

Get Off Your Worry-Go-Round!

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Worry-Go-Round™ Sharie Spironhi

Publisher: Sharie Spironhi

Book Design and Layout: Sharie Spironhi

Cover Design: Sharie Spironhi

ISBN-

Contact Information: www.SharieSpironhi.com

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About Sharie**

This book is an abridged version of

Why We Are Wired to Worry
and How Neuroscience Will Help You Fix It.
Stop Stressing, Reduce Anxiety, Feel Happy Finally!

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Before you begin your journey, let me welcome you!
I applaud your efforts to improve your life.
You are going to learn things you never knew
before and if you put them to use your life is
going to change drastically for the better.
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Enjoy your journey!

Chapter 1

Stop Wasting Your Energy

I don't know about you, but I have always been pretty exhausted at the end of my day. Years ago if you asked me why, I often didn't have a definitive answer. However, I have come to realize that my exhaustion was mostly due to my incessant mental activity trying to prepare for problems and reassess events that were long over. I know, if you are reading this, that you are exactly as I used to be—burning through your emotional and physical resources everyday by hashing and rehashing the same presumptuous fears, hypothetical “what ifs”, and concerns from the previous day. Living in your virtual reality of possible disasters. Regardless of the fact that you have persevered through everything life has thrown at you, you still continue to waste your precious energy by reacting as though you are about to be crushed by the “next thing”.

So my first question to you is — if you have persevered thus far in your life, then why doesn't your brain recall those moments to reinsure your security, safety, and resources to handle what might be next? Because your brain's job is not to reassure you, but rather to prepare you, and that means prepare you for the worst! Your brain will react as if a crisis is already happening in real life, causing your body to release stress hormones. Stress does not happen to you, it is your reaction to these hypothetical “what ifs” stemming from your virtual reality. Let's see if this sounds familiar: You leave the office after a stressful day at work. You are so happy it is over and can't wait to get home. However, by the first traffic light you are back at work, going over discussions, comments, and attitudes from co-workers that ticked you off. Then the phone rings and you are asked to stop at the store. This should be no big deal, but because you are still dealing with work in your virtual reality, it feels like a total inconvenience, and that comes through loud and clear over the phone. This is not the atmosphere you want to come home to. You want to be greeted with open arms by those who love you! I mean, that is why you go to work in the first place, to provide for loved ones.

Seventy-seven percent of the US population suffers from physical symptoms related to stress. Stress is our reaction to disappointments and problems, both real and imagined. It originates from within us, so it is there that we have to begin to fix it, and thankfully science is offering us the tools to do just that. Stress and worry are the culprits robbing you of a happy life. Up until now, it has not been your fault, but rather your *default*. But you are responsible for what you know. So if you like being miserable, anxious, and feeling like a victim then don't read any further, because once you do you will have no more excuses. Here I will give you all the control you need to dissolve your stress. Maybe you have been promised this before, but now you will learn where that control has been hiding and how to use it to regain some of your energy and vitality.

Being wasteful with any resource is usually a direct result of ignorance. If you don't know that leaving a window open while running the air conditioner will raise your utility bill—you waste money; if you don't know that leaving your car running while you go into a store will waste gas—you waste money; and if you don't know that your brain will rehash 90% of the same information as you thought about the day before—you waste *precious* energy. But now you will learn how to break this vicious cycle so you can save your energy for more important tasks—like real problem-solving and creativity. I call this cycle the Worry-Go-Round™ because it gives you the illusion of making progress when in the end, you realize you haven't moved at all.

Why we ride the Worry Go-Round™ to begin with used to be a mystery to the world of science, but now, thanks to technology, neuroscience tells us that it is part of an internal outdated warning system that was used to keep us alive thousands of years ago. This broken system leaves us exhausted at the end of our day with no sense of happiness or wellbeing in sight. Which is asinine when that is the reason behind everything we do; *If I hurry, I will get more done and **feel better**— If I stay up and finish this project, I will feel like I am **caught up**— If I only take a half hour for lunch and my boss notices, I will feel more **secure in my job**— If I run this yellow light I will shave minutes off my schedule, giving me a sense of **extra time***. We charge at the “next thing” like a linebacker trying to get past a blocker. It is our ass-backwards way of chasing happiness and peace. Now, here is the reason it doesn't work: Your brain does not care about being happy. It is not wired to seek happiness and does not even place it on your priority list. Of course, you may be thinking, “Wait a minute—I absolutely care about being happy; it's why I am reading this!” But that is your *mind* talking, not your *brain*, and your mind and brain are not the same. Your mind is the consciousness that resides within your brain. The part of you that chases happiness in all its forms. However, your brain's number-one job for the past ten thousand years has been your survival, and to this day its primary goal remains keeping you alive at any cost, even if that cost *is* your happiness. How it does this is by obsessively looking for danger, which to your brain is anything that might threaten your life in any one of these five areas: **love, money, status, health, and security**. Anything that can threaten these areas

can threaten your life as far as your brain is concerned. This has turned your brain into a magnet for problems both real and imagined. It is that constant echo of, “Careful, oh no, watch out!” ringing in your ears. That’s its job—your survival. It cares about danger, not about your emotional state of mind. So your pursuit of happiness winds up being you attempting to secure every one of the five areas I just mentioned, and by doing so you run your physical and mental health into the ground.

We Are Making Ourselves Sick

Even if you don’t feel overly stressed, don’t think for a moment that you aren’t at risk for health problems. The chemicals at play in your body are wreaking havoc with many of your systems; over time, that can do long-term damage. No amount of stress is OK on a long-term basis.

Sad to say, the majority of people know very little about that three-pound mass above their neck. We let it feed on any thoughts, images, or emotions it wants and we often disregard its need for sleep and nutrition. We walk around oblivious to the signs that it is in trouble until it is too late. Then we waste a whole day, lacking productivity, because of a bad mood that we will blame on outside events. We spend our days living for the weekend and vacations and hate the days in between. We waste precious energy trying to manage the awful feelings and physical effects of stress. It is why we overeat, crave comfort foods, drink too much, sleep too much or not enough, take risks, sleep with people we don’t know, and beg our doctor for prescriptions to stop the pain.

We perceive our moods as something mysterious, and believe if we can just figure out the magic recipe of behaviors, diet, and sleep, we will find happiness. We assume being happy should come naturally if we do the right things—but nothing could be further from the truth. It is time that human beings learn the fundamentals of how the human brain, the most sophisticated machine in the universe, works. In my book [Wired to Worry](#) I don’t get too technical with a huge vocabulary, but it would be nice to at least know how to use your own brain to be a happier person. Sure, there may be a few terms that you have not heard before, but that is part of learning something new. You had no idea what an iPad or GPS was fifteen years ago, but you know them now and understand how they work. It is no more logical to ignore new discoveries about the brain than to ignore new technology and expect to stay current with the world. We spend more time in a given year learning about our new smart phone than we ever do about our own brain. Well, it’s time. In [Wired To Worry](#) you will learn a few fundamentals about your brain that will change your life. No more living on autopilot, guessing at why you are in a good mood or assuming why you are in a bad one. You are going to learn how to make conscious decisions that

will control the performance of your brain and mind. This stuff is as basic as understanding why you turn your lights off and take your keys with you when you exit your vehicle.

Did you know surveys have shown that many healthy individuals are less happy than cancer patients and people in wheelchairs? In the absence of these difficulties, we should be waking up every morning singing to Pharrell Williams's song "Happy." Americans spend almost \$700 million per year on self-help books. The topics vary from becoming a better communicator, parent, or spouse to losing weight. Categorically, we can define our intention to feel better, act better, or be better together as the common goal—therefore reducing our stress level in some way and becoming a happier person.

Our misery starts with a false belief that our natural emotional state is *supposed to be one of happiness*, with happiness defined as a sense of well-being and contentment. Most of us believe that if all of life's problems just left us alone, we would be happy. We believe it is only because we are disrupted by the everyday pressures of life that we are stressed out. Therefore, we spend most of our time trying to fix the "next thing" in an effort to find some peace. When we believe this, we could not be more mistaken. Science has now revealed that it is the opposite. **Being happy is not our default state of mind!** What is our default state? After about four years of age, our default state starts to evolve into one of **shyness, insecurities, caution, and defensiveness**. So genuine happiness can only be found on the inside because that is where our perception of problems start. Otherwise, most of our efforts toward self-improvement are akin to giving our car a new paint job when it really needs a tune-up.

