

Gretchen Rubin: Let's just use happiness. It's like a loose term that we all have our own definition. How can we be happier today, tomorrow, next month, next year? What can we do to be happier? Am I a six or seven or an eight right now? Okay, I'm one in the morning. I'm one at night. What does it mean? I'm happy in one way, but unhappy in another. My mother is in the hospital. Do I want to be happy? No, I'm not going to be.

I mean, to me, I'm just like I get all tangled up in that, but I'm like, "Could I be happier? If I went to sleep earlier, would I be happier? If I read novels more than look at Instagram, would I be happier? If I joined a book group, would I be happier? If I go to my college reunion, will I be happier? If I quit sugar, will I be happier? If I exercise regularly, will I be happier? If I get a dog, will I be happier?" That to me seems much clearer and more straightforward rather than being like, "Where am I?" because most people, it's like, "Would like to be happier?" they're like, "Yeah, I'd like to be happier," whether they're at a seminar or four.

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave Asprey: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that it turns out that, if you give your kids fewer toys, you might have more creative kids, and this research comes from the University of Toledo in Ohio, and they looked at 36 toddlers between 18 and 30 months in free play sessions, and they just said lower quality play from an abundance of toys, so, when there were only a few toys, the kids played with them in different ways, more variety and longer periods of time. When they had lots of toys, they flitted from one to the other, but never really got engaged, so, if you want to teach your kid to focus and engage, maybe put fewer toys in front of them and put the other ones in the cabinet, I don't know, but it seems interesting because the study also applies to adults. If you have way too many distractions in your life, maybe you won't spend much time on any of them, and that won't make you very happy.

It turns out that the guest on the show today is an expert on happiness, in fact, a really big expert on happiness, as well as some things about clutter. Today's guest knows so much happiness, habits. She's been on my list of people to interview for two years, and we finally made our calendars line up. I'm talking about Gretchen Rubin, who's one of today's most influential and thought-provoking observers of human nature, and she's got this amazing ability to take complex ideas, make them funny and clear and really accessible to the point that Oprah interviewed her. She's walked arm in arm with the Dalai Lama. She's had her work in the medical... written up in a medical journal. She's been the talk of the town in New Yorker Magazine, oh, and also was, I believe, editor-in-chief of the Yale Law Journal in another life, so this is a big brain.

She's also written New York Times bestseller's *The Four Tendencies*, *Better Than Before*, and *The Happiness Project*, which spent two years on the New York Times' bestseller list, so a super thought-provoking and intelligent person, who's just someone worth your time to listen to.

Gretchen, welcome to the show.

Gretchen Rubin: I'm so happy to be talking to you. Yes, we've been wanting to do this for a long time, so I'm so happy to be talking to you at last. We're interested in so many of the same things.

Dave Asprey: We are, and I have to congratulate you. You just started on CBS This Morning, which is so... How did you go from Yale Law Journal to expert on happiness to CBS This Morning? It's the most unlikely journey I can imagine. How did you do that?

Gretchen Rubin: I was actually clerking for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor when I got the idea for my first book and became very preoccupied with wanting to write a book, and so then I was like, "Okay, I got to get an agent. I got to write a book," and I went to the bookstore and bought something called How to Write and Sell Your Nonfiction Book Proposal and I followed the directions, and so that's how I went from law to writing, and then I had written three books before I wrote the Happiness Project, which got me so interested in happiness and human nature.

Really, all my books are about human nature, but that's when I realize that that was my subject, that human nature was my subject, and I've been writing about that ever since, about good habits and The Four Tendencies, which is all about personality, and then, from CBS This Morning, they just wanted to have a little happiness moment a minute at the end of the show every week, and so I was like, "I got a million ideas about how to be happy," so we sat that up.

Dave Asprey: That is so cool. I think I read that same book about how to be an author, and I did all that stuff for my very first book, and after maybe 20 publishers rejecting it, I got a \$13,000 offer for my advance. I'm like, "Woo-hoo."

Gretchen Rubin: There you go.

Dave Asprey: That was my entry to professional authorhood. Since then, I've gunned it up a little bit from there, but, yeah, it's hard to break in. I decided to do it, went off and did it, and, apparently, your quality of thinking and writing is what it needed to be. I like to look at what you've done, and so you've figured out how to hack your own happiness, and you've written about that. Look, you were depressed. You describe it as like malaise or discontent. It feels like almost everyone I know, with very few exceptions, has some of that going on. Did you have more of that than the rest of us or were you just more annoyed by it, or is this just a normal human thing?

Gretchen Rubin: I think it's a normal human thing, absolutely, and I don't think that I did have more of it than the average person. I think that what was helpful is I really stepped back, and for me it took the form of saying, "Am I happy?" and I realized I didn't spend any time thinking about whether I was happy or not, and then I was like, "Are there ways to be happier?" and I was like, "What are the

ways to be happier? Can you make yourself happier? What would you do if you wanted to make yourself happier?" and so then I became very entranced with that kind of research question. What does ancient philosophy say? What does contemporary science say? What does popular culture say? Are there things I could try, and if I tried them, would they work?

Most people all around the world say they're either pretty happy or very happy. Most people are pretty happy, but I think, at the same time, for most people, there's a lot of low hanging fruit. There's a lot of things that are well within our reach without spending a lot of time, energy or money that can make us happier, and, to me, I think why would you not do that if there are these fairly straightforward, easy, concrete, manageable things to do that are going to boost your happiness?

It's worth the time to try to think about what those things would be, which takes a little time and self-reflection, and then put them into action, which then that takes effort and a little bit, often, habit formation, which is why I ended up writing *Better Than Before*, which is all about habits because I'm like, "We know these things will make us happier. Why don't we do them?" and that's often a problem with habit formation, so I think that I have a very common experience of feeling like, "Is this all there is? Am I really a grownup? Is this my life? Is this my beautiful house? Can there be more?"

