



# Happiness@TheSpeedofLife

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter

August 2003, Special Edition: The Power of Positive Emotion

1,714 words of content -- approximate reading time required: 6.86 minutes. And isn't your happiness worth it?

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Welcome to my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the 13 Principles of Happiness in your life and work. It is a (more or less) monthly communication. I invite your comments, reactions, and ideas. Jim

A special welcome to all who've joined us in the past few weeks, including Pam Schuck of Cleveland, who recently became my 500<sup>th</sup> subscriber!

==>If you like what you read here why not share it with a friend?  
==>If you received this from someone else you can join (it's FREE) in a few seconds. Instructions are at the end of this newsletter. I never rent, sell, or give away my lists.

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## I. SPECIAL EDITION: THE POWER OF POSITIVE EMOTION

*"Man is fond of counting his troubles, but he does not count his joys. If he counted them up as he ought to, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for it." ~Fyodor Dostoevsky*

This Special Edition replaces examination of the 13 Principles of Happiness with some exploration of the theories BEHIND those principles: Positive Emotion.

Three months ago I began a six-month class developed and taught by Martin Seligman, PhD, one of the creators of modern Positive Psychology. Traditional psychology is rooted in Freud and Jung, and focuses on fixing what's wrong—helping people who are not functioning fully to get their live back to a "normal" state. Seligman and his colleagues challenged conventional wisdom to ask, "If we can help dysfunctional people move to a more neutral condition, is there something we can do to help functional people create a better condition?"

They began to study the cause-and-effect cycle of POSITIVE emotions, e.g. gratitude, joy, hope, interest, contentment, love, and, of course, happiness. They learned some amazing things—specifically, that people who experience more positive emotion in their lives...

...are more RESILIENT. They hold up to stress better, and recover from negative or traumatic situations more quickly.

...are more CREATIVE. They typically see more options available to them and are more comfortable trying new ideas and experiences.

...are HEALTHIER. The Mind-Body Connection is strong. In clinical studies, for instance, researchers found that people who were trained to focus on and write about the positive aspects of their lives had more rapid cardio-vascular recovery from stressful events than both the negative



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focus group and the neutral (control) group. For more on this, see the work of Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, at the University of Michigan (type in her name on Google for lots of links)

...LIVE LONGER. Several long-term studies link positive emotion to longer life. One of these is the Nun Study: 678 Notre Dame sisters (survivors currently 70+ to over 100) participating in longevity research. Researchers analyzed autobiographies written by the nuns in their early 20s, looking for key words such as "happy," "joy," "love," "hopeful" and "content." They found that the nuns who articulated more positive emotions lived as much as 10 years longer than those expressing fewer positive emotions. ([http://www.canoe.ca/Health0105/08\\_nuns-ap.html](http://www.canoe.ca/Health0105/08_nuns-ap.html), or go to Google.com and type in Nun Study)

The best news of all is that people -- including YOU! -- can LEARN to experience more positive emotions in their life by engaging in a variety of reflective, skill-building exercises.

What I am learning is that **positive emotions are like our muscles. When we work out regularly, our muscles grow larger and/or stronger – when we don't exercise, the unused muscles become weak and may even atrophy.** Our emotional "muscles" need to be worked out a bit to help them grow stronger. The more often we seek out and experience positive emotions (happiness), the more resilient we can become, and the greater our future capacity to deal with negative events, stress, aging, etc. Pretty cool, huh?

Please Note: Being "happy" does not mean being bubbly and smiling all the time. Positive emotion can show up in very quiet ways in our lives, such as feeling hopeful, noticing things we are grateful for, appreciating the beauty that exists in everyday life, or simply being content and at peace. Our media-drenched world tends to focus on what is bizarre and negative, yet there is so much to enjoy when we try a different approach.

### ***Tips for Training Your Positive Emotion "Muscles"***

~~ Document Your Blessings. At the end of the day, write down three things that went really well that day. These may range from the simple (a friend paid for my coffee this morning) to the really big (I got a raise!). Next to each, answer the question: "why did this good thing happen?" Try this for two weeks, and notice how it increases your daily awareness of the good things that occur in your life.

Note: some may find this difficult at first. That's a sign your "positive awareness" muscle is a bit weaker. So start with one per day. You'll find the muscle strengthens over time.

~~ Take a "Beauty Walk." Give yourself 20-30 minutes for this. Take a relaxed walk around your neighborhood, office complex, or even the local mall – it's best if you choose a venue you are familiar with. As you walk, invite yourself to notice the world differently, through a POSITIVE lens. Focus your attention on things you don't normally notice: the splash of color on those hydrangea bushes up the street, the neighbor who is cutting the lawn for an elderly widow, the intricate arrangement of colors in a display window, toddlers in awe of the leaping water in a mall fountain, wildflowers growing in the cracks of a driveway, the whisper of a wind chime. Extra Impact: take time to write it all down, or tell the "story" of your walk to a friend, and notice how savoring the experience heightens your positive feelings.

~~ Write a Gratitude Letter. The positive emotion of gratitude connects us to the kindness of others – yet our society lacks many formal rituals for thanking others. Think of someone from your past who has made a difference for you by their kindness, but has never heard you express your gratitude. Write them a letter, expressing in concrete, specific terms what they did for you, how it affected your life, and how you are grateful to them. Make it heartfelt. Extra Impact: Deliver it personally and read it aloud in their presence. (Don't tell them in advance the purpose of your visit).