We come hardwired to be prepared for the worst-case scenario, and this negative focus has all of us walking on eggshells, waiting for the crap to hit the fan 24/7. It never allows us to relax or be too happy, and it even downplays good events with the proverbial, "Yeah, but..." or "What if?"

All your misery or lack of joy and happiness is due to your brain's five basic fears. These control 90 percent of your brain's thoughts; loss of **love, money, status, health, and security**. Did you catch the key word here? Fear, an extreme emotion over what *might* happen! We live in fear of losing any of these five things even when we have an ample supply of them. We all know that rich guy who is always saying he's broke. So we chase more love, more money, more status, more health, and more security so that we can finally be happy. Some of us even try to reject these comforts and riches in the hopes that doing so will free us from this chase. The problem with trying to accumulate more and more is that the brain will never, ever tell us that we have enough! Never. This is the harsh reality that smacks most rich and famous people in the face, causing them to spin out of control. After they travel down this illusionary road for the promise of bliss, they discover that their brain is still not satisfied and continues to torture them with the fear of loss... which, to the brain, means loss of life. This is all part of our survival instinct; it is

hardwired into the most primitive area of the human brain, not a switch we can just turn off. In essence, the brain is obsessed with chasing misery/problems both real and imagined in every area of our life—present, future, and past—in an effort to preserve love, money, status, health, and security. To your brain anything at all that could or might even graze those areas is reason to panic.

Until you understand how this happens, you will continue wasting precious energy chasing happiness, where it can't be found. But hang in there, it will make sense soon.

The Proverbial "Panic Button"

So which part of your brain actually sounds this alarm warning you of impending doom? It is a small, almond-sized area in your brain that evolved over thousands of years called the amygdala, also known as your lizard brain. Pronounced **ah-mig-da-la**. This part of the brain has been around forever, and every animal has it. The amygdala is no bigger than your fingernail, but it is the hub, or control center, for your emotions and determines what emotions to trigger, from elation to temper tantrums and worrying yourself sick. It is the switch for FIGHT or FLIGHT. It also does several other jobs, though, so unfortunately you can't just cut it out and go on your merry way. It helps you determine whether the face you are looking at is sad or happy, motivates you to find food when you are hungry, and helps you decide whether Eggplant Parmesan or a big steak will put a smile on your face. This little almond-shaped area helps you understand and process emotion both in you and around you. People who have been exposed to any kind of childhood trauma are likely to have a larger amygdala, with thicker connectivity to the areas around it, making it even more prone to emotional outbursts.

Something no bigger than your fingernail is responsible for all of this. You may hear some call it your lizard brain because it is in the oldest area of your brain, the part called the reptilian brain. These are all terms used to make it easy for you to remember it. However, the focus of this book is its role as your ALARM BELL. This personal warning system alerts you to problems real or imagined by making you feel horrible, by triggering stress-related hormones, such as cortisol (a hormone that, in excess is bad for your heart but good for adding belly fat—YUK!) and adrenaline. These hormones' job is to bring you to a heightened state of UH-OH or OH CRAP! along with sensations of muscle tension, anxiousness, sweaty palms, heavy breathing, and rapid heartbeat. That is your brain's way of telling you to STOP doing whatever it is you are doing!

For thousands of years, our amygdala functioned very well at keeping us alive in the wild by sending waves of these stress hormones such as adrenaline, cortisol, and epinephrine through our bodies as soon as we saw a lion in the bushes or a dangerous snake. It did that so we would do one thing... run like hell. Not worry, evaluate, or analyze it.

Back then, people's lives were in constant jeopardy, either from physical harm or from becoming a social outcast. Ten thousand years ago, if a woman's mate seemed unhappy with her, the woman's alarm bells would scream because if the man left, her family would have no food or protection and her offspring would die. The same happened when people were shunned by the other members of their tribe, causing them to become outcasts. That was a death sentence within hours. So it was not only the lion in the bushes but also the treatment they received from their inner social circle that meant life or death.

Now, here you are today with a brain that is still interpreting any problem as a life-threatening situation! Your superior annoyed with you, a fight with your spouse, car trouble, or being late for a meeting—all of these are often interpreted as life threatening as far as this little amygdala is concerned. It focuses on what will kill you—not on what keeps you happy—and therefore, so do you as you board the Worry-Go-Round™ trying to **stop, prevent, hold off or hang onto whatever it is you “think” you need to be content.**

Although 90 percent of our problems in the twenty-first century are NOT life threatening, they trigger our amygdala. We need to reprogram the brain so that it doesn't hit this panic button simply because we received one hundred e-mails or because someone decided to do forty miles per hour in the fast lane. The human brain doesn't know that the coworker who gets snippy with us isn't life threatening. It senses a violation and sounds the alarm so that we come out swinging. Just knowing that we won't die from a dirty look is not enough to stop the alarm bell from telling us to prepare to pounce. We all see people overreacting to the slightest irritation—fights breaking out at sporting events, road rage, and so on—and we all know a hothead. The problem with employing common sense during these events is that this much older area of the brain responsible for emotion does not understand words and thoughts because it does not process language. It sees images and then judges, according to our past experiences, whether they are good for us, dangerous, or simply threaten any of those five areas I mentioned earlier. Once the brain sounds the siren, telling ourselves to calm down is pointless.

Like a gladiator jumping over a wall into the middle of a battle, that uneducated, ancient part of your brain has the final say regarding what you need to do to survive. Simply trying to think your way out of a panic or temper tantrum will not help. Once the amygdala releases those fight-or-flight hormones into your system, it is all systems go! Have you ever tried telling someone who was yelling to calm down? A lot of good that did, right? While these chemicals are in play, you will feel very justified as you yell or have a tantrum, but then when they dissipate, you wonder, “Why did I react like that and get upset over something so trivial?” You did it because your brain thought your life was in danger, and in the blink of an eye, you reacted instinctively. How many

times a day or week do you overreact because of situations that did not really warrant it? Can you see now the amount of energy you are wasting?

We all have genuine situations to deal with, but at those times, when your brain pushes the panic button over something small, I can assure you there is something else going on in your mind, and probably something unrelated. At the early stage of getting upset, you generally have an inaccurate perception of what is angering you. Underlying thoughts and memories from the past often attach themselves to the things happening in the present, causing you to overreact. You may be ruminating on something upsetting that took place yesterday when you suddenly spill something and let out a stream of expletives. All the while, you are completely unaware of what really triggered your outburst.

Wired To Worry will teach you to separate an upsetting event from your ongoing undercurrent of worrisome thoughts. Only then will you be able to figure out what you are *really* feeling, and therefore how to feel better. Because that's your brain, a never-ending stream of what *ifs* and *worry* about how life did or will go wrong. Welcome to the **Worry-Go-Round™**

Worry-Go-Round™—*The time you waste going in circles rehashing the same fears, concerns and memories you had yesterday with no change. — Painted horses optional.*

Here is a quick trick for you: The next time you are ready to explode before you slip into a rage stand on one foot, close your eyes, and count. Even if you don't count, try to maintain your balance, and your mind's attention being drawn to keeping your balance will calm down the release of cortisol and adrenaline. Open your eyes each time you feel yourself losing your balance. When you regain it, close your eyes again. This is like "force quitting" a frozen program on your computer. When a program just gets stuck you have to take control and shut it down. That is what you are doing here.

Chapter 2

Stop Throwing Your Time Away

The average person has between 32 and 48 thoughts per minute, according to the Laboratory of Neuro Imaging at the University of Southern California and the National Science Foundation. That can add up to a total of 70,000 thoughts per day! Several studies have also shown that 80 percent of those thoughts are negative, and 90 percent of which are similar to the ones you had the day before!

The only way to overcome thoughts is with feelings. Thoughts are no match for feelings! But everyday we try to talk ourselves up, down, in and out of emotions. Once again we have a pattern of behavior steeped in habit born out of ignorance. If we were to add up the amount of time we waste trying to control our emotions in a given week it would equate to hours. The amount would differ among each person, with women wasting even more than men, but regardless, even if we went with the lowest estimate of only three hours (although estimates are higher), think about what you could do with three wonderful hours just for you. And for those of you reacting with even more stress, what could you do with 4 or 6 hours a week just for you? There are so many new activities or practices you could engage in to bring lasting health and happiness.

