

you are what you have to defend

Life is what happens to you
While you're busy making other plans

Before you go to sleep
Say a little prayer
Every day in every way
It's getting better and better

How to Get Flat Abs, Have Amazing Sex and Rule the World in 8 Easy Steps

The covers of most men's and women's magazines have similar headlines: "Get Great Abs" and "Have Amazing Sex."

From the looks of it, these two issues have been recycled over and over (with some other stereotypically gender-relevant articles thrown in) on every Men's Health, Maxim, Cosmopolitan and Glamour cover since the dawn of time. In fact, I'd bet that if we could get a better translation of cave drawings, they would read something like "Grok get flat belly. Make girl Grok moan with joy." And we keep buying them. We keep buying this lie that these things will make us happy. I've had washboard abs (past tense) and I've had some pretty phenomenal sex. Neither one made me a better person. Neither one completed me or made my life more fulfilling. We chase this idea of "I will be happy when..."

I will be happy when I have a new car. I will be happy when I get married. I will be happy when I get a better job. I will be happy when I lose five pounds. What if instead we choose to be happy -- right now?

If you can read this, your life is pretty awesome.

Setting aside our first-world problems and pettiness, if you are online reading this, you have both electricity and WiFi or access to them. Odds are you are in a shelter of some sort, or on a smart phone (and then kudos to you for reading this on the go). Life might bump and bruise us, it may not always go the way we plan and I know I get frustrated with mine, but here's the thing: You are alive. Because you are alive, everything is possible. So about those eight tips...

1. Stop believing your bullshit.

All that stuff you tell yourself about how you are a commitment phobe or a coward or lazy or not creative or unlucky? Stop it. It's bullshit, and deep down you know it. We are all insecure 14 year olds at heart. We're all scared. We all have dreams inside of us that we've tucked away because somewhere along the line we tacked on those ideas about who we are that buried that essential brilliant, childlike sense of wonder. The more we stick to these scripts about who we are, the longer we live a fraction of the life we could be living. Let it go. Be who you are beneath the bullshit.

2. Be happy now.

Not because The Secret says so. Not because of some shiny happy Oprah crap. But because we can choose to appreciate what is in our lives instead of being angry or regretful about what we lack. It's a small, significant shift in perspective. It's easier to look at what's wrong or missing in our lives and believe that is the big picture -- but it isn't. We can choose to let the beautiful parts set the tone.

3. Look at the stars.

It won't fix the economy. It won't stop wars. It won't give you flat abs, or better sex or even help you figure out your relationship and what you want to do with your life. But it's important. It helps you remember that you and your problems are both infinitesimally small and conversely, that you are a piece of an amazing and vast universe. I do it daily -- it helps.

4. Let people in.

Truly. Tell people that you trust when you need help, or you're depressed -- or you're happy and you want to share it with them. Acknowledge that you care about them and let yourself feel it. Instead of

doing that other thing we sometimes do, which is to play it cool and pretend we only care as much as the other person has admitted to caring, and only open up half way. Go all in -- it's worth it.

5. Stop with the crazy making.

I got to a friend's doorstep the other day, slightly breathless and nearly in tears after getting a little lost, physically and existentially. She asked what was wrong and I started to explain and then stopped myself and admitted, "I'm being stupid and have decided to invent lots of problems in my head." Life is full of obstacles; we don't need to create extra ones. A great corollary to this one is from [The Four Agreements](#), by Don Miguel Ruiz: Don't take things personally. Most of the time, other people's choices and attitudes have absolutely nothing to do with you. Unless you've been behaving like a jerk, in which case...

6. Learn to apologize.

Not the ridiculous, self-deprecating apologizing for who you are and for existing that some people seem to do (what's up with that, anyway?). The ability to sincerely apologize -- without ever interjecting the word "but" -- is an essential skill for living around other human beings. If you are going to be around other people, eventually you will need to apologize. It's an important practice.

7. Practice gratitude.

Practice it out loud to the people around you. Practice it silently when you bless your food. Practice it often. Gratitude is not a first world only virtue. I saw a photo recently, of a girl in abject poverty, surrounded by filth and destruction. Her face was completely lit up with joy and gratitude as she played with a hula hoop she'd been given. Gratitude is what makes what we have enough. Gratitude is the most basic way to connect with that sense of being an integral part of the vastness of the universe; as I mentioned with looking up at the stars, it's that sense of wonder and humility, contrasted with celebrating our connection to all of life.

8. Be kind.

Kurt Vonnegut said it best (though admittedly, and somewhat ashamedly -- I am not a Vonnegut fan): "There's only one rule that I know of, babies -- 'God damn it, you've got to be kind.'"

Kindness costs us nothing and pays exponential dividends. I can't save the whole world. I can't bring peace to Syria. I can't fix the environment or the health care system, and from the looks of it, I may end up burning my dinner.

But I can be kind.

If the biggest thing we do in life is to extend love and kindness to even one other human being, we have changed the world for the better.

That's a hell of a lot more important than flat abs in my book.