



12 Intentional Activities for Increasing Life Satisfaction



Person – Activity – Fit

Adapted from
The How of Happiness by
Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007)

introduction

Research shows that 40% of your life satisfaction is dependent on your Intentional Activity... what you **think, feel** and **do**.

There are many pathways to happiness. Researchers have identified **12 activities** that have been **shown to increase life satisfaction**.

It would be daunting to try every Intentional Activity at once.

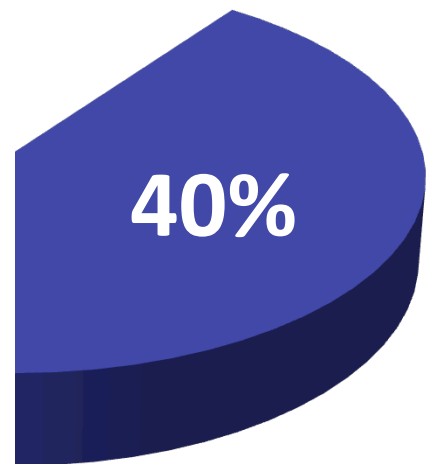
The activity that is likely to give you the maximum outcome for your effort is matched by your **interests, values** and **needs**.

In this process you will take a survey to identify **which activities would be most effective for you**, learn about each activity and get specific examples of how to put them into practice. Enjoy!

instructions

Take the **Person Activity Fit Scale**.
Review your results and all of the research-based activities for increasing life-satisfaction reviewed here.

Commit to practicing 1 or 2 of these activities over the next month.
Remember, happiness skills require endurance training!



Express Gratitude

What
is it?

Something you feel when you feel you have been the **recipient of someone or something** else's **positive actions**.

Proof it
works

Research shows grateful people are:

- More satisfaction with life
- More pro-social behavior
- More other centered
- Less negative "self-preoccupation"
- Better sleep and vitality
- More optimism

Why
it
works

- Increases positivity
- Enhances the experience
- Enables savoring
- Counters hedonic treadmill
- Counters materialism & adaptation
- Decreases stress

One
Liners

"Research shows that expressing gratitude increases your happiness by helping you notice the good things that are already happening."

1. Gratitude Journal

Write down the 3 to 5 things for which you are currently grateful – from the mundane (your flowers are finally in bloom) to the magnificent (your child's first steps).

Do this once a week. Keep the strategy fresh by varying your entries and how much you express them as possible.

2. Gratitude Expression

If there's a particular person who has been kind or influential in your life, don't wait to express your appreciation. Call, text, or if possible, visit them and express your appreciation *in concrete terms*. This can be someone you saw today – or someone you have not seen in a long while. Open your phone's contacts and choose someone now.

3. Create your own:

How
to
use it

Savor Life

What is it?

Being **attentive & appreciative** of a particular experience. Often involves the use of the sense.

Proof it works

Research shows:

- A recent study in Sonja Lyubormirsky's lab showed that the practice of remembering happy life events and attempting to replay them in one's mind prolongs and reinforces positive emotions.
- Elicits conscious memories of positive past
- Builds past, present, and future minded positive emotion
 - Which builds resilience and buffers against depression
- Relieves any current stress and refocuses brain

Why it works



One Liners

*According to psychologist Bryant and Veroff, "Positive events alone are not enough to bring about happiness. People need to be able to **attend to and appreciate the positive feelings** that emerge from positive events" (2007, p43).*

1. Savoring Album

Take a picture of something of beauty you encounter, & write a short text description of what you found to be beautiful about it.

The Savoring Album is a great way to stop and take a good look at things that we admire and appreciate. Use the camera not to document, but to help you truly look at things and help you experience their beauty.