Feelings are to thoughts what water is to a flame. **We can't talk our way out of emotional pain; we have to feel our way out.** You can't be happy. Happy is not something you become. *You have to feel happy.* Until you learn how to *feel* happiness all around you, the majority of those negative seventy thousand thoughts per day will win out. If you were to try—and millions do every day—to just change your thoughts, how effective would you be even if you managed to fit in just 10,000 positive thoughts among, say, 50,000?

Saying you want to be happy is like saying you want to be rich. To accomplish either one takes understanding and learning beyond what you can figure out from reading books or magazines. You won't become rich just by avoiding financial losses; you have to actually make money at some point. Similarly, you will never become happy just by protecting those five areas of loss. You have to *accumulate feelings of happiness.* The first step toward feeling better is to teach

your mind to begin focusing on all the good facts around you, exactly the way it has been focusing on the negative. Until you understand some concepts, your reality is distorted, meaning two things: You think you *do see* all the good and it pales in comparison to your problems, or you don't think you have much good around you. Trust me, both are wrong.

Thus far, your brain is programmed to overlook most good things, except those that relate to preserving your life, so that is the first thing we are going to change. This may seem trite or silly. Most people think they are aware of all the good around them. We count our blessings, as they say. However, acknowledging that something is good is very different from learning to *feel* it on an emotional level.

You can't talk your way into a good mood; you must feel your way. You will learn to deliberately seek and hold onto the positive things around you, allowing these observations to become amazing feelings that sink into your whole being.

Quick even by today's standards, all it takes is waiting 10 to 20 seconds for a positive feeling to sink in. Then, like magic, your brain will release all of your feel-good brain chemicals completely altering your mood for the better. You do this now all day long by ruminating on mere potential problems and then feeling like your life is a potential powder keg. Why? Because reality and fiction are irrelevant to the brain; it can't tell the difference—which is why you get upset way before stuff actually happens.

Take twenty seconds right now to envision a person or pet showering you with love; Yes, that means *you*. Imagine the sounds, the feel of their arms around you, the words they are saying, or in the case of a pet, imagine the feel of their fur and the look in their eyes. Bring to mind how unconditional their love is. Now put this down and really feel their love filling you. Did you feel the emotional lift? Did you see how your brain responded as quickly as it does when you are just thinking about upsetting events? Now imagine carrying that feeling around most of the day. Can you picture how different you would feel if you did this regularly? Well, I will teach you how to train your brain to do this instinctively all day long.

Harnessing the power of your imagination will change your life. It is one of the tools you will use throughout [Wired To Worry](#) to rewire your brain to create long-term feelings of wellbeing. If it seems silly to use your imagination or to waste ten seconds waiting to have a good feeling about something, consider this: Most of us cherish the thousands of hours we spend watching movies and TV shows just so we can feel a whole host of emotions. We love our emotions, and we seem to like them even more when we can feel them without having to go through the actual trials that the actors portray. Right now you are allowing emotions to come and go as they wish, all day long, giving them no direction, but now you will learn the skill to move them in the direction you want them to go so you can start feeling happy in any moment you want.

The Power of Your Brain to Change Your Mind

Does it sound incredible to be told you can “rewire” your brain? Well, the reason behind this is due to something called neuroplasticity. In 1996, neuroplasticity was finally proven. This monumental breakthrough meant that the long standing belief that the human brain did not change after adolescence was all wrong. Neuroplasticity meant that the brain is not static and can change daily and even moment to moment according to what we are doing or learning. Brain areas can switch jobs, grow new cells, and even enlarge, depending on how much we use them. This discovery is the foundation of all hope regarding the brain’s ability to repair damaged areas and improve itself. Now neuroscientists understand that every time we learn something new or even practice a skill repeatedly, the brain changes accordingly. Someone who has played piano or a stringed instrument will have a larger volume of area in their brain dedicated to finger movement than the average person will have. This is neuroplasticity. On a grander scale, this process occurs in the brain of a blind person whose hearing develops way beyond what the normal range would be. Neuroplasticity is the light at the end of the tunnel in your search for happiness and wellbeing. It is how you will redirect your brain’s attention toward a truly positive perspective and away from its normal diet of doom and gloom. This change in focus will completely alter your emotional landscape to one of peace, contentment, and security. As you learn to see and think differently, your brain will rewire itself, causing your perception and various beliefs to change as well. Changing your brain's focus is similar to deciding to buy a specific car, then seeing that car everywhere. There isn’t suddenly more of that car, but rather your brain now searches for them since you have a new interest in them. Much of this work takes place in the back of your mind, so you will not have to give up anymore of your precious time than just a few minutes a day.

As I am sure you understand, old technology always takes more time and more energy than the newer version, and it's the same with this old program of ours. It triggers the amygdala and sends constant distress signals (SOS) at the slightest provocation to rob us of our peace and happiness. When that happens, we allow our overreaction and stress to suck the energy right out of our very soul.

All of this happens on an underlying level involving our chemical states. We human beings are just like addicts, making decisions from one moment to the next based on 2 questions: What will give me the greatest amount of pleasure right now or the least amount of discomfort? Every situation—physical, emotional, or social—is fueled, directed, and regulated by the drug effect we are seeking from the brain’s own chemical pharmacy, and this pharmacy is open twenty-four hours a day! The timely release of the “feel good” chemicals in the brain underpins a healthy emotional balance.

In [Wired To Worry](#) you will learn how to use this understanding to cut negative chemical signals off at the pass, restoring you to a sense of wellbeing. You will also, for the first time, be able to really know what is triggering your moods, anger, frustration, and fears. You waste valuable time every day trying to figure this stuff out from a psychological standpoint, but everything will be clear when you realize what brain chemicals you are chasing.

You will learn three new names, and if you can understand the difference between octane levels at the gas pump, you can understand these. Consider these brain chemicals like a light switch in a room. Different rooms control different moods. When you feel a certain way, you will be able to walk down the hall and see which light went out (brain chemical) in what room—and then you will know what to do to get it turned back on. This is where you will really start to gain control.

The first time you heard the term endorphins was likely back in the '80s. Endorphins are a brain neurotransmitter (just a big word for the way your brain sends and receives messages). This particular brain chemical is responsible for the natural high that runners can experience. But it is also associated with drugs such as heroin or morphine. Everyone was abuzz back then about how it was the reason cigarettes were so hard to quit. “Cigarettes are like morphine to your brain,” people were saying.

There are many of these chemical messengers, but in my book [Wired to Worry](#) you are going to learn about the three that drive almost every decision you make! Dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin. They are the “WHY” behind all of your behaviors, the drive behind what you call instincts and base desires. I refer to them as DOS. In the book, there are pages of examples of each chemical and what the corresponding behavior would be to increase it or decrease it. These lists are invaluable, as I have never seen anything like these in print anywhere. They will give you insight into *your* drives, instincts, behaviors, moods, and emotions, as well as of those around you.

These brain chemicals are how messages are sent and received in your brain. When your brain learns that donuts can put a smile on your face or a banana split can make you feel almost euphoric, it builds networks to reinforce these behaviors so that you never forget them. Therefore you will learn to make use of the rule that **what fires together, wires together**. You will use new good and powerful experiences to alter your mood, emotions, and even your feelings about past events.

Chapter 3

Stop Following the Crowd

To begin gaining control over our negative bias and redirect it toward the positive, we must understand first that we humans like to make sense of our behavior, and sometimes at any cost. So, for thousands of years, we have dreamed up some good reasons behind our overwhelming obsession to worry and stress out. These so-called good reasons can stand in our way until we see them for the illusions they are. In [Wired to Worry](#) you will come to understand the three most powerful obstacles to overcome in developing this new mind set. Having a detailed understanding of them will unlock the door to overcoming your own bad habits, not to mention moods. They are:

Human habits and beliefs

Psychological obstacles

Physiological barriers

Myth One: I would be happy if ...

Most people believe that our environment and events control our moods. Our culture teaches us that we need a reason to be happy. That little uptight, responsible voice in our heads says, “What right do you have to feel happy if your life is so hard?” Or “You can be happy when you —get a promotion, lose weight, get married/or become single, or have more money.”

