

# Want a Happier, More Fulfilling Life? 75-Year Harvard Study Says Focus on This 1 Thing



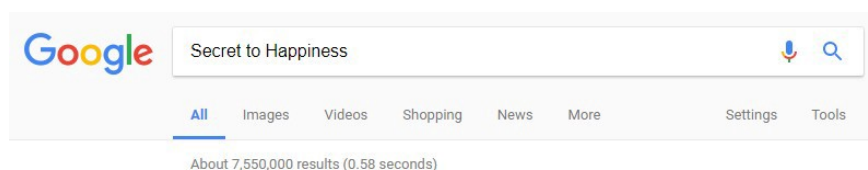
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Positive Alacrity is the art of creating micro-experiences that have an emotionally uplifting impact on others. But I'm getting ahead of myself ...

A quick Google search for “secret to happiness” brings up over **7,500,000** results.



That's a *lot* of people writing about and searching for something that, according to a groundbreaking Harvard study, has *already been found*.

That's right: Thanks to Harvard's Grant and Glueck studies—which tracked 724 participants from varying walks of life over the course of 75 years—we've *already* uncovered the key to long-term happiness and fulfillment.

The answer? **Our relationships.**

Here's Robert Waldinger, director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development:

*"The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period."*

In other words: **The quality of our life—emotionally, physically, and mentally—is directly proportional to the quality of our relationships.**

*But there's a catch.* If there's one thing most of us have learned, it's this: Just knowing a lot of people isn't enough.

True fulfillment in relationships is about genuine connection, and one of the most efficient ways to form that connection is by practicing what we at Mindmaven call Positive Alacrity; a skill we define as **creating micro-experiences that cause an emotional uplifting in others.**

## The Uncomfortable Truth About Relationships

Did we really need a 75-year study to tell us relationships are important?

Probably not; I bet many of you already knew that. So why do we so often struggle to treat many of the most important relationships in our lives with the reverence and priority we *know* they deserve?

For example, do any of these situations sound familiar?

- When under stress, you may have a tendency to be ruder to your *spouse* than you'd ever *dream* of being to a complete stranger.

- When building a business, you're willing to work 60-hour weeks but somehow never *"have time"* to check in with lifelong friends.
- Speaking of business: You may fail to *consistently and proactively* invest in deepening the professional relationships that might provide the breakthrough opportunities you need.

So why do we do this? Because ...

*Although many things in life are deadline and urgency driven, relationships almost never are.*

As a result, they're often one of the first parts of our lives that we neglect until we "find the time."

The good news is, building those deep, meaningful relationships isn't as daunting or time-consuming as it may sound. In fact, **by focusing on one habit, anyone can build more fulfilling relationships every day.**

## **The Secret Factor Controlling the Quality of Your Relationships**

But what determines the level of fulfillment we find in our relationships? It isn't simply "knowing" the other person.

*What makes you feel happy or fulfilled isn't the relationship itself, but the interactions that make that relationship up.*

Here's what it comes down to: The only path to achieving the goal of a fulfilling life is to have fulfilling relationships, and those relationships can only be created by consistently connecting through meaningful interactions.

Let me illustrate with a few examples.

### **#1: "I just want you to know how much I appreciate you."**

John's wife Sarah welled up with tears as she read the unexpected thank you note her husband had written her before he left on a 6:00am flight for a business trip.

John—the CEO of an *aggressively* growing startup—thanked his wife for all the support and grace she'd given him over the last three years as he worked long hours to reach his—and his company's—fullest potential.

The short note left Sarah feeling appreciated, loved, and truly known by her husband.

## **#2: "Thank you for sacrificing your time for our vision."**

Hannah, a recent intern-turned-engineer at a public company, felt pleasantly surprised and greatly affirmed after Erin, the CEO, walked over to her cubicle specifically to say thank you.

Without prompting, Hannah had recently pulled an all-nighter in order to ensure a back-end patch was completed on time to restore server stability. And even though Erin's visit was shorter than 30 seconds, the fact that the interaction was focused solely on thanking Hannah left her feeling appreciated for stepping up and excited to work for the company.

## **#3: "So you never have to lose something again."**

Cole—a die-hard Atlanta Falcons fan—laughed in amusement as he wrote back "Thanks, but I hate you lol ;)" to Rob, a friend who had sent him a Tile following the Falcon's 2017 Super Bowl loss so he'd, "never have to lose something important again."

The practical joke made Cole smile and deepened the sense of connection and friendly rivalry the two of them shared.

## **The Science-Backed Power of Positivity**

Here's the key takeaways from those examples: Each time, someone performed a small, lightweight gesture. For example:

- John's handwritten note to his wife,
- Erin's 30-second interaction, or
- Rob's quick email and gift.

And despite the ease of each interaction, they all delivered an uplifting sense of connection to the other person.

But perhaps the best proof of the power of interactions comes from Dr. Martin Seligman's famous Gratitude Visits. For those unfamiliar, Dr. Seligman—founder of the positive psychology movement—introduced the concept of Gratitude Visits in a University of Pennsylvania study.

Here's how it worked: Participants were asked to write a 300+ word letter of gratitude to someone in their life, and to then visit the recipient and read the letter aloud to them.

Simple though that may be, the effects were profound: Although Gratitude Visits were one of many positivity practices recorded in the study, they were the *only* practice that had participants reporting **increased happiness and decreased depression for a full month after completing the action**.

And while I fully support the practice of Gratitude Visits, they come with a challenge: Most of us don't have time to sit down and write a 300-word letter every time we feel positive or grateful.

So I figured if Gratitude Visits are truly one of the most fulfilling things we can do, there must be a way we can simplify it into a habit that can be practiced daily.

