



## Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 62: The Hidden Gift of Crisis

**2,287** words of content including several practices and powerful questions to provoke your personal development. Approximate reading time required: **9.14** 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.

### 2010: Creating More Happy Conversation

As noted last month, I will shortly launch a second list that will feature more frequent messaging and conversation. I will issue a few extra notes to THIS list during the next month, and then return to the (only) monthly communication. If you want to come along, you'll need to register for the other list. If this newsletter is enough happiness for you, just delete the extra messages and next month we'll return to normal. Thank you!

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### I. THE HIDDEN GIFT OF CRISIS

Happy New Year, my dear readers! 2009 is now for the history books (thank goodness!). I hope that 2010 has begun to manifest the great things that you expect and deserve from a new year and a new decade.

The year-end holiday season is a difficult time for many Americans. Even when you love your family and friends, the six weeks from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day require an intensity and intimacy that can stress even the most positive and organized among us. My family was certainly tested to the max this year... and what happened over our holidays has been so central to my world that I have no choice but to write about it in this month's edition.

### Shock!

Literally during the very hour that this newsletter appeared in your Inbox last month, I was sitting in a doctor's office with my wife, Cheryl, seeking the cause of some minor vision issues she'd been having. Her ophthalmologist walked into the room with Cheryl's MRI films and announced, "Well, we discovered the cause of your vision problems: you have a brain tumor."

And in that moment...our world shifted.



## Looking for the Gift in Crisis

Have you ever been in that space? Where you're tooling along in life, minding your own business, when suddenly everything stops? Or when suddenly, a huge black chasm of unknown opens up in front of you and you feel you might fall into the abyss?

That "Moment," that crisis, occurs in everyone's life at some point. Job loss. Traffic accident. Serious injury. Unexpected death. Stock market/financial loss. Diagnosis of illness. Reorganization. A break in/burglary. Natural disaster.

Large and small, these crises occur in our lives. And typically, we react according to our programming, using those skills most familiar to us. Some of us go to fear and some to anger; some withdraw or sink into sadness, and some shift into hyper-control mode in hopes of making it 'go away.'

Others, however, reflect on what happened, how they handled it, and what they might do to improve their ability to handle future stress. They look for the gift, or the learning in the crisis.

Then they resolve to live their life in a different way.

So that next time (when it comes) they will be stronger and wiser.

## "You have a Brain Tumor"

Ok, so back to the story. Within two days we were sitting in front of another doctor, a world-class neurologist at the Cleveland Clinic, who told us, "these sorts of tumors grow very slowly – yours has probably been growing for 15 to 20 years – until one day they make themselves known. Yours has declared itself..."

"...and it has to come out."

Cheryl took a deep breath, and asked, "What are my options?" And that is how she ended up having Brain Surgery on December 24, Christmas Eve.

I don't intend this newsletter to be about her surgery or recovery, but I will tell you this: the 8-hour procedure removed 99% of the tumor, it was not cancer, and while recovery from brain surgery takes a v-e-r-y long time, she is progressing well.

{Note: I issued written reports to family and friends every few days for the past month, and have posted them all on a back page on my blog. So if you'd like to know more, you can visit <http://www.lifewithhappiness.com/life-after-brain-surgery/>}

## What Does This Have To Do With Happiness?

So, what does all this have to do with happiness and positive emotion?

Well, frankly, everything. What we learned from this experience has affirmed everything I've implemented in my life and coached others around over the past decade, and reinforced for all of us the vital importance of perspective and practice.

**Perspective:** how you choose to look at a situation (the interpretations you make of it) create nearly 100% of your experience. A brain tumor, a heart attack, a job loss, or a death can begin a spiral down into a dark place of depression and victimhood... or can be seen as a challenge that requires new skills or an opportunity to reach out and connect with others. The same event, viewed differently, can be for one person the end of the world and for someone else a new beginning. AND YOU GET TO CHOOSE WHICH WAY YOU LOOK AT IT!

