



**Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter  
Edition 36: It's In The Silence**

1,887 words of content -- approximate reading time required: **7.54** 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.

**IN THIS ISSUE**

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- I. Happiness is in the Silence
- II. In The Workplace: Creating Quiet Moments
- III. Wedding Update: The Calm Before the Storm?
- IV. Instructions and contact info

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**I. HAPPINESS IS IN THE SILENCE**

Happiness is, well, complicated. Know what I mean? Most representations of Happiness in the media involve people in varying states of unfettered joy, with a generous dollop of gifting and bright sunshine and puppies. But that narrow interpretation of happiness can shut out some of the more quiet – and possibly deeper – manifestations of happiness.

Happiness grows in the silence and the quiet moments, as well.

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Last month I mentioned that Cheryl – my wife -- had experienced a “meltdown” of sorts. It was pretty major, actually, and working with her emotional recovery has been my highest priority over the past six weeks.

She's lucky (so she says!) to be married to The Executive Happiness Coach. And truly, we've been working with the same basic tools I use with my clients to help them rediscover and strengthen their positive emotion muscles.

As I've shared with friends, family, and work colleagues what happened to Cheryl, I've been stunned at how many people I encounter say, “That's me... I'm like your wife.” And a great number of them have shared with me that Cheryl's story has caused them to reexamine how they're currently living their life -- and make changes before something happens to them.

So in the spirit of writing about what's right in front of me trusting that it's the right thing to do, I give you...

**Cheryl's Story (co-written by Cheryl Smith):**

*First, some background from Jim.* Cheryl made an appearance in the Emergency Room in mid-August, where she was rushed from her place of work. Her blood sugar was 41 (that's bad! – normal is 70-150) and her blood pressure was 70 over nothing (really bad!). They filled her up





with antibiotics for a minor infection she was carrying at the time, and she returned to her routines in a few days. We thought what happened was an isolated episode.

However, she continued to be fatigued – unable to sleep at night, then difficulty getting up and functioning the next day, etc. She barely made it through our daughter's bridal shower on 9-23, and the next day suddenly collapsed.

Basically, her systems – physical and emotional – all shut down. No appetite, no sleep cycle, nausea 24/7, interminable fatigue and physical weakness, feelings of depression and anxiety, disorientation, fuzzy vision.... And to make matters worse, she had reactions to some of the sleep aids our doctor prescribed, so it was a week before she was able to sleep.

We were incredibly frustrated, as her symptoms could arise from a dozen different causes. So figuring out how to treat her was a process of “diagnosis by exclusion,” meaning that we started with obvious stuff and started ruling things out....

After many tests (and a lot of blood draws) the doctor was able to rule out a series of possible physical illnesses. What emerged as the prime diagnosis is that she **decompensated** (yes, it's a real word!) In psychological terms it means: *The inability to maintain defense mechanisms in response to stress*, In plain English, she worked herself into a place of extreme mental exhaustion in response to stress, and her emotional system collapsed, taking the physical along with it.

We now believe we can trace her current condition back four years ago to when her mom died, followed the next year by our daughter Kara's sudden death, then by a couple years of working six days a week for a third of the year during tax season, lots of family changes, etc... and to the present, with our house rehab project and the wedding coming up fast. When one's stress immune system is weakened, even positive stressors (like the wedding) become impossible to handle.

She has clearly been trying for too long to ignore her own stress, and so became like the proverbial boiled frog: the temperature just kept going up one tiny degree at a time – so gradual she was unaware of the change – until the water was boiling around her.

Ok, so stress and anxiety incapacitated her. Once diagnosed, our doctor put her on some medication, all the while stressing that she needs to change how she manages stress.

The irony here, in case you're missing it, is that she's married to a guy who coaches life balance and stress management – and she'd been actively rejecting all that “touchy-feely stuff” for years.

Suddenly, I've got her attention.

### **Cheryl's Perspective**

*Cheryl:* “When Jim asked me to write about my experience, the first thing I thought of was something that happened about two weeks before my meltdown. Jim had been on my case about learning how to be calm. He was concerned I might not make it through the wedding, and he wanted me to practice taking deep breaths.



So one night as we were getting ready for bed he was rubbing my back and he leaned forward and said, “how about you take in a nice, deep breath?” I was so irritated! So I said, “Don’t stress me out by making me breathe – I’m trying to get ready for bed!” End of discussion.

How stupid was I being to say that *breathing* stressed me out? I was so tied up in knots I could not even take 30 seconds at bedtime to relax.

When I was diagnosed, my doctor said to me, “the medication will help, but you still have to change how you live your life.” So I turned to Jim and said, “help!”

