot going on; he’s probably just too busy to date.”



ACTIVITY:

The quadruple Ps for positive events

This activity uses another mnemonic:

The Quadruple Ps:

Positive events = **P**ervasive,
Permanent, and **P**ersonalized

Consider a recent positive experience and how you explained it. Did you describe it as pervasive, permanent, and personalized; or isolated, temporary, and external? How could you have explained it differently?

WHY SO SERIOUS?

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Cultivating Lightheartedness*

One of our favorite Good Life skills is the art of lightheartedness. The word itself connotes joy, levity, and laughter. Lightheartedness describes someone who doesn't take life, or themselves, too seriously.

How do we harness this beautiful mare and put 'er to work on our life-farm? Primarily by putting our sense of humor to work in the suckiest of times.

Humor has a way of cutting through negative emotions. It works because our brains need release. We simply cannot hang on to feelings of sadness or anxiety forever (even when we want to). Practicing lightheartedness in all moods can help us to weather storms more effectively, and to be a bright spot for others.

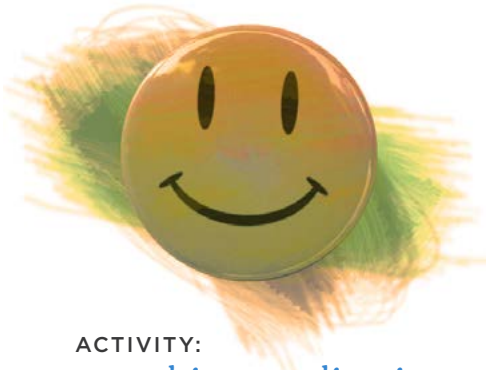
The road to lightheartedness may be paved with clown noses and punchlines, but it doesn't require nonstop cheerfulness. (Let's be honest: the people who always seem super-happy can be super-irritating to be around.) What it *does* mean is the ability to maintain perspective, to not blow things out of proportion, and to always find the funny.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

A giggle a day

There have been lots of studies linking laughter with positive health benefits. A good guffaw has been connected to boosting the immune system, decreasing blood sugar levels, and reducing pain. You may not be receiving prescriptions for giggles from your doctor any time soon, as the jury's still out regarding a causal connection, but there's no doubt that laughing feels good. So why not do what you can to up your chuckle factor?



ACTIVITY:

Laughing meditation



5 minutes, as often as your roommates, coworkers, or family can stand

Begin by doing a minute of full-body stretching. Reach your arms toward the ceiling and stand on your toes. Stretch your facial muscles, too.

Next, allow yourself to smile, at first just by curving your mouth. Allow your smile to broaden—show your teeth—and feel how the muscles in your face change.

Start laughing. You don't need a reason. If it feels silly, you're doing it right.

Let your laughter deepen, and feel it in your belly. Observe how it makes you feel in all parts of your body.

After a few minutes, quiet your laughter, and be still for another minute. If you were standing while laughing, you may want to sit.



ACTIVITY:

Come out and play



1-2 hours, at least once

One of the best things about being an adult is that we were all children once. If we try hard, we can remember what it felt like, and maybe even learn a bit from our shorter, droolier, more playful past selves. Kids are rad because they're so good at not needing to feel productive or purposeful—they just play, with no specific goal in mind.

Spend an hour or two doing an activity you loved as a child. Fingerpainting, doing cartwheels, or playing a pretend monster-slaying game with a ruler for a sword can all be worthy adult endeavors. As you play, try to get in the kid zone—that mental space where you lose track of time and just enjoy the moment.



ACTIVITY:

Put away your worries



a couple of minutes, and then literally no time at all

Do you ever feel anxious about work over the weekend? Or get preemptively stressed before the holidays? Or maybe you fret over test results in the days before you receive them?

All of these experiences involve unnecessary worry, and none of them help you in any way. The next time you feel anxiety coming on, write down what you're worried about on a piece of paper and tuck it away in a drawer. This signals to your brain that you're not going to think about whatever's causing you anxiety until a more appropriate time. If the thoughts do sneak in, remind yourself that you put them away for later. Amazingly, this can really reduce anxiety. Try it!

TREAT YO SELF.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *We'll say it again—Treat yo self!*

We love treats! Besides often being delicious, treats can be powerful motivators. Of course, they need to be distributed in moderation, and they shouldn't always be the caloric kind, nor should they be the expensive kind. (Pro-tip: Giant cupcake- and gold jewelry-based personal incentive programs might sound like a fine idea at first blush, but we can pretty much guarantee problems will arise.)

