

Always look on the bright side if you want to win

THE advent of positive psychology and the realisation that money is only weakly related to wellbeing has led to a flurry of books on happiness.

But the jury is out with regard to teaching happiness. We all know the heart-sinking person, the pessimist, the complainer, the gloom-and-doom monger. Whatever happens to them, they remain negative. We also know the life-enhancers — they may be called sunny or bonny or simply optimists — who bounce back from adversity and are resolutely positive. They are stable extroverts, on the whole, while the heart-sinkers are unstable introverts.

There is not much one can do about one's personality. People do not change much over time: we do become a little neurotic and a little less extroverted, but these personality traits are remarkably stable despite what happens to us, be it winning the lottery or a terrible accident leaving us paralysed.

We can, though, assess and improve emotional intelligence (EI). People with more EI are happier. They are more perceptive and sensitive to others; more rewarding and more fun; more adaptable and flexible. They find it easier to make friends and keep them, a crucial ingredient for happiness.

EI is about being aware of, and sensitive to, one's own and others' moods. But it is also about the management of your own and others' moods. So, emotionally intelligent people are better at reading and shaping their own moods and those of others, a key ingredient of success.

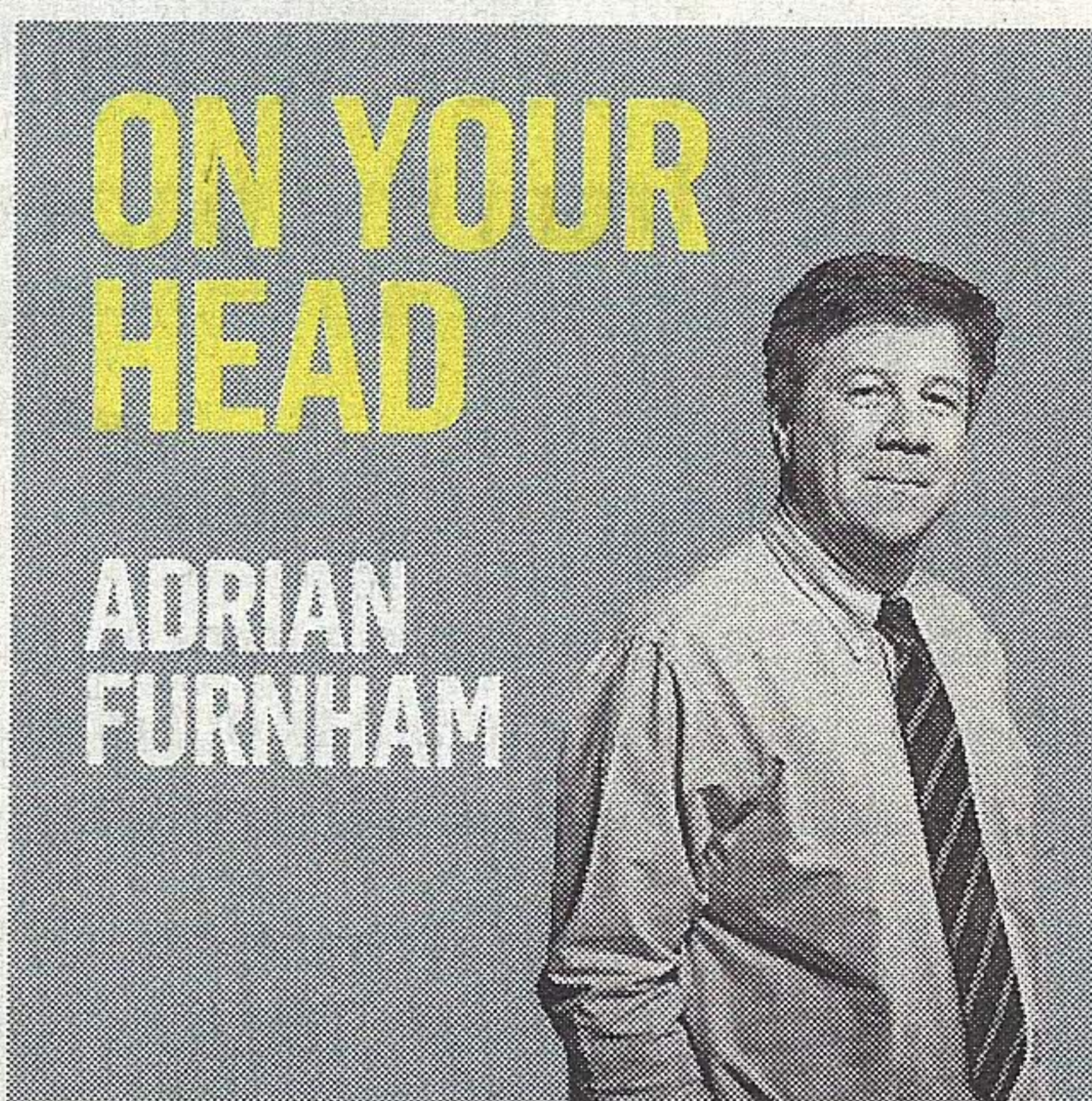
Those who have studied the role of personality, emotion and mood have found, not surprisingly, that happy people are more successful at work.

Compared with unhappy people, but matched on other criteria such as education, experience, skills, we find that:

- Happier people get better jobs — with more autonomy, variety and meaning;
- Happier chief executives have happier people working for them;
- Happier people show better job performance;
- Happier people make more money.

These findings occur across different jobs and in different countries — everyone from German businessmen to Malaysian farmers. So why is there a connection between positive moods, a sense of wellbeing, happiness and work success? There seem to be various factors.

Focus and distraction: Unhappy people are prone to taking their eye off the ball at work. They tend to be more self-obsessed and not as vigilant about the needs of others, be they colleagues or customers. EI teaches one to be more focused on others.



Memory: People in a good mood recall more positive things and vice versa. Positive people recall happy customers and co-operative peers; the unhappy never let go of their negative experiences.

Decision-making: People with sunny dispositions make better decisions: they are faster, more accurate and more inclusive. Unhappy people are “hung up” on small, irrelevant issues and alienate those who try to help them. Optimistic people believe problems are solvable and that they can (with help) make good decisions. Pessimists are hapless, hopeless and helpless . . . and often procrastinate or make poorer decisions than the optimists.

Evaluating others: We all know bosses are best avoided when they are in a bad mood. People in a good mood are more encouraging, more forgiving, more

tolerant of others and their “little foibles”. Negative moods are associated with blaming and attacking others rather than helping them. Negative people make bad colleagues and team members.

Co-operating: Good moods make people more generous, more co-operative, more helpful. People in a good mood tend to deflate crises and resolve conflicts. Those in a bad mood increase conflict.

Management is a contact sport. We can all, irrespective of our personality, learn to improve our social and interpersonal skills and in the process become emotionally intelligent. The happiness gurus suggest:

- Accept that enduring happiness doesn't come from materialistic success;
- Take control of your time, and aim for a little progress each day;
- Act happy because going through the motions can trigger the emotions you need;
- Seek work and leisure that engages your natural strengths and skills;
- Join social groups that reflect your interests, values and passions;
- Get enough exercise and sleep every day;
- Give priority to close relationships by affirming others and sharing together;
- Focus on others more than yourself;
- Keep a record of good things that happen to you (gifts, blessings).

They should also add: improve your emotional intelligence. Other people are by far the best source of wellbeing, but you need to learn how to become a better communicator of emotions.

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Good vibrations: happier people get better jobs — and make more money