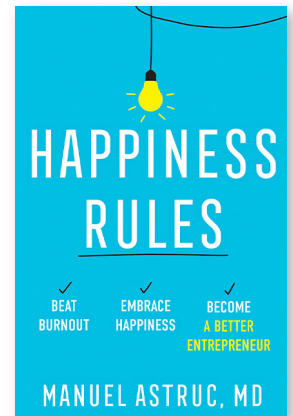


Happiness Rules

Beat Burnout, Embrace Happiness, and Become a Better Entrepreneur

by **Manuel Astruc**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Success is the measure by which most entrepreneurs judge themselves. But success doesn't guarantee happiness—especially if it leads to burnout.

Dr. Manuel Astruc wrote *Happiness Rules: Beat Burnout, Embrace Happiness, and Become a Better Entrepreneur* as a solution to the problem of entrepreneurial burnout. In *Happiness Rules*, he offers practices developed using his knowledge of the mind and our motivations as humans—all gathered from his decades of work as a psychiatrist. And these rules aren't hypothetical; Manuel has used them himself to escape from the deepest reaches of burnout.

Happiness Rules teaches readers how to make happiness the engine to success—rather than the outcome—leading to more personal fulfillment as well as being more productive, energetic, and engaged at home and at work.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How burnout causes intense disruption to your life and work.
- How to take small, positive steps toward a healthier, more optimistic, and happier life.
- How to maintain a consistent, healthier state of mind no matter what issues you're facing.
- Tools to help alleviate burnout.
- How to restart that engine that has driven you to success and maintain it in a way that is healthier for you, your business, and those you care about.

Introduction

Burnout is defined by the World Health Organization as an occupational syndrome, a response to a life that is out of order. It manifests in those who constantly and consistently put work before everything else. And it causes intense disruption to your life, your work, and your health.

These rules allowed me—and will allow you—to take small, positive steps toward a healthier, more optimistic, and happier life. If you are feeling exhausted, bitter, detached from work, or seeing a lack of effectiveness in your work—or if you are feeling a lack of purpose, a sense of stagnation, or emotionally numb—the Happiness Rules can provide you with a consistent, healthier state of mind no matter what issues you are facing.

But before you can follow the rules that lead you back, you have to first acknowledge where you are—and that you have a problem. You have to accept that you are facing burnout. That it isn't a weakness. That you're allowed to struggle. And that the consequences of ignoring this situation can be serious. Only then can we commit to change and make our way back onto the path of happiness.

Part 1: Why We Need New Rules

1. The Cost of Burnout

Entrepreneurs are, by nature, fixers. And we're often very stubborn fixers at that. We see it as our job to dig in and repair whatever isn't working in our businesses in order to reach optimum effectiveness. Under normal circumstances, this serves us well.

However, burnout isn't a nail. It isn't a standard problem that we can fix by concentrating on it and executing a strategy. Unlike other problems, we can't work through burnout while we ignore our underlying stress and exhaustion. That only makes it worse. We have to look at burnout like an underlying injury to our body and mind. Burnout is your mind and body telling you to change what you're doing, not lean further into it. Ignoring the symptoms of burnout only makes the injury worse.

Here, we looked at the nature of burnout. There is a continuum of burnout. Ignoring early, mild signs—such as exhaustion, feeling detached or negative about work, or losing effectiveness at work—will lead to these issues getting worse. There's an inclination to find ways to deny that this is happening. We have to face the truth about burnout.

Over time, burnout spreads to affect not just work but the rest of your life, from family and friends to health.

2. Why Burnout is So Prevalent

In an effort to be happy and fulfilled, we chase success. Society tells us from a young age that hard work is the key to this success.

This is wrong, and our focus upon work above all else is unhealthy. There is a point at which working hard can cross a line into addiction—defined as continuing to engage in an activity in spite of evidence that it is hurting you. When we eventually face burnout, society has few ways to bring us back to health and satisfaction.

Modern medicine is good at treating a disease, but burnout is an occupational syndrome and we don't have a treatment model for it. Because of the limitations in our methods and the insurance system, modern medicine is incentivized to make a quick diagnosis instead of looking for a root cause. The system prefers a diagnosis like depression or anxiety and a pill for treatment rather than a syndrome that is harder to quantify.

There are four pressures that lead to burnout:

1. Highly demanding work
2. High level of responsibility
3. Low control
4. Low reward

Entrepreneurs are exposed to all four. Most entrepreneurs strive to be good leaders. They want to motivate their teams, innovate their industry, inspire their customers, and push their companies to the limit. Unfortunately, the very qualities that allow an entrepreneur to do all this are the ones that make them most at risk of burnout.

3. The Happiness Rules Preamble

Your situation is not hopeless. No matter where you are on the burnout spectrum, the Happiness Rules can help pull you out of it.

With that in mind, there are three facts to recognize about yourself and your situation:

1. You are not alone
2. Change is possible

3. There is hope

Each of these concepts is an integral mindset adjustment on the road to happiness and becoming a better, healthier entrepreneur.

To overcome your burnout, we'll find the way back to happiness through three sets of rules:

1. Health Rules
2. Growth Rules
3. Purpose Rules

Part 2: The Health Rules

4. Getting Your Body into Shape

It is incredibly difficult to be happy and a successful entrepreneur if your fundamental physical and mental health is out of order. In fact, solidifying the foundations of your physical and mental health can arrest your slide into burnout.

Small steps provide the consistent action that creates what we call motivation, and that forward motion allows us to create life-long, life-changing habits in the same way peddling can get us across an entire city.

