



Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 52: Fake It Till You Make It

1,905 words of content -- approximate reading time required: 7.62 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. SPREAD THE WORD: Please forward to a friend who needs more happiness.

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I. FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT

During the past month my training as a Mentor Coach for the [Newfield Network](#) kicked into high gear. I am studying coaching from a new perspective: as an assessor of the coaching rather than as a participant in the conversation (e.g. as coach or client). And from that different point of view I am more and more aware of the role the body plays in creating real change.

We Must Engage the Mind-Body Connection

The Mind-Body connection is this: What you think affects how you feel, and those emotions affect your body – your non-verbal language like posture and facial expression, the actions you take, the words that come out of your mouth, how you walk, talk, and even your pulse rate and how you breathe.

While sometimes wonderful things happen *during* a coaching conversation, the fact is that most coaching occurs *between* conversations as clients process and expand the ideas generated from the conversation. We can together create a new idea, feeling, or posture during a coaching discussion, but merely talking about it and trying it *once* does nothing. It is only through repetition that a new habit can form, a new thinking can overwrite an old "tape recording," or a new response can replace an old instinctive emotional reaction.

Here's a common clip from a conversation:

"Jim, this is very UNnatural for me. It's not comfortable."

"That's not unusual. Your system wants to go back to the thinking/feeling/actions that it's always known, even if that old pattern was unproductive."

"But...it feels really fake for me to talk/behave this way."

"Have you ever faked behavior before? Has there ever been a time when you imitated someone or put on a false face just to 'fit in' or be in compliance with what was required?"

Often, there's a realization here. We've all had the Human experience of intentionally modifying our behavior to fit in or to avoid a consequence. When we say, "This is who I am," we are forgetting that at some past time the behavior/reaction that is now habit was, in fact, something we had to fake until we got it "right."

That's why we call this 'fake it till you make it.' You have to practice, practice, practice a new thinking or behavior many times to overlay that OLD thinking or behavior pattern.

It Takes Many Repetitions

Somatic experts (those who work with the body as a whole system) tell us that it requires a minimum of 300 repetitions of a new action for our bodies to even start to get comfortable with it, and thousands of repetitions before it becomes an unthinking response. And Brain experts tell us that it takes many, many repetitions of a new thought to lay down new neural pathways in the brain.

So is change hard? Yes. AND you've done this many times before -- how do you think you developed your many habits in the first place?!

Do This For Yourself

Stop for a moment and consider something you want to change in yourself. For example, you may want to:

- Change a story you tell yourself (aka self-talk)
- Shift an automatic response you have to certain people or situations
- Live in a different mood (like calm vs anxiety, or expectation vs sadness)
- Modify a behavior or posture

Here are a few ideas to help you create a new pattern:

New Thinking

Since you have been thinking <that old thought> for many years, the neural pathways in your brain are like deep channels. To overwrite them, take a deliberate and consistent approach to working with a new thought or new story.

- **Write it down.** Give it life on paper. Scott Adams, the creator of Dilbert, says he used this technique for years to shift his self-identity from corporate wage-slave to comic strip illustrator. Every day, he wrote down his new thought 15 times. The repetition combined with the physical act of writing (engaging the body), every day, every day, every day, eventually gave him the courage to leave his day job... and we all know the rest. He claims he still uses this tool to help him adopt new thoughts about himself.
- **Sound it out.** Say the new thought out loud, every day. Engage your voice and your ears in the process. You might even record it (in your own voice) and listen to that daily. Have you ever saved a really cool voicemail message for a couple of months just so you

can listen to it over and over again, and experience that little thrill you get when you hear it? So, call and leave yourself a message with your new thought soundtrack, and every time you pick up voicemail you will dig the new path in your brain just a wee bit deeper.

- **Speak it to others.** If the thought is something about yourself, start using it in conversation. It will feel incredibly fake, of course. But remember: that's not necessarily because it's untrue, but simply that you're not used to saying it. After awhile, it will feel more natural, you'll begin to own it yourself, and eventually it will be embedded in your cells.

New Emotional Body

Every emotion you live in corresponds to different body postures, breathing, and energy. If you want to live in a different mood or emotion start with your body – thus reversing from mind-body to a Body-Mind connection: a different body will cause different emotional responses, which will in turn affect your thoughts.

