Get Your Shift Together
How to Think, Laugh, and Enjoy Your Way to Success in Business and in Life
by Steve Rizzo

McGraw-Hill
© 2013, Steve Rizzo
224 pages, $25.00

SUCCESS Points
From this book you will learn how to:

• Live in the moment and find happiness in the present
• Face adversity with strength and humor instead of despair
• Achieve joy by spreading joy
• Combat negative thinking with positive self-talk

Decide to Be Happy
The way you choose to respond to circumstance determines how you experience life.

QUICK OVERVIEW
In his new book Get Your Shift Together, former stand-up comedian Steve Rizzo shares his wisdom on how humor and a commitment to living in the present can increase joy and change your life for the better. After watching his brother come back from what should have been a fatal wound in the Vietnam War, Rizzo discovered that the keys to joy do not lie with conventional success, money, power or fame. They lie with cultivating joy in the present and learning to see life’s challenges with both a sense of humor and a commitment to finding opportunity in the midst of trouble.

In this concise and humorous book loaded with chapter-closing “action tips,” Rizzo outlines a plan to shift your thinking from focusing on what doesn’t work in your life to what does, and watching the positive results as they roll in.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE
When Steve Rizzo’s brother Michael returned from the Vietnam War with a gaping abdominal wound that ultimately left him with only one foot of small intestine (the remaining 26 feet had to be removed), doctors said his chances of living, much less leading a normal life, were slim to none. Fortunately, however, Michael Rizzo showed those doctors what his family and friends have since called “the finger of optimism,” that is, the gesture he gave the medical experts who did not think he could defy the odds. But he did.

The shift from victim to being a man determined to prove everyone wrong provides a stellar example of how attitude can affect outcomes. Today, Michael Rizzo is a husband and father and assistant superintendent of a school system… and he eats whatever he wants—all because of his attitude. “I believe without a doubt,” writes Rizzo, “that Michael’s greatest weapon in his fight for survival was his steadfast determination to shift away from the negative forces that might consume him toward a positive, healthier mindset. … You can definitely say my brother has his shift together.”

What circumstances or difficulties are you facing? As you read this summary, consider what kind of mental shift you need to make to turn things around.
My message is a simple one: If you shift your focus and way of thinking, you can turn challenging times into opportunities. If you are grateful for what you have, rather than fixating on what you don’t have, you can be happier than you ever imagined. And if you unleash the power of your Humor Being on a daily basis, you will come to know that not even fear can stand against the power of laughter.

MY SHIFT FROM A COMEDIAN TO THE ATTITUDE ADJUSTER

In the early 1980s, I was gaining momentum as a national headlining comedian. Despite this success and after much soul searching, I made a major shift and decided to do something more meaningful with my life. I packed my things and went back home to New York—away from a promising career as a stand-up comedian and toward the start of a new vocation, that of a professional motivation speaker and trainer.

Although I no longer wanted to be a comic, I still was, and am, a comedian. Today, I use comedy as an attention grabber to help captivate my audience and get my message across. If you laugh while you learn it’s just an added bonus. In fact, if you’re having fun while you learn, studies show that you learn better.

This is one of the things I love about life. You never know when or how you’re going to receive that long-awaited moment of clarity. But when it hits, there is absolutely no denying it.

The most valuable lesson I’ve learned is that nothing in life is wasted if I view it as a lesson learned. I now understand that every step I took, whether forward or backward, was necessary to prepare me to recognize and receive whatever gift was being given to me at the time. I needed every experience to help me grow.

It is essential for your well-being that you understand that circumstances, events, or situations are not the final word on your quality of life, no matter the severity. It’s how you respond to them and the fear and other negative emotions they elicit that makes the difference…. It’s all about attitude.

It’s not what happens to us that determines our fate, but rather what we do about what happens that makes the difference.

Too many of us relinquish control of our lives and accept our circumstances for what they might seem to be. We don’t know we have a choice, the tools, the power, or the know-how to confront our fears and challenges head-on.

Your life isn’t predestined for greatness. Nor is it predestined for failure. Only you can choose to shift your thoughts and words to turn challenges into opportunities. Believe me when I say that talent and ability are not the only factors that determine a successful and happy life.

If you are grateful for what you have, rather than fixating on what you don’t have, you can be happier than you ever imagined.

For your sake, especially during tough times, get into the habit of choosing positive thoughts and speaking empowering words. Focus on hope, gratitude, and seeing the good during adverse times, and you will discover a brighter day, regardless of what is happening to you.

