

TWELVE DAYS OF

wellbeing

AN INSPIRATION WORKBOOK

BY MARIA JACKSON



*“Gratitude is the wine for the soul.
Go on. Get drunk.” -Rumi*

ENGAGE

A theme that keeps coming back to me again, and again, and again? Gratitude. Where would we be without the blessings in our life? The genuine guidance of our mentors. Our health. The ones we love. The morning cups of coffee. A place to sleep tonight. The random acts of kindness from a stranger. Who would we be without all the little (and big) gifts we take for granted?

DAY ONE:

Gratitude



Use this space to write your letter of gratitude

ACTIVATE

“My cup has been filled with the gifts of so many. How can I fill the cups of others?”

When I was a kid, my mother always insisted we send a handwritten thank you card for every gift we received. I still do. There is something so thoughtful, considerate, and special about a true, handwritten letter of gratitude. It shows the time taken in a fast-paced world; it shares a vulnerable heart in a world of emotional armor.

Think of someone you are grateful for – a coworker, a mentor, a friend, a family member, your favorite bank teller. Why are you grateful to this person? You don’t need to be the world’s best writer, and you don’t need to write a novel. The beauty is in the fact that you took the time to share your heart. You may choose to deliver this message. You might just make their day. I wouldn’t be surprised if this practice of gratitude makes your own day, too.

REFLECT

Practicing gratitude focuses our gaze in the direction of all that is good in our lives. “Neurons that fire together wire together” – that is Hebb’s Law of neuroscience. For example, the more we practice making pasta sauce, the easier and more natural it becomes to make pasta sauce. If we can trade out tomatoes for counting our blessings, we are going to find it a lot easier and more automatic to see the positive in our lives. A once-daily practice of “counting our blessings” focuses our brain on the positive throughout the day.

“How can I live out the story of my life with the spotlight on my blessings?”

So, shall we try it out? Take a moment to put your phone on silent and set aside your to-do list. Pull out a piece of paper and your favorite pen, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. What are you deeply grateful for?

Sit with this question for a moment, noting what arises. Then, get those thoughts down on paper, however you would like. Bingo– you’ve just practiced gratitude!

“Staying vulnerable is a risk we have to take if we want to experience connection.” -Brené Brown



DAY TWO:

empathy

ENGAGE

Empathy can be personally uncomfortable. In fact, it often is. Empathy is thought of as a way one way street: from me to you. But I actually want to connect to two different points for true empathy: from me to you, AND from me to me. Connecting to the emotional part inside myself that mirrors the cor-

responding emotional part inside you is true empathy. When he is hurt, I tap into the part of myself that could be hurt. When she is angry, I tap into the part of myself that could be angry. Empathy is a practice in feeling our feelings, even when our intention is to give ease to another.

ACTIVATE

If you could choose only ONE activity to boost your empathy, what would it be? Neuroscientist Richard Davidson found that participants who regularly practice a certain type of meditation show significantly more action in the empathy-centered regions of the brain than those who did not. What's the secret sauce? A specific meditation style called lovingkindness. It's easy, I promise, and I can personally attest that even 5 minutes of practicing it leaves me feeling warmer and fuzzier.

How do we do it? First, take a moment to put your phone on silent and find a place where you can sit or lay for an uninterrupted 10 minutes. Close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths to clear your mind. Then, begin the lovingkindness meditation. You will send healing, positive thoughts toward four different types of people,

In this order:

1. Someone (or an animal) who is easy for you to love.
2. Someone neutral to you (the post office person, a cashier)
3. Someone who is difficult for you to like (a challenging co-worker, your sassy teenager)
4. Yourself.

Some common messages to send are, "May you be happy", "May you be free of suffering", and "May you be at ease." You can choose whatever phrases or images naturally come to mind in sending good wishes. You will know you are done when you have finished with your four people, or you can set a 10-minute timer for yourself. Don't be surprised if this is difficult at first, especially for the last two on the list. You are not alone, and just being aware and forgiving of the sensations that come up for you is a sincere act of empathy.

LOVING KINDNES

Use this space to write down any sensations, thoughts, or feelings that came up during the lovingkindness exercise.

REFLECT

“How does my body feel?”