2. Replay Happy Days

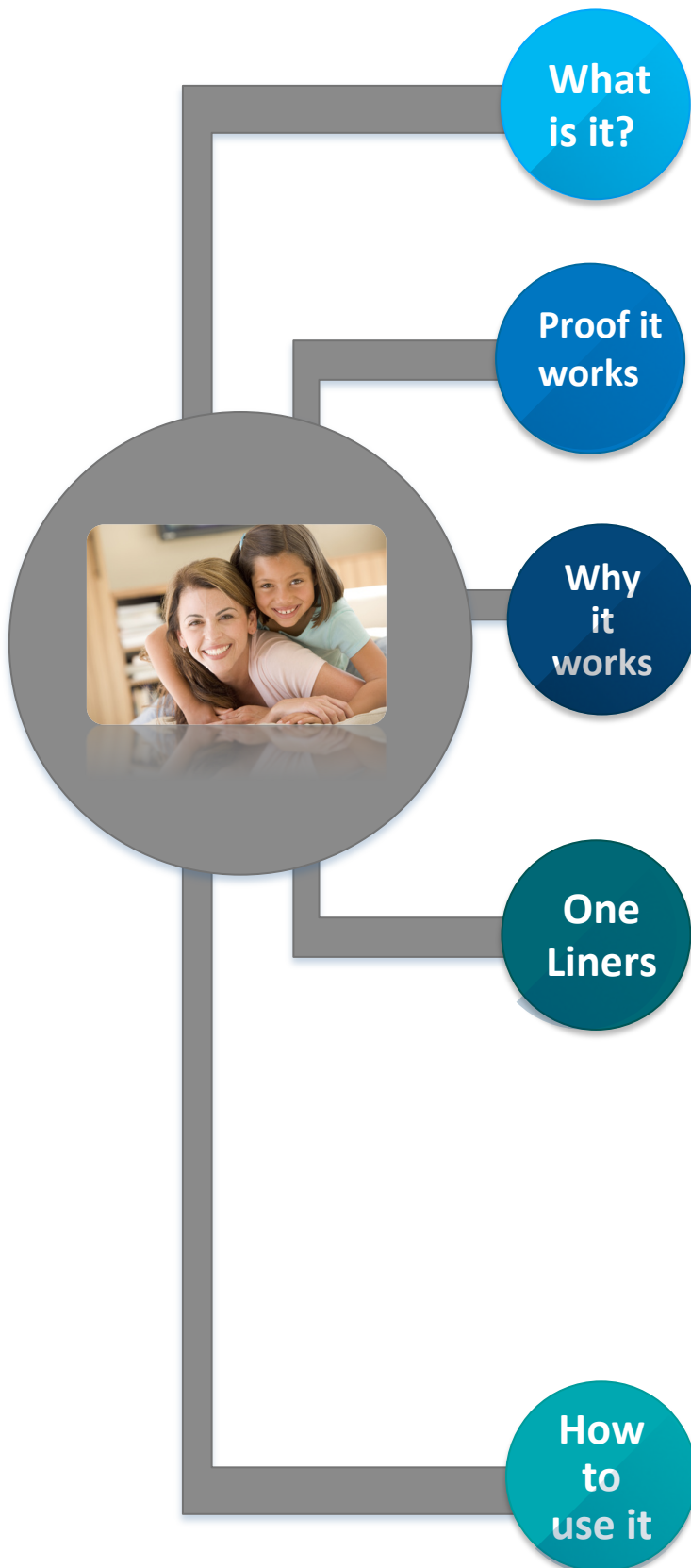
Some psychologists suggest taking "mental photographs" of pleasurable moments to review them in less happy times.

Look back at past photos to remember and "replay" your happiest days. The trick is to remember the details: the events and the thoughts and emotions that happened that day.

3. Create your own:

How to use it

Nurture Social Relationships



What is it?

Proactively enhancing the quality of your relationships. Deepening existing relationships.

Proof it works

Research shows nurturing relationships:

- Promotes a charitable perception of other people and community
- Creates favorable social comparisons
- Relieves distress or guilt over other's misfortunes
- Fosters heightened sense of interdependence and cooperation

Why it works

- Leads people to view themselves as generous, and to feel confident, efficacious, in control, and optimistic about their abilities to help
- Inspires liking and friendship by others, as well as their appreciation and gratitude
- Produces prosocial reciprocity

One Liners

Research shows that strong social ties is the only thing that separates very happy people from very unhappy people.

