

## ● Ask America's Ultimate Experts

# “I want to feel more positive about the future!”

Our experts share the simple ways *you* can pump up your optimism and embrace tomorrow—starting today!

## 1 Revitalize your viewpoint!



### Try the time-machine trick!

Ironically, nostalgia can help you embrace tomorrow: “In one study, a group of 75-year-olds were told to pretend it was 20 years earlier,” says expert Shawn Achor. “They even wore IDs with pictures of themselves in their fifties. At the end of the study, not only were they happier, they looked younger and their eyesight improved by 10%!” To get the benefits of the “time machine,” just do anything that makes you feel like a kid again, from dancing to playing a game!

### Send “me-mails”!

Positive feedback triggers you to expect more good things to happen—especially when that feedback comes from *you*, says psychologist Terry Paulson, Ph.D. “I had a friend who would send himself an e-mail at the end of every day describing one accomplishment he achieved that day,” he notes. “It could be anything from calling the plumber to starting a project, just as long as the first thing he saw in his inbox the next morning was something positive.” Reading an upbeat note from your very recent past, he explains, is empowering because it reminds you that you’re the one “writing” your own destiny.

### Jumpstart joy with details!

“For 21 days, we asked people to think about one meaningful experience they had over the last 24 hours,” Achor says, “then to write down every detail of it—how they felt, the sights, sounds and smells.” The result? “It was the fastest way we found to increase optimism in what can sometimes feel like a negative world.” Writing in detail about the little things that make you happy “supersizes” them, fortifying their ability to brighten your overall outlook.

## 2 Embrace the possibilities!

**Carry a motivating motto!** “My grandmother said, ‘If you read something often enough, no one can take it away from you.’ So on a card, I write down something that makes me feel good and pull it out whenever I need a lift,” says Paulson. “For me, it’s *Psalm 118:24: This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” Another tip? “Record a short message on your iPod reminding you of something to be grateful for.” When your music is in random shuffle, it’ll provide an out-of-the-blue boost!

## 2 Embrace the possibilities!



### Flex the big five!

The five character traits most closely linked to a positive outlook: curiosity, gratitude, optimism, humor and enthusiasm!

### Look forward to your calendar!

“Ask yourself, ‘which of these activities on my calendar am I *sincerely* looking forward to,’” suggests happiness expert Gretchen Rubin. “It’s not about what you think you should do—it’s about what you want to do.” The more “want-to-do’s” you have to look forward to, the better your tomorrows will be!

### Don’t call it the future!

Future. The word is like a fog with no boundaries—and when we can’t define something, it makes us anxious. So break up the future into smaller pieces: “Write down three things you want to achieve over the next six months,” says Rubin, explaining that’s a block of time we can all visualize—and conquer.

## 3 Pay positivity forward!

### Lend a hand locally!

Helping others is one of the surest ways to add meaning to your life, dispel-

ling pessimism, says Achor. And the great news: It doesn’t have to be a giant act of charity. Simply changing something for the better locally—whether by chairing a fund-raising bake sale, pitching in at a nearby school or helping a friend cope with a setback—will leave you feeling as if you’re making a real difference.

### Share your smile!

When we smile, we not only lift our own mood, we lift the mood of others, creating a pool of positivity, says Achor. In fact, “one six-month study found that when hospital workers smiled more, doctors and nurses were happier and patients got healthier.” The upshot? A smile *can* change the future for the better.

—Kristina Mastrocola



## Our expert panel



Researcher **Shawn Achor**, founder of Good Think, Inc., is the bestselling author of *The Happiness Advantage* and the former head teaching fellow for positive psychology at Harvard University.



Psychologist **Terry Paulson, Ph.D.**, is the author of *The Optimism Advantage* and a motivational speaker whose clients have included IBM, Johnson & Johnson and NASA.



Author of *The Happiness Project* and *Happier at Home*, **Gretchen Rubin** writes about her firsthand experiences “test-driving” happiness studies on her blog The Happiness Project (Happiness-Project.com).

Photos: Kristiane Vey/Jumpfoto; iStockphoto; Media Bakery (2).