Dave Asprey: If you ask them, 90% of people will say they're above average.

Gretchen Rubin: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah, that's a Lake Wobegon effect.

Dave Asprey: Now, if you ask people, "Are you happy?" it's like, "How are you doing?" "Fine. Actually, maybe not." Do you believe most people when they say that they're happy or are they just telling themselves they're happy, but they're actually secretly laced with malaise and discontent?

Gretchen Rubin: This is research that's widely reported, and they have very scientific ways of... There's something like 15 academic definitions of happiness, so they're measuring subjective well-being and all this kind of things. I mean, for what it's worth, I think the research shows what the research shows. Are people honest when researchers ask them questions? I don't know. That's a question about the validity of people's response to researchers I guess, what they say, but I think that there is a lot of actual research to try to really figure that out.

Dave Asprey: Okay, and your reading of the research though, most people are generally pretty happy.

Gretchen Rubin: That's what the research shows. Most people say they're pretty happy or very happy, or more than half of the people. This idea that most people live lives of quiet desperation, that's not the case. Most people don't live lives of quiet desperation.

Dave Asprey: It's a definite thing. Quiet desperation is way overstated, and I wonder if the research from 10 years ago is still relevant because we've changed our brain so much with social media and with just using devices and all, and I know, with kids, the numbers are... kids being... teenagers even, the numbers are pretty staggering with depression and anxiety. It seems like they're just climbing through the roof.

Gretchen Rubin: Recent research suggests that social media doesn't affect the mental health of children, that it doesn't lead to high levels of distress and anxiety. For everyone, medicine can become poison, for sure, and, certainly, certain people are more susceptible to the negative aspects of it and are more vulnerable to it or, in tough situations, that could lead... any tool that you have, but it does seem like of the concerns about the use of social media and children and teenagers is not the dire situation that people thought.

Dave Asprey: It's not as bad as we thought. All right, you just gave everyone permission to download another episode of your podcast and listen to it on the phone, so there you go.

By the way, if you don't know about Gretchen's work, her podcast, Happier with Gretchen Rubin, is a really good show. It's worth listening. You should add that to your iTunes, whatever you call it when you add something on iTunes, listening to something or-

Gretchen Rubin: Your playlist or your... Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Yeah, podcast playlist.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Now, okay, so you're not that worried about social media and you're really interested in the habits that can make people happy. If someone listening to this is going, "I think I'm pretty happy, but I'm not really that sure," what are the steps that you'd recommend to take an inventory? Should I believe my happiness level or am I just telling myself I'm happy even though actually you have that creeping discontent?

Gretchen Rubin: See, I think that's not a very interesting question to me, because I had a friend when I started on The Happiness Project, a friend who's a scientist, he was like, "What you should do, you need to have your husband rank you in a one to 10 scale twice a day, and then you can measure whether you're changing and everything," and I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, I can't think of anything more boring," and, also, my husband will never do it, and so we'll just have conflicts.

What I think is the interesting question... and, of course, people are very different. There's a huge amount of research on exactly the kind of thing you're talking about that people like, but the way I like to think of about it is, whatever

happiness is, maybe you think it's calm or peace or well-being or joy or bliss or whatever word you want to use, so let's just use happiness. It's like a loose term that we all have our own definition. How can we be happier today, tomorrow, next month, next year? What can we do to be happier? Am I a six or seven or an eight right now? Okay, I'm one in the morning. I'm one at night. What does it mean? I'm happy in one way, but unhappy in another. My mother is in the hospital. Do I want to be happy? No, I'm not going to be.

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That to me seems much clearer and more straightforward rather than being like, "Where am I?" because most people, it's like, "Would like to be happier?" they're like, "Yeah, I'd like to be happier," whether they're at a seminar of four, and, then, of course, there's the genetic component. 30% of happiness is genetically determined, and 10 to 20% is life circumstances, which is things like health, education, income, occupation, marital status, things like that.

There are some things that we can't really affect, and then there are some things that we really can affect with our conscious thoughts and actions, and so, to me, it's much more interesting to think like, "Whoever I am, wherever I'm coming from, can I be happier?" rather than being, "I'm a four and you're a six, and what does it mean to be a six, and what does it mean to be happy?" I went to law school, so that kind of definition probing is so familiar to me. We spent a whole semester talking about what is a tort, and I still don't really know what a tort is because it's so complicated. To me, that's just a more helpful frame rather than worrying about immediate measurement and definitions, which I find to be fairly sterile.

Dave Asprey: You mentioned a lot of things like, "If I do this, will I be happy? If I have this, will I be happy?" sort of things.

Gretchen Rubin: Happier.

Dave Asprey: Happier.

Gretchen Rubin: Will I be happier?

Dave Asprey: Okay, that's a really important point. When I was 16, I said, "What's going to make me happy is having a million dollars," and so I did the Think and Grow Rich and I wrote my little thing on the mirror and all that stuff. It totally didn't work because I didn't make a million till I was 26. I actually made \$6 million, and it didn't make me happier.

In fact, I told a friend at that company where everyone made more money than they should have, "I'll be happy." I didn't say happier, but just, "I'll be happy when I have \$10 million," and it seemed like each of those things, I'll be happy when I do this, I'll be happy when I master handstands or whatever else, it feels like they're very fleeting forms of happiness. I got it and it made me happy for two minutes, and now I want the next sports car or whatever the deal is and-

Gretchen Rubin: Right, that's called the arrival fallacy.

Dave Asprey: Right, but is-

Gretchen Rubin: I'll be happy when I'll arrive at a certain place, and then the happiness will kick in. That's not how happiness works.

Dave Asprey: Most of your list was, "I'll be happier when. I'll be happier when," but is that actually something that-

Gretchen Rubin: No. It's like when I exercise, you don't get to... That's not something like I hit a mark and now I'm done. You exercise.

Dave Asprey: Habits.

