

Happiness hacker Penny Locaso shares the secrets to finding joy in everyday life



DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

ICAN'T recall how long ago exactly it was now, 2020 feels like the fastest slow year I've ever experienced. It was just before Melbourne went into stage 3 lockdown version 2.0 that close friends called and asked if I would live at their farm and care for their animals indefinitely. They had decided to extend their stay interstate until COVID calmed down.

I had grown up on farms, absolutely loved nature but my past life hadn't allowed the space for an opportunity like this to evolve. Then COVID arrived and like so many, my foundations on every front were shaken to the core and through the cracks the silver linings started to appear.

The forced reality of working remotely and homeschooling at the same time meant the door to possibility was wide open to explore a completely different kind of life. One that was a little slower and more intentional and so within 24 hours I packed up my life in Melbourne and moved to the country.

Words cannot explain the impact this decision has had on expanding my happiness and that of my 10-year-old son. Which leads me to my first secret in the realm of Hacking Happiness.

SECRET 1

Happiness is often found at the intersection of what you long for and what you are avoiding
My average day on the farm consists of

meditation, journaling, yoga, a HIIT workout, homeschooling, blocks of deep work, feeding chickens, collecting eggs, stoking open fires, handfeeding calves, a hot spa, family dinner, gratitude and often a board game. Honestly it feels more like a retreat than lockdown and it's come with extreme guilt.

I've longed for this life yet I've avoided sharing too much of my joy (until now) out of shame that I'm not suffering enough at a time when so many are doing it tough.

TRY EXPERIMENTING WITH A SMALL 10-MINUTE DAILY RITUAL OR PRACTICE THAT BRINGS YOU JOY

Over the years my journey has taught me that the secret to hacking happiness is often found at the intersection of what you long for and what you've been avoiding — and I've been avoiding my guilt.

We suppress exploring the intersection of longing and avoidance because it can feel so overwhelming to deal with. Why? Because it is alerting us to what truly matters and where the key to unlocking more joy can be found. Why not consider carving out a little undistracted time with a pen and a paper and write down what you long for (on one side of the page) and what you have been avoiding (on the other).

Observe it, notice where you feel it in your body, sit with it and give yourself permission to move through the discomfort of awareness into a space of possibility.

SECRET 2

There is no perfect plan when it comes to hacking happiness — just start

In the early days I was searching for the perfect plan to start my Hacking Happiness journey. I was afraid to move forward without it because my past experience had conditioned me to believe that not having a plan was a risky move, it meant I might choose the wrong path or worse still, fail.

I soon learnt in the realm of Hacking Happiness there is no perfect plan, there are no wrong paths and failure — that's where we do our best learning. Waiting for the perfect plan to appear only holds us back from making a start.

This idea of a perfect plan feeds our desire for certainty and in the space of Hacking Happiness certainty is an impediment to growth. Embracing the unknown is where the magic lies. So, take your journaling from above and gift yourself permission to take just one small action in a direction that feels right for you. Trust me when I say each action you take will breed clarity on which action to take next.

SECRET 3

Happiness is a practice not a goal

I spent years ticking boxes I'd been told would make me happier only to realise at the age of 39 that happiness was not goal — it's a daily practice. Too often we direct our energy around the accumulation of what we don't have when what we all have — our mindset and behaviour — is where our hacking happiness opportunities lie.

Assuming the role of the imperfect experimenter to embrace uncertainty and take action is where the possibility is found.

Try experimenting with a small 10-minute daily ritual or practice that brings you joy. It can be anything: 10 minutes dedicated to learning something new, a walk, undistracted quality time with your child. It's our daily practices that provide the opportunity for us to dial up our happy moments and the frequency of them.

It's these secrets that have enabled me to own my COVID guilt, process it and come out the other side just a little better than what I was before.

I'm choosing to let go of the fear of judgment about enjoying this time and embracing the idea that sharing may inspire another to hack their happiness.

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