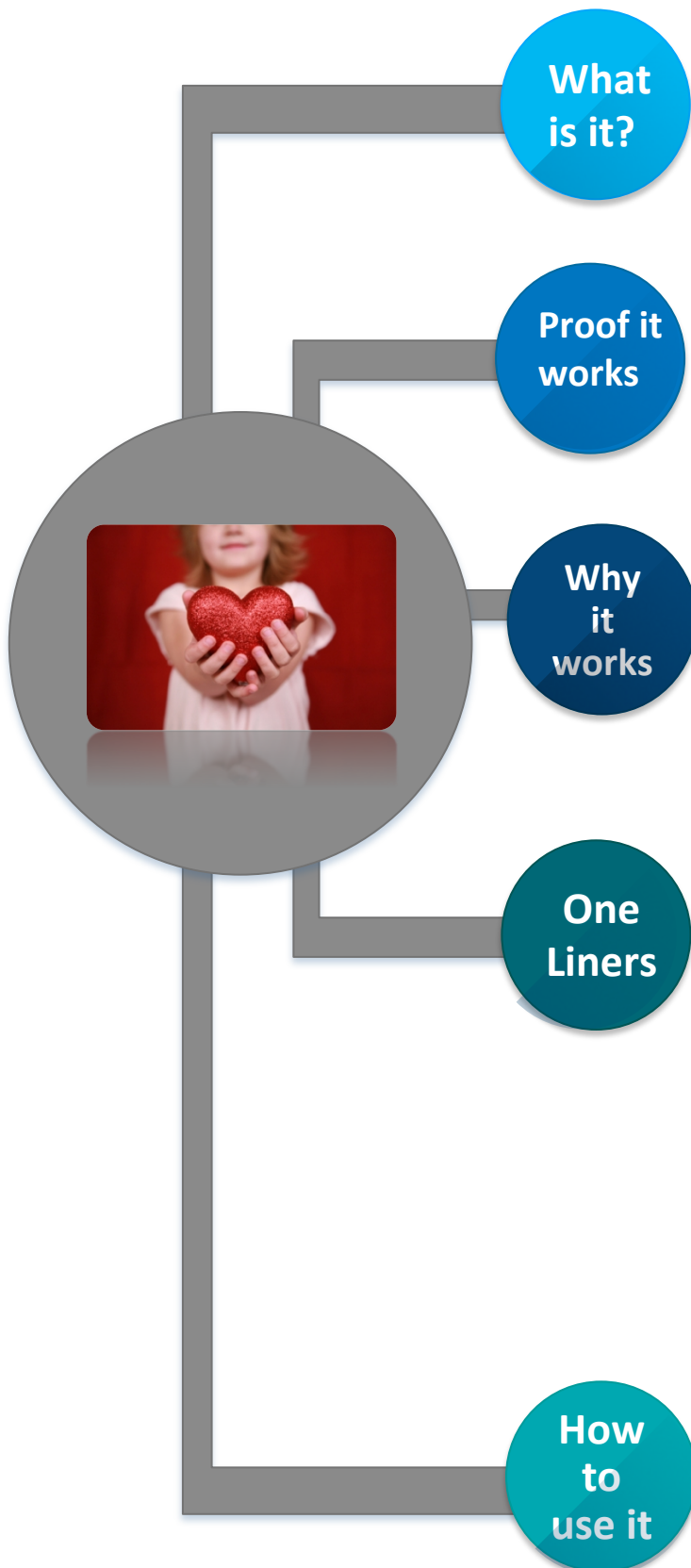
1. Connect

contacting someone from your family or a friend you haven't been in touch with for awhile – someone with whom you want to strengthen your relationship. Think of a person who can benefit from your skills, time, or support. Make time to listen and to express your appreciation and affection.

2. Create your own:

How to use it

Practice Acts of Kindness



A spontaneous gesture of goodwill toward someone or something

Research shows:

- Altruistic people tend to be happier
- Altruism and volunteering tends to benefit the giver even more than the receiver.
- Performing acts of kindness increases people's happiness level, and the more acts that are performed in one day, the higher the happiness.

- Creates upward spirals
- Helps people shift into a self-perception of "I do good in the world."
- Produces prosocial reciprocity
- Strengthens social ties

When people are stuck in a negative state, they are often self centered in their thinking and feeling. Performing a kind act gets people into an "other-centered" way of being, which can increase their mood, and put them into an upward spiral.