Gretchen Rubin: Book groups, quitting sugar, these are all things that... and... but you're exactly right. The thing about money is money is like health in that it has a very negative effect when we don't have it.

Dave Asprey: Correct.

Gretchen Rubin: Not having money, having debt, having insecurity, worrying about money, worrying about your health, feeling low energy, having pain, these drag you down, but then once we have enough, it's very easy to take it for granted. This is why people need gratitude practices because it's very easy when you can write the rent check and when you can get out of bed without you feeling like your knees are going to collapse under you. It's very easy to forget how much it contributes to your happiness. We have to remind ourselves of that, but then, of course, it's how you use it because you could use your money to take yoga, a yoga class that's going to blow your mind or you could buy cocaine, which is probably not going to be good for you, or you could buy the tenth pair of black boots, which you're not even going to notice it the next day, or you could buy a guitar and learn to play the guitar, and that would be great.

A lot of it is choosing wisely. Money can buy us many things that would contribute or might lead to happiness. Giving to causes that we believe in, supporting people who need our help, these are huge sources of happiness if we spend our money that way. If you're just like, "Oh, I'm going to buy another sports car, a new sports car," then you get under the Hedonic treadmill, which is when, after two weeks of driving that car, it's like, "That's just car." It's hard to

be excited about it, but if you really love music, maybe a really amazing music system, you would appreciate it every day. Another person, they're like, "Now that I'm used to it, I don't even hear the difference from listening to my phone."

Dave Asprey: Yeah, it's about just being aware and doing, choosing to do things...

Gretchen Rubin: Wise choices.

Dave Asprey: ... that are likely to support happiness. All right, let's talk about The Four Tendencies. I love personality profiling. I run it on my employees, on myself to help us understand what's going on, and I've had so much benefits from it. Okay, tell me about your four tendencies, and then I want you to tell me your favorite survey of anything, because I don't know if you have a survey for The Four Tendencies, but there's love language tests and there's Myers-Briggs and there's [crosstalk 00:17:15] scores and all kinds of stuff. I want you to tell me which ones do you think are really good, but, first, tell me about your four tendencies in your book.

Gretchen Rubin: Okay. Yeah. Mine is a very narrow one. Unlike something like the Myers-Briggs or the Enneagram where it's trying to paint a big picture of your whole personality, this is a very, very narrow aspect of your personality, but it turns out to be very significant. It makes a big difference, so what it looks at is how do you respond to expectations, which sounds super boring, but, actually, it's interesting.

We all face two kinds of expectations, outer expectations, which is like a work deadline or a request from a friend, and then there are inner expectations, my own desire to quit sugar, my own desire to keep a New Year's resolution, and so depending on how you respond to outer and inner, that is what determines whether you're an upholder, a questioner, an obliher, or a rebel, and I'll briefly describe them, and, frankly, most people know what they are right away and probably can also know what many people in their life are just from a brief description.

If you want to take a quiz that will give you an answer, you can go to quiz.gretchenrubin.com, and there's a free quick quiz like, I don't know, 2 million people have taken this quiz now, so, if you want to have an answer spat out, but here it is in a nutshell. Upholders are people who readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet the work deadline. They keep the New Year's resolution without much fuss. They want to know what other people expect from them, but their expectations for themselves are just as important. They're very good at executing, so their motto is discipline is my freedom.

Then there are questioners. Questioners question all expectations. They'll do something if they think it makes sense, so they're making everything an inner expectation. If it meets their inner standard, they'd do. No problem. If it fails

their inner standard, they will resist. They hate anything arbitrary, unjustified, irrational, inefficient, so their motto is I'll comply if you convince me why.

Dave Asprey: They're very cognitive? They're rational-minded?

Gretchen Rubin: I wouldn't say that, because a lot of times crackpots are questioners. What they're looking for is rational and reasons. They really trust their own judgment, their own research.

Dave Asprey: Got it.

Gretchen Rubin: In a sense, they are looking for justification, but they don't always look rational to other people because, I mean, like a friend of mine, it's like, "You are trying to design your own chemo. Why do you think you know more than the cancer doctors?" It's like, "I did my own research on the Internet, and I believe it," so not all questioners are like that, but, questioners, they will always look for their... look for reasons that seem valid to them, and they ask a lot of questions.

Then there are obligers. Obligers readily meet outer expectations, but they struggle to meet inner expectations. I got my insight into this where a friend of mine said, "I don't know what my issue is. I know I would be happier if I exercised, and when I was in high school, I was on the track team, and I never missed track practice, so why can't I go running now?" and I thought, "Why can't she?" It's the same person. It's the same behavior. What's the difference? Now I know. She's an obliger. She readily meets outer expectations, so, when she had a team and a coach expecting her to show up, she did, no problem, but when she was just trying to go on her own, she struggled.

The motto of the obliger is you can count on me, and I'm counting on you to count on me, because the secret for obligers is, if there's an inner expectation that they want to meet, they want to read more or they want to exercise, they have to create outer expectations. If you want to meet an inner expectation, you have to create outer expectation. If you want to read more, join a book group. If you want to exercise more, work out with a trainer. Work out with a class. Work out with a friend who's going to be annoyed if you don't show up.

Then, the final one is rebel, and rebels resist outer and inner expectations alike. They want to do what they want to do in their own way, in their own time. They can do anything they want to do. They can do anything they choose to do, but if you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to resist and, very often, they don't like to tell themselves what to do. They don't want to sign up for a 10:00 a.m. woodworking class on Saturdays because they're like, "I don't know what I'm going to want to do at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday. I want to just do what I want to do," and their motto is you can't make me and neither can I, so those are the four.

Dave Asprey: It's pretty much just the ratio of outer versus inner expectations. Help people listening understand a little bit more about the difference between what is an outer expectation versus an inner expectation.