SHIFT INTO A HAPPIER MINDSET

Studies have shown that those who make conscious choices to enjoy themselves and laugh throughout the day are more creative, productive, and resilient to challenging situations. They are also more likely to easily find solutions to complex problems.

No matter who you are or what you’re doing, whether you’re teaching or learning, if you are enjoying the process the odds are in your favor that you’ll achieve the outcome you desire. It seems obvious to consciously choose happiness, but I would wager any amount of money that when writing out their short- or long-term goals and plans, most people don’t count enjoying themselves during the process as part of the equation.

Statements that focus on what you lack in the present, or predicate happiness on a future event, destroy your chance of enjoying the moment.

When you convince yourself that your happiness is dependent upon something that has to take place in the future, it is difficult to enjoy the present.

I want to be happy because it makes me feel good. When I feel good, I know I’m connected to my higher self. When I’m connected to my higher self, my life flows, I lose any feeling of self-consciousness, and I find myself...
making choices that contribute to desired outcomes. When I’m in a state of happiness, problems and challenges are easier to handle. I don’t feel singled out or unfairly targeted by little obstacles that inevitably come my way, but view them as a part of the natural process. I am filled with hope and appreciation for life’s choices. But most importantly, when I’m happy, I know I’m living in the moment. I’m not living with regret over something that might or might not happen in the future. When I’m happy, I’m simply enjoying whatever it is that I’m doing.

Happiness is our main goal and purpose in life.

Happiness isn’t exactly something you can just be. Remember the pursuit? Happiness is a trained behavior. If you don’t enjoy the pursuit then there won’t ever be quite enough success, satisfaction or comfort to allow you to experience a deeper kind of true happiness.

The problem we have is that we’re not fully aware that happiness is our main purpose and ultimate goal in life. After years of concentrating on the next weekend, paycheck, raise, or family milestone, it’s easy to lose track of why we work so hard, what our lives are ultimately all about.

Our culture teaches us that things outside ourselves make us happy, whether they are material or the realization of a goal. A distinction is not made between the relative happiness and relief that the attainment of our desires brings, and a deeper, truer happiness that is unaffected by life’s ups and downs.

When we recognize and understand that happiness is our main purpose and ultimate goal in life, then we can choose to make it the cornerstone of everything we set out to do.

Researchers have found that we come into the world with a certain set point—a fixed degree or level of happiness—and guess what? We’re stuck with it. Even though your potential for happiness may be genetically impaired, happiness is a learned behavior, and you can learn to be happier than you ever imagined.

When you are in tune with your natural state, you are able to handle conflict and chaos more easily. When you’re not in tune with your natural state, even the slightest obstacle or the simplest task can appear overwhelming and send you spinning out of control. In other words, when you’re happy and in tune with your natural state, your life works more smoothly. When you aren’t, your life can become out of sync and full of suffering.

When our lives become burdened with responsibilities and problems, we forget that we should take time out and shift our focus to appreciate what is working rather than obsessing over what isn’t. We don’t give ourselves permission to take time out to laugh out loud at the absurdity and craziness that surrounds us.

It’s a well-known fact that every time you laugh your body releases chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins are naturally manufactured by the body to relieve pain. They actually put you in a happier state.

But instead of letting biology do its job, we compound our stress by getting frustrated and angry. Experiencing true happiness invariably involves emotional discomfort and difficult experiences along the way. In fact, it depends on them. Our challenges build our character and self-esteem. How we approach and respond to these challenges is what determines the quality of our happiness. A happy

How to Make Yourself (and Others) Happy

There are many simple ways to give of yourself that can have a tremendous impact. The following are just a few examples of things you can do for someone else that take little or no effort and will surely brighten their day, if even for only a passing moment:

• Tell someone what a nice smile they have or how good they look.
• Give a salesman, customer service agent, or coworker a compliment for a job well done. Better yet, tell their superior!
• Write a letter or make a phone call to someone you haven’t seen in awhile and tell them you miss them.
• Buy a coffee for the person in line near you at the coffee shop.
• Let someone with only a few items move ahead of you while you’re in line to check out at the supermarket.
• Ask someone if you can run an errand for them, even if it’s out of your way.
• Remember the mailman, sanitation workers, gardeners, housekeepers, and others at holiday time.
• Take a moment to write a letter of praise to a company or organization for a great experience with their product or service.
• Tell a child how special he or she is.
• Lend an ear to someone in need.