Simply take a moment after you finish your meditation to breathe deeply a few times. How does your body feel? What sensations are showing up? Where in the body are these sensations felt? Sit with this for a few moments, letting your body become satu-

rated with the sensations you are currently experiencing. You may find it helpful to write down any sensations, thoughts, or feelings that came up during the lovingkindness meditation. These notes might be helpful tomorrow as we explore the root

of all empathy: self-compassion. Interested in doing more loving-kindness meditation? You can find an 8 minute guided meditation by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society here: tinyurl.com/y8yyb4mo

DAY THREE:

self-compassion

*"The boundary
to what we can accept
is the boundary to our
freedom." -Tara Brach*



ENGAGE

Not so long ago, I learned that I am a highly self-critical person. Not so long ago, I hadn't ever even thought about what I say to myself on a daily basis. To be honest, once I paid attention, the soundtrack sounded a lot like this: "You're not doing enough; You're not meant to be happy; You will never fit in." I was living a good, intentional life, and I probably shock most of my friends and acquaintances in sharing this. I rarely showed this darkness.

But deep, deep down, a very scared part of me believed these mantras to be true.

Months of therapy, completing my EQPC, and practicing emotional intelligence dedicatedly has changed almost every facet of my life. I am a better communicator, a happier person, a more lovely partner, and a greater friend to myself. All of these constellations of positivity spiral tightly into one bright origin: *my self-compassion*.

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." -Carl Rogers

ACTIVATE

You know how people say, "love yourself"? I had literally no idea what they meant. It made sense in my head, as a concept, but my body and heart looked upon that phrase as Greek. I get it now, or at least I am getting a good grasp on it. Loving myself is accepting and nurturing whatever is inside of me, even when (especially when!) what is inside is uncomfortable. Anger, sadness, guilt, fear, disgust, hopelessness. When I am practicing self-compassion, they all go into an inner pile of unconditional acceptance. This isn't to say that I act out on my feelings or enable their power; in fact, quite the opposite occurs. When I allow these feelings to be heard, seen, and acknowledged, they transform. I simply can't say it better myself, so I will repeat Rogers again: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I

am, then I can change." Are you willing to try out one of my most cherished emotional intelligence tools?

Follow this link:

<http://6sec.org/selfcompassionmeditation>

to a 10-minute meditation on self-compassion from Tara Brach, called the RAIN method. It is helpful to have in mind a difficult situation or emotional state you may currently be experiencing. It doesn't need to be big or dramatic, but having something specific in mind is very helpful for this type of meditation. For example, "I am feeling guilty about not spending enough time with my kids right now."

I really hope this meditation is as transformational for you as it has been for me.

Use this space to write down any insights you received from your meditation or ideas you have for moving your self-compassion practice forward beyond today.

REFLECT

How are you feeling? Did the RAIN meditation provide a different way to process an uncomfortable emotion or thought pattern? What could you take away from the RAIN meditation that would be helpful in your daily life? For those of you who have a practice of self-criticism, the path to self-compassion may be the most challenging and rewarding journey of your life. Your wellbeing depends on it, and emotional intelligence is here to help you with tools along the way.

"How can I continue being a little bit more self-compassionate?"

ENGAGE

What does a good life look like? Lots of time with family and friends. Food on the table. A basic sense of having our needs met. Having our health. A career that we believe in and believes in us. What does an extraordinary life look like? A life deeply rooted in purpose and meaning. A life that, when left, leaves a legacy of positive change in the world. A life that is steeped in our noble goal.

DAY FOUR:

Legacy

“The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.” -William James

Picture yourself at 90.

ACTIVATE

This older version of yourself is gazing back at you, smiling with kind, crinkly eyes. They have lived a good, long, meaningful life. As they reflect back on their miraculous life, they say to you, “Good job, you've really done it!” Why? What is this 90-year-old person so proud of?

In finding out the answer to this question, you are tapping into your noble goal, your life’s purpose. Your noble goal acts like a compass; in a meaningful life, it guides everything you do.

Let’s come back to your reminiscent, smiling

90-year-old self. Allow yourself to really close your eyes and indulge in imagination. What are they smiling about? What are they remembering? What are they feeling? Jot down a few words, emotions, or images that come to mind.

Hold the image of your old, smiling self in your mind as you slip away from your current roles and delve into your purposeful life. What are the building blocks? In family, work, play, faith, and friendships, what is the golden thread that knits them all together to make each moment meaningful?

REFLECT

“What does my most meaningful life look like?”

