

happiness



FEELING UNHAPPY AND UNFULFILLED? AUTHOR AND INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKER, **SHARON BULL**, HAS TWELVE STEPS THAT HELPED TAKE HER FROM HER LOWEST EBB TO FACING HER FEARS, FIGHTING DEPRESSION AND ADDICTION, AND FINDING HER PURPOSE IN LIFE

From the age of twenty, I found myself battling with mental illness – including depression, anxiety and a spending addiction that incurred £50,000 of debt. For thirty years, my authenticity had played second fiddle to all the mad distractions I associated with being happy, and it wasn't until I reached my lowest point, that I found what I believed to be my purpose.

My first book, *Stripped Bare*, is a true story based on my experiences, and how, after a failed suicide attempt, I finally faced up to my fears. I wanted the book to lift the lid on the toxic effects our society can have on people's lives, and the huge pressure we put on ourselves as we tirelessly strive to live out the perfect lifestyles seen in adverts and the media. Most importantly though, I wanted to help break down the stigma attached to mental illness and emphasize that our perceptions of others can be far from their reality.

HERE ARE MY TWELVE TIPS FOR HAPPINESS:

It's in adverse times we grow and learn, even though we don't see it at the time.

If we can see problems as lessons, rather than annoyances or stumbling blocks, we can generally glean some strength and knowledge. So often these problems are a blessing in disguise.

The bigger house, the faster car, the next job promotion, or relationship, whatever external entity we perceive to be the conveyor of instantaneous happiness is merely a distraction, unless we are at peace with ourselves.

To achieve long-term contentment and happiness we cannot rely on future external events or outcomes. If we have not already found our inner peace, these are generally short-term fixes and will only paper over the cracks.

Never let the ego overrule the heart. The ego is generally guided by perceptions and fears, which can be created by our past experiences.

So often we miss out on wonderful and life-changing opportunities, because we choose to listen to the ego's many negative reasons why we shouldn't and couldn't. The heart knows best, no matter how uncomfortable the first steps may be.

We must face up to our fears, because the only time we stop loving is when we lose faith in ourselves.

Bitterness, anger and resentment are just some of the emotions driven by fear, so it makes sense that we face up to whatever it is that makes us apprehensive.

Nothing is too late; the time is always right for positive change.

Everyone should do what they can in their own way, in whichever manner feels comfortable and most importantly when the time seems appropriate.

If we can learn to cherish others over and above ourselves, and see their lives as equally as important as ours, the world would be a much better place to live in.

Compassion and kindness towards ourselves is the key factor to a more fulfilling life. If we can then extend this same compassion and kindness towards others, not only does our own happiness benefit from our actions, but we create a snowball effect too.

Just because it's always been that way doesn't mean it has to stay that way.

How many times do we hear stories about the continual knock backs highly talented and recognised artists, musicians and scientists have received time and time again – with claims it can't be done, or this is the way it has always been – only for them to finally come back and prove their doubters wrong.

Judgement of others doesn't help – there isn't one person, country or nation that can point the finger at another, without three fingers pointing back.

Anger, vile words and venomous actions seriously destroy our spirit, so we need to step back and take a few deep breaths in our moments of despair. Our perceptions of others can also be far from their reality. In the words of the late Alice Hertz-Sommer, the oldest Holocaust survivor, who died at 110 in February 2014: "Hatred eats the soul of the hater, not the hated."

Lives can be changed in a matter of seconds, in ways we perhaps would never have imagined, through unbeknown circumstances.

We should have high standards, hope and aspirations, but we lose many precious moments by continually reaching for the stars, without appreciating what is already available to us.

"Bubbles" can seriously change your mood.

It is one of the few words that cannot be said angrily. Go on, try it next time there is a need.

Always choose love.

Choosing to turn the other cheek is never easy and it isn't always the right option either, but opening our heart and nominating love over and above hate, should take precedence every time.

There is always someone worse off than yourself.

And finally, one of my father's favourite quotes. A quote he lived by, even though he was struck down by different illnesses throughout most of his life: "It is not easy to be authentic in a world where becoming second in a race is never quite good enough, but the only steps we should consider are the ones that feel right in our heart."



Sharon Bull's twelve recommendations towards a more fulfilling and happier life are taken from *Stripped Bare*, published on 28th August and available on the high street and online