If you're ready to make your treat game a little sweeter, read on.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Give and take

On *The Happiness Project* blog, Gretchen Rubin writes about studies showing that when people receive small treats, such as surprise gifts or watching a funny video, they experience a boost in self-control. As Gretchen writes, “If I give more to myself, I can ask more from myself.”⁷



ACTIVITY:

Your personal “power-ups” list



a lifelong habit, a moment at a time

In video games, “power-ups” are objects that give your character extra abilities. For this activity, take time to recognize your own real-life power-ups. What little things can you do during the day to boost your mood or re-energize? Maybe there’s a certain song that always gets you going, or photos that remind you of a happy time, or a power color that you feel invincible wearing.

Other ideas to help you expand your power-up repertoire: looking at beautiful images on Flickr or Pinterest, reading a passage from a favorite children’s book, riding a merry-go-round, putting on slippers, perusing travel blogs. Or follow Gretchen Rubin’s lead and treat yourself to lovely scents!⁸

Jot down all the personal power-ups you can think of, and add to it whenever you notice a new one.



ACTIVITY:

Emergency perfect day



one hour to prepare, one day to put into practice

Have you ever had this conversation?

“What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know. What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know. What do you want to do?”

Here at Everybody’s Invited, we’re on a mission to eliminate this conversation from ever happening in our lives, because it is the worst, and we invite you to do the same.

In order to properly *carpe the diem*, you need to have an “emergency perfect day” in your back pocket. Flip through a guide book for your city and make a list of all the things you would do if you were a tourist. The next time you have some unexpected free hours, refer to your list and live your perfect day.

part 3:

BE OF SERVICE



NO ONE HAS
EVER BECOME
POOR BY GIVING.

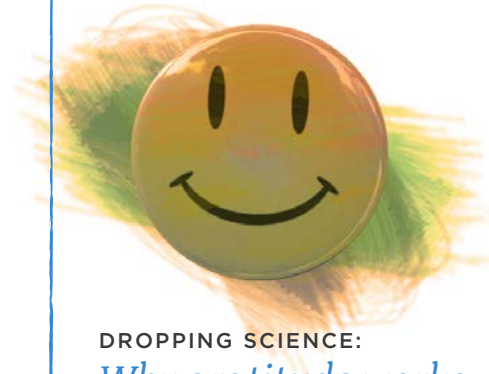
—*Anne Frank*

HEY, THANKS!

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Gratitude*

Gratitude is the secret sauce in any selflessness recipe. Helping others starts with a deep appreciation for what you have. But it's not entirely altruistic—gratitude's connection to well-being has been proven in scores of studies. It can help resolve mild depression, and its effects can be long-lasting (even in small doses). It's also unbelievably easy to put into practice.

Unfortunately, though, gratitude is usually one of the first things to go when we're feeling stressed. It's difficult to remember to be appreciative when you're in the midst of a crisis. (And, let's be honest, it's annoying to be reminded.) This is why we recommend practicing your attitude of gratitude (or, as we like to say, *raditude* of gratitude) when you're feeling good about life.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Why gratitude works

Dr. Christine Carter, a sociologist at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, has identified three reasons why gratitude leads to greater happiness:⁹

1. Acknowledging that another person has incurred a cost for you increases your self-worth
2. Gratitude bonds you to other people
3. Building a gratitude habit helps you notice positive experiences in all parts of your life



ACTIVITY:

Gratitude journal



5-10 minutes a day,
every day if you can

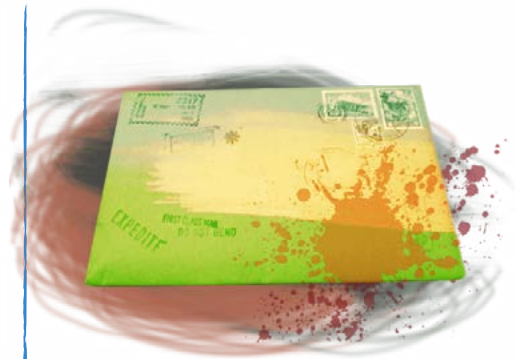
Sure, it may feel a bit Oprah-y, but that lady does have some smart things to say. If you've never been able to commit to journaling regularly, you might have better luck with this simple list format:

Today I'm grateful for...

Today I loved...

Today I'm looking forward to...

It's a super-simple way to reflect on your days—even the crappy ones!