Imagine a life where your noble goal compass points toward true north. It is fine if it doesn’t seem realistic or reasonable; allow yourself to indulge in imagination. What does this life look like? How do you feel? What are the textures, sensations, and qualities of this dream? Simply planting this seed of intention toward your noble goal helps to clarify what it means to you. Hold onto these thoughts and feelings. Tomorrow, we will be using them to look at how to practice your noble goal on a daily basis.

Use this space to write down your vision of your thriving 90-year-old self.

ENGAGE

Remember your 90-year-old self from yesterday? The one with the warm smile and all the answers? They have the luxury of having an birds-eye view of your life; they can zoom out from the details and see the whole, rosy picture. In reality, though, our life is nothing if not a composition of a million details.

A million times of saying “yes” and a million times of saying “no.” How do we merge the two lives? How do we do the dishes, go to work, take care of children, and brush our teeth with our noble goal in the forefront of our mind?

How do we intentionally choose a life— saying “yes” to the meaningful and “no” to the stagnant? Fortunately, a lot of wise people have gone before us to reconcile this question, and we will rely on them to teach us how to build a daily life of meaning.

“No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path” - Buddha

DAY FIVE:

Intention



ACTIVATE

“Life is short. How do I get from mundane to meaningful?”

So let’s focus in on how to integrate our noble goal into our daily lives, shall we? Start off by doing one of my favorite things: make a to-do list for the day. and make something artistic, or simply put a check mark beside these items. If you do something out of sheer obligation, it does not get a check mark.

Actually, make it a SUPER to-do list. Write down every little thing you are going to do today or tomorrow; making yourself lunch, changing diapers, greeting your coworkers, you see what I mean. Next, get a little wild with me. Make a new list, and only keep the items with a check mark on it. This is your new list. It may not be entirely complete. Changing diapers might need to sneak back on there, but maybe your obligatory meeting where

you never say a word gets nixed. Maybe you do something that feeds your soul, like sending an email to an old friend, instead. Write down event the little things. Now, the task ahead of you is to mark everything on your list that actively contributes to your noble goal or that you enjoy doing. You can pull out the colored markers

REFLECT

“How am I spending these precious hours on earth?”

Money comes and goes. Time just goes. Look at your new to-do list. Does this look more in-line with how you’d like to spend your fleeting time on this earth? Even if this list is not entirely realistic now (we can’t all quit our draining commitments right away), it is an exercise of practicing intention to write it. Your list an act of choosing yourself. No one is going to choose your meaningful life for you except YOU. You are the only one who is lit up by your noble goal, and you are the only one with the power to choose yourself. So go make your 90-year-old self proud, life isn’t getting any longer.

Use this space to write down your SUPER-TO DO LIST & check mark lists.

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.”
-Jimmy Dean



DAY SIX:

optimism

ENGAGE

When I was trying to find a good quote for the topic of optimism, I found a lot of this: “the light is greater than the dark!” “look on the bright side!” and “rainy days bring rainbows!” Our culture has a lot to say about optimism, and a lot of the rhetoric seems to focus on the silver lining. This is helpful, for sure. Neuroscience has a lot to say about focusing on the positive in life; optimistic people are more likely to have healthier self-esteems, relationships, and are better leaders. However, I’ve actually found this “sunny-side-up” ideology to be the most

useful when I am already in a good mood! It’s great to boost my attention of the great stuff going on in my life, much like we did in our first Gratitude activity of listing our blessings. But, let’s admit it, most of us need help with optimism when we are on the opposite side of the spectrum. When life feels rough, when we feel stuck, when we can’t seem to get out of our destructive thought patterns. What do we do then? How do we tap into a glimmer of hope? How do we even begin to envision the rainbow at the end of the rain?

ACTIVATE

“Out of a rut & onto a road”

Here is a simple exercise for adjusting our sails and practicing optimism when we are feeling down. Think of a situation that has made you feel “stuck” lately. An ongoing argument with a loved one, an annoying habit of your boss, a decision that needs to be made but begs clarification. Write down every single possible option or outcome for this situation. Allow yourself to feel unattached to these options and completely brainstorm. They don’t

need to be realistic, reasonable, or likely, they just need to be plentiful. Especially if you know you fall into the more risk-averse category, just let yourself get really wild for this list. No one will see it but you, I promise. When you feel like you’ve exhausted every possible choice, step back and look at what you’ve written. Look at all of those options! Optimism is seeing all of the possible outcomes of a situation, and you’ve done just that!

