HACKING HAPPINESS

The whole book on one page, for the refrigerator door.

“That’s the alarm.”

When your heart jumps at a headline, a phone call, or a relative across the table, say it first.

The bug: you have an ancient alarm that can’t tell a lion from a headline. You are not broken. You’re running brilliant old equipment in a brand new world. These are the patches.

Look up.
What’s actually in front of you?

Keep your track record.
“I’ve gotten through every one so far.”

Name it, then ask.
Is there real danger here? What do I actually know? Is there one useful thing I can do, and when?

Spot the fake.
Watch for the urgency trick: the more urgent, the slower. *Who is this, really? What do they want? Why the rush?* Hang up and call back.

Choose what you feed it.
You’re the editor now. *“Who gets paid if I stay scared?”*

Tame the phone.
Silence everything that isn’t a person. Let it sleep in the kitchen. *“What for?”*

Try AI, then check it.
Give it one small job. Check one thing it tells you.

Change the music.
“One song first.” It gets in through the side door.

Move.
“Just to the end of the block.” Give the alarm the ending it’s been asking for.

Breathe out.
“Longer out than in.” In for four, out for six or eight, five times.

Sleep on it.
“That’s the 3 a.m. version.” Things look better in the morning.

Know their lion.
“What’s their lion?” Everyone you love is answering an alarm you can’t hear.

Kids these days.
“Different isn’t wrong.” Is it hurting anyone, or just not how I’d do it?

Find your tribe.
“Say the real thing.” Then show up.

It’s not all yours.
“Is it mine? Is it today?” Then do your part.

Prepare, don’t rehearse.
“One useful step.”

Be strong and generous.
“Who today?” Stay open when the alarm wants you to slam shut.

Mend the fence.
“Nobody has to win Thanksgiving.” Go first. Bring a question, not an opinion.

Pick one. Give it ten minutes a day. Get past minute three. Never miss twice.

From *Hacking Happiness* by Paul McGowan. © 2026 Paul McGowan.
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