ACTIVITY:

Grab your quill



15-30 minutes, at least once

Now let's make the leap from journaling to correspondence. Try following this outline to produce a heartfelt expression of thanks:

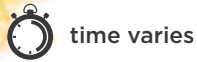
1. Choose the recipient of your thank-you letter: a friend, a former teacher, a family member, a coworker, or maybe someone you don't even know all that well (like the barista who painstakingly makes your daily double latte with almond milk).
2. Describe the action you feel grateful for. Try to start with the word "You" rather than "I." e.g. "You make the best caramel mocha in the city."
3. Acknowledge that it was unexpected or otherwise above and beyond.
4. Explain how it specifically affected you or improved your day.
5. Explain how you paid it forward (which you did, right?) so the person has the added pleasure of seeing their own positive ripple effect.

Remember, if this were a wizard's spell, it wouldn't be binding until you actually delivered it—so don't skip that part!



ACTIVITY:

Pay it forward (not that god-awful Haley Joel Osment film, but, like, actually pay it forward)



time varies

Have you ever seen one of those videos of a chain of customers each paying for the next person's drink at a Starbucks drive-through? You could be the first link in that chain!

When you're feeling grateful, it's natural to want to pass that good feeling on to others. If you're not a coffee drinker, here are some other easy ways to pay it forward:

- Compliment a stranger (in a non-creepy way, of course)
- Offer to let someone cut in front of you in line at the grocery store
- Loan money on [Kiva.org](https://www.kiva.org)
- Give up your seat on the bus or subway
- Give blood or sign up to be a bone marrow donor
- Write a positive business review on [Yelp](https://www.yelp.com) or [TripAdvisor](https://www.tripadvisor.com)
- Write a letter to a store or company telling them about the excellent customer service you received (mention names when possible!)
- "Donate" your birthday by asking friends to give to your favorite organization instead of buying you presents

FRIENDS: NOT PHOEBE AND CHANDLER— YOUR ACTUAL FRIENDS.

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Cultivating Friendships*

There's a famous longitudinal study of 268 male Harvard students who were examined by physicians, social workers, and psychiatrists throughout their lives, starting with their time at Harvard and ending when they were in their 90s (though many had passed on by then). The study is a rich source of data that has been used to infer rules for living good, meaningful, healthy, and successful lives. You can read more about it in *Triumphs of Experience: The Men of the Harvard Grant Study*.

Among the study's many significant findings is the central tenet that good relationships are the key to successful aging. The men's relationships at age 47 predicted their ability to adjust to later life better than any other variable, except defenses (defined as the unconscious thoughts and behaviors that shape or distort



DROPPING SCIENCE: *Only the lonely*

According to a University of California, San Francisco study published in 2012, loneliness is correlated with functional decline and early death in older adults. More than half the study participants who self-identified as lonely had difficulty with basic housekeeping and personal tasks during the six-year follow-up phase. They also had a 45 percent greater risk of dying earlier than older people who felt more connected to others.¹⁰ But of course, loneliness isn't experienced only by older adults. According to a 2013 survey conducted by Lifeboat, an organization that "advances the cause of friendship," three quarters of Americans are not truly satisfied with their friendships. A higher percentage of seniors and baby boomers reported satisfaction with their friendships than millennials and gen X'ers.¹¹

a person's reality). As George Vaillant, the lead researcher on the study wrote, "The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people."¹²



ACTIVITY:

Grade Your Friend Skills

For this activity, consider your core group of close friends. These are the people you'd call in a crisis, or for whom you'd drop everything to help if they needed you. For some, this may be one or two people, while others may have a larger group. (But research shows that we can't

sustain meaningful relationships with more than 10-15 people, so keep your list to the relationships you invest in the most.)

As you read over the following statements, think about your interactions with your close friends over the last three months. Give yourself zero to three points for each statement, based on how well you think it describes your relationship with your close friends.

- I have been good at keeping in touch with my close friends
- I have remembered and acknowledged the important events in the lives of my friends
- I have shared important news with my friends directly, not just over social media
- I have known what's happening in my friends' lives
- My friends have known that I care about them, because I've told them or otherwise expressed it to them
- I have gone out of my way to do something kind or thoughtful for a friend
- I have expressed enthusiasm for a friend's achievements or good fortune
- I have been a source of support to a friend who was going through a challenging time

You've awarded yourself somewhere between zero and 24 points. Are you happy with your score? If not, brainstorm some ways you can commit to upping your it in the coming three months.