Use this space to write down every single possible option or outcome for a situation that has made you feel “stuck” lately.

REFLECT

"Fueling the flame of optimism"

It's just fine if none of these options jump out at you as "the right one" (though I often find one does with this exercise!) The act of widening your lens and considering other options, even outlandish ones, fuels your inner flame of optimism. It helps us to let go of the constraint our minds had put on us and the situation, and we might see that some of those assumptions are unfounded. Optimism is learning to navigate our challenges in a way that keeps our intentions clear and our restraints minimized. Even making a simple mind-opening list helps us to hone our ability adjust our sails and find the rainbows.

DAY SEVEN: *emotional awareness*

*“What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself.”
-Abraham*

ENGAGE

I felt tingles during most of my EQPC. There was something deep within me saying, “PLEASE listen to this. PLEASE do more of this!!” I knew I couldn’t ignore the voice. I couldn’t just stop this work after the training was over. The day I got back to my cozy home, I sat down with my pages and pages of notes and drafted an emotional intelligence practice plan. I called it my “Better Self” project. For one month, I dedicated myself to a comprehensive emotional intelligence practice that unfolded itself in a million beautiful ways.

Where did I start? With emotional literacy. As I had learned during my EQPC, I have a rational-focused brain style. I knew that focusing on my emotions needed to become a priority in order for my wellbeing to grow. I dedicated myself to practicing the most simple tool for building emotional literacy I could possibly think of, and what I would like to invite you to do today is practice the same.



ACTIVATE

“What emotion am I feeling right now?”

Today’s practice is so, so simple.

Throughout your day today, I invite you to name your current emotional state as many times as possible.

Let’s begin; what emotion are you feeling right now?Okay. Is there anything else in there, on the edges? Okay. Good job, you’re up to one time today! You can repeat the questions “Is there anything else?” as many times as practicality allows. When I am doing something by myself, like cooking or doing the dishes, I let myself delve deeply into these questions. If I am mid-conversation, I offer myself a simple answer with no follow up questions. The goal is just to steep your day today in emotional awareness.

If naming your current emotion didn’t feel excessively easy to you, no worries. Thanks to a dedicated group of researchers who have come before us, we have tools to help us name emotions. Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions is a very helpful map of emotions you can use to pin down exactly what you are feeling.

REFLECT

Naming emotions is a surprisingly effective way to de-escalate uncomfortable feelings. However, naming emotions (especially uncomfortable ones) can be a trigger for self-doubt and aggravation in some people. If this is the case, I invite you to go back to the RAIN meditation in our Self-Compassion email. Having compassion for yourself and internalizing the message that all emotions are helpful messengers will light the way for healthy navigation of tricky feelings. I envision myself piling all emotions I name into a big, golden bowl with the words “YES” written on it. In this way, I validate both my emotions and myself as being worthy of existence and care. Is there an image or phrase you could use to help you with accepting your uncomfortable emotions? Learning to recognize and saying “YES” to even the most shadowy parts of ourselves is a mighty challenge with even mightier rewards. Are you ready to begin your journey?

Use this space to write about an image or phrase you could use to help you with accepting your uncomfortable emotions.

“How can I bring my emotions to the surface in a way that is healthy for both me and my emotions?”

DAY EIGHT:

connection

*“Invisible threads are the
strongest ties.”*

-Friedrich Nietzsche



ENGAGE

Yesterday was a magical day for me. I woke up in a cabin with no TV and no internet. I lazily read books beside my partner, felt the warmth of a roaring fireplace while playing games with my “in-loves”, and savored a gorgeous sunset from the wide back porch with the whole family. If my day sounds like a country song,

it’s because it kind of was– I could literally see a deer stand from the back porch! Seriously, though, my life felt filled to the brim with love, natural beauty, and simplicity. I felt that deepest kind of gratitude that can only come from one place– being surrounded by people I love and who love me.

“Why is connection important?”



ACTIVATE

Let’s go back to the scene of me lazily reading on the porch beside Michael. If you could zoom in on the picture, you would find the title of my book– “Brain Rules for Aging Well.” It is a phenomenal book by a phenomenal developmental molecular biologist and writer by the name of John Medina. The book artfully explains the brain research behind aging and what we can do to realistically become that 90-year-old we dreamed about the other day.

