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## Book Review

### How To Be A Happy Academic

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Clark, A., & Sousa, B. (2018). *How to be a happy academic*. London: sage.

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**Keywords:** values; effectiveness; personal growth; higher education

This book is person-centred and focuses on the personal values of “academic workers”. It gives a fresh insight and a collection of tools to help academics thrive in a complex and challenging environment. The discussion of the tensions between the values of one person and those of different-minded colleagues gives an unusual perspective on professionalism, as does the challenge of managing one’s values within the organisational missions and systems.

One of the first activities we give our new lecturers is to begin to write their personal philosophy of teaching and to consider how to enact it within a sometimes difficult context. This text will support that process. It will also give experienced staff some intriguing notions.

The book takes the reader through a series of exercises developed from workshops and this gives a clear structure to the text. The Success Pyramid shows Success Indicators at the top above priorities, then Goals, then Tasks. Each layer is tackled in a separate section. I found that the process of writing this review began as a success indicator then moved down through priorities through goals to tasks.

The second section of the book is devoted to developing the Core which is explained as a set of six related domains of academic work with a chapter on each:

- Creativity: Adding the Vital Spark
- Human Work and Self-Work
- Learning: Success, Failure, and the Growth Mindset
- Influence: Persuasion and Connection
- Write Anything Better
- Developing Better Habits and Systems for Everyday Tasks

I found this reminiscent of the writings of Stephen Covey and his habits of effective people. The difference is the context of higher education and the focus on values literacy. It draws on emotional intelligence, on the process of reflective practice, and on the ideas of action research where the academic is both the question and the answer, without referring to any of them explicitly.

The writing is engaging and the format is clear. There are some very useful diagrams such as the one balancing different aspects of one’s academic purpose: passion, mission, vocation and profession. The audit tools scattered liberally through the text provide a useful framework but it might have been helpful to include blank versions at the end. The Case Studies bring the approach to life. There are regular lists of Remarkable Resources, summaries of the key points from seminal texts.

At times I found the style patronising such as putting key sentences in massive block capitals like a newspaper headline. Also there was no need to repeat the Success Pyramid a dozen times. Some of the content is so well known e.g. SMART targets, action planning, and the priority matrix that it could be referenced rather than explained in detail. The focus was very much on an academic researcher rather than an academic teacher which may reduce the appeal for some readers.

I like the title and the book contained what I expected. However, one colleague picked it up and muttered that a “touchy-feely” style was not for him. Another person thought it was aimed at her students. I believe that students and even colleagues who deal mainly in quantitative metrics would benefit from taking the time to explore the underlying tenets of the book. It might actually help to make them happy.