ACTIVITY:

Celebrate a friendiversary

We first read about the idea of a "friendiversary" in an interview with friendship expert Carlin Flora on the Lifeboat blog.¹³

In Flora's words, "There are friends who have been friends for 20 years and have never stopped to acknowledge that. I'd love to introduce an idea where people celebrate friend anniversaries so people start thinking in terms of, 'this is a long-term relationship that I should really value'."

Do you have any friends who have been in your life for five years? 10? 20? Mark the milestone with a celebratory lunch date, and use the occasion to let them know how much their friendship means to you.



ACTIVITY:

Rev up your listening skills

What's that? You want to be a really good friend? Well, start with listening. You may already have the basics of good listening down. You may know to put your phone aside when your friend starts downloading her latest work drama. You may know how to show you're listening by nodding, making eye contact, and raising your eyebrows. And hopefully you know to not make a habit of interrupting people when they're talking.

That's Listening 101. Are you ready for a Master Class in Advanced Listening? Here we go.

1. Lead with empathy.

Save the judgements for *American Idol*. Just listen and try to understand where your friend is coming from. Instead of inserting your own opinions, try repeating back what you're hearing. "Oh man, it sounds like you were really frustrated."

2. Don't try to solve someone's problem, unless they specifically ask.

Your friend may simply want to process a bad experience by sharing it with you. You can help them clarify their feelings and options by asking questions, but they can likely come to their own conclusions without your unsolicited advice, thank you very much.

3. But do ask what role they'd like you to play.

"Would it be useful to talk through some options, or do you just want to vent right now?" "This sounds really hard. Is there anything I can do to help you?" Provide a specific suggestion, if you can. "I'd be happy to look over your resume if you do decide you want to start looking for another job."

4. Ask questions.

Questions not only show that you're paying attention, they also provide space for your friend to navigate their feelings. Don't assume you understand what they're experiencing. "How do you feel about that?" is a really useful question.

5. Provide context and perspective.

If your friend is in crisis mode, she may not be seeing the forest for the trees. As a neutral observer, you can provide beneficial perspective by reminding her of her strengths, a similar storm she weathered in the past, or a silver lining she's not seeing (though be careful with this last one. Gauge your friend's tolerance for 'upsiding' before going all Pollyanna on her. And make sure you're not invalidating her feelings or trying to solve her problems—see numbers 1 and 2.).

PUT YOUR ACTIONS WHERE YOUR VALUES ARE

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Living Aligned with Your Values*

Sometimes we feel like tools when we find ourselves writing about how important it is to live in alignment with our values. The language around this topic can be really hokey. When we catch ourselves writing words like “authenticity,” “harmony,” and “congruence,” it makes us want to “barf,” “vomit,” and “upchuck.”



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Contradiction = destruction

According to the chiropractors at The Pelly Clinic, “Alignment first and foremost refers to living in alignment with your core values and life’s purpose. Stress and the impact stress has on allowing for disease to manifest in your body often results from living with actions that are out of alignment with your values. Wellness expert Dr. Patrick Gentempo teaches that living in contradiction always leads to destruction. If your health is a priority for you and you do not live a lifestyle in alignment with your values, it will lead to health problems. It is a natural law that your actions must be in alignment with your values to experience success.”¹⁴

Real Talk: No matter how pragmatic and rational you are, you've experienced moments of upheaval in your life. And some of those moments might have been caused by living your life according to someone else's rules. That's what we mean when we talk about values and misalignment. There may not be a greater source of dissatisfaction than this kind of imbalance.



ACTIVITY:

Values Venn diagram

You knew this was coming: It's time to make a list of your core values. You might want to take a look at a [published list of value words](#) for inspiration. (Some gems from this list: coolness, extravagance, ferocity, gallantry, logic, majesty, mellowness, outlandishness, perkiness, shrewdness, and "being the best.")

First, identify up to 10 values that best reflect your actual day-to-day life; the ones you're currently living. For each value, list three ways it manifests in your current life.

Next, identify the 10 values that resonate with you most. These are the ones that represent your ideal lifestyle, your ideal way of being. For each value, list three ways that value might manifest in your life.

Is there any overlap between the two lists? Are you living in alignment with your core values, or are you operating a bit outside your ideal?



ACTIVITY:

Get in line

Now take your notes about how your ideal values manifest and think about practical opportunities for increasing alignment. What changes can you make in your life now to start leading with your deepest values?

