

- If you want to protect yourself from bloodsucking vampires, you gather your tools (stakes, garlic and holy water). In the same vein (pun intended), if you want to protect yourself from optimism-suckers, you must also assemble an appropriate arsenal.

Tools To Fight the Happiness Vampires

Those optimism-suckers disguised as pop culture — music, movies, and TV — this is the stuff you actually have control over. That's right. *You* have control over these external powers that affect your mood.

How?

Glad you asked! Prepare to get your happy on by stocking your arsenal with these four simple tools.

1. positive people
2. plenty of water and unprocessed foods
3. uplifting conversation
4. upbeat music, comedy, and success stories

It's easier than you think to revamp the environment that surrounds you.

Strategy #1: Seek Out Positive People

You don't have to be convinced about this technique. You already know how it feels to be around the upbeat, the happy, the cup-is-half-fullers, the believers, the supporters, and the complimentary. Their energy is infectious, their goodwill contagious.

On the other hand, how do the criticizers, complainers, naysayers, disbelievers, and downers make you feel? Usually, hanging with unhappy people makes you unhappy. And, in a bizarre twist, if you are immersed deeply enough, sometimes negativity can feel normal... making cheerful people seem irritating.

People always physically react to smiles, so go find the smilers.

- Get on a computer and look up *Happiness Organizations*. There's a Happiness Club near me. Perhaps there is one near you. (<https://www.happinessclub.com>)
- Do some volunteer work that requires you be around other people (community gardening; soup kitchen; make quilts for the homeless; knit hats and scarves for donations, etc.)

- If you know particularly nice positive people, tell them that you admire their outlook on life, and that you are trying to adopt a similar attitude. Then ask them their secret for maintaining a happy life. You may gain yourself a new friend in the process.

Strategy #2: Supply Yourself With Plenty of Water and Unprocessed Foods

You know how too much junk food (sweet snacks, salty snacks, and fast foods loaded with chemical additives) makes you feel sluggish and tired? Eating that way also contributes to you developing serious health issues. Just ask anyone from the 70% of the USA workforce who suffers from one *or more* chronic diseases (diabetes, cancer, asthma, arthritis, hypertension, lung diseases, kidney diseases, celiac, etc.). That's 70% of our workforce living with illness. Sadly, that means 70% of our beautiful children are destined for the same.

With that many people suffering from chronic ailments, it's almost guaranteed you know someone struggling to function despite his or her condition—your neighbor, a teacher, a secretary, an office mate, your boss. Observe what the ill people eat, drink and munch on, and ask yourself, are their choices making them healthier, or contributing to their condition?

Your body can only work with what you give it. If you keep ingesting harmful garbage, your body will try its best to clear it out, but eventually bad choices will overwhelm it, and you will become a member of the unfortunate 70% who fight their chronic diseases every day.

Hopefully, that hasn't happened to you, or yours, yet.

If, instead, you provide the nutrient building blocks your physical being needs (filtered water and unprocessed veggies, fruits, fats and proteins), your body will repair itself and build back up. Among the things that will benefit are:

- Your brain
- Your heart and lungs
- Your skin, nails and hair
- Your bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons
- Your mood and energy



Unprocessed
Veggies + Fruits + Fats + Proteins
+ Filtered or Tap Water
=
Healthy Brain, Heart, Lungs, Skin, Nails,
Hair, Bones, Muscles, Ligaments, Tendons,
Mood and Energy

It's your choice, but personally I'd choose clear skin, shiny hair and increased energy over fast food any day. (But that's just me.) Believe me, feeling healthy and looking healthy will definitely make you smile.

Strategy #3: Surround Yourself With Uplifting Conversation

If you deliberately feed your body the healthy things it needs, you'll increase your health. If you deliberately feed your intellect the positive things it needs, you'll increase your happiness. That includes everything from profound conversations to idle chitchat, whether verbal, electronic, or written. If, on the other hand, you allow the negatives of the world to bend your ear, that garbage will bring you down.

If you allow garbage conversations into your world, you will produce garbage conversations. Don't share damaging gossip, negative tweets, mocking messages, or mean emails. Participating in mean-spirited conversations to make someone feel badly so you can feel better (i.e., bullying) creates a negative vibe that will reverberate throughout your entire being.