- **Act like a different mood.** Recognize that every mood comes from a different body posture. Stand in front a mirror and notice the way your body looks when you are worried, fearful, sad or frustrated. Shift yourself to embody what you want more of, e.g. calm, confidence, happiness, or patience. Straighten up, open up, uncurl, unfold, or relax your body/posture. Don't forget to shift your facial expression to match the mood you want to carry.

Notice how you feel in different postures. (Remember, different may feel uncomfortable at first.) Practice that adjusted posture multiple times daily.

If you are unsure of what mood you are putting out, do the above exercise with a friend who can help you “re-sculpt” your body, facial expression, and breathing.

New Behavior or Posture

You've been living in your body for several decades, and you've grown comfortable with the way you walk, sit, stand, breathe, and otherwise carry yourself. How you do so is neither good nor bad, it just is. But as long as you behave the way you've always behaved, you'll always get the same outcomes.

- **Increase awareness.** For a few days or a week, just make notes on how you show up. How do you normally sit in a meeting? Do you more often lean forward or backward? What expression do you have on your face when you walk around? How do you stand when you are in conversation? What do you do with your hands? Where are your shoulders? And so on... For many people, the simple act of paying attention to their own non-verbals inspires a shift.
- **Experiment.** Try a new way of walking, standing, or sitting, that will give off a different non-verbal signal, or that will cause you to feel differently when you do it. E.g. open your chest, drop your shoulders, sit/stand with a tall spine, try a solid stance vs weight on one foot, put feet flat on floor vs curled under chair, walk with your head up or a smile on your face. Note which changes create positive reactions in you or others, then select just one to practice until it feels natural.



- **Put on a new outfit.** Do you have certain outfits in your closet that make you feel better when you wear them? When you know what image you want to convey to self and others, just put on that “body” like a set of clothes. Maybe it won’t fit as well at first, but you’ll grow into it

I have a vivid memory of how I faked myself into confidence when I was in my late teens. I had fairly low self-esteem in high school, and it apparently showed in the way I walked and sat – slouchy, head down, and so on. When I was 16 my mother was pregnant with my youngest sister (there were eventually eight of us!) and one day I was sitting with some friends when my mom walked by. Patty, a friend who was always ragging on me to stand up straight, said, “look at that, Jim. Your mom’s seven months pregnant and she’s got great presence. If she can stand that tall while carrying that much weight, why can’t you?” That conversation embarrassed me so much (doesn’t everything embarrass a 16-year old?!) that I vowed to take up Patty’s challenge. I remember spending an entire summer practicing how I walked, keeping my spine straight and my shoulders back. By the time my baby sister was born that Labor Day, I lived in a new body that knew how to experience self-confidence. I entered my Junior year in high school – and the rest of my life – as a very different person.

Physical, emotional, and mental are quite intertwined. An intentional shift in any domain will affect all three... so you can come from any direction that works for you, then repeat over and over until you start to notice that new thinking/response no longer feels fake. Then one day you’ll realize it’s become part of “who you are” when that thinking/response shows up at times of stress and when you’re moving fast.

That’s when you’ll know you’ve made it!

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The 13 Principles of Happiness provide a framework for shifting how you show up in your world – 13 practices you can choose to Fake till they feel real for you.

Why not download and post a 1-page summary of all 13 as a reminder? You can do so here: <http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>. Take care of you.

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**II. I REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE!**

Times are tough, sure. AND I still have all my skills, my connections, my knowledge, and my health. And my optimism. I refuse to live in fear and anxiety.

Have my retirement funds taken a nosedive? Yeah, ya betcha. I’m not planning to retire for at least a decade, so any “loss” is on paper only.

I heard a story on NPR the other day about a group of people on the East Coast who had T-shirts made up that read, “I refuse to participate in the recession.” The story focused on how attitude affects behavior. Many of the people in the group had been affected by business downturns, but they’d made a decision to remain positive. “People lose jobs all the time in a good economy,” said one guy. “If I buy in to the idea that there are ‘no jobs out there’ I will sink into depression. But I just visited Monster.com, and there are lots of jobs available. I choose to focus on that.”