For each value, write at least one specific action you could take in the next month to start getting yourself in the habit of living it. For example, if one of the ideal values you identified was mellowness, and you wrote that mellowness could manifest in your life if you stay calm when you're stuck in traffic, make it a written-down goal to keep your cool next week when you'll be driving two hours to Grandma's house—even if there's construction on the highway.

GIVE IT AWAY NOW

GOOD LIFE SKILL:

Using Your Time and Talent to Help Others

Want to give yourself a boost? Try helping someone else. Volunteering can improve your life in so many ways that most volunteers claim they get more out of the experience than the people they're serving. You can gain skills, grow your professional network, improve your social life, beef up your résumé, and test out new career possibilities, among many other benefits. When we put it that way, it almost sounds selfish, doesn't it?

Ready to give it away? Let's get altruistic!



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Body & Soul

Volunteering has even been linked to physical health benefits. Several longitudinal studies have correlated volunteering with living longer, and when people with chronic or serious illnesses volunteer, they derive more benefits than from medical care alone.¹⁵



ACTIVITY:

The (right) opportunity knocks

There are so many ways to volunteer, it can be overwhelming. Ask yourself these questions to help you narrow down your options:

What issues are you passionate about? Maybe you love working with children, or animals? Maybe you care about relieving homelessness, or you'd like to help refugees? Perhaps you're dedicated to the environment? What skills can you bring? Tech savviness to older adults? A green thumb to a community garden? Are you a number cruncher by day? How about providing tax help to low-income families?

How much time can you commit? If you're looking for a one-off, try volunteering for a fundraiser (think "a-thons" or gala events), or building a home with Habitat for Humanity. If you have the wherewithal for something sustained, consider signing up to tutor kids in a weekly after-school program.

Once you've spent some time reflecting, look to a local volunteering resource or hit up an online hub to find opportunities that match your criteria. Many communities have volunteer centers, but if you don't know of one where you live, try an online hub like idealist.org, volunteermatch.org, or catchafire.org.

ACTS OF KINDNESS

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Killin' It With Kindness*

The Good Life is fueled by random acts of kindness. But happily, unlike petrol, kindness isn't a finite resource. You can always generate more, adding to the mass of good feelings in the world and improving your own well-being. Plus, no noxious fumes!



DROPPING SCIENCE:
Mixing it up

In her paper, *Boosting Happiness, Buttressing Resilience: Results from Cognitive and Behavioral Interventions*, Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky describes a study that tested how completing random acts of kindness affected people's self-reported happiness levels. Lyubomirsky found that participants experienced greater happiness when they were able to vary their acts of kindness, rather than repeating the same one.¹⁶



ACTIVITY:

Run your own kindness experiment

Take a page from Dr. L's book and run your own month-long kindness experiment (lab coat not required, though dressing up is fun). Choose up to 20 acts of kindness and complete five of them during the course of each week for 30 days. Check out RandomActsofKindness.org for inspiration.

part 4:

BE BETTER

BE SO GOOD THEY
CAN'T IGNORE YOU.

—*Steve Martin*

HOW DO YOU GET TO CARNEGIE HALL?

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Deliberate Practice, Practice, Practice*

Deliberate practice is the most essential ingredient in any Get Better recipe. There are no substitutions allowed.

You may have heard of the 10,000 hours rule, made famous by Malcolm Gladwell in his bestseller *The Tipping Point*. The 10,000 hours rule states that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to develop expertise in any area. Sounds legit, huh?

But allow us us to drop a truth bomb on you:

The 10,000 hours rule is completely useless if most of those hours are spent on automatic pilot, mindlessly rehearsing what you already know. Deliberate practice is the art of making those hours count.

Deliberate practice requires setting up and sticking to a regular practice schedule, establishing feedback loops, creating and adjusting a practice plan based on feedback, setting milestones, and recognizing signs of plateauing.



ACTIVITY:

Keep a deliberate practice performance journal



ongoing, with frequent updates

Think about a skill you're working to develop, preferably a skill you're honing in a relatively stable context. Think running, tennis, playing guitar, knitting, drawing, photography, or cooking.

Start a performance journal to track your progress. Start with:

- Your goals, including very specific milestones (e.g. "I'll run my first 10K by April 15th")
- Your practice plan (e.g. "Play guitar for 30 minutes each day"). Be sure your practice plan is at least 70% practical (e.g. actually taking pictures), and no more than 30% theoretical (e.g. reading about photography techniques).

