

The POWER  
*of* CHOICE  
Kelly Weekers

How to hack your happiness

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“

Whatever  
the *situation*,  
remind yourself  
that you can  
CHOOSE  
how you want to  
*handle* it.

”

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# PREFACE

What shall I wear? What to eat for lunch? Go to work by car or take the bike? Change jobs or just stay where I am? Wait until my car's EMPTY light comes on or fill it up now? Work out or just chill on the couch? Wash my hair or hide the grease with dry shampoo? Renovate or move house? And if I move, then where to? Spend money on a vacation or save up? Meet a friend for drinks or opt for some me-time? Go out on the town or get up bright and early? Keep trying or split up? And what movie do I want to watch?

Whether it's trivial everyday matters or big life-changing decisions, sooner or later we all have to choose. And even though we often don't consciously think about all these insignificant choices, the big ones can trigger chronic stomach aches, stress and anxiety. They can also be a source of happiness, however. Whichever way you look at it, everyone on this planet has the power of choice, the power to

decide how to deal with something that crosses their path.

I'd like to start off by saying that it took me quite a while to realize I actually had this power. Of course I made all sorts of decisions before that finally sank in. Not only regarding my studies, career, friendships, boyfriends and clothes, but also choices with regard to my thoughts, actions and words. In hindsight, I also made some 'bad' calls. Not that I regretted any of these decisions, it was more that I wasn't really making *my* choice. In fact, my choices were largely determined by what others told me to do, by my upbringing and by the choices people around me made. When I had to make a decision, I would usually not ask myself any questions beforehand, and if I did, they would be the wrong ones. So I didn't really think about what university major would make me happy, but whether my parents would be proud of me. I didn't ask myself which boyfriend would suit me, but whether we looked picture-perfect for the outside world. I didn't ask myself if I felt like going out; my friends wanted to, so I did. I didn't think about my outfit; the Spice Girls dressed like that, so I did as well. I either did things on autopilot, or I was more preoccupied with the opinions of others than with what *I* actually thought or wanted.

This insight only sunk in when I started studying

psychology; it was then that I discovered the power of choice. It was fascinating to learn so much about human beings, and therefore also about myself. To understand why people act the way they do. That's where I learned there's a space between stimulus and response, between action and reaction. It is that space that allows us to determine how we want to respond to something. Moreover, our response is largely determined by our beliefs. And those, in turn, are driven by our genes, upbringing, experiences and environment. The realization that I could adjust those dials was a huge eye-opener. What's more, I could even reset them. And while I had previously believed that I didn't have any options, or simply just didn't see they existed, all of a sudden they were becoming more visible and also so much more in line with my true self. More and more often I would ask myself: "Hey, wait a minute, what do *I* actually want?" That was the moment when I started to map out my own path.

I'm now at a point where the power of choice is a unifying theme running through my life. This has enabled me to distance myself from and leave behind all kinds of situations and people as well as parts of myself. By doing so, I have created more room for new experiences, for new people *and* for a nicer version of myself. Every day, it helps me deal in

the best way possible – my *own* way – with the ups and downs that cross my path. What I cannot tell you in this book is which choices will work out best for you. What I *can* help you with, is understanding that you *always* have a choice. That there are often many more options than you might think. And by making choices true to your heart, they automatically become better choices, making your life more enjoyable and making you a happier person. By sharing my lessons and insights, I hope to help you reflect on your life. By giving you a glimpse of my thoughts and sharing how I went about it all, I hope you will start to believe that you can indeed choose your own path. That you are *allowed* to choose your own path. And that it's okay to change course when the old one no longer suits you. So let's go make some choices!

- Kelly

# MINDSET

**A**s soon as we wake up, we start making choices. We choose to have a sandwich or eat yogurt for breakfast. We choose to wear a skirt or pants. We choose to reply to a message right away, or not. Some of our choices are a little more complicated, of course. We choose our friends. We choose how we let others treat us. We choose to stay in a relationship rather than leave. We choose to focus either on abundance or on what's lacking. We choose to have a positive or negative outlook on life. We choose to hold on or to let go. To feel gratitude or jealousy. From the smallest actions to the biggest decisions, all day long you're making all kinds of choices, consciously or otherwise. Your brain mostly does this on autopilot, which is a good thing when you think of how many choices you make every day. You could get a burnout from less.

I can't tell you how happy it makes me to be in control and to realize that I am the one who makes



these choices. To know that when someone offends me or says something negative, I can choose to feel hurt or sad and whether I want to react or just let it go. When I'm tired, I am the one who can choose to carry on, or ask for help and let myself get some rest. When I drop something on the floor and it breaks, or when I forget something, it is *my* choice if I'm going to feel bad about that and for how long. How people treat me is also my choice. *I* am the one who's in control, not other people or 'life in general'.

It might sound simple to be able to make choices and take the wheel all the time, but I've noticed it can be quite difficult. Because here's the thing: your values influence your decisions and the whole process goes very quickly and automatically. *Bam!* You've already reacted and will have to deal with the consequences, since you didn't really feel you even had a choice. And once you've finally made a choice, it's sometimes more like, "Wait, why the fuck am I doing this?!" I've discovered there are two crucial steps if you want to reap the benefits of the power of choice in your life:

1. *Realize you have a choice.*
2. *Make the right choice by asking yourself the right questions.*

\*

I'm sure everyone feels stuck in life at some point: stuck in a relationship, in work, or in a friendship, or bogged down by health issues or grief. You might start thinking: It's no use, it won't change, it is what it is. Yet you can choose to do something about it. Or choose not to. You might now say: "Yeah right, saying goodbye is easier said than done, that bitch is family!" I get that and I hear lots of people saying similar things, but that doesn't make it true. Kudos to my parents for always giving me the idea I had options. Which didn't mean the options themselves were always great. Sometimes it meant having to work harder and earn less for a while. (But it would also mean that I was done with that shitty job and could still make a living.) Sometimes it meant a difficult conversation. (Breaking up with someone because I was no longer happy in a relationship, even though I also hate hurting others.) Or I had to apologize to a friend. (I hadn't really been there for her.)

But I did have options. I had the feeling I was in charge. Sometimes I had to overcome obstacles to get where I wanted to be. Fact is, when you think you don't have a choice, you keep on doing the same thing over and over. If you believe you don't have a choice, you feel trapped. Believing in choices