

Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old

by John Leland

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Summary:

Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old by John Leland is an exploration of aging and how to make the most out of life. The book follows journalist John Leland as he spends time with six New Yorkers aged 85-95, learning about their lives and what makes them happy. Through his conversations with these individuals, Leland discovers that happiness is not something that can be found in material possessions or external circumstances; rather, it comes from within. He finds that those who are happiest have developed habits such as gratitude, resilience, and connection to others.

The book begins by introducing us to each of the six people featured in the story—Lillian Rubin, Mary Cerrone, Joe Novello, Ruth Willig, Muriel Gillick and Alice Herz Sommer—and exploring their backgrounds. We learn about their childhoods and families before they moved into Manhattan's Upper West Side neighborhood where they now live. Each person has had different experiences throughout their lives but all share one thing in common: a commitment to living life fully despite age.

Throughout his year spent with these individuals, Leland learns many lessons on how to find joy even when faced with difficult times. He discovers that having meaningful relationships is essential for happiness; being able to connect deeply with others helps us feel supported during hard times and gives our lives purpose. Additionally he finds that cultivating gratitude can help us appreciate what we have instead of focusing on what we don't have; this allows us to focus on positive aspects of our lives rather than dwelling on negative ones.

Finally he realizes that resilience plays an important role in finding contentment; no matter how challenging life may be at any given moment it is possible to bounce back if we remain open minded and flexible enough to adapt when needed. By embracing these three habits—relationships, gratitude and resilience—we can create more fulfilling lives for ourselves regardless of age or circumstance.

Main ideas:

#1. *Social Connections are Essential for Happiness: Social connections are essential for happiness, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and isolation. Leland found that those who had strong social connections were more likely to be content and fulfilled.*

Social connections are essential for happiness, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and isolation. In his book Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old, John Leland found that those who had strong social connections were more likely to be content and fulfilled. He interviewed dozens of people over the age of 85 in New York City, many of whom lived alone or with limited family support. Despite their circumstances, he found that those who maintained meaningful relationships with friends and family were much happier than those without such connections.

Leland's research showed that having someone to talk to was key for these seniors' emotional wellbeing. Those who had regular conversations with others reported feeling less lonely and isolated than those without any close companionship. Additionally, they felt more connected to their community as well as supported by it—a sense of belonging which is often lacking in older adults living on their own.

The importance of social connection cannot be understated when it comes to overall happiness among the elderly population. It is vital for them not only to have someone they can rely on but also someone they can share experiences withâ€”someone who will listen and understand them no matter what life throws at them.

#2. *Meaningful Activity is Important: Meaningful activity is important for the elderly, as it gives them a sense of purpose and keeps them engaged in life. Leland found that those who had meaningful activities to do were more likely to be happy and fulfilled.*

Meaningful activity is an important part of life for the elderly. It gives them a sense of purpose and keeps them engaged in life. According to John Leland's book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who had meaningful activities to do were more likely to be happy and fulfilled. Meaningful activities can range from hobbies such as gardening or painting, to volunteering at local charities or taking classes at community centers.

Engaging in meaningful activities helps keep seniors active both mentally and physically. It also provides social interaction with other people which can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation that many older adults experience. Additionally, it allows seniors to stay connected with their communities by participating in events or programs that are available locally.

Having meaningful activities is essential for maintaining physical health as well as mental wellbeing among the elderly population. Not only does it provide an outlet for creativity but it also encourages healthy habits such as exercise, proper nutrition, and stress management techniques.

Overall, engaging in meaningful activity is important for the elderly because it gives them something positive to focus on while providing numerous benefits including improved physical health, mental wellbeing, social connections, and overall happiness.</p></div>

#3. *Gratitude is Key: Gratitude is key to happiness, and the elderly are particularly prone to feeling grateful for the small things in life. Leland found that those who expressed gratitude were more likely to be content and fulfilled.*

Gratitude is key to happiness, and the elderly are particularly prone to feeling grateful for the small things in life. According to John Leland's book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who expressed gratitude were more likely to be content and fulfilled. Gratitude can help us appreciate what we have instead of focusing on what we don't have or wishing for something different. It can also help us recognize how much others do for us and make it easier to show appreciation in return.