## Building Happy, Fulfilling Relationships with Ease

The solution? Positive Alacrity.

At the end of the day, this concept's all about consistently delivering *small, simple* experiences that leave people feeling genuinely uplifted. So how do we do this? It all comes down to a single habit:

*When you think something positive and you genuinely believe it, voice it.*

As simple as that habit may be, we believe the impact of Positive Alacrity is as profound as Gratitude Visits, with one distinct advantage: That same simplicity allows you to practice it *anytime*, *anywhere*, with practically *anyone*.

Why? Because most of us already think positive thoughts on a daily basis. For example, I wouldn't be surprised if you often thought things like ...

- "That's a really insightful way to look at the situation,"
- "I really appreciate the way she listens to me," or
- "Wow, he handled that ordeal really well."

Pause a moment and test it for yourself: When was the last time you thought something positive? I'd venture to bet it was within the last 24 hours.

The problem is, we often let these thoughts come and go without ever practicing Positive Alacrity. But when we forgo voicing these thoughts to others, we cheat ourselves out of a valuable opportunity to enrich our relationships in three key ways:

1. When you voice positive thoughts, you make the recipient feel emotionally uplifted.
2. This feeling elevates their appreciation of you and the relationship you share.
3. Because you were the source of that interaction, their emotional response creates an incredibly fulfilling sense of happiness and satisfaction in you.

That last part's key: By uplifting *others*, we inadvertently uplift *ourselves*. Why? Because ...

*The effects of Positive Alacrity go both ways.*

For instance, remember the example above with Hannah the CEO and Erin the engineer?

As a seasoned leader, Erin closely observed Hannah as she thanked her for working so diligently on that patch; so she noticed as Hannah's expression slowly shifted from shocked confusion to recognition and, finally, to realization.

Seeing Hannah's cheeks flush, smile spread, and eyes gleam made Erin realize she'd just delivered something truly meaningful, and Hannah's reaction created a tremendous sense of *satisfaction and fulfillment* in Erin as the one who delivered that interaction.

If you've ever been in a similar situation to Erin's, you probably understand *exactly* how she's feeling, and know just how uplifting those feelings can be.

*When you practice Positive Alacrity, you're not only uplifting others. Above all, you're uplifting yourself.*

## **Positive Alacrity in Action: Mastering the Habit of Intentional Positivity**

The action itself is simple: **Think something positive? Voice it.**

But until we turn that conscious *action* into an unconscious *habit*, we won't be able to fully leverage it to impact our relationships and enrich our lives. And that all starts with a shift in awareness.

By default, positive thoughts often slip through the cracks before they ever reach conscious acknowledgement, let alone vocal affirmation. So how do you become more aware? By becoming intentional.

Once you've become aware of a positive thought, consciously label it "Positive," then ask yourself: Do I *genuinely* believe this?

If you believe it, voice it. **Positivity works so long as it's perceived as genuine**, and as long as you truly believe what you're saying you can usually count on a positive outcome.

## Habitualizing and Compounding the Secret to Happiness

Keep in mind: As with any new habit, practicing Positive Alacrity is probably going to feel a little clumsy or unnatural at first. But as long as you genuinely believe what you say, it doesn't matter how awkward it comes out because it's *real*.

The most important thing is that you're voicing it. And if you're able to push through that initial awkwardness, I can practically guarantee the process will become second nature in no time.

So how do you start? Thankfully, **the practice is as simple as the theory**. Try following this three-step process to utilize Positive Alacrity today.

1. **Recognition:** Think of something positive that happened within the last 24 hours, then ask yourself: "Who was the cause of (or involved in) this experience that I could thank or compliment?"
2. **Specificity:** Ask yourself: "What *specifically* did I like or appreciate about this experience/situation?"
3. **Action:** Now, voice it. Pay this person a face-to-face visit. If that doesn't work, call them. If you can't call them, then text or email them; immediately, *before you finish reading this*.

Keep in mind: The steps above are an example of how to leverage Positive Alacrity *retroactively*, but it's even easier to perform as you move forward in your day-to-day life.

The only thing you have to do is increase your ability to recognize these thoughts as they occur, then voice them as you become aware of them (rather than once a year when the holidays roll around).

John, Erin, and Rob are prime examples of these principles in action:

- While getting ready to leave on his business trip, **John** looked over at his sleeping wife and realized just how appreciative he was for her continued understanding about his hectic travel schedule. So instead of just grabbing his jacket and heading out the door, John



went over to the study, picked up some stationery, and wrote Sarah a short note expressing those feelings.

- After learning of Hannah's all-nighter, all **Erin** had to do was have a 30-second conversation genuinely thanking her. The only risk she took? Potentially being a few seconds late to her next meeting.
- And as the Falcon's loss made **Rob** realize how long it'd been since he and Cole talked, the only actions he had to take were writing his friend a tongue-in-cheek note and asking his assistant to mail it off along with a package of Tiles.

John, Erin, and Rob all spent less than a *minute* acting on their positive thoughts, but the uplifting emotions from those simple interactions have the potential to last for *months*.

And what about Sarah, Hannah, and Cole, the recipients of those interactions? They're probably going to walk through the rest of the day feeling uplifted and empowered. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if, later that same day, they provided a similar experience for someone else.

That's the Pay-it-Forward principle in practice:

*A single positive interaction can have a multiplicative effect, building and spreading further than you'd ever imagine.*

Ultimately, those simple interactions are the *heart* of Positive Alacrity and the *foundation* for meaningful relationships. And, as that 75-year Harvard study taught us, **those very same relationships are the secret to lifelong happiness and fulfillment.**