



## Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 65: Are You Caught in an Emotional Web?

2,127 words of content including 1 HUGE idea to increase your happiness and strengthen your leadership presence. Approximate reading time required: 8.51 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. Are You Caught In An Emotional Web?

Do you ever feel like you're "stuck" in a situation or mindset? When you get stuck it is often because you are off balance in one of the five domains in which you exist as a human being: Intellectual, Emotional, Physical, Spiritual, or Interpersonal.

**Intellectual** – Human beings are the only species on the planet that can Time Travel. How often do you spend time re-living /fretting /obsessing /savoring about your Past? And how much time do you spend worrying /dreaming /fantasizing /creating your Future? If you are stuck in a story about another time, you may find it quite challenging to live, work, and make decisions in the Present.

**Emotional** -- When you get stuck it's usually because the story you're telling yourself about the Past/Future or Present evokes a strong emotion. You are always in some emotional state, of course, but the stronger the emotion, the farther you are from the place of rational calm where decisions are easier.

Think of your emotions as being spread out in a web around you (see figure). Each emotional "family" exists on a strand of intensity. As a very simple example, on the **Anger strand** Irritation is a fairly mild emotion. Frustration is a notch higher, Anger more intense, and at Rage one can spiral totally out of control. The **Fear strand** might start with low-level worry, escalating to the unreasoning





state of Panic. The farther one moves from the center, the more intense the experience – and the more difficult it can be to make rational decisions. Yes, this is true even of the more positive emotions, as you can see from the Love strand.

Think of a spider and their web. Notice spiders always sit in the center of their web. Why? Because that is the strongest place. The farther out on a strand they go, the more vulnerable they become. The best path to any part of the web always runs THROUGH the center.

**Physical** – When you feel off balance in your body it is a literal experience, e.g. when you lean too far, sit in an awkward position, breathe very high in your body, or exceed your physical limitations (like climbing stairs or running too fast). Your intellectual story and the emotional response that goes with it can also affect your breathing and pulse rate in negative ways.

**Spiritual** – Imbalance in this domain occurs when you notice a break in the connection between you and the rest of the Universe. It's not about religion; whether you are a Catholic, Muslim, agnostic, or tree-worshipper, your system craves to feel loved and legitimate in the world. When that is missing, you can feel groundless and unable to act.

**Interpersonal** – You get stuck around interpersonal issues when it's about them, them, them. Most relationship problems rooted not in the other person, but in the thought you have that "they" should change or be different. The more you hold that story ("why can't THEY change?") the more out of balance and stressed you feel, because you are essentially making yourself a Victim.

## To Get Unstuck, Come Back To Center

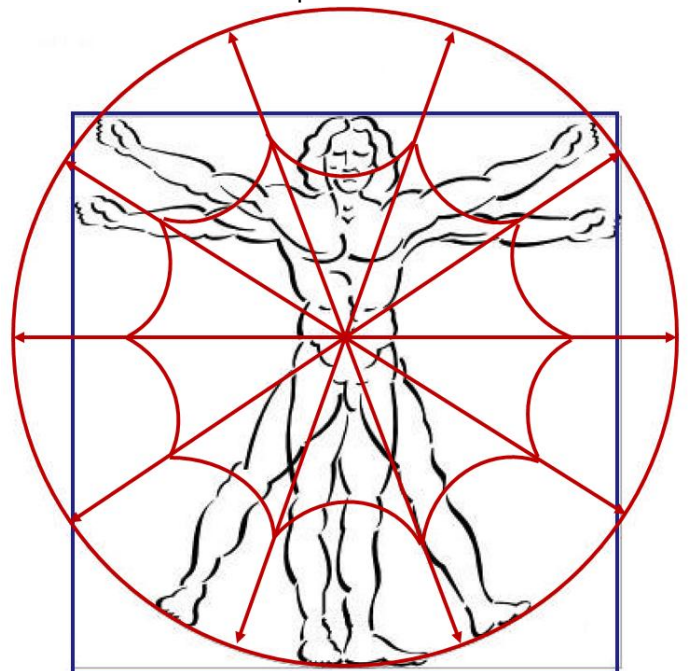
A common effect across all five domains is this: the farther you are from your Center, the more likely you will feel stuck, unbalanced, disconnected, or out of control. So let's explore the nature of Center.