**Practice:** As I've said many times, "We become what we repeatedly do." There is simply no way you can lift a heavy weight or run a marathon if you've not spent time training your muscles. In like manner, there is simply no way you'll be able to encounter a dark time and bounce back quickly if you've not experienced some happiness, joy, or optimism in normal times. If you've not practiced happiness, your emotional choices maybe limited to fear, depression, or sadness. EXERCISING YOUR EMOTIONAL MUSCLES GIVES YOU THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE YOUR RESPONSE TO WHAT HAPPENS IN LIFE.

### **The Best Gifts are Sometimes Disguised**

Two years ago, my wife had a nervous breakdown. A few years earlier her mom died after a long illness, followed quickly by the sudden death of our 22-year old daughter. Stress multiplied when she added wedding planning (for our eldest) and a big home remodeling project, and then collapsed under the weight of taking on 'too many' burdens for other people. In short order her physical and emotional systems just collapsed.

She worked really hard to come back from a dark place, and to her great credit she began to practice meditation, did her breath and balance exercises, changed the 'stories' she told herself, and many other things that helped her build a new level of emotional resiliency. Today, because of her practices, she is a much stronger person with a very different perspective.

And that 'stronger person' is the one who received the diagnosis of a brain tumor. Two years ago, such a discovery might have, literally, killed her emotionally. Instead, I watched in awe as she took deep, calming breaths and chose to be curious rather than descend into fear.

And so it was that on Day 26 of her recovery that she said to me, "I just realized that not once have I asked myself the question, 'Why me?' I haven't worried about that. I've just focused on getting better. Up until two years ago, that was my favorite question. Now, I don't even think about it."

That, my dear readers, is what happens when you practice the skills of emotional resiliency, nurturing your gratitude and optimism 'muscles.' I'm inspired by Cheryl's strength, and incredibly proud of how well she has endured through the past month.

Bottom line, her 'breakdown' in 2007 turns out to have been the best thing that could have happened to her, because it forced her to develop the coping skills that she needed to have when her brain tumor decided to announce itself.

And that's how many of life's gifts show up –disguise as a hardship.

### **Learning from Crisis**



I have a good friend who was a 'successful' professional. He had a dental thriving practice, a large custom-built home, financial success, a lovely family, etc. AND he was over-leveraged, short on time for his wife/kids, frustrated on dozens of levels, and a self-described jerk. When he was 41 years old, he nearly died after he suffered a stress-induced heart attack.

That was 20 years ago, and since then he has transformed his life in about a million ways. He has a fabulous relationship with his wife and adult kids, he is one of the most gratitude-filled people I know, and he spends most of his time helping others to transform their lives before stress kills them! He considers his heart attack to be one of the greatest learning events of his life. It was a gift, in disguise.

**Look for the Gifts in Your Hardships**

Steel becomes stronger when it is subjected to the fire. So too, people get stronger when they are tested in fire.

I invite you to look back at past events. Consider times when your life has crashed, or when you have failed, or been ill, or been under tremendous pressure.

In what ways did you become stronger? What did you accomplish that still amazes you? How were you transformed? What new attitude did you take away from that crisis? How can those skills help you today?

**Practice What Will Help You in Future Crisis**

Finally, remember again that you can't 'learn' new skills in the midst of the fire. The learning comes before or after, and the practice must be done every day, during normal times.

- If you want to be calm in crisis, practice moments of calm every day.
- If you need to be assertive with difficult people, practice standing up for yourself in everyday situations where the stakes aren't as high
- To live in gratitude, practice every day by writing down your blessings or sending out notes of appreciation.
- And if you want to improve your ability to experience happiness, Act Happy for some time everyday: Stand tall, take a deep breath, and smile. Smile when you look in the mirror. Smile as you walk down the hall. Fake it...and one day, you'll notice it feels natural.

My best to you for 2010.

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The 13 Principles of Happiness offer many practice ideas to prepare you for thriving in crisis. Why not post a copy of the original 13 Principles on your workstation wall or on your refrigerator? You can download a 1-page summary here:

<http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>. Choose Happiness.

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**II. IN THE WORKPLACE: WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?**



The recession from which we are emerging has done some damage to companies and individuals, no doubt. At the same time, it has done what economic hard times always do well: separated the weak from the strong and challenged the ‘way we do things.’