So, what are the secrets to having a healthy, old

brain? I’m only one chapter in, but I can already tell you a big one: relationships. In one 12-year study, 1,140 seniors were measured for their social activity and their cognitive health; the group that socialized most showed a whopping 70% less mental decline than those with little to no social activity.

Now that I knew the facts, I had to have a talk with myself, and so do you. Am I doing the best that I can to prioritize the relationships that will give me a long, healthy, meaningful life?

REFLECT

Medina's book brought up an interesting question for me. He writes a sentence that is intended as a backdrop to another topic, but it grabbed me immediately. Here it is:

"While you maintain your closest relationships with five people at a time, researchers find, you can have meaningful relationships of varying quality with an additional 150 people."

Wait a minute, back up there, your closest relationships with five people? I thought about it; can I really claim that I make a strong effort to maintain really close relationships with five people in my life? No, I can't honestly say I do. I felt ashamed about this, but then I asked my (super relationship-oriented) mother-in-law the same question. She, too, had to think long and hard about who those five people would be. So it wasn't just me. I got to writing, and I invite you to do the same.

I am one day in, and I have already started following my plan for energizing these close relationships. I think our brains, hearts, and loved ones will thank us for the effort.

Use this space to list the five people in your life with whom you would like to have the closest of connections? While you’re at it, can you brainstorm the effortful action steps you will take to solidify each person on your list?

*“How can I live
out my life
with a
focus on my
relationships?”*

A person's silhouette is seen from behind, floating in the ocean. The water is dark with small, rhythmic waves. The sky above is a vibrant orange and red, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

DAY NINE:

trust

“I am the ocean, and these are just waves.” -Tara Brach

ENGAGE

It had been a hard few weeks. The logistics of my upcoming knee surgery were overwhelming me. My normally delightful relationship was going through a rough patch. My work wasn't feeling nourishing, and I was starting to doubt it all together. I was starting to doubt myself all together. I had lost the trust in myself that I hold so dearly. I was becoming engulfed by the unsettling waves of my life. And before it got better, it got a lot worse.

ACTIVATE

The waves came to their crest during a conversation with my partner. I was reaching out to him, desperately treading water and looking at his hand to pull me up. He said something that was hurtful to me, and it was like his hand had snatched away, and I lost any urge to keep reaching. I went underwater. I was submerged in the fear, guilt, and shame that I had been trying so hard to keep above. Then, I became the ocean. I remembered deeply inside of myself, thanks largely to my regular prac-

tice of emotional intelligence, that I can contain all of these emotions. I felt them fully, I listened to them, I nurtured and cared for them. I trusted myself again. When the tears stopped flowing, I took a few deep breaths above water. I sat up to find a patiently waiting and slightly terrified Michael, and I was able to calmly and confidently express my needs. I felt a deep trust in myself; I knew that even if he didn't give me the response I wanted, I was honoring and taking care of myself.

“Sometimes the waves must get big to remind us we are the ocean”

REFLECT

Few more words were spoken that night, but everything has shifted in our relationship. I can't take all the credit; I have a really incredible and thoughtful partner. But I am responsible for the larger shift inside of myself. That night taught me how important it is to cultivate trust and faith when times are good, so that we can draw on that strength when times are tumultuous.

What builds your sense of trust and faith? Meditation on tapping into your inner self. Prayer to whatever it is you believe in. Daily self-affirmations like "I am the ocean" or "I love you." Regular visits to a therapist to delve into the self. Whatever it is, do more of it.

Build that ocean so big and strong that all waves

can be met with unconditional love and understanding. Build that ocean now so that, when the waves come, you can say, "I trust that these waves will build my strength." Build that ocean now so that you can see those waves from a mile away and say "I see you out there, waves, I already understand you, and I am already prepared for you to be closer." Perhaps, when we get to that point, we will find that the waves slow way down.

“How can we sow the seeds of trust so that they can grow to be strong enough when we need them?”

Use this space to explore what builds your sense of trust and faith. Draw, make lists or find your own way to describe your ocean.

*“Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful,
and relax and exhale during the ordinary. That’s just
living heartbreaking, soul-healing, amazing, awful,
ordinary life. And it’s breathtakingly beautiful.”*
-LR Knost

DAY TEN:

Luxuriate

ENGAGE

Occasionally, we have days like the one I described yesterday. Challenging.
Packed with opportunity for growth. Exhausting.
Occasionally, we have days like my day at the cabin.
Glorious. Cup-filling. Restful.
And all the other days?
This is where our focus is going today. How can we pour a little hot fudge
on the most mundane of days?