There is no real secret to building a good foundation for well-being and happiness. It has to start with your physical and mental health. Any system that ignores health is bound to eventually fail.

To start improving your physical health, go for the low-hanging fruit first. Those are the things you can change quickly and a little at a time: eat better, move more, and focus on sleep.

To develop new habits, use BJ Fogg's ABCs:

- Anchor: Anchor the new habit to something you do every day.
- Behavior: Start the habit with something almost ridiculously easy and then build on that as the habit gets ingrained.
- Celebrate: Celebrate the wins, give yourself a high five, pump your fist, and shout out "DONE!" This gives you a dopamine reward and encourages your body to want more.

5. Getting Your Mind into Shape

If you want the benefits of this process, you need to be dealing with your psychological health at the same time. It doesn't take a serious psychological illness to lead our brains into a cycle of negative thinking.

As with your physical health, you can start improving your mental health by reaching for that low-hanging fruit.

Cut out negativity in your environment from sources like news media, social media, and people. Our brains are remarkably easy to "prime" with even brief exposure to negativity, so limit the negative as much as possible.

You can also stop indulging "automatic negative thoughts" by putting up blinders to them rather than wallowing in them. You can start to do this through the "think, think, think" process developed in AA.

Finally, set rules for when to stop working. You won't always be able to follow them, but creating clear boundaries to avoid "workaholic" working is important.

By making these small changes, you can start to reorient toward a sense you are in control and even "prime" the mind for greater happiness and opportunity.

Part 3: The Growth Rules

6. Learn and Grow

In a busy, stressful life, we often take every chance to make things less challenging. In some ways, this is one of the key motivators in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are always trying to remove friction from the purchasing process for their customers and from their internal processes for their employees. Any time a challenge can be eliminated, we make a point of doing so.

However, we need challenges. It's hard to be happy being on autopilot.

By nature, we need to be learning. You should seek out the flow state—the state in which we feel our best and perform our best. According to author Steven Kotler, it occurs when we are operating about 4 percent beyond our capabilities, in a "stretch but don't break" situation.

You can also find new interests by cultivating the habit of exploring "adjacent possibles" that relate to your current strengths and interests. These require only a small commitment of time, energy, or money to learn about these new possibles.

Flow and adjacent possibilities can lead to a program of learning and growing, all while hunting for new opportunities.

7. Strengthening Connections

We crave connection with us and react to social situations subconsciously. So the fact that modern life has left us so divorced from our relationships and communities is immensely difficult for our mental health.

We require a strong social network in our lives to provide meaning. This can be summarized through the 4 Cs: Connection, Community, Collaboration, Contribution.

Connection: The last fifty years have left us feeling isolated from our “tribe,” and entrepreneurs are especially at high risk for this because of the nature of their work. We need to rebuild those broken ties to family and friends because there is a mountain of science that tells us the stronger our connections, the healthier and happier our lives.

Community: This is where we fit in; it’s our place in our “tribe.”

Collaboration: Humanity has dominated nature because of our ability to create well beyond what an individual can achieve. We crave this in our lives.

Contribution: We also crave a way to make our work matter.

We can use technology as a tool to build the 4 Cs in our lives. Find groups you want to join, seek out collaboration, or find your tribe through podcasts.

Part 4: The Purpose Rules

8. Blaze Your Own Trail

The knowledge that things can change is central to the Happiness Rules.

We are never finished products. Our ability to choose what our life is and what it will become is our superpower. To enable that superpower, though, we have to flip the switch from living by default to living by design.

To start flipping that switch, ask yourself these questions: What are you uniquely good at? What are you curious about? What do you want? What do you want to contribute?

9. Creating Resilient Happiness

We live in a society determined to eliminate struggle. In a world in which our basic needs are easy to take care of for

most of us and survival is assured—again, for most of us—we now work to reduce discomfort, eliminate friction, and increase convenience. Wherever possible, we concentrate our efforts on distracting thoughts of suffering and struggle with acts of pleasure.

We can be happy through any circumstances—without eliminating our other emotions and experiences. What’s more, we have to develop more resilience in our happiness because pain and struggle are as inevitable as gravity. The Happiness Rules can’t remove difficulties from your life, but they can give you control over how you respond to those difficulties. Struggle does not have to lead to unhappiness.

You can choose the way of happiness—of health, learning, connecting, and blazing your own trail—through everything life throws at you. That is the power you have over your circumstances, whatever they happen to be.

Conclusion

In these pages, I have laid out my attempt to systematize and codify the tools I used to overcome and stay clear of burnout—so I could enjoy the ride, no matter what. One of the worst feelings I had in the midst of my own struggle was that I was alone and no one could help me through what I was experiencing. I hope this book has provided you the reassurance that not only have others been where you are but that there is a way through this.

I firmly believe that the best thing you could do for yourself today is to take your first small step towards implementing the ideas you’ve read about here. And tomorrow, take that next step. That step may be as small as buying healthier snacks or taking a ten-, or five-, or even two-minute walk at the end of your day. It may be turning off Netflix a little earlier in the evening and spending fifteen extra minutes reading about something that interests you—or going to bed fifteen minutes earlier. It could be an email to an old friend or signing up for a group that shares your passions.

Whatever step you choose to take, the most important thing is that you take one each day. Go at your own pace, but keep going.



Manuel Astruc is the founder of Your Next Act, a coaching program to help high-achieving entrepreneurs find the mental strength to not just survive their ventures but to thrive. When he personally experienced the effects of consciously choosing to embrace happiness in his daily life, he knew he needed to share the knowledge with others.

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