Gretchen Rubin: An outer expectation is just something that comes and starts from the outside, so someone else is expecting it of me, my boss, my sweetheart, my dog. The interesting thing is, sometimes, outer expectations, we can have almost imaginary expectations, my future self, so, sometimes, an obliger can say, "Gretchen right now doesn't want to exercise, but future Gretchen is going to be so disappointed," or like, "Now Gretchen feels like I should stay late because my boss asked me to, but future Gretchen is going to be really mad if I don't go to that, take time for myself or whatever," and so outer and inner, and inner is really like the New Year's resolution. It's the thing that you're doing because it's what you want, and so, for some people, they call it self-care.

Anytime somebody talks about self-care, it's a huge sign that someone is an obliger because the other three tendencies don't have a problem with self-care. It's obligers who have a problem with self-care because what they're experiencing is, "Oh, I'm meeting everybody else's expectations. Why am I not meeting my expectations for myself?" Whereas, I'm an upholder, I don't have trouble making time for myself. That was one of the things that hit me off. A journalist said, "Why is it that busy parents like us don't have time for ourselves?" and I'm like, "I don't have any trouble taking time for myself," because I'm an upholder, and so I meet inner expectation.

For me, inner expectations almost matter more than outer expectations, and so you start to understand why certain things work for certain people. With a rebel, if you're a rebel and you want to exercise, you wouldn't... If somebody is like, "Oh, you got to sign up for class. You need accountability. You got to work out with a trainer," it's like, "No, that probably won't work for a rebel."

A rebel might do something like join a giant gym that's got a million classes and like, "Today, I do feel like yoga. Today, I feel cardio. Today, I feel like doing Zumba. Today, I feel like doing weightlifting." You can do whatever you want whenever you want. You make the rules. You do what you feel like. That might be more appealing to a rebel or, for rebels, identity is very important, so they might be more like, "I'm an athlete. I'm working out because I'm an athlete," or, "I work out at my lunch hour. They try to keep me trapped behind my screen, but I'm out there with the sun on my face."

Once you know your tendency, you can set up situations in a way that harnesses the strength of that tendency and also offsets the weaknesses and the limitations of the tendency, because all of them have great strengths, but they all have weaknesses as well.

Dave Asprey: Which one is the best to hire?

Gretchen Rubin: It depends on what you want.

Dave Asprey: I knew you were going to say that.

Gretchen Rubin: It depends on what you want.

Dave Asprey: Fair enough.

Gretchen Rubin: No, because, so often, I mean, I think almost any profession, any tendency could do it in their own way. Sometimes, people are like, "Of course, I'm a journalist. Of course, I'm a questioner." I'm like, "An upholder could be a great journalist. An obliger could be a great journalist. A rebel could be a great journalist." They'd all bring something different to it, but, for instance, if you're in a profession where, "Hey, man, you do whatever it takes. You've got to bend the rules. That's okay with us," like sales, rebels tend to do well with that because they're like, "I'll do it my own way."

If you want somebody to be like an SEC regulator, you probably are going to want someone who's going to be comfortable and maybe even take energy from learning the rules and executing the rules. Now, questioners are interesting because they resist anything arbitrary, and so, if you put them into a workplace where it's like, "Hey, we hear what corporate wants, and we do what corporate wants," or, "We're a team here," it's like... but questioners are always like, "Wait, that doesn't make sense to me," or like, "You need to explain that to me," or, "I'm not doing it just because corporate told me to do it because that doesn't... Like this works for me."

They will often say things like, "Oh, yeah, I'm supposed to use the software, but I'm not convinced it's better, so I'm not going to use it," and I'm like, "That's hard to run an office that way if everybody's using a different software," but if you know you're dealing with a questioner, you're going to have to take time to bring those people up to speed. It depends. Many people have said to me they only want to hire obligers or they think, in their profession, obligers would succeed the best. Certainly, client services, there's a lot of about obligers that work in that kind of thing, so it really depends on what you're looking for.

Dave Asprey: All right, that's a fair answer. It seems though that having a lot of upholders would be pretty useful because they would meet the expectations that you and their colleagues set on them, and they aren't going to fight themselves along the way.

Gretchen Rubin: Okay, but here are the weaknesses of the upholders, and I know them well because I'm an upholder, which is they can be very rigid. It's hard for them to succeed when it's not clear what the rules are or what success looks like. It's hard for them to be spontaneous and change on a dime, so, if you're a rebel, you probably don't want an upholder working under you because you're like, "Hey, I have a new vision for this company," and they're like, "Wait. What?"

because we are totally dedication to the vision that... I have a spreadsheet. I planned up my whole year, or it's like, "We're going to take the afternoon off," it's like, "No. I got 10 things planned." I can't just walk out the door because you want to have an outdoor meeting. I've got a call... They can be like that, and they can sometimes become the bureaucrats who are like, "It's two minutes late. It's late, so I'm rejecting your application."

I'm not saying that's all upholders, but I'm saying that can come up. That's what an upholder can look like, and so, given a situation, given a task, given a team, you would want to know that that could become an issue, and as an upholder myself, I always am very aware that that's where... Am I rigid? Am I not seeing that I can turn things down? Am I agreeing too readily to things? Questioners are always like, "Why are people such lemmings?"

What tendency do you think you are?

Dave Asprey: I'm pretty clearly the rebel one.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, a lot of people who work for themselves are rebels because they're like, "I can't do what anybody else tells me to do. It makes me crazy. I can't succeed like that. I'll make the rules for myself."

Dave Asprey: I had oppositional defiant disorder when I was a kid, so that pretty much-

Gretchen Rubin: I think a lot of people who have oppositional defiant disorder may be rebels, but the fact is, with a rebel, if you know that someone's a rebel and you talk to the in a rebel way and you frame things, then... I mean, one of the things that I love most about the tendencies is talking with the parents of rebels because, when you understand where they're coming from, you can communicate with them in a way that really takes away a lot of tension and conflict and really helps the rebel get where they want to go because, a lot of times, rebels are very ambitious.