These are some of practices he’s taught me that have proven to me that it is possible to live life without constantly being on the edge of panic and anxiety (which is where I’ve lived much of the past couple years)

**1. Calm is in me.** First, he’s taught me what CALM feels like. And I’ve learned that calm is a form of happiness – a quiet, silent form of happiness. I used to say, “I suck in my calm from you.” He’s helped me realize that it’s already in me, and I just have to access it.

**2. Breathing. Deep breathing.** I cannot put into words what an enormous difference it makes for me to take a DEEP breath into my body. I’ve learned that the shallow, chest breathing I did was just reinforcing my feelings of constant panic. It took me almost two weeks of practice just to learn how to breath deeply into my gut.

Once I learned, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve used this tool to relax my mind, relax my body, help me fall asleep, help weather one of my frequent “panic attacks,” and to overcome my feelings of depression.

**3. Touch Meditation.** Jim taught me a simple form of touch meditation ([Jin Shin Jyutsu](#)) he learned from his own coach. It is simple to do and involves simple hand positions that supposedly align the body’s energy flows. Two months ago I would have told him he’s crazy. Today I can tell you that this practice significantly helped me to calm my body again – for sleeping or from panic attacks. I used it most frequently during the first several weeks when I was really out of balance.

**4. Journaling.** Jim’s kept a journal for years, and I know he recommends it to his clients all the time. I saw it as a huge waste of time. Now I write in my journal daily. It helps me to capture my thoughts. It forces my brain to slow down. And when I express my feelings I find it is much easier to release something instead of worrying it to death.

**5. Gratitude exercise.** I write ten things I am grateful for every day. This was really hard for me at first; yet it was critically important for me to focus on something positive when everything seemed so negative – and it was so much easier for me to look at the negative. Jim’s forcing me to show him my list every day helped me change what I look at each day.

**6. The Power of Hugs.** I’ve never been much more than a “polite” hugger. Jim’s always preached that a person should have 12 hugs a day for growth. Now, I “get it.” As I’m feeling stronger and re-connecting with more people, I always begin with a hug. It feels great.

**7. Being Still is Doing Something.** I have never been patient. Jim says I “don’t grasp the concept.” He’s helped me understand that sometimes doing nothing IS doing something. It is helping me develop patience, and let go of what is not important.



All these exercises to help me focus on calm and patience have helped me gradually return to feeling happier.”

**Do This For Yourself!**

For many of us, the holiday season brings opportunities for moments of happiness and periods of stress.

Don't miss the lesson in Cheryl's experience.

If you start a small practice now, before the stressful times occur, you may find it easier to just relax and enjoy your holiday celebrations.

Calm and peace: It's in you.

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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.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>

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**II. IN THE WORKPLACE: CREATING QUIET MOMENTS**

The “Speed of Life” that this newsletter refers to really shows up in the workplace. Everything's moving faster. We are constantly pounded with information. Change is relentless and brutal. And our job follows us everywhere, thanks to BlackBerrys, cell phones, and the wireless internet.

Feeling stressed? It's no surprise -- humans are simply not programmed to be constantly “On.” Our systems (mental, emotional, physical, spiritual) need time to recharge so we don't burn to a frazzle. We need an occasional time out.

If you're in a leadership position, you can create that time out for yourself by making sure you take your vacations – and take them OFF THE GRID so you can really recharge. In the long run you'll accomplish more because you'll be stronger. In times of crisis, you'll have a deeper capacity to address issues than if your internal engine is running on fumes.

And you can help others in many ways. Every once in a while, stop to celebrate and have a little fun with your team. Create quiet moments of conversation when you sit down with people to provide positive feedback and discuss their development.

Remember: Leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader who provides a positive influence and is able to project calm in a crisis!

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**III. THE WEDDING UPDATE: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM?**

We are in a stretch of quiet. In the past month all the wedding action's been generated by our postal carrier – every day, we receive and open another batch of responses.





I am fascinated by the predictability of the returns – each day for 18 weekdays we’ve received exactly four (4) response cards. Is this a message from the Universe, or merely a statistical improbability?

Yes, this is how boring the past month has been.

Oh, and the UPS guy drops by three or four times a week with another mysterious package. We’re saving them all, unopened, until Kelly returns home from Philadelphia the week prior to the wedding.

Ten more days of calm, and then things will start to happen. Fast.

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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.TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com/newsletter/archives.cfm>

Drop me a line anytime with your feedback and queries! Jim  
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**Happiness is a decision, not an event.  
How will YOU decide today?**

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