Waiting until we have a reason to be happy is like chasing the proverbial carrot at the end of the stick or waiting for tomorrow, which never actually arrives. This is not just a faulty belief system, but one of the most wasteful lifestyles one can lead. Wasting days, weeks, and years for everything in your life to be just the way you want it so you can finally sit back and say “Ahh I can relax now.” Here is a cornerstone truth: **Your brain does not need a reason to be happy; it only needs your mind’s permission to do so!**

Myth Two: Money

Many of us believe money would solve most of our problems. We all have the dream of hitting the lottery and having our money problems disappear, assuming that will make us happier. However, a very well known study was done to find out how true that was for people. What they found was that those who won the lottery described themselves as being “less happy or as happy” six months later than they were before they won. They then researched people who were left paralyzed after an accident. Many of those people were actually as happy if not happier than they had been the day before their accident. How could that possibly be? **Because our situations do not determine our happiness.** Your amygdala will look for problems regardless of how much money you have. Lottery winners are still obsessed over every problem, real or feared. You will learn to internalize this scientific truth so you will see your whole world differently. No longer trusting the images coming from your virtual reality, but rather testing them against what you know to be facts.

Psychological Obstacles (Misery Loves Company)

As we will dig deeper into human behaviors, you will see how being calm might be perceived as not caring, leaving you feeling disconnected. The reason is rooted once again in our brain chemicals and something called mirror neurons. When your boss is yelling at you from across his desk and wants to see you tremble, sitting there too calmly could backfire. There is a stigma with being too chill. If people are freaking out, they expect you to jump on that emotional roller coaster and ride it with them. It validates their outburst and gives them comfort that they are not alone with the problem. Mirror neurons are behind our love of watching movies or TV shows and reading a juicy novel. It is why we can get lost in them as the same emotions well up in us, along with the corresponding neurochemicals: dopamine, serotonin, and even oxytocin. This is also the enjoyment behind watching sports. Our brains are firing as if we were running down the field, all the while triggering our dopamine. If there is painful contact with one of the players, everyone says, “Ohhh,” as if we somehow feel it.

Once you see this obstacle all around you, I will then teach you how to stop its influence in your life so you are not sucked into the drama of those around you.

Physiological Barriers— Threats Trump Happiness

For the past ten thousand years, the threat of danger had more impact on our survival than good experiences; therefore, our amygdala was primed to label most experiences as dangerous and has continued to do so right up until present day. We were built to last, not for lasting happiness,

which is why we learn faster from pain than from pleasure. Each time something happens that we don't like, cortisol magnifies the feeling, embedding it into our memory as a threat of some kind.

For example, your boss gives you a stellar review, but at the very end, he says, "The only thing I would like to see improved is _____." Yet after your meeting, all your brain focuses on is the one thing he wants you to improve.

We all tend to do this, regardless of the feedback or the source of it. The brain digs out the negative comment; sometimes it may even dig through a positive one and think, "Hmm, but what was he really trying to say?" We tell ourselves that we do this because we just want to improve but that is contrived crap! The real reason we do it is that the brain interprets any slightly negative feedback from another person as us being at risk for getting "kicked out of the tribe." You are going to learn how to disrupt this pattern of thinking so instead you feel absolutely wonderful over kind words, compliments, and even a review from your boss.

These behaviors have been around for thousands of years; you can't blame yourself for reacting this way. Having a simple disagreement even with someone you love can switch the amygdala to the fight-or-flight position. You enter into a discussion in which you expect the person to agree with you. Then when the person doesn't, cortisol releases, causing an immediate shutting down of reasonable thinking and processing. Cortisol interrupts the prefrontal cortex as it tells your brain, "Your life is in danger; this is no time to be thinking!" So you raise your voice, yell, and take on aggressive body posture. Your whole body is reacting as if the other person is a threat to your life. That is a pretty crappy way to feel around your spouse or best friend. This is why arguments rarely prove fruitful and is why discussing topics such as religion and politics is so dangerous. No one wants to hear what you think unless you agree with them. Once you understand the underpinning of your behavior and that of those around you, office meetings, discussions with your loved ones, and even negotiations will be smoother as you will almost be able to see what is triggering the other person's behaviors and emotions.

Chapter 4:

Your Perspective Your Reality

Understand this fact: It is your perspective that will determine if something is good or bad. *“It’s never the problem; the issue is how you SEE the problem”*. Your happiness will be a result of choices you make to see the world in a certain way. And we make those choices within every second. This is why so many studies repeatedly prove that 90 percent of our problems stem from how we see things. The philosophical question “Is the glass half full or half empty?” does not do justice to the power of perspective. The simple truth is that events happen—what makes them bad or good is simply what you decide to *think* or *believe* about them.

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but so are problems. That can be hard to swallow; we want our anger and frustration validated, not debunked as a figment of our perception! Most of us have been building stories for years around why things happened. “Why me?” “I hate my life; nothing ever goes right!” These beliefs are as deadly to your mental health as a daily diet of bacon would be to your body! This is a habit that you will learn to break through. I have devised powerful, insightful questions that will help you see through all of the stories, myths, and BS that you have built creating “your story”. The workbook portion of the book [Wired To Worry](#) has been carefully woven into each chapter to allow you, the reader, a safe way to explore the inner workings of your belief system. This is what will allow you to see your “real life”, not the story about your life, that you have been telling yourself.

Expectations = Disappointment

Imagine being at home and something happens that really disappoints you. You are totally bummed. You put the TV on and what you see playing are all the times you have been let down or disappointed! You are stunned as you sit there watching when suddenly you can’t believe how bad your life is. Well, this is what happens in your mind whenever a situation arises that triggers

any kind of negative reaction in you. Your memory jumps in and says, “Wait a minute, we have felt this before, let me show you!” and it begins to replay similar past events. But why? To validate the fear, sadness, or anger you are currently feeling. It’s job is to recall past experiences of whatever your mind seems to be focused on in the moment. That is how you know what to do this time. Well, that is helpful when you are lost trying to remember what direction to go, or seeing something move in the bushes so you know whether to run or not. But other than that, it can often be more harmful.

Up till now you have gone right along with these images, allowing them to “rub salt in the wound”, as they say. But after working through the questions and exercises in the book, you will catch what is going on before your head digs up every memory of having been treated unfairly.

Disappointment is a direct reflection of expectations. Expectations subtly sneak in, hanging around in the background. They are a result of you making subconscious decisions to expect an outcome of some sort. Becoming aware of these expectations early on is the key to avoiding these kinds of setbacks that can plague your mood all day long. When things go wrong, it takes real effort to break the habit of weaving an entire story of injustice around a new disappointment. We want reasons to make sense of failures or disappointments. It makes the brain happy to know why things don’t go right, so human beings find solace in feeling that we know our future. Good or bad, it gives our life a sense of predictability, making us feel somewhat more secure and stable. This good feeling is because of the specific brain chemical being released in the brain, but when you understand this process you will be able to trigger that same brain chemical with other healthier behaviors, to give you that sense of safety and security. It takes practice to learn to listen to what is going on in your subconscious, but this is the key to real serenity. It is not hard, it just takes a little bit of focus each day.

I will teach you the keys behind disarming disappointments. For example, before disappointment strikes, you must be vigilant in reminding yourself that setting your hopes on one particular event or occurrence is dangerous, unnecessary, and misleading. No event will make you happy forever! Everything is transient and passes. You will learn how to spot even the most subtle expectations that you hold onto, so you can let them go and not feel like it is a personal assault when you are sitting in traffic. You will learn the trick behind not clinging to outcomes.

A research study found that Danish people are the happiest on earth, and the reason was that they have very modest expectations. They understand that life owes them nothing and that when things go well, it is a blessing. *They are living proof that keeping an attitude of appreciation and gratitude reduces stress and frustration.*

Chapter 5

It's Not Personal— It's Just Life

In addition to being bad for the body, stress can stain our reputations as individuals with bad tempers or being a drama queen. Just *wanting* to be more calm and in control of our emotions is not enough; we have to be a little desperate, because many of us LOVE our fury and will go down swinging when told we have to give it up if we really want happiness. Dealing with urges to throw a tantrum can be a tough one if you are someone who has done that most of your life. Tantrums and anger are often a direct result of us taking some random event and making it personal, or we are afraid of something. Figuring out which it is can make the difference between getting it under control or doing something that can cost you dearly.

Learning how to let go of your over-reactive emotions might feel scary, counterintuitive, and even dangerous at first, because you will feel like you're letting your guard down. I compare it to being asked to play a game of catch with your eyes closed. You want to have the confidence that the ball will land in the mitt, but you are also wincing because you know you could get hit in the face. However, when you explore the depth of your belief system, which has made getting angry a coping mechanism, you will be able to dismantle it for good.