Expressing gratitude doesn't just benefit our emotional wellbeing; research has shown that it can improve physical health as well. Studies suggest that people who practice gratitude experience fewer aches and pains, lower blood pressure, better sleep quality, improved immune system functioning, increased energy levels, and even reduced depression symptoms.

In addition to its many benefits for individuals, expressing gratitude can also strengthen relationships with family members and friends by creating an atmosphere of mutual appreciation. When we take time out of our day-to-day lives to express thanks for all that someone does for usâ€”whether big or smallâ€”it helps build trust between two people.

Ultimately, practicing gratitude is essential if we want to lead happy lives full of joy and fulfillment. By taking time each day to reflect on all that we're thankful forâ€”no matter how smallâ€”we open ourselves up not only to greater personal satisfaction but also stronger connections with those around us.</p></div>

#4. *Embrace Change: Change is inevitable, and the elderly must learn to embrace it in order to remain happy. Leland found that those who were able to accept change were more likely to be content and fulfilled.*

Change is an unavoidable part of life, and the elderly must learn to accept it in order to remain content. John Leland found that those who were able to embrace change were more likely to be happy and fulfilled. He observed that many older people struggle with accepting changes in their lives, such as a move from their home or the death of a loved one. However, he also noted that those who could find ways to cope with these changes often experienced greater satisfaction than those who resisted them.

Leland suggested several strategies for embracing change. He encouraged older adults to focus on what they can control rather than worrying about things outside of their power. Additionally, he recommended finding new activities or hobbies which can help keep minds active and engaged while providing opportunities for socialization and connection with others.

Finally, Leland stressed the importance of maintaining a positive attitude towards life's challenges. By looking at each situation as an opportunity for growth rather than something negative, seniors can better adapt to changing circumstances and enjoy life despite its difficulties.

#5. *Find Joy in the Little Things: The elderly must learn to find joy in the little things in life, as this can help them remain content and fulfilled. Leland found that those who were able to appreciate the small moments in life were more likely to be happy.*

Finding joy in the little things is an important lesson for the elderly to learn. It can help them remain content and fulfilled, even when life throws unexpected challenges their way. As John Leland found in his book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who are able to appreciate small moments of pleasure are more likely to be happy overall. This could include simple pleasures such as watching birds at a nearby park or enjoying a cup of tea with friends. Even something as mundane as taking time out for yourself each day can bring immense satisfaction.

The key is to focus on what brings you joy and make it part of your daily routine. Whether it's reading books, listening to music, going for walks or engaging in hobbies that bring you happiness – these activities should become regular habits that will help keep your spirits up during difficult times.

It's also important not to forget about the people around you who care about you and want nothing but your happiness. Spending quality time with family members and close friends can be incredibly rewarding and provide much-needed emotional support during tough times.

#6. *Don't Dwell on the Past: Dwelling on the past can be detrimental to happiness, and the elderly must learn to let go of the past in order to remain content and fulfilled. Leland found that those who were able to move on from the past were more likely to be happy.*

Don't Dwell on the Past: It is important for elderly people to learn how to let go of the past and focus on living in the present. According to John Leland, author of *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who are able to move on from their past experiences are more likely to be happy. This means that it is essential for seniors not to dwell too much on what has already happened and instead focus their energy and attention towards creating positive experiences in the present moment.

Leland found that when older adults were able to accept their life circumstances as they were, rather than dwelling on what could have been or should have been different, they experienced greater levels of contentment and fulfillment. He also noted that those who had difficulty letting go of negative memories or feelings associated with events in their past often struggled with depression or anxiety.

Therefore, it is important for seniors not only to recognize but also embrace this idea – don't dwell on the past! Instead, take steps each day towards making your current situation better by focusing your energy and attention towards

activities that bring you joy. By doing so, you can ensure that you remain contented and fulfilled throughout your golden years.