They want to achieve things, and we're actually making everything worse and slowing them down and getting in their way because we tell them to do something. Even if it's something they want to do, they will often push back, so, a lot of times, I'm like, "Just say nothing. Don't tell them what to do. You may be the very reason that this rebel is resisting because you keep reminding them or giving them helpful suggestions." I'm like, "Just back away." What does look like if you have a five-year-old? I've talked to a lot of people who are the parents of rebels about that.

Dave Asprey: Very fascinating stuff. It makes sense. I do find though that, if I don't have some upholders around, people will drop balls because they're useful.

Gretchen Rubin: I think you probably have obligers because most rebels who are partnered up either in romance or in work situations, when they are working with other

people, they work with obligers. That is overwhelmingly the case. I would anticipate that you don't really have that many upholders because upholders tend not to want to work with rebels because it's just like such a different way, but obligers work well with rebels.

Dave Asprey: I can say I don't think I've ever heard anyone who used to work at the DMV or that, if I did, that they would be happy working for me. It's all right.

Gretchen Rubin: I don't think the DMV probably is the place where... I think you would see... I don't think people are attracted to that because of their tendency. I don't think that's a high fit occupation.

Dave Asprey: I'm just thinking about what's the most rigid profession I could think of? It would be like the person at DMV. They'd be like, "Okay, this is the rules, and you have to follow the rules," and so stereotypes.

Gretchen Rubin: Actually, that would suit a rebel very well probably because it's not... anyway... but what interesting about rebels, too, is some rebels are very attracted to areas of high regulation like the police, the clergy, the military, high regulation, corporations, yeah, because they need something to resist. Like you are self-generated. A lot of rebels are like that, but some rebels need to be in a place where there's rules for them to push against. They feel like that gives them energy.

Dave Asprey: Is this tied to brain structure? I mean, Daniel Amen has been on the show. I've had SPECT scans. I ran the EEG facility, and you mentioned OOD, but there's also a ton of entrepreneurs with ADHD, and there's people with anxiety and other tendencies. Does this correlate well to neuroscience imaging stuff?

Gretchen Rubin: I'm a big believer in the genetic roots of personality, so, yeah, I think this is... You're born with this into the world. It's part of what you bring. It explains some of the anomalies in the big five because it's conscientious. One of the things that was weird to me as an upholder was like... I'm like, "I don't understand people who are conscientious." I'm always conscientious, and I was like, "But what's the pattern that explains people who are halfway conscientious?"

It turns out they're obligers or they're questioners. You know what I mean? Conscientious just doesn't get into the fact that people are not... It's not a universal thing because it depends on what is being asked of you, so I think this is just part of what's brought into you, so, sure, being your brain though, it's in all your DNA. It's part of who you are. It's part of what you bring to the world.

Dave Asprey: Can you change it? Can you just say, "You know what, I'm going to do brain surgery. I'm going to do extensive brain training. I'm going to do CRISPR gene editing?" Do you think I could go from being a rebel to being an upholder, or is this just an impossibility?

Gretchen Rubin: I mean, CRISPR aside, a lot of times people will say like, "Could you change your tendency?" To my mind, again, it's like, "Can you change your inborn nature?" If it's even possible, it's extremely difficult. What I think is a more interesting and much more manageable question is, okay, there's aspects of my tendency that I don't like, and that's why I feel like I would prefer to be in a different tendency.

I don't need to change myself. Whoever you are, there's many people in the same situation who have the same challenges. What are the solutions where they can get where they want? You don't care what your tendency is as long as you're achieving your aims for yourself, so it's like, "Achieve those aims in a rebel way, and you'll get where you're going just the way any other tendency would." Achieve your aims in an obliger way, and you'll get what you want just like any other tendency, so don't change yourself, which would require advanced technology. Change your circumstances. That's easy once you know what to do.

People get frustrated because they throw spaghetti against the wall and it doesn't work or they're like, "Oh, it worked for my brother. It worked for Dave. Why? If Dave can do it, why can't I do it?" I'm like, "Let's look at why. Maybe you need to set it up in a different way." Rebels often don't like accountability. Obligers depend on accountability. Maybe you need more accountability structures in your life. That is super easy because many, many, many people require accountability.

There's like thousands of ways to give yourself accountability once you realize that that's the missing piece, but a lot of times people are like, "I just need to get motivated. I need to make time for myself. I just need to get clear on my priorities," and I'm like, "If you're an obliger, no, that's not going to work." I'm like, "I'm just sorry to tell you that's not going to work, but something else would work over night. Do that. Don't change yourself. Change your setup."

Dave Asprey: You sound an awful lot like a biohacker. The definition there is change the environment around you and inside you so that you have control of your biology and your behavior obviously. Okay, so it's true, changing your circumstances and what's around you is a heck a lot easier because self-change takes work.

Gretchen Rubin: If it's even possible. Yeah. Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Remember, I'm a rebel.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, it's definitely-

Dave Asprey: I'll make it possible. I'm just kidding.

Gretchen Rubin: You can do anything you want to do. Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Totally. Totally joking. I do want to point people listening to the bonus episode you did on your Happier Podcast. You did an episode with those, a deep dive into The four Tendencies. I think there's real value in this line of thinking, this work, and so I would just say you should go listen to that, and I'll put a link in the show notes.

Gretchen Rubin: Great. Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Now, are there personality tests like Myers-Briggs or Enneagrams or something like that that work well with The Four Tendencies, or are you a fan of those? Do you think they're all a waste of time?

Gretchen Rubin: I mean, I love them all because I feel like you do get insight for your... into yourself by using them. Some people say, if you define me, you can find me. Mow, I like the shorthand. I think it's very helpful. I think all of them have their own nuance and their own vocabulary, and you lose that if you try to cram them all into one frame, so I like to let them all be what they are, except the one thing that I absolutely resist, which people often will suggest to me as like what correlates with what, and that is the Houses of Hogwarts.