You first need to learn that when something upsetting happens and you go along with that first rush of adrenaline, your brain will begin to send you every thought and memory possible to validate your anger and frustration and might even have you pointing fingers. "It's their fault! Why does this keep happening? This is unfair!" So, within seconds, as the adrenaline begins to course through your veins, you are completely captivated. It will feel as if you are one with the emotion.

We find it very hard to separate from it in those first few minutes, but our interpretation of it is an illusion. We are not those emotions, and they are not accurate. They don't reflect reality as much as they reflect our overblown perspective of it in that moment.

The trick is to remember that when anger does overtake you it is almost never for the reason that you think. Only after you calm down will you see the truth, and it will almost always have its root in some kind of fear. I suggest to clients that when anger rises, they should stop and ask, “What am I afraid of right now?” Common fears are those of embarrassment, rejection, loss, and danger. Getting to that root will always put things in perspective. In the book you will be introduced to your “virtual reality”. You actually have two realities— the one around you that is comprised of your environment and the other one in your head comprised of your memories, beliefs, shoulds and should nots. We spend way too much time in the virtual one and give it way too much credit. You will learn how to step out of there and keep your feet in the real one.

Deciding not to throw tantrums is one of the hardest behaviors to overcome, but it is easier when you reconcile how silly it is and what a false sense of protection it gives. Thankfully, even a little progress in this area will yield big results. When you feel rattled, just taking a long breath at the beginning of the upheaval will change your chemistry enough for you to stay present. You need to remind yourself that you are not going to die from this or that, and you need to place the blame where it really belongs—with that lizard brain of yours.

When uncertainty or a disappointment has you rattled, you may engage in any of the following behaviors to increase some brain chemicals, but the benefits are short-lived. If you complain to other coworkers about how bad your company or boss is, those who agree with you will make you feel safer and more connected because of serotonin and oxytocin. If you put the government or world leaders down, predicting doom and gloom, you make the world feel predictable, releasing some serotonin. Even making false predictions about the future will make you feel superior. After you have practiced the techniques in the book you will learn how to catch these subconscious behaviors and engage in new patterns of thought that will raise your feel-good brain chemicals without having to stoop to screaming, complaining, or gossiping. These are the time and energy suckers in our life. We do them almost everyday and then wonder where the time goes and why we are so tired.

Your Amygdala Needs Drama Rehab!

With all of this stress and drama you are dealing with during the day, it is important to mention the unyielding determination of your amygdala to stress you out at night as well. It is sooooo addicted to stress and drama that some nights, like an addict, it will reach for one more hit right before bed. Does this sound familiar?

Your head hits the pillow and you begin having a heated one-sided discussion with that coworker, child, or spouse, and although this is happening only in your head, you get as angry

and upset as if it were happening in real life, with all the same harmful chemicals in play. (My personal favorite is rehashing a situation from childhood or with someone who isn't even in my life anymore.) Talk about insane behavior! Over and over in your head, you will make your point, chasing some sort of elusive validation like a dog chasing its tail. Before you know it, you're tossing and turning and can't sleep.

For others, fears of your loved ones being in danger take over. If you are a parent you know this all too well and mothers are especially good at it. As we toss and turn, witnessing this horror movie of our own making, we search for any reliable gut feeling or sense that we are correct in our fears. As if knowing something bad was coming would allow us to prevent it anyway. Take it from an over-protective aunt who has had her share of sleepless nights *for no reason*: If you think your fears have any basis, pray. At least I feel like someone with more wisdom and power is responsible now. Oh sure, are there dangers at some point? Yes, but never affiliated with a particular night of tossing and turning. So after all the stress one day can hand you, you climb into bed exhausted and your brain hops back on the Worry-Go-Round™.

Some of us start our day playing this make-believe game with our adversaries in our bathroom while we are getting ready for work! Who hasn't mentally told someone off while getting ready in the morning? By the time you leave the house, you are ready to explode and have put yourself in a horrible mood. You need to be alert for these autopilot moments. You have to catch them quickly because once cortisol is released, it takes about thirty minutes to subside. You might as well hang a **WARNING** sign around your neck for a half hour. And there you have it: You are in a "mood" and have no idea how you got there. Not to mention you have now shortened your fuse so anything could ignite it.

By now, I am sure you can see where your time and energy go everyday. So, with all the self-help time-improvement tactics, and with all of the better eating habits, *you will be no better if you don't get to the root of the issues*. It is scary to peek behind the curtain of our behavior, but it should be easier when you realize that everyone does this stuff to some degree or another. You are wired to be this way.

After you learn the techniques in the book you will be amazed to see how often you do this. Like when you are preparing for some kind of discussion and you begin reciting word for word what you want to say, or rehashing a past discussion and what you should have said. The problem is you will do this over and over and not even realize it. When you learn these techniques you will know how to properly prepare for a hard discussion and how to disengage from past ones.

Chapter 6

How Much Control Do You Really Have?

Right now the one who is in charge of your behavior/feeling center is your back office, not your newer, reasonable, thinking front office as you might hope. (In the book you will learn exactly what I mean by those terms.) Initially this older brain, the “back office” has most of the control in how you are influenced; it draws conclusions about people you don’t really know, deems others dumb or ignorant before you have even one conversation with them, and dislikes or champions people through beliefs you don’t even know you have. It will believe a total stranger and refute your friends based on a gut feeling instead of information, it will join a team of people you don’t know, and defend causes you know very little about. It is where your beliefs and opinions are protected to the death. In short, this is your ego personified. Only after you are practicing the techniques you will learn from the book will you be able to see clearly what has been controlling, or at least steering, your behavior. The goal of all the practices is to be able to know what messages are coming from your subconscious, or back office. However, something is standing in your way and that is your incessant mind chatter, which is your mind wandering from the here and now to whatever it thinks is more interesting.

The Cause of Absentmindedness

Although our prefrontal cortex is our head office, the back office (lizard brain) has been here longer, so it thinks it has seniority, so to speak. It is up to you to teach the front office to exercise its authority. You will learn to do that by training it to stop drifting; no more casual focus. In order to be in charge, it has to know what is coming out of the back office. When we don’t, we are like robots so lost in incessant thinking that we can drive home and have no idea how we got

there, walk into rooms and have no clue why, and lose our keys, wallets, and purses all because our minds are convinced that the noise going on in our heads is more important than what is happening around us.

About a decade ago, neuroscience began probing the cause of this excessive mind wandering, and it seems to be what the default state the mind goes to whenever we lose interest in what we are doing or become tired. And now, thanks to all of our modern marvels, we have the attention span of eight seconds, so we are almost never here in the moment! The purpose of this wandering state seems to be so we can decide whether our reaction to our spouse this morning was warranted. However, this program is broken, so instead of thinking through the issues at hand and drawing helpful, insightful conclusions, we ruminate repeatedly over situations, conversations, and even a single sentence said to us ad nauseam.

This reptilian brain of yours is the seat of your unconscious and can process more than 200,000 bits of info per second! That is a lot of processing power. So about every eight seconds, or whenever you get bored, it takes over grabbing memories from your past, speculating on your future, and scanning your environment for danger, which could mean just a dirty look. This is so constant that it becomes an energy you can actually feel in your physical body, like an undercurrent of anxiety or worry, even though you may not be aware of it. Being distracted by all this internal noise can result in your moving about restlessly, recklessly, dropping things, or even being a klutz. The most common symptom, though, is that it leaves you absentminded and forgetful. Once you practice the techniques in [Wired To Worry](#), in only two weeks you will notice a substantial difference in being able to stay focused on what is happening in front of you. The benefits of this are far reaching.

- **Increased focus and concentration**
- **Reduce emotional reactivity**
- **Reduce stress**
- **Improve memory**
- **Enhance empathy**
- **Increase cognitive flexibility**
- **Lower sensitivity to pain**
- **Less physical and mental mistakes**
- **Calmer**
- **More interested in what is happening around you.**
- **Better listening skills**
- **More conscious decision making**

This is just to name a few but the list could fill several pages.

Like a dog that knows how to be attentive when a sound suddenly breaks the night silence, so it is with most of us. We can concentrate when something of interest grabs our attention, but now we need to learn to stay in that place of focused attention. We need to learn to be present rather than running out into mental traffic, resulting in the awakening of our amygdala dressed in full battle gear!