• Tell someone what a nice smile they have or how good they look.
• Give a salesman, customer service agent, or coworker a compliment for a job well done. Better yet, tell their superior!
• Write a letter or make a phone call to someone you haven’t seen in awhile and tell them you miss them.
• Buy a coffee for the person in line near you at the coffee shop.
• Let someone with only a few items move ahead of you while you’re in line to check out at the supermarket.
• Ask someone if you can run an errand for them, even if it’s out of your way.
• Remember the mailman, sanitation workers, gardeners, housekeepers, and others at holiday time.
• Take a moment to write a letter of praise to a company or organization for a great experience with their product or service.
• Tell a child how special he or she is.
• Lend an ear to someone in need.
person can experience highs and lows throughout their whole life while maintaining a positive outlook on their life as a whole.

Sometimes nourishment of the soul is more important than nourishment of the body. It is well-documented that humor, more than anything else within the human ambit of understanding, can help an individual to rise above any situation.

[Concentration camp survivor and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*] Viktor Frankl did whatever he could to focus on things that would help lift his spirits. This simple act gave him an infallible attitude, the courage to dare to be at least happier than his circumstances dictated, and in the end it was responsible for his survival.

It is my belief that we all intuitively know what Frankl understood and acted upon: that happiness is our right to choose our destiny. It is a calling and a yearning for a higher part of ourselves, challenging us to experience a sacred ‘time out’ for peace and joy, even under the most severe circumstances.

**Happiness is a choice.**

Happiness is a long, continuous choice. If that notion seems too daunting, try thinking of it as a lifetime of small, moment-to-moment choices.

Rather than dwell on negativity, you can choose to focus on what is working in your life, to be grateful for what you have, and to use your time and energy finding solutions to your problems. If you do, you will be nourishing your soul and experiencing a happier, healthier reality for yourself. Choose to be happy now, no matter what is happening around you. If you wait for something else to change first, you don’t stand a chance at happiness.

Gratitude is the most powerful connection you have to your higher self. When you fully appreciate what you have in the moment, good things come into your life.

**MAY THE SHIFT BE WITH YOU**

You have the power to experience any challenge in your life as a positive and an opportunity for growth. Some people say that the challenging situations in life that are naturally presented to you dictate what kind of life you’ll have. Others maintain it’s the way you react to these situations that determines your satisfaction in life. In my view, it’s not the aggregate of your personal situations that determines your quality of life; rather, it’s the way you think about them that governs their impact.

The beliefs you have about anything in your life are created by your constant thoughts. If your beliefs are shaped by positive streams of thoughts, you’ll be left with positive beliefs that allow you to overcome, achieve, and succeed. If your brain is consistently bombarded by a barrage of toxic thoughts, a negative, self-limiting belief system is created and you can be crippled.

Your emotions are the broadcasting signals that let you know if you are on track to get what you want. So whenever you’re feeling bad or in a low mood, you’re sending signals to bring more bad stuff your way. If you don’t make an effort to tune into this process and change your thoughts and feel better, you’re telling yourself that it’s okay to continue to feel bad and you’re laying welcome to a bad mood.

**A Humorous Offense**

Everyone on this planet is born with their own internal Humor Being. A “sense of humor” means to be aware that you have a mental quality to turn your mind in an unusual way, or a need to produce joyful or absurd ideas that can soothe your very being.

Your Humor Being is part of your higher self. It’s the part of you that brings out the best of who you are when times get tough. What your Humor Being gives you more than anything else is emotional stability and peace of mind. Those who make the shift and live in harmony with their Humor Being have the ability to see the bright side of a negative situation. They embrace change more easily and make conscious choices to enjoy themselves during the process of whatever they are trying to achieve.

Humor gives you the motivation and attitude to move forward. Humor shrinks negative thoughts before they blossom into full-blown emotional havoc.

If you expect to prevail during tough times you must understand that it is your current perception of the situation that either gives you hope or makes you want to give up to a lost cause. Ever hear the old saying, “Misery loves company?” Being miserable doesn’t exactly attract good...
things, does it? If you want to change your life for the better, start by consciously changing what you think and what you say.

The best defense for any kind of negative assault on our emotions is to go on the offensive against that nasty voice that has been hardwired into our heads. No matter how big the problem, no matter how intense your troubles, no matter how overwhelming a situation may seem, it’s always fear-based thoughts and defensive emotions, as well as beliefs that have been built from past experiences and from the negative words we use, that result in the loss of control of our emotions. When we lose control of our emotions pretty quickly thereafter we lose control of the situation we find ourselves in.