~\*~\*~QUOTES~\*~\*~

*"The world is full of people looking for spectacular happiness while they snub contentment."  
~Doug Larson*

*"You need to learn to be happy by nature, because you'll seldom have the chance to be happy by circumstance." ~Lavetta Sue Wegman*

*"This is my 'depressed stance.' When you're depressed, it makes a lot of difference how you stand. The worst thing you can do is straighten up and hold your head high because then you'll start to feel better. If you're going to get any joy out of being depressed, you've got to stand like this." ~Charlie Brown*

*"Happiness is the resultant of the relative strengths of positive and negative feelings rather than an absolute amount of one or the other." ~Norman Bradburn*

If you'd like to download a 1-page summary of the 13 Principles as a reference, you can do so right now: <http://www.1leadercoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>

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## **II. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: LESSONS FROM THE BEACH**

I recently spent two wonderful weeks at the beach on holiday. The combination of sun, sand, sea, and the occasional spectacular storm created a perfect setting for detachment. Every day is pretty much the same, so it's easy to slip into a relaxed state of observation.

During the second week, when I'd forgotten about "doing work" and was focused on just BEING, I began to record those observations in my journal – pages and pages of them. What emerged was both fun and interesting, so I thought I'd share a few with my subscribers. As you read on, **think of these as metaphors for life and happiness.** (And if you have any ideas on how I might develop them, please drop me a note. Who knows... maybe this list will eventually morph into a chapter in the book I have yet to write....)

### **RIDING JET SKIS**

- ~ The faster you are going when you take your foot off the gas, the farther you go before coming to a complete stop.
- ~ Being dumped and getting wet are part of the fun.
- ~ Before you leave the dock, learn how to right the boat in case you flip.

### **GOLFING**

~ Golfers don't care about the weather. When you are playing a match, everyone has to deal with the same conditions. The playing field is always level.

### **THE BEACH**

- ~ Stormy seas make for the best body surfing.
- ~ What looks like a pitch-black night from inside a lit house is a starlit night from out on the beach. But you don't know that till you venture out and let your eyes adjust.
- ~ Dark clouds and thunder don't necessarily mean that it's going to rain; and sunshine doesn't mean that it won't.
- ~ The sands shift overnight, every night. Unless your trail is deep and strong it won't be there tomorrow.
- ~ The winds can change at any time and can come from multiple directions even in the same day. If your tent is not firmly rooted, you will get blown away.



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- ~ Cloudy days can be a blessing.
- ~ Know your own limits or you will ruin the fun.
- ~ Afternoon naps are delightfully decadent.

What are the metaphors in YOUR life?

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### III. IN THE WORKPLACE

When under the gun, understaffed due to vacations, in the midst of a dozen conflicting priorities, and feeling like you are being “meeting’d” to death, it’s tough to practice optimism, eh? Although some corporate cultures teach that action “off the agenda” is a mortal sin, we know that taking a moment to just “BE” can help us re-center and return to the workplace with more energy and creativity.

TRY THIS: Start out your next team or executive staff meeting with an exercise I call, simply, Good News. As the meeting starts, announce that you’re going to begin by going around and asking everyone to share a piece of good news from the past week. It can be personal or workplace focused. Be sure to have something of your own to start!

Not only might you learn a thing or two about how the others on your team think, but be prepared to watch the energy of the group rise a notch or two as people share things that they are happy or proud about.

Variation on a theme: At the end of a meeting, ask everyone to identify something positive they are taking away from the meeting (other than more work!). Either version of this exercise will help the entire group exercise their positive emotion muscle.

Remember, leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader if they focus on helping others to succeed and grow!

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### IV. RANDOM FUN STUFF

GO HERE, VIEW THIS: <http://www.astercity.net/~tobik/pingpong.html>

Here is a perfect example of totally useless but fun items out on the internet. Watch this game of ping pong closely. If you’ve seen the movie The Matrix it will look vaguely familiar. Is this how Keanu Reeves did the special effects in that movie? The first time I viewed this video clip I was, as they say in IM-speak, ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing). I hope you enjoy it even half as much...

KEYS 2 KIDS: I’ve recently worked with a client in Queen Creek, Arizona who coaches parents. She’s written for a local paper and issues her unique brand of child-rearing advice in an e-newsletter. With five kids ranging in age from toddler to teen, Michelle believes in teaching kids to be responsible, while teaching parents how to “let go.” Some great stuff. Two examples:  
--> “Run the vacuum every day while your new baby is napping – it trains them to sleep soundly.”  
--> “Every time you do something for your child that they could do for themselves, you handicap them.” Whether you are a parent or not, you may enjoy Michelle’s direct, no-nonsense style. You can sign up for her e-zine on the homepage at [www.Keys2Kids.com](http://www.Keys2Kids.com).

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### V. INSTRUCTIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Jim Smith is a personal and leadership coach, trainer, and Speaker. Jim is a recovered corporate



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executive who has over a decade of experience helping leaders at all levels to be happier and more successful in their lives and careers. He'd love to help you succeed in a bigger game! Why not bring Jim into your organization for a mid-day "Happy Hour" (it's alcohol free!) on the 13 Principles?

=> P.S. Don't keep us a secret. We grow by referral, so please pass it on! To join our complimentary newsletter, please visit my website: <http://www.1leadercoach.com/> .

Drop me a line anytime with your feedback and questions! Jim <mailto:Jim@1LeaderCoach.com>

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**Happiness is a decision, not an event.**

**How will YOU decide today?**

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