This incessant thinking is happening to you. You are not doing it, but rather passively allowing it because the front office has not been properly trained. Your goal will be to disassociate with these passing thoughts, thereby distancing yourself from any emotion they trigger. You learn to observe them, not be dragged around by them. If you have ever tried to focus your attention during a lecture, meeting, or while in church I am sure you noticed your untrained mind chasing every passing thought, just like a dog trying to absorb every scent as he sticks his head out of the car window.

Any thought that makes you feel threatened, afraid, concerned, annoyed, frustrated, or demeaned—and of course, on the other spectrum, heroic, amazing, smart, creative, interesting, and funny—will all be a distraction. This is a tantalizing smörgåsbord for the mind, either happily keeping you from the reality of a bad day or burying you further in despair. Being tossed about all day at the mercy of whatever those seventy thousand thoughts want to say will leave you at the end of every day the way you began it—frustrated, upset, and tired.

Single-Minded Attention

After practicing about 3 weeks you will have a greater emotional tolerance when something does happen that you did not expect, such as traffic, no parking space, or lost keys. You will notice these issues won't fluster you the way they did before.

The training will allow you to see how disruptions annoy your brain. If you're reading, writing, talking, or watching TV, interruptions disrupt your flow and cause a slight annoyance. When you understand the way the brain processes information, you will easily see in the course of the average day how often your own mind races back and forth thinking about everything except the now. Then, when something happens in the now, like you spill some milk, it's an interruption to your brain. Your brain has to stop its racing and focus on the here and now. You know this is

happening when you hear yourself bark, “Damn it!” However, when you learn stop this racing back and forth you will notice almost zero frustration. You will experience things not catching you off guard. With some practice, you will begin to see things with an interest and slight fascination similar to that of a wide-eyed child so that almost anything that happens just draws more interest.

Now, at first glance you might think that stopping this ruminating might require control, but what it really takes is trust and courage. It will feel very unnerving to stop peering into the future for threats, dangers, and possible mishaps. However, you will learn that if you ignore even a few minutes down the road, you will begin to feel that happiness and peace you so deserve. Learn the rules: allowing your brain to go into the future unattended will bring anxiety, and allowing it to drift casually into the past will make you mad/sad. Remember, you hold the leash!

Upon hearing this you might feel that it is too difficult a shift for you to make from the incessant wandering you are used to, but not only will you be able to do it, you will be able start making these changes within 2-3 weeks. People are making this change every single day to improve their lives and those of their loved ones, and you too will be able to join them. It is the opposite of the way our culture encourages us to be, but the truth is we are less productive, less creative, less happy, less informed, and less likely to make good decisions if we are rushing toward the next thing and being ready to pounce on anything that does not go our way.

Chapter 7

What Really Makes Humans Happy

Most of us have read that book or been at that seminar that really made an impact; however, we had trouble maintaining any real change—often because we had no idea how to keep that powerfully touching information alive or that we should. We often think that just having an epiphany is good enough because the brain will do the right thing with that new information. However, our brains need repeated experiences to create a neural tract that remains.

Even when reading [Wired To Worry](#), no matter how many new ideas resonate with you, if you do not get the book and the workbook and practice them each day for at least the first month, they will not rewire your brain. Repetition is the branding iron of knowledge and that translates into new behavior; your brain already does this to memorize pain and problems from your past, present, and hypothetical future. Now you are going to throw all of that into **REVERSE**.

Most of us are very confused about what actually makes us happy, which is obvious by our pursuits for the empty promises of status, money, and fame. *In an article published in Harvard Business Review Press in 2011, Professor Amabile states, “We found that of all the events that could make for a great day at work, the most important was making progress on meaningful work — even a small step forward.”*

Studies reveal the 3 top things that make humans happy—

1. Being a part of something that offers meaning and purpose.
(dopamine/serotonin)
2. Spending time with family and friends. (serotonin/oxytocin)
3. Being kind and helping others. (serotonin/oxytocin)

In short, we need to feel that *we matter*, but when we question our value or those around us do, we can spiral into misery. It doesn't take anything horrible to happen; just having a coworker or supervisor question our competency or having friends go out without inviting us can result in us feeling the darkness creep in.

When something like that happens to you, your amygdala trips the switch, telling you death is once again at your doorstep. Again during these bouts we will waste mental energy and emotion on trying to figure out the how's and the why's someone could think that way about us. This is where you will be changing things— no longer will you get caught up in the psychological trap of trying to figure out another person's motives to ease your own pain. Instead you will be able to trigger your own brain chemicals to improve your own state of mind. Then use the column writing tool from the book to ascertain the facts of the situation so you don't inflate it by creating an unrealistic story around what happened to validate your pain.

As you will come to understand, your beliefs **allow** or **disallow** your wonderful brain chemicals to flow. If you went on vacation but kept telling yourself you didn't deserve it, that you didn't work enough for it, or that you have no money to be on vacation, you would not enjoy yourself. Your belief would supersede the experience, and your brain would not reward you with serotonin. So you will learn how to spot the underlying beliefs that are active both on the surface and in the background.

Key Beliefs When on Vacation:

I deserve a time-out.

My life won't fall apart.

I need this for my health.

My only job is to appreciate beauty.

I can stop worrying.

I am safe here.

All of these beliefs can be adopted in everyday life, but until now we have believed that mindset to be opposed to fixing everything we don't like about life. This is a pivotal technique that is easy to understand and put into action.

We are quick to give in to the everyday pressures along with the lie that *we can be happy after these problems are resolved*. Which really just means we will be stressed out until we are back on vacation next year.

What Stops You From Feeling The Things You Already Have?

You have worked hard for your home, car, job, friends, and family. When you were growing up, all you could do was dream about one day having these things. Now, all these things are available to you, plus a host of other nice things, good things, great things, and kind things—but as I said earlier, your mind barely notices them. Your brain has been programmed to want to just move on so you can get to the next thing. It never ends; its appetite for the **next thing** is insatiable. It sees almost everything as a means to an end...some evasive “end” that never comes, like tomorrow. *At best, it will see each moment as a tool; at worst, as another problem to be solved or overcome.*

This is the dreary fog in which we walk around, never really seeing, feeling, or tasting any of the precious things life brings to us. This has to change. Throughout [Wired To Worry](#) you will learn that the degree to which you give this moment your *full attention* and *focus* will be the degree to which the next moment is prepared for you. Life is not a series of obstacles to get through every day. For what? When does the pleasure start? When we get home from work? When we get the kids to bed? When we get into bed? The pleasure is hiding in plain view within each moment we experience. The pleasure is recognizing that there is no other place to be but *in this moment*. It is the pleasure of not running ahead worrying about stuff that has not even happened, the pleasure of seeing the smiles on the faces of friends and colleagues that we normally only glance at. This pleasure entails smiling right now and knowing things don't have to be perfect to feel good right now. With a new understanding of what is happening in your brain 24/7, you will be able to come out of this fog and never allow it to control your attitudes and moods again.

The Modern Marvels We Take for Granted

Our tendency to dismiss or take for granted our modern-day advancements is one such place where we can see how badly our perspective needs a re-adjustment. We complain when it takes an extra twenty seconds to send an e-mail. Twenty seconds to send our thoughts, which may or may not be of any importance to anyone but us, to the other side of the world! When I was growing up, it blew my mind to hear another voice on the other end of my new walkie-talkies that I got for Christmas. What about Facebook's occasional changes? OMG, everyone starts flipping out as if it will stop the world as we know it, and the “I am leaving Facebook forever” chant begins. This program allows us to find, in mere minutes, a second grade crush! And for free! Our storming off is pretty much irrelevant to Facebook, yet our overinflated perception of our own influence is staggering!

How about an iPad? I admit I have gotten annoyed when it takes too long to get on YouTube. I've gotten indignant at how it is interrupting my workout on the stationary bike because I have no use for the twelve TV channels that the gym offers. It is all because I want what I want when I want it. And what I want is to be watching lectures from UCLA while I exercise!

When you take a moment to think about how you have reacted over these stupid little interruptions, you have to either laugh or feel kind a dumb. Your choice.

Starting today, make sure a positive experience or modern marvel is never wasted again. Right now, look around and notice five things that are there for you in any way. These are your good facts. They may be from the past, present, or future. They could be people, surroundings, or technology. Perhaps one thing is your cell phone that lets you see the other person's face while you talk to them. Bluetooth technology that allows you to answer your phone through your car speakers. Your computer—do I even need to say anything about that? What about a GPS that can keep you from getting lost even if you are 3,000 miles from home?