I'm here to tell you The Four Tendencies do not line up with the Houses of Hogwarts, and I can prove that with three names, Hermione, Fred, George. They're all the same House of Hogwarts. They're all Gryffindors, but they are not the same tendency. Clearly, Hermione Granger is probably the most famous upholder in the world, so that one I reject, but the other ones, I think they all have their own power though. I like all of them and... but they don't match up neatly.

Dave Asprey: Okay, and if you had to pick one of those tests as your favorite, which one would it be?

Gretchen Rubin: I like The Five Love Languages. It's totally unscientific. It's just like a guy who's like, "I've been talking to married couple for years," and...

Dave Asprey: It totally works.

Gretchen Rubin: ... like, "This is what I see."

Dave Asprey: Yeah, it's real.

Gretchen Rubin: It is. It's very specific. I feel like sometimes what I get frustrated with personality things is they're trying to describe too much, so you feel like part of it is helpful, but part of it then you're like, "I don't know." There's so many categories, you're like, "Who can even keep track? Is this the same as that? I don't know." I don't know. I feel I can get overwhelmed by them, but I do think they can be useful when they're used.

I think, also, sometimes it's like, when the student is ready, the teacher appears, and it crosses your path at the right time, and it really shines a spotlight on some aspect of your character, your nature that is very, very helpful, so I think sometimes it's just that showing you something about yourself that maybe you didn't... you weren't keyed into.

Dave Asprey: Okay, that makes so much sense. I want to talk about more of this, changing the situation around you, because you wrote *Outer Order, Inner Calm*, which is a book about happiness and decluttering, and I'm a little bit skeptical to be perfectly honest.

Gretchen Rubin: I write about that in the book.

Dave Asprey: My wife read *Kondo-ing is a Verb*. She read Marie Kondo's book and immediately took all of my coffee-making equipment and put it under the counter. Now, if you want to block marital bliss, you hide a person's coffee-making equipment every single day, and so that only lasted for three days of intense unhappiness because I'm like, "I don't care if it's cluttered. This is my space," but what it led to, in fact, we ended up hiring an expert on organizing just to help advise us for a half a day, and what we learned is that my wife like tidy things, and so she wants things put away, but she doesn't necessarily care if they're put in the same place each time. She just wants them out of sight.

I'm happy to have stuff everywhere as long as I know where it all is because it doesn't look organized, but, in my mind, I know exactly where everything is on my desk, so, when people say, "You should declutter," I'm like, "But it's organized even if it's 'cluttered.'" What's the difference between disorganized and cluttered and decluttered? How do you go through that difference? Einstein's desk was a mess, but he could find that paper 20 down. Walk me through your thoughts on that.

Gretchen Rubin: First, for someone like Marie Kondo, I mean, I really believe that there's no magic one-size-fits-all solution for anything, for how to exercise, how to eat right or how to clean up, and so the idea that we need to put everything away and have a very clear counter, I'm like, "Maybe you do. Maybe you don't. Maybe that's important to you. Maybe it's not."

I mean, one of the differences that you're pointing to is the difference between simplicity lovers and abundance lovers. Simplicity lovers tend to like a lot of bare space, a lot of room on the shelf, not that much going on, one little vase with one little rosebud, and then abundance lovers like choice and profusion and buzz and a lot going on, a lot of stimulation. There's not one that's right and one that's wrong and one that stimulates creativity and one... You know what I mean? The problem comes-

Dave Asprey: I love that.

Gretchen Rubin: The problem comes up when I'm the boss and I say, "A cluttered desk means a cluttered mind," and everybody has to have a clean desk policy," but that wouldn't work for you, Dave, because that's not how you roll, and so it's like we have to come... so if you're married to somebody or you work in an open office, you have to maybe come to something that everyone can manage, but it's not that one person is right and one person is wrong.

Now, there are people who are truly clutter blind. My sister is like this some, and we talk about this a lot on the Happier podcast. She doesn't care. I mean, the cabinets are open. The mail from two weeks ago, it's all on the counter. She doesn't care. It doesn't bother her. It doesn't weigh her down. It doesn't slow her down. If I come over, as I do, and I come to her house in Los Angeles and I clean everything up, she's happy about that. She doesn't really care. I enjoy it because I love clearing other people's clutter more than anything else. It's like my favorite hobby, but she let's me do it because she knows I enjoy it, but she doesn't really care.

Some people don't even care, and then, like you say, some people, it's very organized, so clutter is something that you don't need, don't use, don't love, so, just because something is out, to me, it does not make a clutter. Clutter is we have a mixing bowl that we haven't used in 10 years. Why is that there? We don't need it. We don't use it. We don't love it.

I have seven black cardigans. I wear the same two. Why do I have the other five? That's clutter. I don't need it. I don't use it. I don't love it. I have a Magic Eye postcard that's one of those things where you go like this, and, every three years, I get it out. I'm like, "Whoa, I see the Big Ben popping out of this weird thing." I love it. I almost never look at it. I forget it's there. I come across it, and I totally enjoy it. I'm like, "That's not clutter because I love it," and so I think the idea that if everything looks a certain way, that's right or that's what everyone should be aiming for is very misleading, and I also think that the problem that comes when you have people trying to share space is that, a lot of times, people are like, "I'm right and you're wrong. You need to do it my way because I'm right," and what I think is there is no right or wrong. There are only preferences.

I can talk about my preference, and you can talk about your preference, and we can try to arrive in something that we can both live with. It's not that one person is right and one person is wrong. It's just a preference, and so I think that also takes some of the heat out of it because, a lot of times, people feel very righteous or they feel guilty, and I'm like, "You don't feel righteous. You don't feel guilty." It's just a preference. Some people-

Dave Asprey: Yeah, I felt pretty righteous about my coffee. I really have to say that.

