



**Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter  
Edition 30: You Get What You Expect**

1,672 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **6.7** minutes. And isn't your happiness worth it?

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Welcome to my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the Principles of Happiness and Positive Emotion in your life and work.

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**I. YOU GET WHAT YOU EXPECT**

Story: I'm sitting in a coffee shop, writing. Background music creates a sort of white noise, masking multiple streams of conversation that I only half-notice from within my envelope of concentration.

One recurring theme in the chatter occurs whenever a new customer walks in. "How are you today?" asks the bright-eyed, caffeinated clerk behind the register. Most respond with a simple "fine," or "okay." Some brave a "great!" or maybe a low key "I'm not quite awake yet."

One guy loudly replies, "Shitty!" A pause (2, 3, 4...). "Oh...." and then, falling back into her usual patter, she asks, "Well, what can I get for you today?" Ah, but he doesn't seem to want to let it go. In what can only be described as his 'stage voice', the patron continues: "You'll find out when you're older. It's shitty being old."

By now, all other conversation has paused while everyone in the shop watches this mini-drama unfold (he's being too loud to ignore). I look up to see who's talking. The gentleman is maybe a couple years older than I, grey hair around the temples and a bit of a paunch. He seems to be walking fine, all his limbs work, he has a nearly full head of hair, and apparently he has enough discretionary cash to afford a large mocha cinnamon latte thingy.

Yet he chooses to describe his mood as "shitty" as he screws his face into a nasty scowl. I wonder what sort of day he's having, as he shuffles grumpily along, proclaiming his mood as though it is an unbearable weight, an inescapable consequence of aging, a mood he is condemned to carry. No one really wanted to continue conversation with him.

Is his day REALLY shitty? Well, as soon as he decided it was... it became that.

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Two days later, I'm having breakfast in a diner when three older gentlemen are seated at the table next to me. One of them trails behind, his walker stuck on a chair leg. He sits slowly and



carefully, using gnarled hands to pull his legs around underneath the table. The server for our section sweeps by with a tray full of food for another table and chirps, "I'll be right with you guys. How y'all doin' today?" The walker guy bounces right back with, "Not bad, for a kid!"

Wow, what a contrast! I'm betting that "walker guy" is having a much better day than the coffee guy – and so are the people around him.

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"But Jim," some say, "it's just words. Not everybody is all chipper and positive. I'd rather tell the truth than lie about how I'm feeling!"

OK, I hear you, and I agree that 'lying' is not usually a good strategy. Yet I believe they are more than "just words."

There is great power in words. Words and the energy they carry can create or destroy – and they define us as individuals in addition to defining our world. Yet even though we know this, we often let them flow out unattended, until suddenly we encounter negative consequences.

So much of the pain we cause ourselves and each other could be avoided if we were just a bit more attentive to what we say. Our relationships, our work environment, even our feelings about ourselves, can be transformed simply by taking time to think about how words create our reality.

### **Do This For Yourself!**

The first step in changing your world is to start becoming conscious of what you say – both out loud to others and (in your head) to yourself.

So, for just a week, be aware of not just what you say but also the way you say it. See if you can sense the emotional effect your words create. How do you feel after you speak? How do other people react?

I promise you that when you observe, you'll notice new opportunities for yourself.

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

*"To speak and to speak well are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks." ~Ben Jonson*

*"God has given you one face, and you make yourself another." ~William Shakespeare*

*"Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud." ~Hermann Hesse*

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

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## **II. IN THE WORKPLACE: SETTING EXPECTATIONS? HUGE!**

I'm currently working with three clients who, in very different ways and for different reasons, are



focused on improving their organization's Performance Management systems. The three cultures differ dramatically, as do the issues that need addressing. Yet a common issue has emerged at all three: we need to do a better job of setting expectations, or goal setting.

I believe attention to expectations is not merely an HR exercise. Rather, I believe that good conversation about clear, challenging goals can make a HUGE difference in performance and workplace outcomes.