Then there is all the various social media and how it keeps you in touch with everyone and everything that matters to you—and on a screen that fits into your pocket! There are also all of the things you are able to accomplish each day because of technology. Things you do with ease that make your day run smoothly or allow you to make a living.

I never stop being amazed that I can ask any question on the Internet that I think of and can get multiple answers, in less than a second! I remember my days at the town library and how lucky I was if they had the book I was looking for; usually I was told they had to rent it from some other library six towns away. Now I can find the answer to things I would never dare even ask in public!

Why Are You Here?

The importance of having a purpose in life can't be overstated, and for good reason. Like I said, scientific studies have proven time and time again that the happiest people in the world are those who feel they have a purpose. We need to matter. In your journey through *Wired To Worry* you will learn ways to discover and uncover your purpose. That purpose can involve the world, your town, your family, or any organization where you feel needed or counted on. When that wanes, even in the course of a day, it can leave you experiencing low-grade misery. To the degree that you feel you make a difference, you will feel good. Purpose is why humans are drawn to join clubs, groups, fraternities, sororities, and other organizations.

In the course of your day, the short-term purposes may be obvious; your lifelong purpose, however, can be more obscure. Yet, when you know what yours is, it will be the reason you spring out of bed in the morning.

Many people have no idea what their purpose is, and tons of seminars are given every year to help them find it. Not knowing one's purpose can trigger a midlife crisis and can be the reason for taking trips to go find oneself. We all seem to have this innate need to know that there is a reason—and a damn good one—for being on this earth. Often this issue raises its head only long after college, as in college goals have more to do with career choice and making money; much less consideration is given to the importance of making a difference. You will learn the daily steps you can take to maintain your sense of purpose and the steps you can take to discover your life long purpose.

You will learn not to psychoanalyze these passing moods, looking for some big, hidden issue. Most days it is just a chemical that you need to fire up. Evolution has proven over time that humans survive only by helping each other, so a strong drive evolved within us that leads us to try to make things better, support, collaborate, and make a difference for an optimum life. You will learn where those opportunities are hiding so you can maintain your sense of purpose in the course of a day.

Chapter 8

How To Be the Hit of the Party

Social settings are notoriously hard for many people, and once again we have evolution to thank for that. It's why we invented alcohol.

Thousands of years ago, meeting new people could mean extreme danger. A new tribe showing up out of nowhere could mean a battle to the death. Very seldom did a new group of people show up just to say, "Hey, Wus Up?"

Now here you are thousands of years later, supposedly much more evolved, and yet the moment you walk into a room, that damn amygdala starts scanning for enemies of all kinds. Remember, you are programmed to survive; now, however, instead of your brain looking for people with clubs, it scans for people who might be judging you, giving you a wrong look, or saying something off-color. In this survival mode, you will compare yourself to them, looking for reasons to feel insecure or embarrassed. The smallest infraction will set off major alarm bells! "Boy, they seemed cold. Why do I always have to say hi first? Why are they staring at me?" Is it any wonder we go running for the bar?

Through the exercises in my book you will learn to retrain your brain to walk into a room and, at first glance, note everything and everyone in the room *for* you, *not* against you. Which will completely alter your persona.

The highest compliment I have ever heard about another person is this: "When you talk to them you feel like you are the only one in the room." People will always be drawn to that kind of person, as they are a rare find. So you must understand that people *won't* like you because you are *interesting*, but rather *interested*... in them. This is a challenging one because the minute we walk into a social setting we are going to start chasing serotonin to feel more confident, and that often means bragging in one form or another. But once you understand the dynamics as to how this works in the brain, you will learn how to circumvent these behaviors so you are a joy to be

around and not a drag. You will also learn tricks to boost serotonin in others as well, making you a very sought after guest.

Learning to be very comfortable in social settings takes practice, but it is a skill that can lead to job offers and networking opportunities that can change your life, so the practice is well worth the effort.

Try this test today: Notice when you enter a public setting if in the background of your mind you sense a quiet assumption that people are judging you, even at the supermarket. Almost everyone does this. It is why we walk into a store and avoid most eye contact—and is why they, too, assume that we don't want anything to do with them. Our way of protecting ourselves is to either ignore the faces in front of us or begin to judge them back.

When you start to see just how often you avoid eye contact with strangers, you will spot these underlying tendencies. I am still taken back when I am in a store and I hear a kind voice from a stranger or get a kind look. It is there that I instantly feel my defenses come down and am aware of my own negativity churning away in the background. In public gatherings of any kind, your subconscious will be hitting the warning bell continuously—the wrong glance from a friend or foe or even someone whispering into an ear thirty feet away will set your amygdala at the “ready” position. You have to pay attention to what is traveling at light-speed through your mind—otherwise, trust me, your mood will fluctuate ten times in a minute.

When you learn to take control of the negative background static and go on the offensive to be kind and nice, you will notice your own fears and insecurity dissolve, as well as those of the people around you. This is the psychology behind banks and some stores that have people waiting to greet you at the door.

Let me mention here that being socially accepted is a *much* higher priority for women, because it is more hardwired into women's brains than into those of men for the reasons I covered earlier. When you change your own comfort capabilities in social settings, you change how you see the whole world, as well as how they see you and that is where everything changes.

You may notice that at any place where you have to wait to be served, you may tend to see the others as obstacles because typically you have to wait for them to get done before you can be taken care of. Initially, we walk into a store and see how much time this will cost us before we even think about a price. On the opposite side, I have actually noticed slight feelings of guilt when I am in line somewhere and another has to wait for me, like at the post office. (But that could just be my Catholic school guilt; let me know if that happens to you.)

It only takes about a week to become aware of all the defensive chatter going on in the back of your mind. Then you will put into practice a host of strategies and techniques to break these thought patterns so you become a draw—not a drain. Your entire energy field will change for the better and you will know this because complete strangers will begin greeting you with a smile. We are very perceptive creatures and pick up on each other's energy faster than you will ever be consciously aware of. As that begins to happen you will gain a new level of confidence in any social setting.

Chapter 9

No More Feeling Bad About A Life That is Pretty Damn Great

I am sure you know negative people who put a negative spin on everything that they discuss or recollect. Even good events can take on a negative tone when recounted by “Downer Dan.” Instead of admitting something was good, he somehow finds a way to downplay it. However, there is something to be gleaned from that ingrained pattern. These patterns are learned, then perfected by repeated practice, and then ingrained. These become what are referred to as neural patterns.

A while back, after telling a group of acquaintances a story that most would consider pretty traumatic, others at the table commented on my positive attitude. I smiled because, until that moment, I had never seen myself as a positive person, *per sé*. I always considered myself a realist. It was then that I realized I had always viewed a positive attitude as a decision to forcibly put a positive spin on things. I’d thought it was a decision that took strength and fortitude and a giant fake smile that I always believed was more about being in denial. Conversely, for me in this story, there was no other choice, no pushing away a buried resentment; this was the only way to see it. As I have now rewired my brain with these techniques, I see that same perception pervading all the areas of my life.

After practicing these techniques, your brain, too, will begin to naturally lean toward this perception. It won’t take putting rose-colored glasses on—just clear ones.

If you are someone who has often felt that you have been a victim of circumstance, or have never been given your fair shot at the good life, it can be a challenge to release your grip around the neck of negativity. Even your best efforts can be hindered by stubborn patterns of fear, and it can seem almost impossible to review your life in anything less than the dim light of injustice and bad breaks. However, there is way around this.

I created a visualization tool that will allow you to see your life with complete objectivity. This exercise is particularly helpful if you are struggling with a lot of anxiety, because this mental separation disengages all of the judgment filters that you normally force all information through. Until these filters are dissolved, it can be difficult some days to see your life in a positive light. It is as though you are standing in a courtroom trying to convince a jury that your life has some great things in it when the prosecutor suddenly jumps up and yells, "Objection, Your Honor; this is hearsay and can't be proven!" Yeah, we all have that guy in our head from time to time.

This tool seems to have the most profound impact on my clients, as it often leaves them in awe.