As you implement your plan, use your journal to track:

- Changes to your level of discomfort. You want to stay in the maximum growth area of about 60–80% successful. If you are less successful, you'll suffer from disillusionment, but if you're too successful, you'll plateau. Learn to "right size" your challenges.
- Specific growth areas. Your feedback loops (see the "How'm I doin'?" activity below) are a valuable source of information about what specific areas you need to work on. Adjust your practice plan accordingly (e.g. "My wife has really enjoyed the sauces I've made recently, but I've definitely been overcooking the meat. I need to work on that specifically.").



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Practice isn't everything

Malcolm Gladwell himself has said that the 10,000 hours rule has been oversimplified and doesn't apply to all fields.¹⁷ A meta-study of 88 scientific articles concluded that practice explains a paltry 12% of your performance in a given task, and that it plays a more significant role in stable contexts (e.g. playing an instrument, mastering games) than unstable contexts (e.g. handling an aviation emergency).¹⁸ Even though the 10,000 hours rule has had enough holes poked in it to give Swiss cheese a run for it's money, we remain big believers in the art of deliberate practice for skill development.



ACTIVITY:

How'm I doin'?



time varies

A critical part of deliberate practice is establishing feedback loops. How will you know whether you're making progress toward your goals? How will you know which specific areas to target for further development?

Your feedback loops will depend on the activity, but here are some examples:

- watching video of your soccer or dance practice
- taking practice tests
- receiving comments from an editor
- performing your music in a train station
- entering your artwork in a contest and asking for feedback from the organizers
- joining a writer's workshop
- starting a personal advisory board of trusted friends and colleagues to provide honest feedback
- making use of a service like [BrutalFirstImpressions.com](https://brutalfirstimpressions.com) to get honest feedback from a neutral party

Choose a method that makes sense for what you're trying to learn.

STORYTIME

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Reframing*

Have you read *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire? It tells the familiar story of *The Wizard of Oz* from the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West. It turns the traditional tropes on their heads and provides a whole new perspective on some well-known characters.

The human brain is a storytelling machine. We love stories because they help us make sense of the world. But as *Wicked* demonstrates, stories do not present an objective, scientific-type truth. Instead, they present *one version of someone's truth*.

Many of the stories we tell about ourselves offer a harsher-than-accurate version of events, or paint a negative picture of our role in them. Stories can be a powerful illusion. They can feel absolutely True. That's why the ability to tell yourself another story—a more positive one—is such an important Good Life skill.

DROPPING SCIENCE:

Positivity intervention!

In an interview with *Scientific American*, Timothy D. Wilson, author of *Redirect*, tells the story of a study he did with first-year college students who were struggling academically. They were in danger of adopting negative, self-defeating thought patterns in which they told themselves they “weren’t college material.” For the study, the students were randomly divided into two groups. One group received information indicating that many people do poorly in their first year and improve later, and they watched interviews with upperclass students who reinforced that message. This group achieved better grades the following semester than the control group, who did not receive the positivity intervention. Wilson concludes that the additional information allowed the students to “edit” their own stories to allow for a more optimistic interpretation.¹⁹



ACTIVITY:

Tell a different story

20-30 minutes, at least once

For this activity, call to mind a negative thing you believe to be true about yourself. Write it down using this format: I always/never X because Y.

Next, choose one of these two inversions:

- The Total Delusion: Swap always/never, keep the X, and replace the Y with what would need to be true for the sentence to make sense
- The Give Yourself a Break: Keep the always/never X, but find a kinder Y

Say the inversion out loud. Say it again.

Next, describe what your life would look like if the inversion were true. What would it feel like? Pretty sweet, eh?!

Finally, the clincher: Look for evidence to support the inversion. Write down that evidence.



ACTIVITY:

Sleuth your stories



a few moments at a time, several times over the course of a week

For a week, practice recognizing the moments when you tell yourself stories. Here are some clues:

- If you find yourself saying, “I always” or “I never” or “That’s just the way I am”
- If you arrive at a different conclusion than other people who have the same information
- If you find yourself nervous or anxious about something that hasn’t happened yet
- If you’re saying something disparaging about yourself, to yourself or to others

For one week, jot down a note every time you realize you’re telling a negative story about yourself.

ACTION HERO

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Develop an Action Orientation*

This Good Life skill is loaded with life-changing potential. Seriously, it packs quite a punch. If action is the superhero's MO, then the supervillain runs on two flavors of kryptonite: procrastination and rumination.