Positive people are the ultimate shift-heads. They always find ways to shift their perspective and hold on to the things that bring them joy. That is a quality that keeps them from feeling victimized. Pain is unavoidable, but to a person with a positive attitude, that’s all it is: pain. It is not something to be compounded by doubt and past experience.

Positive people instinctively know that adversity is necessary in order to grow. We are here on earth to experience, learn, grow, and become the person we are meant to be. How we choose to experience what happens to us, be it good or bad, will dictate our life lessons.

Life is full of disappointment and heartache; good and bad experiences are simply part of the process of life. In fact they provide a point of comparison. It’s necessary to feel the effect of one to appreciate the other. Life would indeed be boring and unfulfilling without the highs and lows that naturally occur. This is the wonder and, yes, the blessing of being alive. So in the big picture of life, even when bad things happen, if we can look at the bad things from a more neutral position, then we will truly understand that there is no bad experience, only a bad attitude.

You can’t stop life from throwing stuff at you. You can’t stop the unexpected from interfering with your goals and dreams. But you can choose how to respond. You can always choose to shift to a positive state of mind when unwanted things happen. People who are happy, successful, and optimistic know that no matter what happens, life still goes on and they can choose to focus on things that empower them.

THE SHIFT CONTINUES

The present is the only place where your life can happen. Not the past, not the future. The present is also the only place where happiness and peace can be experienced. Sadly, though, the past and future are where many people choose to live their lives. Failure to understand that “now” is the only moment in which life is actually taking place is a major cause of unhappiness.

When happiness becomes a habit, you will be able to weather the storms of chaos and misfortune with the knowledge that while your circumstances may not be ideal, your attitude is. Remember, the more you focus on what is working in your life, the more you appreciate what you have, the more you elevate your degree of overall happiness.

How to Find Your “Humor Being”

When do you need to tap into your Humor Being? When you become aware that your emotions are veering out of control. How do you determine they’re heading in that direction? Stop, take a deep breath, and ask yourself any number of the following warning questions:

- What will the consequences be if I hang onto this anger?
- I have an important meeting with a client. Am I putting my best foot forward?
- What will happen if I don’t get my shift together?
- I have an extremely busy day. Am I in the mood I need to be in to get things done?
- Are my fears keeping me from succeeding?
- What can I do to turn this mood around?
About the Author

Steve Rizzo is a former headline stand-up comedian, personal development expert, and professional keynote and motivational speaker. His clients have included American Airlines, JPMorgan Chase, Scholastic and Sprint. He has been featured on MSNBC, CNBC, Oprah and Friends Radio Network, and also launched his own PBS special Becoming a Humor Being. Rizzo was inducted into the Speaker Hall of Fame and was also voted a Showtime Comedy All-Star. As a comedian, Rizzo shared the stage with Jerry Seinfeld, Ellen DeGeneres, Eddie Murphy and Rodney Dangerfield.

Action Steps

Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned. Here are a few questions, thoughts and activities to get you started.

1. The next time you catch yourself worrying about the future or dwelling on the past, immediately stop and refocus on what you’re doing. Find joy in your present task, no matter what it is.

2. Remember that the key to happiness is being able to enjoy the journey and the process of life, not achieving goals.

3. If you find yourself going into a spiral of negative thinking, acknowledge the negative thoughts and whisk them away with some positive (and even humorous) self-talk. Get in the habit of doing this.

4. Practice gratitude every day. No matter what is happening in your life, remember to focus on the things you do have instead of focusing on everything you don’t.

5. Pay attention to how you respond to challenges in life. Do you see them as obstacles or as opportunities?

6. Avoid being governed by fear. Letting fear get a foothold in your life is the fastest way to derail happiness.

7. Never forget that happiness is a choice. You can train yourself to be happy. You can choose to be happy right now.

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of Get Your Shift Together, check out:

The Attractor Factor by Joe Vitale

The Carrot Principle by Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton

Becoming a Humor Being by Steve Rizzo

© 2013 SUCCESS. All rights reserved. Materials may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form without prior written permission. Published by SUCCESS, 200 Swisher Rd., Lake Dallas, TX 75065, USA: SUCCESS.com. Summarized by permission of the publisher, McGraw Hill. Get Your Shift Together by Steve Rizzo. © 2013 by Steve Rizzo.