After you learn to see the greatness in your life, there is no doubt that there is plenty of painful stuff as well. But there is a way to clear out the pain of the memory by utilizing a wonderful technique that has helped thousands of people. This is one of the coolest techniques in the book, as you will learn to literally attach amazing feel-good feelings to past memories so they don't hurt or sting like they did. The other benefit is you can use the same technique to overcome frustration with certain tasks; I have clients using this to deal with issues at work that are annoying, boring, or frustrating.

Happily, I can report that due to neuroplasticity, most of my clients engage in these techniques automatically without my conscious brain having to remind them. They just naturally find themselves constantly taking in good things, and if they find they are thinking about the past or future, their mind automatically pulls them back to the present. Your brain, too, will begin to rewire permanently. It just takes some consistent awareness.

How You Will Progress

After about three weeks you will find that your tolerance for problems, disappointments, and setbacks has increased. When a bill arrives or your boss has an attitude, your brain will naturally recall these things of comfort before you go into fight-and-protect mode, and you will immediately feel a sense of relief and safety. When you notice that you are reacting to a situation out of habit, you will be able to feel that the emotion is not nearly as strong as it used to be. Your reaction will now be calmer because of the extra supply of DOS you now carry.

After I was five weeks into a regular practice of this training, I remember seeing a parking space and as I approached, out of nowhere, a car pulled into it right in front of me. I had my blinker on, so I believed it was deliberate. I instantly let out some choice words, but then I stopped and had to chuckle. I wasn't feeling the anger that normally would have accompanied such language. I was reacting out of pure habit, and truthfully, I really didn't feel anything about it. I wondered, "Hold on; is this real?" I was amazed. I had been making an effort to feel appreciative all day, so this little blip didn't even register on my radar. Yes, I had to battle my

old thought patterns—that out of pure principle, I should say something—but now that was a choice, and I chose to just keep feeling happy.

After reading the book [Wired To Worry](#) and putting into practice what you will learn, you will notice changes in the first week. Annoyances from another driver, a derogatory comment, or a family member requiring more than you have to give will sting much less. You will notice how you start reminding yourself of everything that you have learned. After one or two days, this constant choice to remember that you now *have a choice* is the first step, and although you may not experience happiness or bliss in the first two or three days, you will begin feeling a sense of relief that you are not forced to react. **The rewiring has already started.**

By the fourth day, of consistently using the tools, you will begin to feel some relief, a sense of hope around this new pattern of thinking developing.

In days 5-7, you will be maintaining a calmer demeanor. You will be less afraid of uncomfortable situations. You will begin to notice that problems are working out without you getting worked up.

In week 2, you will smile more, and although no specific event is occurring, you will have a stronger sense of well-being and you should feel more approachable.

By week 3, frustrating situations should bring only the memories of the old reactions. You may find yourself uttering the same verbal retort or sarcasm, just as I did when I lost my parking space, but you will notice that the old negative emotions are not there nearly as strong as they were before.

After 60 days, most report that they are happier, more easygoing, and more hopeful about their future than ever before. No longer living in fear of the next crisis, they have a sense of strength, confidence, and stability.

You will take great pleasure in affecting your environment; people will begin to relate differently to you because you will be operating out of this base of security, confidence, and safety, and they will notice the change. You just need to commit for one month and your mind will rewire itself! I know you are busy, but most of that busyness is rooted in trying to find the sweet spot of peace. If you are reading this, I know that much of your time is consumed with being stressed and unhappy. You have to decide once and for all—do you want more than anything to wake up with a sense of peace and wellbeing and stop wasting your time and energy, or would you rather continue commiserating with everyone around you, ruminating about future events that haven't even occurred yet? Don't you want to recapture and maintain the feeling you have while on

vacation? Isn't it worthwhile to sit quietly when everyone starts ranting about our government leaders, knowing you can wake up with a smile? How desperate are you?

I was desperate. I finally decided I no longer wanted to live opening my eyes each morning and not being sure what mood I would be in, and then have it affect me all day. Even waking up in a good mood for no reason was frustrating because I didn't know what to do to harness it. Nothing had changed in my life—not a darn thing—but there it was, calm peace of mind! I knew there had to be a way to harness that magic. Well it's here. The hardest part will be your commitment; the process is very straightforward. It's up to you. Finding happiness is the motive behind every action, behavior, thought, and idea we concoct. So just do it already!

Sign up in our Facebook Group for the readers of this book ([Get Off Your Worry-Go-Round](#)) and say, "I'm in; I want to feel happy." Talk with others and enjoy the inspiration and encouragement from those who want to make the most of their lives. And remember, none of us lives in a vacuum; everything we do affects those around us. Whom will you help?

I hope you are encouraged and can see that we really do have a choice about how we feel. No more chasing some elusive promise that we can feel good later, when all our problems are handled—which never happens!

I hope you go to AMAZON right now and buy [Why We Are Wired to Worry and How Neuroscience Will Help You Fix It Stop Stressing, Reduce Anxiety, Feel Happy Finally!](#) I sincerely want you to feel better and be able to wake up each morning with a smile on your face. No longer fearful of what life may throw at you. What you have just read was only an overview. The book will take you step by step into that 3lb mass above your neck so that you can learn where all the buttons are and finally love life a gain!

About the Author

Public speaker, educator, counselor, trainer, author, and artist, Sharie is a philosopher, a visionary, a riot, a role model, and a beacon of light for those in the throes of mental darkness.

Sharie has an unquenchable thirst not only to learn about neuropsychology (how the brain makes us tick), but also to teach it to others and has been doing so since 1985. In the '80s, she was a highly sought motivational speaker who taught at high schools and colleges. Both the kids and psychology professors gained new insight about themselves using science, wisdom, and experience.

In 1986, she co-produced the David Toma show on WOR for a year, working closely with David to reach teens on an international level. She then spearheaded and became the director of the David Toma Center in Tecate, Mexico, a rehabilitation center for those caught up in drugs and alcohol.

Sharie was at the top of her field as an educator, therapist, and motivational spokesperson when her world suddenly fell apart. After she was diagnosed with rapid cycling bipolar depression in 1990, her life came to a crashing halt. For the next six years, Sharie's journey in and out of hospitals left her hopeless, tired, and ready to quit. Despite her unending research of this disorder, the twenty-one doctors she saw were unable to prescribe anything that would give her stability for longer than a few weeks.

Between March 31 and April 3, 1996, just before she gave up, a miracle transpired, and Sharie was radically healed of any and all mood swings after having an 86 year old woman named Fuchsia Pickett pray for her over the course of 4 nights. When she reported to her doctor, he told her that what had happened was impossible. She left his office smiling from ear to ear; his disbelief made what happened to her even more profound. This propelled Sharie to discover how the miracle happened and whether a scientific explanation existed, as well as God's divine intervention. It was in 1996 that neuroplasticity was confirmed, proving that the human brain can change and heal itself.

Sharie has a deep passion to reach into the human soul and grab hold of what matters to people. She is not afraid to use her incredible past to inspire others. Sharie has a gift for explaining technical, scientific details, using humor, metaphors, and pure wisdom. Through techniques based on neuroscience and using ten seconds at a time, she can help you rewire your brain for happiness and learn about you.

Sharie is available for workshops, readings, one-on-one sessions, and speaking engagements.

Contact Info:

Be sure to sign up on her website for the FREE meditations and workbook.

www.shariespironhi.com

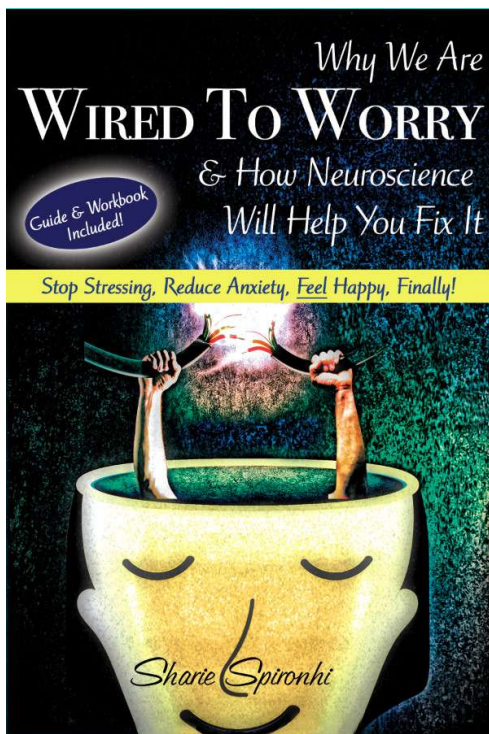
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