Your **Intellectual** center is Now. When you come back from time traveling to be fully Present, you are at your most powerful.

Your **Emotional** center is calm, or Choice. From Calm, you can make better decisions and choose which emotional state will serve you best.

Your **Physical** center is your solar plexus, just below your navel. The Vitruvian Man (see illustration) demonstrates this. When you shift from autopilot into awareness of your body you ground yourself in the Here and now.

Your **Spiritual** center is Self-Acceptance, the place where you can say, "I am." I am, I accept myself with no conditions. I am loved. I have legitimacy, I have the right to exist.





Your **Interpersonal** center is also You. In any interaction, you are 50% of the conversation... and you are *only* 50%. So if there's anything going on in a relationship, what can you control? You -- your story, your beliefs, and your attitude toward the other person(s).

## **I/It versus I/Thou**

When your attitude is "I/It," your relationship to others is transactional, where every conversation is more or less about what you can get out of it. When you hold an "I/Thou" mindset, you hold others in a place of respect that acknowledges their sacredness or legitimacy, where your conversation is, "I am legitimate and you also are legitimate and deserve respect." An I/Thou mindset pulls you out of victimhood and into Strength. You access I/Thou when you are fully present in your body.

So these are your five centers: – Now, Calm (or Choice), Here, I am, I/Thou.

## **Exercise: Accessing Your Five Centers**

I invite you to engage in an exercise. I want to show how in just a few seconds you can access all Five Centers simultaneously.

To begin, sit back in your seat and place your feet flat on the floor. Become aware of your breath as it enters and leaves your body. As you focus, consciously shift to breathing in and out through your nose.

Feel the rush of air as it races through your sinus cavities. Know that your sinus cavities are just below the part of brain that controls your emotions, the amygdala. From a neuro-biological perspective, when you take in a long, deep breath through your nose you send cool air across the surface of the amygdala, thus cooling it and decreasing blood flow -- which automatically calms whatever emotional state you're experiencing. (For those who do yoga, this is the Ujaji breath -- Very powerful).

Next, move your attention to *where* your breath goes inside your body. Consciously move your breath deeper into your body, until you can feel it coming all the way down to your physical center, your solar plexus. (to aid in this, you might place a hand on your belly just below your navel).

Now let's just take a long, deep breath together. Take the breath in through your nose. And notice how in this one moment, this is all you are thinking about. Notice how that deep breath evokes calm. You are fully present in your own body.

You are, in this moment, aligned in your Five Centers. Now. Calm. Here. I am. I/Thou.

Pretty cool, huh? Just from breathing...

I invite you to take one more deep breath, and remember how easy it is to pull yourself back from the rest of the universe and center yourself in **Mind, Heart, Body, Spirit, Relationships**. One breath: Now, calm, Here, I am, I/Thou.



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Remember, you are what you repeatedly do. If this exercise resonates for you, make time every day to practice it. In time, your entire system will know what to do when you are under stress: Just breathe!

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Living **Happiness Principle # 13, Be Authentic** becomes much easier when you are coming from your Five Centers – and you're far more likely to be there if you follow the other 12 Principles. 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: WHERE'S YOUR CENTER?

Listen up, Leaders: the above practice requires no modifications to fit into a workplace environment.

When you develop your capacity to be fully present, well-balanced, and self-aware, you will naturally communicate well, respond better to issues, and have a more positive effect on everyone you work with. Bottom line: from your Five Centers, you'll make better business decisions.

**Remember: Leadership is not about a title.** Anyone can be a leader who can effectively manage their own emotions, remain calm in crisis, and treat others with great respect.

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## III. TWO WEDDINGS AND A MYSTERY TRIP

It's one month until the wedding festivities begin. Oh, and just to keep things exciting, the mother of the bride had an emergency appendectomy last week. Never a dull moment around here....

**Wedding One:** On the weekend of May 22, the wedding party and immediate family will gather at the northern tip of Michigan's lower peninsula for an intimate wedding ceremony, which will take place (weather permitting) on the shore of Lake Michigan, in the gardens adjacent to the Lake House built by Katie's grandfather many years ago. This is a place of many special memories for Katie, and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to spend time with family.

Then, we all go back to our lives for a week.