Gretchen Rubin: It's a preference.

Dave Asprey: It is a preference.

Gretchen Rubin: It's a preference. She wants to put it away, and then you get into the whole thing, "It's mine," and it's like, "Yeah, but it's out on my counter." That can go, "Put it in your office. I can't make coffee in my office." I mean, this thing... so, again, it's like-

Dave Asprey: You can compromise.

Gretchen Rubin: When you compromise, you're like, "Who's it more important to?" and you're like, "It's really important to me to have the coffee machine there because it's such a nuisance to get it out every day. I'm not going to do it," or you could say to her, "You can keep it there if you want, but I expect you to get it out every morning before I come down because that's your preference. My preference is that it's out."

Dave Asprey: I should have.

Gretchen Rubin: You can keep it where you want, but just take it out before I need it because I don't want to do it. Why should I do it? It's your preference.

Dave Asprey: I like that. I'm feeling that one.

Gretchen Rubin: Again, but she might agree to that, I mean, or it's like, "Maybe we could build a hutch," and it's behind closed doors, but [inaudible 00:42:17]. I have that in my kitchen. You can close it off. You can see it...

Dave Asprey: That's actually getting built.

Gretchen Rubin: ... but it's still out.

Dave Asprey: We're building the hutch.

Gretchen Rubin: Then you're like, "We can both be right." It's not like I'm right, you're wrong, or you're right, I'm wrong. It's like, "Okay, given that we have different preferences, is there... Are we thinking of this as a false choice? Is there another solution?" The other solution is how do we make it look orderly and have a coffee machine out? That's easy, but a lot of times, when people's stuff out, it's like, "Oh, I have a bagel slicer out. I haven't sliced a bagel in six months." Okay, you can put that away, okay, because we're not... but if you slice the bagel every morning-

Dave Asprey: I got you.

Gretchen Rubin: I think part of it is just thinking about it.

Dave Asprey: You talk about actual steps, and one thing I like about your work is that you break it down so it's actionable. You talk about steps to attaining outer order,

and you've got five stages to doing this. What are the stages? Just quickly walk me through what you do with those.

Gretchen Rubin:

They aren't stages in that you have to pass through them in any order. They're just what you go through, and one is to just figure out what it is you want and what it is you can get rid of because a lot of times people are like, "I'm going to get organized," and they make this big declarations.

Don't get organized. Ask yourself, "Do I need it? Do I use it? Do I love it?" because it could just be that you don't even need it. If you get rid of all the paperwork that you don't need to keep, maybe you don't need a filing cabinet because it's like that stuff is all online. Why do I even have the paper copies? You don't need that.

We've got all the stuff falling out of our kitchen cabinets, but when we got rid of all the stuff we didn't use, we don't really have to organize it. We could just put it in there any way we want because it just fits, so, if you get rid of all that stuff, so you want to do that first if you can because that makes everything else easier is to just go through and ask yourself, "Do I need it? Do I use it? Do I love it?" and then it's finding the places for things, because you mentioned something, looking for things. It's so annoying. One of the thing is to have a place for things so that everything is put away and you can get it out again so they have that organization.

A step that is my favorite step is to add beauty, because part of feeling like your surroundings give you comfort and energy is beauty, and whether that for one person is bringing nature inside, like having a bowl of pine cones or having a plant, or maybe it's arranging your bookshelf by color. There's all kinds of things that people do to add beauty, and that's a stage that you don't want to overlook because nobody wants to live in a place that feels sterile or stripped, so... but a lot of it also is thinking about how can you create habits that will allow you to maintain order once you created it, because we've all had that experience. You spent the entire day cleaning out your office and then, two weeks later, it's like it never changed.

What are some of the little habits that you can put into place like the one-minute rule? Anything you can do in less than a minute, do it without delay, if you can hang up your coat instead of throwing over a chair, if you can print out a document and file it instead of leaving it in your inbox, and that gets rid of the little scum of the surface of life, and so there's a lot of little habits like that that can help you maintain order without setting aside an afternoon or a weekend or a big chunk of time.

Dave Asprey:

I so want to name this episode How to be Happier Than the Scum on the Surface of the Life because that's just funny. We won't name it that, but-

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, scum is a good word. It's a very evocative word, the scum on the surface of the life.

Dave Asprey: What a word [inaudible 00:45:57] there. All right, I like this idea, and so adding some beauty and, for me, you're very prescient. I'm fine if it's put away. I just have to be able to find it again, but if it's put away in a different place each time, I want to stab myself in the eyeballs, but maybe that's because of my tendencies and things that I haven't necessarily... because I can't conceive of why would it make sense to always put something in a different place so you could search for it later, but, clearly, other people can do that and apparently they like it.

Gretchen Rubin: Why don't you put it back in the same place?

Dave Asprey: I asked myself like, "Wouldn't that be easier for all of us?" but I don't know, it's in a different cabinet each time, so I have to open all the cabinets to find whatever that I want and then-

Gretchen Rubin: Maybe what you need to do is decide where things go and why they go there because then you don't have to remember where something is. I was helping a friend clean out his apartment, and this is a guy who I've known for years, so I know he loves to travel. I was like, "Where's your travel stuff?" His passport was in one place. His foreign currency was in another place. His money belt was in another place. I was like, "Maybe, for you, you should put all the travel stuff together because it's like you need them together." It's like, "Oh, you need your electrical converters when you need your foreign currency," and so then he was like, "Okay," and then they just... They're not organized nicely in this cabinet. They're just on the shelf, but it's like, "That's where they go," and it's like, anytime there's something that's related to travel, "Oh, I have a pound coin from my trip to the UK. I know where it goes." It's things like batteries or tools, and where do tools go or where does stationary go? It doesn't just go.

Dave Asprey: Yeah, this feels like a home area.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, but you need to agree where is that because then people know where to find it or where is something like your passport, because if somebody is just like, "Oh, I just put it in a drawer," okay, that could be a day.