But, what if you're at a gathering, and the conversation turns negative? How do you handle that? All you have to do is steer the topic in a more positive direction. If you can't turn the tide, simply step away. Otherwise, if you stay long enough, their negative garbage will contaminate you. (That's why brainwashing works.) You don't have to stand there politely letting the verbal garbage wash over you. Remember: Garbage In = Garbage Out.

Avoiding negative conversation was always a problem for me in the Faculty Rooms at my high schools. For example, as a first-time teacher, I was a young Connecticut Yankee in Atlanta, Georgia. The negative discussions in the Faculty Lounge had me shaking in my shoes before the first day of school. The other teachers basically convinced me that my southern students would be unruly, unreasonable and uncontrollable, and that my teacher training had not prepared me for what was to come.

So I over-prepared. When the first students crossed my threshold, I was ready for them. Boy, was I ready for them. Hogwarts' Professor Snape would have wilted in my presence. But, after a couple of weeks, I recognized I was in overkill mode. The students were wonderful, and the teaching experience sublime. I happily went back to what I already knew: (a) *all kids want to be liked*, (b) *students want to like the teacher*, (c) *everyone hopes they'll enjoy the subject...* and (d) *it's my job as the teacher to make it happen*.

That left the perplexing question of why I had received all that negative advice from those experienced teachers. It wasn't until the faculty holiday party that I finally asked why they thought so poorly about our wonderful students.

Their reply?

"The kids here *are* great. We were worried about *you*. You're the youngest looking teacher we've ever seen, and we thought they were going to devour you."

Oh.

Okay, so it was true I was barely twenty-two years old (although I looked like I was barely fifteen) and it was true that I was untested as a teacher. It was also true the veteran teachers actually meant well. While I appreciated their good intentions, they had conjured up all kinds of negative scenarios that never actually played out.

Even though that situation got sorted out, what continued to confuse me was the never-ending negativity persisting in the teachers lounge. Though it was not directed specifically at my classroom or students, it seemed to exist without purpose. Somebody was always complaining about something. My emotions drooped every time I went in there. It was always a relief to return to the kids in my classroom.

I learned to stay out of faculty rooms, but some schools housed the Ladies Room in there. When it couldn't be avoided, I would get in and out as fast as I could. Occasionally, I'd get snared into a conversation, but I learned to prepare so I could change the topic, or escape gracefully.

Surrounding yourself with uplifting cheerful conversation is not hard to do, but you do have to go after it with determination. Simply prep for it ahead of time.

My favorite topic redirection line: “My mother told me never to discuss politics, religion or [their topic] at a [party, school, work, etc.].” I then introduce another topic:

“Did you read...”

“Have you seen...?”

“Do you know how to...?”

Dodging the negative chatter keeps you available for positive banter with an upbeat someone else.

My favorite negative conversation exit line: “I’m going to let the experts duke it out.” And, then I step away—to refresh my drink, help the hostess, powder my nose, get some fresh air, grab some food, greet a newcomer, make a new acquaintance, etc.

Go ahead. Use my lines. That’s what they’re here for. Set your intention, create a couple of conversation starters, and head for the happy people. They’ll rub off on you. (You’ll thank me later.)

Strategy #4: Submerge Yourself In Upbeat Music, Comedy, and Success Stories

How does music move you? How about movies? Or, books? Most people are affected by the plight of others, so media that dial into those types of emotions make it very difficult to stay centered, despite your best intentions.

The thing is,

- we watch what’s popular
- we seek what’s trending
- we listen to the Top 40 songs
- we follow the news

But, we don't filter what reaches us. Unwittingly, we allow everything in, and so everything and anything can influence us, our mood, and our outlook.

"What came first, the music or the misery? People worry about kids playing with guns, or watching violent videos, that some sort of culture of violence will take them over. Nobody worries about kids listening to thousands, literally thousands of songs about heartbreak, rejection, pain, misery and loss. Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable? Or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?"

-High Fidelity. 2000

We don't need to completely insulate ourselves from the external influences, but we sure can be selective about our exposure. Imagine life with upbeat music playing in the background, constructive comedy as your go-to entertainment, and dozens of success stories (some of them yours) at your fingertips. How do you think that would make you feel?