1. In Your Network

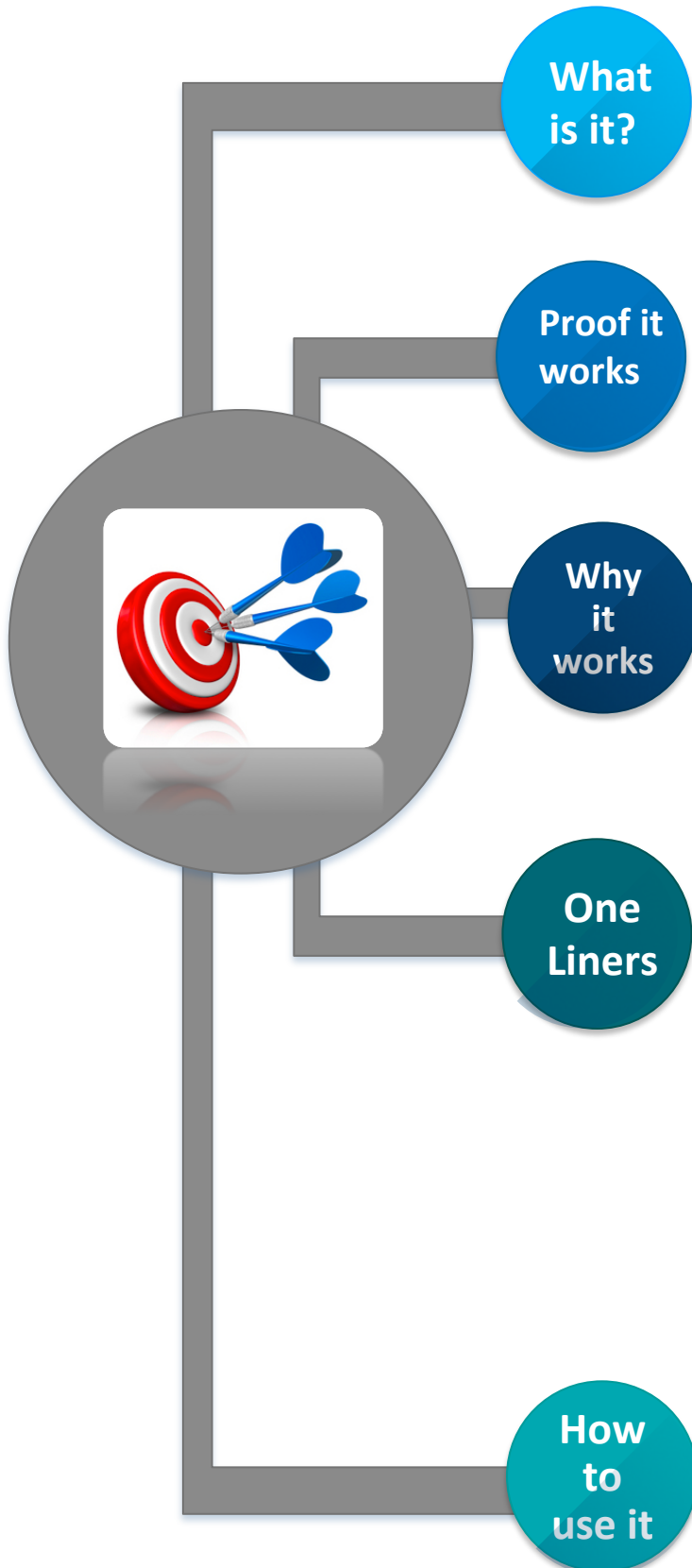
Think of a person who can benefit from your help. Perhaps they can use your support, your time, or your experience. This could be a person you know, or just someone who can use some thoughtfulness and consideration.

2. Examples of Acts of Kindness:

When you go through the day, be aware of the people around you and think of what you can offer them. Write acts of kindness you have done in a journal.

3. Create your own:

Committing to Your Goals



Committing to your goals: Picking one, two or three significant goals that are meaningful to you and devoting time and effort to pursuing them.

Research shows:

- Setting and meeting goals increases a sense of satisfaction and productivity.
- People who set high goals tend to be more satisfied with their work
- Achievement builds a sense of self-efficacy.
- Setting specific and challenging goals that give you immediate feedback fuel your desire to achieve more.

It's essential that people connect to the "why" of their goals and connect to the intrinsic motivation of their achievement.

1. Setting & Reaching Goals

For this activity, you will write down a goal (or goals) you think you might want to attain. To help you choose the right goals, you will rate each goal on your list on whether it is:

- Intrinsic (as opposed to extrinsic)
- Authentic (as opposed to inauthentic)
- Approach-oriented (as opposed to avoidance-oriented)
- Harmonious (as opposed to conflicting)
- Activity-based (as opposed to circumstance-base)
- Flexible & appropriate (as opposed to rigid & inappropriate)

2. Create your own:

Cultivating Optimism

What
is it?

A sense of hopefulness about the future.