Procrastination is avoiding urgent or unpleasant tasks by doing less urgent or more pleasurable ones instead. Rumination is focusing obsessively on the symptoms of your problems, rather than the solutions.

Through procrastination and rumination, it's easy to create an illusion of progress. But in reality, most problems require two things: action and time.



ACTIVITY:

Follow the action hero rules



15 minutes to read and absorb

We've devised this list of rules that, when followed, turn you into a true action hero—the type of person known for getting things done, following through, and delivering value to the world. Print this out and place it where you do most of your work.

Do the high value items on your list first

The “high value” items are the ones that get you closest to delivering something that will be useful to others. You know what they are, but you might be avoiding them because, well, they're often the most difficult to start. Develop a habit of diving in.

Cultivate a just-in-time planning ethic

If you find yourself debating the finer details of a project you know you won't be starting for months, you're wasting time. Not only are you not doing what's actually important in the present, but you'll likely need to re-do all that micro-thinking later when it's actually time to start.

Focus on Getting Better rather than Being Good

Imagine you're going for the “Most Improved” award, rather than the MVP. Emphasizing distance traveled, rather than a destination, is less likely to cause paralysis.

Maximum number of complaints: 1

Sometimes you won't notice right away, but call on your friends to point out when they've heard you make the same complaint more than once. Immediately resolve to take a step toward resolving the situation instead of blabbing on about how annoying it is. No one likes a whiner.

Fear is a signal

Sometimes your fear of something is actually telling you that you should do it! Adopt the mantra: “I'm doing it *because* it's scary.”

Recognize the moment when talking about it stops helping

Talking about a problem can be tremendously useful. You might talk your way into a solution, or learn from the insights of others. On the other hand, there's often a moment when talking stops being useful and starts being just plain kvetching. Learn to recognize this moment and zip your lips there.

Respond to negative feelings with movement

If you're feeling sad, mad, or frustrated, it's best to get moving. Go for a walk or a run if you can. Or at least leave the room you're in if you've been there for awhile. Change your physical scenery to change your mental scenery.

Be willing to change your mind or your plan

Don't get too attached. While setting and sticking to goals is great for many reasons, there are also plenty of times when something changes—either in the context or in your thinking about it—and it will be best to shift direction. Learn to feel for the balance between staying the course and jumping ship.

Just start

Requiring an even smaller commitment than Nike's wise advice, this is probably the most straightforward and useful action tip we can give.



ACTIVITY:

Become a master of good distraction



as needed, for as long as it takes

The secret to avoiding rumination is really the ability to distract yourself—to pull your mind out of a worthless feedback loop and back into real time. Art and nature are two of your most powerful weapons against rumination; use them frequently. Physical exercise, creative projects, work (whatever that means to you), and even television are other great distractors. The next time you find yourself sounding like a broken record, replaying a conversation in your mind, or dwelling on something that's not within your control, try getting your distraction on. The activity should be thoroughly engrossing, so pick something you know you can get fully absorbed in.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Putting off good health

While many people recognize procrastination as a bad habit, most don't realize it can actually be harmful. In a 1997 study published in *Psychological Science*, Dianne Tice and Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University rated college students on a procrastination scale, then tracked their academic performance, stress levels, and general health throughout the semester. The study results showed that procrastinators not only earned lower grades than other students (as you might expect), they also reported higher amounts of stress and illness.²⁰

In their paper *Rethinking Rumination*, authors Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, Blair E. Wisco, and Sonja Lyubomirsky discuss the harmful effects of rumination. When we ruminate we're more likely to explain our circumstances with despair-laced reasoning, we become terrible problem-solvers, and, if we make rumination a habit, we can irritate those around us, causing us to lose social support.²¹ Ick!

LET'S MAKE SOME MISTAKES!

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Developing a Growth Mindset*

Cultivating a growth mindset is one of the more significant changes you can make if you want to live our kind of Good Life (that is to say, the best kind of Good Life, in our humble opinions).

If you have a growth mindset, you believe your abilities can be developed through effort. This mindset creates a love of learning as well as a resilience you can use to counter the obstacles you'll inevitably face.

On the other hand, if you have a fixed mindset, you believe that your basic abilities, including your intelligence, are fixed traits. You don't think you can move the needle, even with hard work. You believe innate talent alone is what creates successful people.