In a frequently reported study undertaken in the 1960s, psychologist Robert Rosenthal and his colleagues provided elementary school teachers in an inner city school with a list of their students who, based on testing, were predicted to blossom academically. In fact, the names on the list were randomly selected but, of course, the teachers did not know this. At the end of the year, the students on the list did blossom compared with those not on the list.<sup>1</sup>

The teachers in the Rosenthal study may have thought that they were responding to all children in the same way. However, if you expect children to succeed, you will behave in ways to reinforce this expectation even without being aware of doing so. For instance, if you ask students considered to be "budding superstars" to answer a question and they cannot, you are more likely to support them, help them think through the problem, and eventually arrive at the correct answer. You do so since you expect that they can learn and when they do not, you consider how best to assist them. In contrast, if you ask children who are not perceived as having great potential a question and they do not know the answer, you are apt to call immediately on another student. Also, budding superstars compared with their peers are more likely to elicit smiles and a positive tone of voice. They will respond in kind.

Syndicated *Boston Globe* columnist William Raspberry addressed the issue of expectations. In the article titled "Kids Won't Learn if We Expect Failure," he wrote of a conversation he had with Rod Paige, the Secretary of Education (2001-2005). They discussed factors that contribute to student failure, especially for children from poor homes. Paige offered the following opinion:

"One difference is expectation . . . . If a teacher does not believe every child can learn, and the evidence is that some children are not learning, the world seems all right. But if the teacher believes all children can learn, and some children aren't learning, then there is a problem that demands answers."

I see the so-called "Rosenthal Effect" show up in the workplace just as in the classroom. Suzy is labeled the "up-and-comer" and suddenly all her ideas are brilliant and her mistakes are deemed "great risks, learning opportunities." Meanwhile, John is stuck with the "unreliable" label because he missed an important deadline back in 2003, and he is continually frustrated because he can't get his boss to pay attention to his ideas.

When we consistently set clear, challenging goals for people, then coach them from a place of "I expect that you will deliver. I'm here to help you succeed," then guess what? We have a lot more high performers than in a work group where the manager calls every success "a lucky break."

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this and the next three paragraphs were adapted from an article by Robert Brooks, PhD, which can be read in its entirety here: <http://www.drrobertbrooks.com/writings/articles/0210.html>



Expect more – from your team, from yourself, and from life – and let others know your expectations. You're more likely to have a happy experience than when you expect only mediocrity or worse, don't communicate anything at all.

Remember: **Leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader who chooses to inspire others and help create positive expectations.**

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### III. RANDOM STUFF: DO YOU BLOG?

From Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

A **blog** (short for **web log**) is a website where entries are made and displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic.

*The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of most blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual although some focus on photographs (photoblog), videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog), or audio (podcasting), and are part of a wider network of social media.*

*"Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning, to maintain or add content to a blog.*

Blogs are REALLY HOT as a communication, media, and marketing tool right now. In May 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 71 million blogs.

BUT... as much as there are lots of them, seems everyone I know finds blogs exhausting. Does anyone actually read blogs, except for other bloggers?

I'm often encouraged to start my own blog. What do you think? If you have an opinion one way or the other, [drop me a line](#) with your reasoning. Just for fun! ☺

### A Wedding Update: Holding Pattern

We are now in the lull between the dress selection and the ramp up for the shower in the fall. Numerous friends and relatives have let us know they made their hotel reservations in South Bend. Cheryl and I have an appointment next week with the seamstress for the first fitting of her Mother-of-the-Bride dress. And work has begun on the favors for the wedding reception.

And still, underneath the calm, excitement grows. December feels far, far away... and incredibly close! Stay tuned.

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### IV. INSTRUCTIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Jim Smith is The Executive Happiness Coach™. He is a recovering corporate executive whose passion is to help people discover and increase the amount of Happiness in their lives and work.

View past editions at <http://www.1leadercoach.com/newsletter/archives.cfm>



Drop me a line anytime with your feedback and queries! 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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