

I Gave Myself Three Months to Change My Personality

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One morning last summer, I woke up and announced, to no one in particular: “I choose to be happy today!” Next I journaled about the things I was grateful for and tried to think more positively about my enemies and myself. When someone later criticized me on Twitter, I suppressed my rage and tried to sympathize with my hater. Then, to loosen up and expand my social skills, I headed to an improv class.

I was midway through an experiment—sample size: 1—to see whether I could change my personality. Because these activities were supposed to make me happier, I approached them with the desperate hope of a supplicant kneeling at a shrine.

Psychologists say that personality is [made up of five traits](#): extroversion, or how sociable you are; conscientiousness, or how self-disciplined and organized you are; agreeableness, or how warm and empathetic you are; openness, or how receptive you are to new ideas and activities; and neuroticism, or how depressed or anxious you are. People tend to be happier and healthier when they score higher on the first four traits and lower on neuroticism. I’m pretty open and conscientious, but I’m low on extroversion, middling on agreeableness, and off the charts on neuroticism.

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