Proof it
works

Research shows having optimism:

- Improves self-regulation
- Provides opportunity to gain insight about one's priorities, motives, and emotions
- Reduces conflicts among one's life goals
- Integrates life experiences in a meaningful way
- Fuels a feeling of control
- Improves performance
- Fosters positive thinking

Why
it
works

- Gets you feeling pulled by your future
- Creates hopefulness
- Creates pathways for achievement

One
Liners

Optimism is both a style of thinking and a hopeful outlook in the world.

1. Best Future Self

Sit in a quiet place and take 15 to 30 minutes to think about and write down what you expect your life to be a few years from now. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possible could. You have worked hard & succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realization of all of your life dreams. Then write about what you imagined.

Start with, "In 5 years, I am": "married," "an engineer," "traveling around the world." This exercise will help you identify your most important and meaningful life aspirations and to practice thinking positively and optimistically about them. Not only has this exercise been shown to make people happier, but also to increase the chances that those goals will actually come to pass!

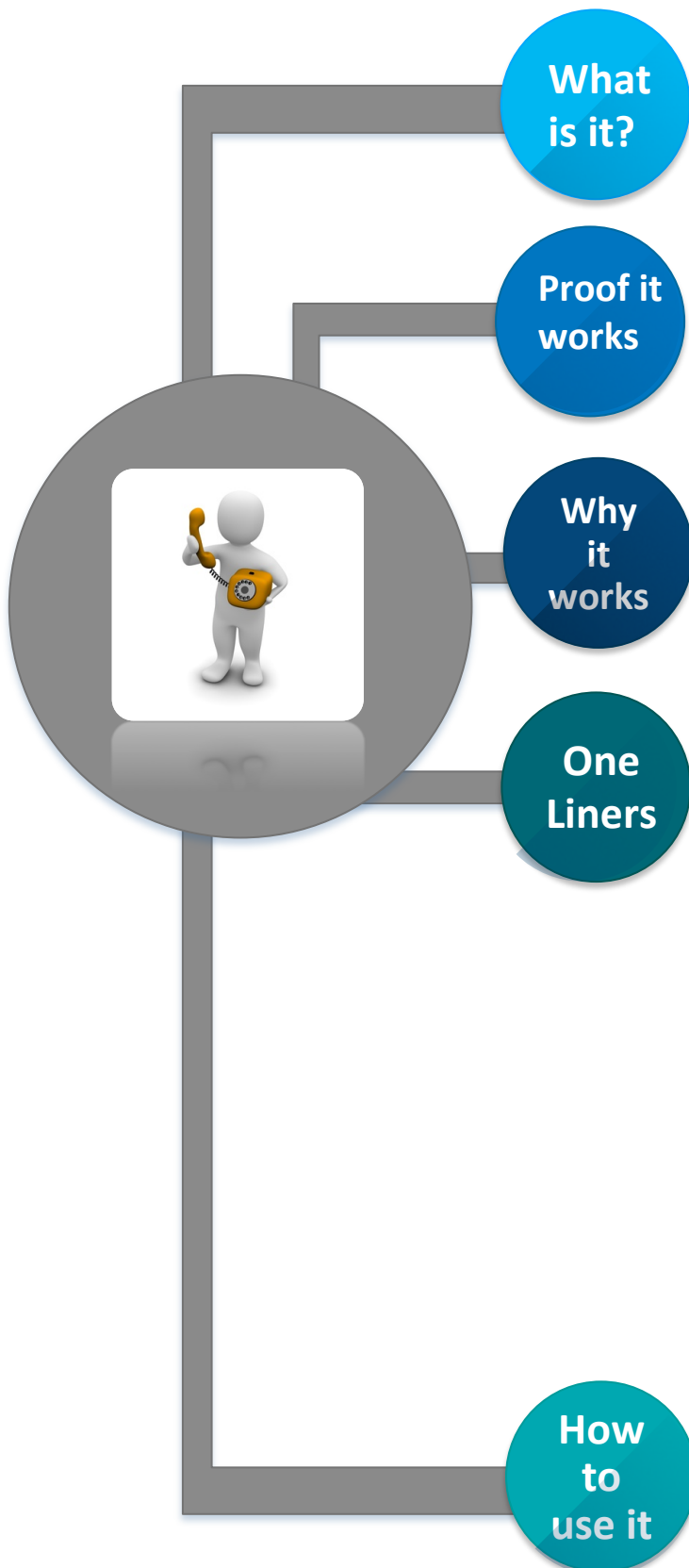
Think across multiple life domains.