ACTIVATE

“*What is my mundane moment?*”

I used to be the queen of “after x, y, and z, I will finally relax!” I was the princess of powering through.

I distinctly remember a moment I had in the week after my powerful EQPC experience. I was working part-time as an insurance biller for a local therapist (if you think your job is more mundane than this, I’ll put you on the next call with an insurance company). I was waiting on the phone to talk with a real person, my back was hurting from the uncomfortable chair I was sitting in, I felt pressed for time as I saw at the pile of claims staring back at me.

My classic, subconscious thought pattern ran through my head, “Just power through this, then you can relax.”

For the very first time in my life, three things hit me:

- 1. I have this thought pattern a lot!**
- 2. This is NOT a healthy thought pattern!**
- 3. This is a choice! I can choose myself and change my situation.**

I stood up and stretched while I waited for the operator to answer. As soon as I was off that call, I made myself a quick cup

of my favorite treat- coffee. I settled back in to finish my work, feeling relaxed, luxurious, and empowered. I made the choice to pour a little hot fudge on my hour, and it felt so, so good.

Choose a moment in your day that causes just a smidge of boredom or annoyance. For many of us, it’s the commute. The errand-running. The waking-up. The waiting in line. The dishes. These are necessary things; they aren’t some existential crisis that requires a complete re-work of our lives. Do you have yours in mind? Good. Read on!

REFLECT

How can you pour a little hot fudge on that mundane moment? What do you consistently enjoy? Savoring a coffee, like me? Talking with a dear friend? Jamming to your favorite music? Indulging in a podcast? Enjoying ten deep, uninterrupted breaths? Counting your blessings? What is the treat you could (safely, healthily) inject into the mundane moment you've chosen? Then, for this day, this week, this year, do it!

This life is your oyster, and every mundane moment deserves to be treated as royally as your first date. You might even find that your mundane moment starts being met with anticipation. And you know who will have the power for that transformation? YOU.

Use this space to answer the question: “How can I make this moment a little more _____?”

A high-angle, top-down photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing black swim trunks, jumping from a rocky ledge into a pool of clear, blue water. The man is in mid-air, with his arms outstretched and legs bent. The water is bright blue with visible ripples and reflections of light. The rocky ledge is composed of large, grey, irregular stones. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and courage.

ENGAGE

I have to be courageous in admitting this, but I am not particularly courageous. Sure, I have moved to non-English speaking countries, jumped off frighteningly-tall waterfalls, and quit jobs that didn't serve me without ones to replace them.

But I hate conflict. I hate making people uncomfortable. I hate feeling judged by others. I will happily perform an improv breakdance routine in front of hundreds, but I will not confront someone about not doing their dishes.

Barring the few of you who have done significant work to overcome your fears, I suspect I am not alone in having an achilles heel of fear. I also suspect I am not the only one who could benefit greatly from sucking in a breath of courage and jumping into the waters of my discomfort.

DAY ELEVEN:

Courageous

“Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.” -Maya Angelou

ACTIVATE

We, as humans, make a lot of decisions based on our desire for comfort or homeostasis. We regularly make decisions that are temporarily comfortable but prolong discomfort. For an extreme but common example, go to the cereal aisle in your local supermarket. We hear a toddler screaming about how she NEEDS the sugary cereal while her dad tries desperately to shush the ear-splitting, embarrassing scene. Dad's ears hurt, shoppers are staring nastily at them, the kid is dissolving into a snotty mess of prolonged tantrum. Dad hands over the sugary cereal. Peace and smiles ensue instantly. Until their next trip to the cereal aisle.

Does this situation sound familiar to you? Do you have a story in your life that is patterned with choosing the immediately comfortable road that inevitably leads to ruin? Take a moment to think about this. It is important to get really clear on the pattern; writing it down may be helpful to solidify the idea. Most patterns can follow this format:

When _____, I _____.

For example, mine is "When I am not sure where I stand with other people, I assume I am overreacting and do not ask them."

“When can I choose courage over comfort?”

Use this space to reflect on your pattern. Try writing it down: *When _____, I _____.*

"How can I rewrite my patterns?"