I’m not in denial about the ill-effects of the economic downturn, but for the moment I’m choosing to focus on some of the upside.

**Innovation is up.** People in tough situations are often forced to let go of old habits, eliminate wasteful processes, and spend more time on innovation. These are all good for business and generally good for consumers.

**Job loss forces reevaluation.** While job loss is hard – very hard – for many people, I’m heartened by the many stories I’ve heard from folks who were laid off and now realize that they had been miserable in their jobs. They speak about being laid off as a ‘gift’ that has taught them to be much clearer about what they seek in a job, so they can live with less stress.

**Leisure time is not bad.** One of my sisters was let go from a law firm where she’d been employed for 30 years. Thirty! She’ll seek a new job, soon. But she has never NOT worked since she was 18, and for the first time in her life she is experiencing the gift of leisure time.

**Flexibility is on the rise.** While many companies cut costs through layoffs, others recognized that in the long run they’ll need those people – so they experimented with reduced hours, telecommuting, video conferencing, flexible schedules, etc, to keep the people but temporarily reduce costs. The upside of this: more CEOs and CFOs are (finally!) realizing many people are happier working with more flexibility. So the gift of crisis may be that when everyone eventually returns to the workplace, they will find more options available for mixing work and life.

And I guess that ain’t all bad.

**So I Challenge You...**

**What have you LEARNED from this crisis?** In what ways are you now stronger, smarter, more creative, or more resilient? What do you now realize you’re capable of that you would not have noticed before? What changes will you make in your workplace or work habits for the future? What do you promise yourself you’ll do differently?

Write down those answers, and give yourself and others permission to do things differently in the future. You’ll end with a more positive environment, whether you’re a leader or a worker bee.

Oh, and if your answer is, “I didn’t learn anything,” you’re in denial. Sit with the questions a bit longer. You’ll be happy you took the time.

**Remember: Leadership is not about a title.** Anyone can be a leader who looks for lessons learned in crisis, and who seeks to make positive changes for a better future.

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**III. SHAMELESS COMMERCE DIVISION – THE LEADERSHIP SERIES**

After another series of small steps, I’m now pleased to announce a new addition to my offerings. I’ve partnered with Skip Weisman of WeismanSuccessResources.com, the creator of “Champion



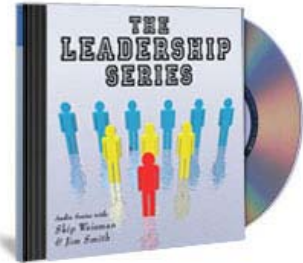
# Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

Organizations” and a fabulous leadership coach based in downstate New York to produce a dynamic audio training series for leaders.

If you are a small business owner, middle manager, or frontline supervisor and you want to lower stress, reduce conflict in the workplace, be more relaxed, and have happier more productive people, then you should pay close attention to this new program.

I'd like to introduce you to [The Leadership Series](#).

This program is the solution to your problems if you've ever thought about any of the following: *"Nobody's ever told me", "I was promoted into this job and I'm supposed to know what I'm doing but I've been given no training." "I'm an entrepreneur not a leader." "The only stuff I know is what I learned from watching my own manager and they're not that good either."*



The program is launching on February 1, and we are offering several bonuses for those who pre-order the series. Visit here to learn more:

<http://www.achievemomentumnow.com/leadershipjim/>

And don't forget my book, [www.HappinessAtTheSpeedofLife.com](http://www.HappinessAtTheSpeedofLife.com)!

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#### IV. CONTACT OR CONNECT

Jim Smith, PCC, is The Executive Happiness Coach®. He is an executive and life coach, international speaker, and author. Jim provides inspiration and practical tools to help people build happier lives and build more positive work cultures.

All things Happiness Coach:  
Blog: [www.LifeWithHappiness.com](http://www.LifeWithHappiness.com). Ask me a question on [LinkedIn](#), [Friend me on Facebook](#), or [Follow me on Twitter](#).

View past editions <http://www.TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com/newsletter/archives.cfm>

Contact Jim directly: <mailto:Jim@TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com>

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**Happiness is a decision, not an event.  
How will YOU decide today?**

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