3. Create your own:

How
to
use it



Learn to Forgive



What
is it?

Forgiving those who had done wrong; giving people a second change; not being vengeful

Proof it
works

Research shows:

- That holding on to grudges takes away from our health
- Forgiving people are less likely to be “hateful, depressed, hostile, anxious, angry and neurotic” and are more likely to be “happier, healthier, more agreeable and more serene

Why
it
works

- Achievement builds a sense of self-efficacy.
- Setting specific and challenging goals that give you immediate feedback fuel your desire to achieve more.

One
Liners

*Forgiving is not the same thing as forgetting.
Forgiving is a gift you give yourself of not letting the situation continue to plague you.*

1. Appreciate Being Forgiven

Before you are able to forgive another, a good first exercise is to appreciate an instance of when you yourself have been forgiven. Recall a time you harmed another and were forgiven. What insights do you have? This exercise will help you see the benefits of forgiveness and perhaps provide a model for your own forgiving. Another way to appreciate being forgiven is to seek forgiveness of yourself.

2. Imagine Forgiveness

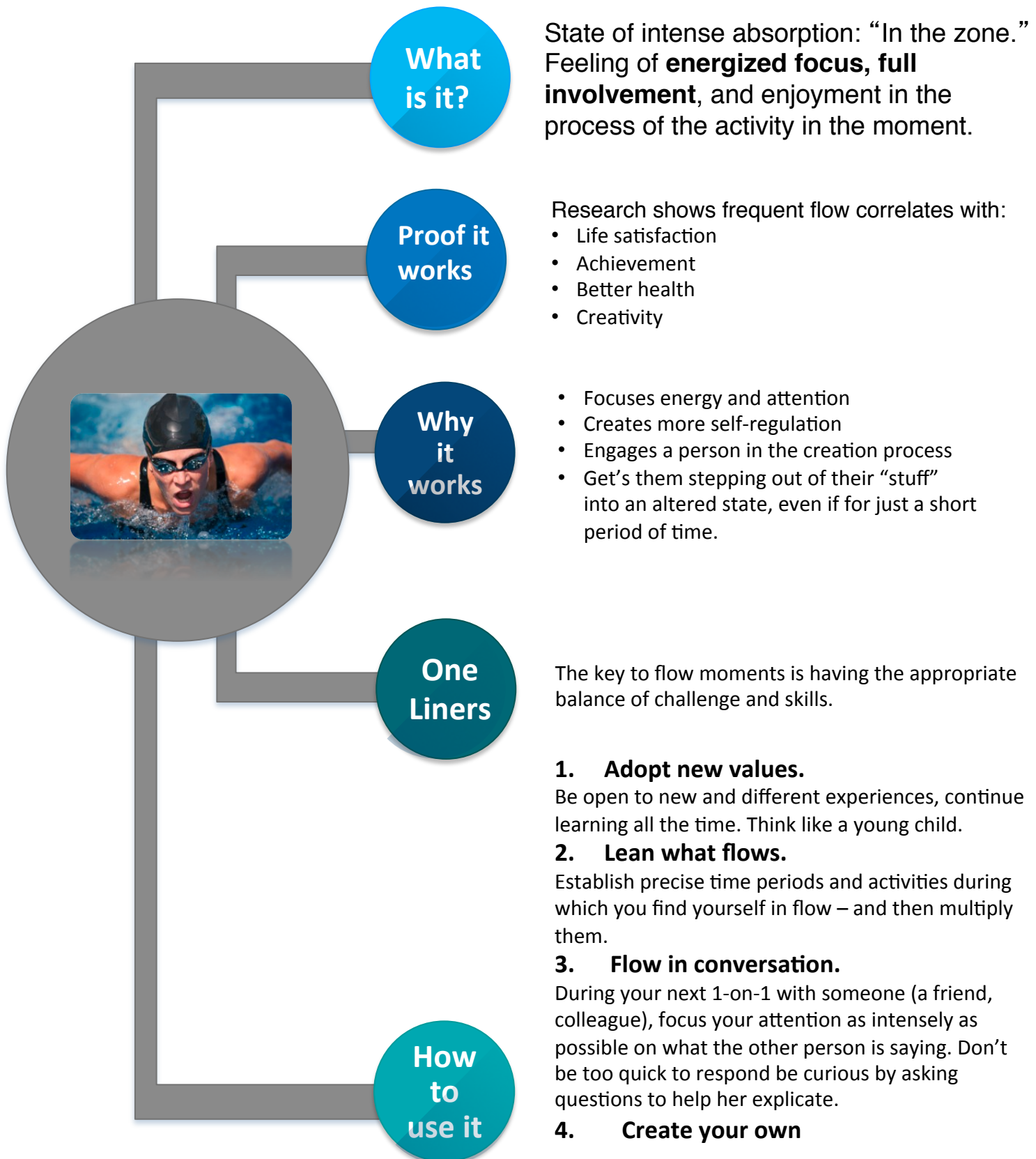
First, identify a particular person whom you blame for mistreating or offending you. Second, engage in an imagination exercise, during which you imagine empathizing with the offender and grating him or her forgiveness. Trying to feel empathy involves viewing the situation through the offender's eyes and ears, seeing him as a whole person rather than defining him solely by the offending behavior.

