



Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 66: Just Say No

1,952 words of content including some great reminders to take care of yourself AND strengthen your leadership presence. Approximate reading time required: **7.81** 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.

If you received this from a friend, [SUBSCRIBE](#) Now to get your own copy in the future.

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I. Just Say No

This has been the most overwhelming month I've encountered in a LONG time. Seriously, I've been even more stressed than a few months ago when my wife had unplanned brain surgery!

I had a major client project coming to a close (with tons of final meetings), an enormous amount of work for a training program I'm enrolled in myself, a peak of client work, and several out of town trips for work... PLUS a son's college graduation and another son's wedding (two weekends of this), all of it out of town and requiring travel...PLUS it's spring time, and we had to get our garden planted in a specific window and maintain the yard.

Whew! As much as I walk my talk, all the meditation, breathing, and gratitude practices in the world were not enough to keep me from falling into frustration, overwhelm, guilt (from missing a deadline), and even, on a particularly bad night, from despair.

Hey, don't lie to me – you've been there! Imagine: There I was, lying on the bottom of the pit of despair and hopelessness, wishing for calm and happiness and satisfaction...when I realized what the problem was.

I was forgetting Happiness Principle #1: Be Positively Self-ish! I'd forgotten that sometimes the shortest path to sanity is to use one of the shortest words in the dictionary: No.

And so I spent the next day working up the courage to start saying No. I reviewed my calendar, computed how much time I'd need for all my commitments, and calculated that I had more work than hours available. (Confession – at this point, I had trouble breathing. Honestly!)



Gulp! So the first order of business was determining what I would say NO to. I decided that I would NOT say No to sleep. Bad idea, to skip sleep.

Next, I sorted out two projects and renegotiated the due dates. I started to feel optimistic, once again. Then the phone rang.

“Hi, Jim. We really need you. Right now. Can you come in and facilitate this leadership meeting for us, right away, for which we’ll pay you money?” (that’s not really how it went, but that’s what I heard). Gulp, again. And I looked back down into the pit of despair and hopelessness...and in that dark place I found a tiny bit of backbone and courage, and I said, “I’d love to! AND I am totally swamped right now, and cannot commit to any more work until June. Can that still work for you?” (My mind raced through many dark scenarios... will they leave me? Will they say, “no way?”)

Hallelujah! “not a problem, Jim. I understand.” And we looked ahead to the relatively open space on my June calendar.

This conversation repeated a few times, and the wonderful thing is, now my June is pretty full. Great stuff! If I’d not found the courage to Just Say No, I would have been completely underwater, and probably trying to edit strategy documents at my son’s wedding or something.

Boundaries protect us

When you Just Say No to things you can’t handle right now, you are taking very good care of yourself. Saying No creates a strong boundary, so that other people know how far they can go and what they can ask of you. If you have weak boundaries, you can end up in situations you do not like, trying to fulfill commitments you can’t handle... and you’ll be miserable.

And remember, when you take care of YOU, you end up with more capacity to take care of others, and in the end, there’s more happiness to go around for everyone.

Because I Just Said No, I was able to be fully present to all my clients, meet most of my commitments on time, and still spend all my weekends with family.

So when life threatens to run you over, take care of you. Just Say No.

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Living **Happiness Principle # 1, Be Positively Self-ish** is critical if you are to open up space to live life on YOUR terms versus everyone else’s. 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: OPEN DOOR? JUST SAY NO**

A common concern I hear from my executive clients is that they have great difficulty with strategy time. The issue usually presents itself like this: “I can’t find the time to think when I’m constantly being interrupted.” OK, why are you constantly being interrupted? The response is usually a form of, “we have an Open Door Policy, so I have to be available to everyone.”

That gets me all curious about what their Open Door policy actually says. What is the intent of the policy? Is it to let all employees know that, if they are unsatisfied with how they are being treated, they can take their concern up the chain of command without concern for reprisal (in other words, that 'all doors are open' to them)? OR does it say, *"You can walk into anyone's office, at any time, regardless of your issue, and interrupt what that person is doing?"* Does the policy say, *"by virtue of this policy, YOU can determine the priorities and schedule of the president of the company, because 'the policy says' their door must – literally – be open at all times?"*

Usually, the first response I get is a puzzled look. The latter definition is what a LOT of people think Open Door Policy means.

"Here is an opportunity," I tell my client, "to regain control of your time."

**Thinking** – which is a legitimate and important responsibility of a top leader – requires some stretches of uninterrupted time. And **Conversation** – which is also a legitimate and important responsibility of a leader – needs to occur. But the two activities are often mutually exclusive. So, just as you schedule meetings, you should schedule time to think, strategize, design, and plan."

Open door policy or not, you are allowed to close your door when you are trying to concentrate or work on what they pay you to do – think about the future. You can manage your 'accessibility' – which is the real issue in an open door policy – by declaring specific hours of operation. For instance, if your best thinking/strategizing time is in the morning, you might say, "I am not available for meetings before 10:30 AM." Or you can say, "I have set aside from 1 until 3 every day for unscheduled meetings. My door is wide open between those hours."

Finally, you must enforce the boundaries you define. If your Closed Door time is prior to 10:30, and Suzie sticks her head in because she wants to talk to you about her boss, you need to say, "Suzie, now's not a good time, as I'm in the middle of \_\_X\_\_. I'm happy to speak with you at 11 today. Will that work for you?" And unless it's an emergency, she'll likely say, Yes. You both win – she gets access, and you get to operate as a strategic-thinking leader. And nobody, including you, has to live in constant frustration.

**Remember: Leadership is not about a title.** Anyone can be a leader who can effectively manage their own priorities by learning to **Just Say No** in a way that allows them to complete their Thinking work, yet still allows time for Conversation with others.

P.S. this tip works if you're a parent, as well, by the way. Or a co-worker. Or even if you are on a deadline and your boss stops by – Just Say No does not mean you can't talk... it just means that you say, I have this Boundary, and I ask that you honor that boundary just now.







## Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

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:

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

**How will YOU decide today?**

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