How do you wish your pattern would look? Using the same *"When _____, I _____"* format, brainstorm what could fill in the second blank instead of your current reaction.

REFLECT

Now that we are clear about our patterns, we can get clear about our goals. How do you wish your pattern would look? For example, mine is "When I am not sure where I stand with other people, I express my gratitude toward them and ask if they are happy with me." Again, take a moment to really get clear on your sentence. You should be able to look at it and thing "YES!"

Looking at your new sentence you've created, how do you feel? If you're like me, you have butterflies in your stomach. I feel excitement and terror in equal measures. I would LOVE to be this person, but what if.....? What if they aren't happy with me? What if I am opening myself up to criticism? It is clearly far safer in the short-term to not make myself vulnerable, but it is far safer in the long-term to be the courageous person I want to be.

Armed with the knowledge that a new, braver you lies behind your second pattern sentence, write down (then DO!) a specific situation in which you can practice your new pattern. Start big, start small, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you start to dip your toes into the waters of your own courage. As for me, I have what feels like a BIG one that is too big to share in a mass email. I'd love to hear yours, and perhaps I will share mine! We are all in this together (courageously!)



DAY TWELVE:

ignite

*“The fire inside people is like a match;
the way to ignite that flame is initially
through friction, then other matches
are lit through warmth.”*

-Stephen R. Covey

ENGAGE

I could have so easily slipped back into the person I was. After my EQPC, I could have so easily trudged along on my well-trodden path of negative self-talk, comfortably destructive overanalyzing, and well-worn pessimistic beliefs about myself. Honestly, regressing to habits is the most natural thing for a brain to do. Habits are automatic and thus take less of the brain's precious energy. Breaking bad habits, then, takes some dedicated work. Like lighting a match, we must create friction to transform darkness into light. I have been lighting that match every single day, in a hundred different ways, since my EQPC. And,

guess what? It's becoming easier. My old, destructive habits are still in my brain, but their grooves are becoming shallower as my healthy, new habits are becoming deeper. The friction that I created in those first weeks to ignite those new, healthy habits have lent their warmth to other, healthy habits that have ignited since. What has caused this phenomenal change inside myself, and why didn't I regress to my old, unhealthy patterns? I made an immediate plan.

“What do I want?”

ACTIVATE

We are never going to create lasting change if we don't believe in our mission. But, I suspect you are up to something big in reading all 12 of these Twelve Days of Wellbeing articles. I suspect that something has ignited inside of you, and I know for certain that nothing is more worthy of your attention than continuing to fan the flames of whatever it is you've found here. So what is it? What do you want? Think big— what of these twelve days

has really spoken to your heart and mind; what is whispering to you to “please, please, do more of this”?

Write a few of these big goals down and remember them as we move into the next phase.

“How do I get there?”

REFLECT

Now that we've thought big, it's time to think small. What are some baby steps you can take to get to these big goals?

What acts, done consistently over time, will lead you to your big goals? Write them down, put them somewhere visible, and do them.

There are a few tips to successfully latching on to new habits, if you haven't already found your own ways of doing so. Attach them to a current habit (I will count my blessings while I brush my teeth).

Create a daily to-do list with your new habits on it (and smile big when you check it off!). Meet with a friend to tell them your goals and ask them to help keep you accountable. Read a book, watch a TV series, or listen to a podcast on the subject you are wanting to practice to boost your awareness of the topic. Set a concrete time limit for practicing (I will think of good questions to ask people for one week).

Whatever ends up working for you, don't forget to reflect. Take time to measure your progress, whether it is with a journal, a therapist, a friend, or a spreadsheet. Ready, set, PRACTICE!

Use
this space to
answer the question:

**What acts, done consistently
over time, will lead you to your big
goals?**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Jackson is a writer for Six Seconds, aspiring yogini, avid gardener, and world traveler. Her noble goal is to “nurture inner illumination,” and she feels grateful to work and live in a world where she can practice on herself and others. She can be contacted at maria.jackson@6seconds.org

Six Seconds is a global not-for-profit organization working to raise emotional intelligence. We research about emotions, learning, and performance and translate the science into practical tools that create value at work, at school, and at home.

If you'd like more ideas on practicing emotional intelligence, we publish several free eLearning courses, host free webinars each month, and have free EQ Café events in over 50 cities around the world. In addition, Six Seconds offers books, assessments, training tools, and in-depth certification training.

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