**Wedding Two:** The following weekend, our extended families and many friends will come together in Chicago for a wedding celebration weekend. Saturday evening we'll see The Cupid Players, an Improv comedy troupe directed by the gentleman who taught the Second City Improv workshop three years ago where Justin and Katie met for the first time.



On Sunday we're boarding the El (Chicago's Elevated transit system) and do a Photo Tour of Chicago, taking pictures of Justin and Katie in their wedding regalia at all the important places in town (like the storefront where they had their first kiss). Sweet, huh?!



Later that evening we'll gather for a big party at Catalyst Place in downtown Chicago. Justin and Katie have promised a reenactment of the actual ceremony, plus a lot of great music, food, and dancing.

**Mystery Trip:** Justin and Katie still don't know where we are sending them for their honeymoon, and they will learn the destination at the wedding. Cheryl and I, and my daughter Kelly and son-in-law Paul have put together a package, and can't wait to give them this gift. They will receive tickets, a full itinerary, and complete contact information – everything's been taken care of, all they have to do is show up and enjoy!

This is gonna be fun!

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**IV. 54: IT'S GONNA BE A GREAT YEAR!**

I turned 54 last week. This was a special birthday to me, because there was a time when I did not expect to live this long.

When I was 28 I had heart problems that landed me in the Cardiac ICU at the Cleveland Clinic. While they tried to get my heart rate under control, my cardiologist introduced me to several older men who had the same arrhythmia, but it had not manifested in them until they were older... and they both nearly died on the spot the first time it happened. I remember him telling me, "you will not live as long as these guys did if you don't take better care of yourself." I asked the one guy, "How old are you?" 54. He was 54 and he looked like crap.

At the time, I was overweight, stressed, and had "too many" negative medical indicators. Ugh.

So my 'scared shitless' story took root, and I changed my life, one little habit shift at a time. I became disciplined about working out. I lost weight. I started watching what I ate, and over the years became a low-carb, meat-free, fresh-foodie (with a dark chocolate addiction on the side). I dropped my cholesterol by 80 points and normalized my blood pressure through diet. I cross trained, did Jazzercise, swam, ran, and lifted heavy things. I started noticing my self-talk, and started studying happiness. I nurtured my optimism. I took up meditation and then yoga.

And yet.... I realized just last year that I've been holding – for many years – the story that ***"I could die when I'm 54."*** And I've been (quietly yet definitely) scared to turn 54.

And now, I'm here. And it's not so scary after all.

And I got here one tiny shift, one new practice at a time.

And, my dear reader, that's what I hope for you. Stand Tall. Breathe Deeply. Smile Often!

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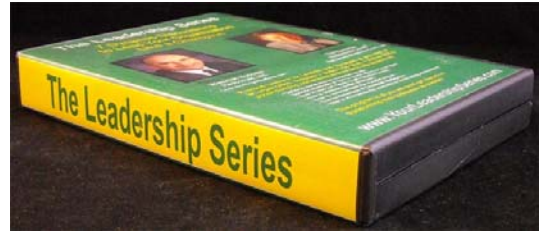
**V. SHAMELESS COMMERCE DIVISION**

**Buy the book:** If you like the newsletter, you'll LOVE the collected essays on The 13 Principles of Happiness, with over 110 practices for building your Positive Emotional muscles. [Happiness At The Speed of Life: 13 Powerful Strategies for Finding Happiness at Home and on the Job.](#)



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## VI. LEARN MORE

Hi, I'm Jim Smith, PCC, The Executive Happiness Coach®. I work with smart, successful people like you, who secretly struggle with overwhelm, negative self-talk, and fear of more success. I help you become a better leader by “holding up a mirror” to show you where you are now, helping you paint a clear picture of a better future, and then supporting you **as you build powerful new behaviors that transform how you “show up” in your life and work.** You will achieve more clarity, build broader leadership skills, and expand your capacity to LEAD your life on a MUCH bigger stage!

I have helped thousands of leaders and business owners just like you to increase effectiveness at work AND live a happier, more balanced life. I invite you to contact me for a free Leadership Strategy Session to learn how you can create **a less-stress leadership presence.**

Reach me directly: <mailto:Jim@TheExecutiveHappinessCoach.com> or +1-440-885-3247

### 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>

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

**How will YOU decide today?**

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