#7. *Cultivate Optimism: Optimism is essential for happiness, and the elderly must learn to cultivate it in order to remain content and fulfilled. Leland found that those who had an optimistic outlook were more likely to be happy.*

Cultivating optimism is an important part of maintaining a positive outlook on life, especially for the elderly. Optimism can help to reduce stress and anxiety, while also providing a sense of hope and purpose. It can be difficult to remain optimistic in the face of age-related challenges such as physical limitations or declining health, but it is possible with practice. One way to cultivate optimism is by focusing on what you have rather than what you don't have. This could include appreciating your relationships with family and friends, reflecting on past successes or accomplishments, or simply taking time each day to appreciate the beauty around you.

John Leland's book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old* provides insight into how cultivating optimism can lead to greater happiness among seniors. He found that those who had an optimistic outlook were more likely to be happy overall than those who did not. Additionally, he noted that having an attitude of gratitude was key in helping people maintain their positivity even when faced with difficult circumstances.

It is never too late for anyone—regardless of age—to learn how to cultivate optimism in order to live a happier life. By making small changes like practicing gratitude daily or looking at situations from different perspectives, we can all work towards creating more joy and contentment within ourselves.

#8. *Practice Self-Care: Self-care is important for the elderly, as it helps them stay healthy and remain content and fulfilled. Leland found that those who practiced self-care were more likely to be happy.*

Practicing self-care is an important part of staying healthy and content in old age. According to John Leland's book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who practice self-care are more likely to be happy. Self-care can include activities such as getting enough sleep, eating nutritious meals, exercising regularly, engaging in meaningful activities that bring joy and satisfaction, spending time with friends and family members, taking breaks throughout the day for relaxation or meditation, and seeking help when needed.

Self-care also involves being mindful of one's mental health by recognizing signs of depression or anxiety and seeking professional help if necessary. It is important to remember that everyone has different needs when it comes to self-care; what works for one person may not work for another. Therefore it is essential to find out what works best for you so that you can maintain your physical and mental wellbeing.

#9. *Find a Sense of Purpose: Having a sense of purpose is essential for the elderly, as it gives them a reason to get up in the morning and remain content and fulfilled. Leland found that those who had a sense of purpose were more likely to be happy.*

Having a sense of purpose is essential for the elderly, as it gives them a reason to get up in the morning and remain content and fulfilled. According to John Leland's book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who had a sense of purpose were more likely to be happy. This could mean anything from having an active role in their community or family life, engaging in meaningful activities such as volunteering or taking classes, or simply finding joy in everyday tasks like cooking meals or tending to plants.

Finding this sense of purpose can be difficult for some seniors due to physical limitations that come with age. However, there are still plenty of ways they can find meaning and fulfillment without straining themselves too much. For example, they may enjoy spending time with grandchildren by reading stories together or playing board games; they may also take pleasure in helping out around the house by doing light chores like dusting furniture; finally, many seniors find solace through spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation.

It is important for us all—especially our elders—to have something that brings us joy each day. Having a sense of purpose helps keep us motivated and connected with others while providing emotional stability during times when we feel lost or overwhelmed.

#10. *Live in the Moment: Living in the moment is important for the elderly, as it helps them appreciate the present and remain content and fulfilled. Leland found that those who were able to live in the moment were more likely to be happy.*

Living in the moment is an important concept for the elderly, as it allows them to appreciate and enjoy their current situation. According to John Leland's book *Happiness Is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*, those who are able to live in the moment tend to be happier than those who don't. This is because living in the present helps us focus on what we have now rather than worrying about things that may or may not happen in the future. It also encourages us to take advantage of opportunities that come our way and make memories with loved ones.

Living in the moment can help seniors stay content and fulfilled by allowing them to savor each day without worrying about what might happen tomorrow. It also gives them time to reflect on their lives and all they have accomplished so far, which can bring a sense of satisfaction and joy. Additionally, living in the present can help seniors connect with others more deeply since they are focused on being fully engaged with one another instead of thinking about other matters.