3. Write a letter of forgiveness

In it, describe in detail the injury or offense that was done to you. Illustrate how you were affected by it at the time and how you continue to be hurt by it. State what you wish the other person had done instead. End with an explicit statement of forgiveness and understanding (e.g. “I realize now that what you did was the best you could at the time, and I forgive you”). You can either send it or not.

4. Create your own:

Engaging in Flow Experiences



Practicing religion & spirituality

What
is it?

Feeling a strong, intimate and personally valuable connection to something greater than yourself, and living life from that space of faith.

Proof it
works

Research shows:

- It does not matter acts of faith are carried out, so long as the activity increases a state of calm and positivity, focuses your attention, and you believe in it.
- People consider themselves to be of “faith” are happier than those who do not.

Why
it
works

- Participating in religion or spirituality can often be tied to being a part of a group and cultivating a sense of shared meaning and belong.
- Helps people make meaning in their life.

One
Liners

Having faith is correlated with life satisfaction.

1. Seek meaning & purpose

Creating meaning comes from having a coherent “life scheme.” Sit back and write down your own life story. Who are you now, and who were you before? What future do you imagine for yourself? What are the obstacles in your path? What assumptions do you hold about the world and why things are the way they are? Who am I? What is my life for? Where do I fit in? Who is the creator? How do I live a virtuous life and improve the world around me?

2. Pray

A universal way to practice spirituality is through prayer. Dedicate a period of time each day, from five minutes to an hour, to prayer. OR, you may choose to pray spontaneously throughout the day—when you feel stressed, or when you witness a beautiful object or kind act, or when something particularly good (or bad) has happened).

3. Find the Sacred in the Ordinary

Find the sacred in the ordinary. Develop an ability to see holiness in everyday things, both beautiful and plain—a meal, a child’s laugh, an autumn leaf. Sanctifying day-to-day objects, experiences, and struggles takes great practice, but it’s at the heart of spirituality and its rewards.

4. Create your own:

How
to
use it

Take Care of Your Mind-Body

What is it?

Both meditation and exercise have powerful positive effects on the mind-body. This activity has to do with self-care practices to keep you healthy and clear.

Proof it works

Research shows:

- Both meditation and stress can be stress relievers.
- Decreases anxiety, stress
- Increases heart-rate variability
- Increases immune response
- Activates Pre-frontal cortex

Why it works

- Releases endorphins
- Resets brain chemicals
- Communicates to the body that you are alive
- Eats up stress hormones.
- Mental and physical cleaning

One Liners

Self-awareness, enables self-compassion, which enables self-care.

1. Get support

Meditation has many rewards, but it doesn't come effortlessly for everyone. For a boost of encouragement, consider taking a class on meditation, visiting a meditation website, or buying a how-to CD (you can also find some guided meditations on YouTube). Meditation is a very personal experience and may be performed in many ways, but experts have put together several crucial elements to aim for in your practice:

Be nonjudgmental (Observe the present moment impartially, with detachment, without evaluation.); Be nonstriving (It's all about progression; Be patient; Be trusting; Be open; Let go

2. Movement is For Everyone

No one in our society needs to be told that exercise is good for us. Whether you are overweight or have chronic illness or are a slim couch potato, remember that it's all about building endurance, one step at a time. And it will make you happier.

3. Create your own:

How to use it