DROPPING SCIENCE:

Know and you'll grow

A growth mindset can be cultivated. Carol Dweck, the Stanford University psychologist known for her pioneering work researching mindsets, has studied the impact of growth mindset training on students. Working with lead researcher Lisa Blackwell, Dweck designed a study in which a group of students whose grades were declining were divided into two groups. The control group was taught about a neutral topic (the stages of memory), while the other group received training on the growth mindset—how the brain grows with learning to make you smarter, and how to cultivate a growth mindset. Three times as many students in the growth mindset group demonstrated an increased amount of effort and engagement, as compared to the control group. Additionally, the growth-mindset group showed an improvement in their grades, whereas the control group's members' grades continued to decline.²²



ACTIVITY:

Letter to your past self



20 minutes, at least once

Think of a time in your life when you felt you weren't up to a task. You didn't feel smart enough, or talented enough. Write a letter to your past self telling her not to give up, and giving her a glimpse of the improvements she's going to make through hard work and practice.



ACTIVITY:

My Favorite Mistake



20 minutes per week for four weeks

It's when we're making mistakes that we're learning the most. This means *we should seek out opportunities to make mistakes*. We should be actively putting ourselves in circumstances where we're stretched slightly beyond our skill level. And we should consider every genuine, hard-fought mistake to be a victory.

Each week for one month, write down three mistakes you make and what you learned from each. At the end of the month, choose the mistake from which you learned the most, and reflect on how you are different as a result.

DIFFICULT THINGS ARE AN ADVENTURE

GOOD LIFE SKILL: *Perseverance*

What's the difference between someone who finishes writing their novel and someone who never does? The answer is simple. Perseverance.

While perseverance doesn't guarantee success, it is pretty much a given that without it, you'll never be a champ.

So what's the secret to sticking with things for the long haul? We think it's treating difficult things like an adventure, rather than a responsibility.



DROPPING SCIENCE:

Your internal reward system

Forget gold star charts! Your body has its own neurochemical system to get you motivated: it's dopamine, the neurotransmitter that controls the reward and pleasure centers of the brain. More importantly, it's what allows us to *take action* to get those rewards. You'll naturally get a rush of dopamine from certain activities—eating, exercise, even sleeping. But you can also do things to trigger its release. Getting the right amount of dopamine at the right time can be key to perseverance.

Here are the differences between a responsibility (ugh) and an adventure (ooh!):

- A responsibility is something you approach with seriousness. An adventure is something you approach with **levity and humor**.
- A responsibility is something at which you'd like to succeed. An adventure is something at which you'd be **happy to fail** (but then perhaps gain an awesome comeback story).
- A responsibility requires the appropriate skills. An adventure requires an abundance of **curiosity**.



ACTIVITY:

Drum up some dopamine with deadlines

Have you ever added something to a To Do list that you just completed, just so you could cross it off? You're not alone. That good feeling you got was a hit of dopamine! You can increase your dopamine levels simply by dividing your work into small chunks, setting deadlines, and meeting those small, achievable goals. The steady stream of dopamine will keep you motivated for the long haul.



ACTIVITY:

Letter to future you

When you're in the midst of a challenge, it can be difficult to see it in the context of your own larger story. You're in the thick of it, and you don't yet know what kind of impact it's going to have on your life. Maybe this difficult assignment at work is going to mark a turning point in your career. Or maybe the demanding class you're taking will set you on a new academic course. In order to remind yourself that this challenge is only one chapter in your life book, write a letter to your future self, thanking her for sticking with it. Tell her how much you appreciate that she kept going, and that you can't wait to learn all the valuable lessons she's learned since.

IN CLOSING

Well, friends, there we have it. One guide, 20 skills, and the rest of our lives to have fun exercising them. How does it add up for you?

Our aim has been to offer a slew of practical tools you can start using immediately to become happier, face challenges better, feel more awake and less afraid, and overall get drenched in the sensation that you're living life fulfilled, flourishing, and basically regret-free. And we tried to make it engaging without relying on the use of cat videos.

Did we succeed?

As we acknowledged in the introduction, “The Good Life” means different things to different people. This guide outlines what it means to us at Everybody’s Invited, and how we think it’s possible to attain it. If you tried our advice on for size, we’d love to know how it fit.

What did you find most valuable, or least? Would you add any skills to the mix, or take any away? What was your favorite activity? Did any of them make you want to close the guide and never crack it again? Write to hannah@everybodysinvited.in or post your two cents on social media using the hashtag #GoodLifeGuide.

Thanks for being here. Until the next time our paths cross, we wish you a Very Good Life!

FOOTNOTES

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