Dave Asprey: I know.

Gretchen Rubin: How many people spend hours and hours looking for a passport, but if there's a place where the passports go, but you have to communicate that, so maybe you want to talk about, "This is the closet for office supplies. This is the closet for household goods." I don't know. Everybody has to do this for themselves because everybody has a different logic, a different user interface with their stuff.

Dave Asprey: I connect way more with what you're saying than make sure your socks are happy. You know what I mean? I meditate. I do energy work and whatever, but this seems just so pragmatic and something that could work in almost any situation for removing clutter in a way that creates peace in your relationships and in your brain because, if you always know where something is, you don't have to think about it anymore.

Gretchen Rubin: Or buy another one. I mean, how many times do you buy... You're like, "I desperately need a stapler. I can't take the time. It's just easier to buy a stapler on my way home," and it's like, "Okay," but now you've got five staplers wherever.

Dave Asprey: We have 16 pairs of scissors because I got so tired of people stealing scissors from the kitchen. I just said, "Every time it's gone, I order two more," and after we got enough scissors in the house that it became a problem, they stopped getting misplaced.

Gretchen Rubin: That's great, and that's one thing I learned because I was an over-consolidator, so I would put all the scissors together instead of realizing what you want is to have scissors in every place. I need scissors in my office, scissors in the bedroom, scissors in the bathrooms, scissors in the kitchen, so then it's like, "Don't keep them all in one place. That's where they go. Put them around." Same thing with something like tape or highlighters maybe, but so, again, it takes a little bit of time to think these things through and, also, you're going to have to communicate with somebody else in your household, but then it can save you so much time.

My parents were staying in our apartment while we were out of time, and they were like, "Oh, we need batteries," and I was like, "Okay, go to the pantry, and on the left side of the shelf that's second from the bottom, you will see a basket and, in that basket, you will see batteries," and it's like, "Okay." That's just satisfying. It's like a surgeon being handed an instrument. I like that feeling of being able to just go get anything. I need a Band-Aid. Where are the Band-Aids? I need sunscreen. Where's the sunscreen?

Dave Asprey: Yeah, it's so satisfying. I love that we're talking about this, and, Lana, I'm going to play this episode for you because-

Gretchen Rubin: Oh, good. Yes. You can come together and have a place for everything.

Dave Asprey: All right, I feel justified in wanting things to be where they live. I hope that this has been as therapeutic for everyone listening as it is for me. I knew there was a reason to put everything where it goes, and I think that you've done some really cool things around happiness with your podcast that are really noteworthy, and I really appreciate the way you think about things, Gretchen.

Gretchen Rubin: Thanks. It's so fun to talk to you. I so appreciate your having me on.

Dave Asprey: I think that people should definitely listen to your show, but I have to ask you one final question before it's time to go, and that's one having to do with antiaging, my new book, Super Human. I've been really open. I'm planning to live at least 180 years old because I think the science is actually coming and there's stuff you can do now, et cetera, et cetera, but how long do you think you can live? What's your number?

Gretchen Rubin: I don't think about it.

Dave Asprey: Oh, that's interesting. Not at all?

Gretchen Rubin: No.

Dave Asprey: Is that because you're-

Gretchen Rubin: Because who can know? It's a question without an answer, I think, so I do everything that I can to be as healthy as I can and as strong as I can be for as long as I can be, but I don't... I haven't really asked myself how long I think that would be.

Dave Asprey: Is that because you're an upholder?

Gretchen Rubin: No, I think it's because it's a question without an answer. It just feels like it doesn't matter what I think, so I don't worry about it.

Dave Asprey: All right, I get it.

Gretchen Rubin: Because deciding to live to 180 doesn't make it any less or more likely. It's what you do right now with your choices that's important.

Dave Asprey: If you meet your inner expectations, and your inner expectation is that you're going to live a very long and healthy life, is that not beneficial from a placebo perspective at least?

Gretchen Rubin: Oh, placebo, if we're going to talk about placebo, it could be, but on the other hand, one of the... Some research suggests that older people are happier in part because they feel like their time is coming to an end, and so they don't make time for things that aren't important. They have a shorter horizon, and so they prioritize things that are the people and the activities that really make them happier, so, arguably, you thinking that you'll live to 180 might make you squander your time because you feel like, "Oh, I have 40 years in which to learn to play an instrument or I have 40 years to get connected by to my childhood friends or... so I have plenty of time," and the thing is it's not knowable how much time we have and so, arguably, that might distort your choices in a way that might undermine your happiness. That's one way of thinking. That's another way of thinking about it.

Dave Asprey: You sound like you might be a rebel.

Gretchen Rubin: No. No. No. No. No. It's funny, some rebels think they're upholders, but, no, all upholders know that they are not rebels, but I've learned so much from rebels. Rebels have so much to teach all of us who are not rebels.

Dave Asprey: Being a rebel, I like to think I have a thing or two, but, who knows, it could just be my ego. Gretchen, thanks for a fantastic and fun interview. I think everyone on the show knows they can pick up your books, and they... If you want to study happiness, you want to learn more about it, listen to Happier with Gretchen Rubin. It's a good show, so thank you.

Gretchen Rubin: Thank you. It's so fun to talk to you. I feel like we could talk all day.

Dave Asprey: If you like today's episode, you know what to do. Pick up a copy of one of Gretchen's books or pick up a copy of one of my books or anyone else that you like and read it because we all know that reading will actually make you happier, and, if not, it's because you're a bad a person, and one thing that is scientifically proven beyond a shadow of a doubt for all four of these types is leaving reviews of the books you read will make you happier.

Gretchen Rubin: Yes. Do a good deed for someone else. There are researches there. You will feel happier if you do a small good deed for someone else.

Dave Asprey: It totally works. Gretchen, have a beautiful day.

Gretchen Rubin: It totally works.