

# 10 Simple, Science-Backed Ways To Be Happier Today

By Belle Beth Cooper

## 6. Help others--100 hours a year is the magical number

One of the most counterintuitive pieces of advice I found is that to make yourself feel happier, you should help others. In fact, 100 hours per year (or two hours per week) is the optimal time we should dedicate to helping others in order to enrich our lives.

If we go back to Shawn Achor's book again, he says this about helping others:

...when researchers interviewed more than 150 people about their recent purchases, they found that money spent on activities—such as concerts and group dinners out—brought far more pleasure than material purchases like shoes, televisions, or expensive watches. Spending money on other people, called “prosocial spending,” also boosts happiness.

The Journal of Happiness Studies published a study that explored this very topic:

Participants recalled a previous purchase made for either themselves or someone else and then reported their happiness. Afterward, participants chose whether to spend a monetary windfall on themselves or someone else. **Participants assigned to recall a purchase made for someone else reported feeling significantly happier** immediately after this recollection; **most importantly, the happier participants felt, the more likely they were to choose to spend a windfall on someone else** in the near future.

So spending money on other people makes us happier than buying stuff for ourselves. What about spending our time on other people? A study of volunteering in Germany explored how volunteers were affected when their opportunities to help others were taken away:

Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall but before the German reunion, the first wave of data of the GSOEP was collected in East Germany. Volunteering was still widespread. Due to the shock of the reunion, a large portion of the infrastructure of volunteering (e.g. sports clubs associated with firms) collapsed and people randomly lost their opportunities for volunteering. Based on a comparison of the change in subjective well-being of these people and of people from the control group who had no change in their volunteer status, the hypothesis is supported that volunteering is rewarding in terms of higher life satisfaction.

In his book *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, University of Pennsylvania professor Martin Seligman explains that helping others can improve our own lives:

...we scientists have found that doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we have tested.

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