



Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter Edition 70: Happiness Isn't Always The Goal

2,020 words of content including at least ten ideas for improving your relationship with your own emotional life! Approximate reading time required: 8.1 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. HAPPINESS ISN'T ALWAYS THE GOAL

I recently read an article written by a mom who was dealing with the myriad emotions that sprang up as she moved through the process of taking her only child to college in a distant state. She spoke of anxiety, sadness, and even panic, and her point was this:

“Feelings are important, but they are not always reliable operating instructions.” In her case, the *emotional* response would have been to grab her daughter and head back home. But the *rational* thing was to leave her daughter behind and let life unfold at college.

“Sometimes,” she went on, “we must make friends with stress and loneliness and grief – or at least pretend to like them for awhile.” This was the lesson she'd learned at a parent orientation session at the college: Happiness isn't always the goal.

Happiness isn't always the goal?! What?! Yes, it's true! While happiness is a lovely place to visit, and usually makes the Top 10 Most Desirable Emotions list, the reality is that happiness does not always serve us.

All Emotions Serve Us, In Different Ways

In appropriate doses, every emotion has a purpose. For example, *Anger* and *Fear* protect us from harm or the threat of same; *Love* and *Affection* help us to build connections with others; *Sadness* and *Grief* affirm our humanity by keeping us in touch with what's important; *Envy* and *Ambition* keep us striving to be better; *Determination* and *Perseverance* help us maintain progress; *Forgiveness* releases us from burdens, *Pessimism* prevents us from overlooking problems, and *Hope* and *Optimism* make sure we can dream of a better future.

Another truth is that many of the “negative” emotions are what make the “positive” ones possible. Happiness is only possible if Sadness also exists**. Anxiety makes Calm more desirable. And let’s face it, would you appreciate Joy nearly as much if you did not have to sometimes deal with Frustration and Despair?

The above statements are only true, of course, when you have a healthy relationship with all emotions. If you don’t know how to deal with strong emotions like anger or grief, you may find yourself “stuffing” those down when they rise up, which means you never fully experience them... and so they remain stuck in your system, festering. People who have difficulty processing strong emotions often end up manifesting those in dysfunctional ways, e.g. unhealthy relationships, addictions, anger management issues, etc.

One of my goals is to help you develop healthy relationships with all your emotions so that you have the capacity to feel anger, fear, or other uncomfortable emotions in an appropriate way – then let them go, to create the space for emotions like calm, joy, satisfaction, and happiness to emerge.

Let It Happen – You’ll Survive!

I know a nutritional coach who claims that the biggest obstacle most people face when trying to change their relationship with food is that they don’t know how to deal with Hunger. Many people carry the “story” that if they feel hunger, it will harm them. That’s nonsense, of course.

Hunger is a physical sensation that comes and goes. The emotional “baggage” associated with hunger is a little tougher to deal with. When a client is ready, she gives them this assignment: “Tomorrow, after you eat breakfast as usual, you may eat nothing else until 5PM. You will feel hungry. I want you to notice that the sensation will come and go. If you need help, call me before you eat anything.”

At the first sign of hunger, panic can set in. But those who follow the instructions soon learn that if they ignore it, the feeling passes. They survive. And by the time they eat their dinner at 5PM, they have learned how to be comfortable with a little bit of hunger as a normal thing. That leads to a better relationship with food as fuel versus an emotional crutch.

In like manner, the path to better relationships with your stronger emotions begins with allowing yourself to experience some of them in small, controlled doses so that you can learn how to recover and move on.

I once worked with a client who ultra-controlled his emotions, mostly because he feared getting angry. People walked all over him, and he never reacted. I learned that his mother had uncontrollable rages, and he was convinced that if he got even a tiny bit mad, he’d go immediately to rage. I asked him, “If you could have a ‘healthy anger,’ what would that look like?” He painted a picture of standing up for himself, being able to defend his ideas in front of the rest of the team, and confronting a colleague who constantly stole his ideas.

I helped him begin with small conversations and move to larger expressions. He started with one-on-one situations, where he practiced explaining what he was feeling and why he felt that way. He eventually got used to expressing irritation, then frustration, and finally he learned to speak up in front of the entire group to say, “I am really upset that Chris is taking credit for this



breakthrough, since I performed 90% of the research.” In the end, he learned he could be angry AND controlled, and his reputation – and influence -- in the office improved dramatically.

Start small, work your way to bigger.

1. **Practice by allowing yourself to experience and express smaller pieces of the emotions you’ve been avoiding.** After my daughter died, I found it too easy to get drowned by my sadness. One of the ways I learned to deal with it was to limit my remembering to just a few minutes at a time, so that I would feel the sadness but not stay in it for a long time.
2. **Watch a movie that evokes an emotional state.** For instance, rent a movie about a sad subject, or a documentary that provokes you into anger, as a strategy for experiencing the emotion for a short time, then being able to step away.
3. **Hold a “limited” conversation with a friend about the subject that evokes a strong response.** Talking “about it” with someone you know and trust can help you dip into the emotional space without feeling like it will consume you. Arrange in advance with your friend to stop the conversation or move into another subject area after a specific time, e.g. 20 minutes.
4. **Practice the skill of getting back to Calm.** Try a short daily meditation practice, or simply practice taking deep, calming breaths a few times every day. This will give you a powerful tool that will help you come back from “the edge” when a strong emotion takes hold.

No matter what route you take to a healthier relationship with your emotions, you will increase your capacity for experiencing ALL emotions. So even when Happiness is not the goal, it can always be an option!

****For more on Why Sadness Matters, see the [April 2009 edition of this newsletter](#)**

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For when happiness IS the goal, there’s always the 13 Principles of Happiness to help you. You can download the 1-page summary here: <http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm>. Post this on your workplace wall or your fridge at home, and use it coach yourself or others to Choose Happiness.

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**II. IN THE WORKPLACE: EXPERIENCE DISCOMFORT**

**People don’t like to be uncomfortable.** I cannot recall the last time I had a conversation a leader where the subject of “difficult conversations” about performance did not come up as one of their most feared situations. Second to that is concern about telling people that “change is coming.” Meanwhile, we face the reality that forward progress inevitably requires change, and change itself is uncomfortable. What’s a leader to do?

**If you want to be effective as a leader, you’ve got to get over yourself.** While you may prefer to spend all your time in a happy, comfortable world where everyone does their job well and



processes always work, that is, in the end, a fantasy world in which your role is unnecessary. The *raison d'être* – the core justification – for your job is to solve problems, to declare new futures, to reallocate resources, and to name the elephants in the room.

**In other words, your role by definition requires that you create discomfort, both for you and for others.** I'm not advocating for "control freaks" or for those with anger issues to run amok in the workplace, because those behaviors create a dysfunctional form of discomfort. I'm simply reminding you that you must, in today's fast-moving world, continually stir the pot of change, and regularly challenge your team members to step up their game – and hold people accountable for delivering on their commitments.

**In order to create discomfort, you must regularly practice that emotional state; you must become friends with unease, concern, nervousness, and even trepidation.** When you become intentionally familiar with those emotions in small doses, you will gradually strengthen your ability to manage them. You will find yourself more capable of holding difficult conversations because you'll be confident in your ability to "live through the experience."

**How do you "practice" feeling comfortable with discomfort?**

1. **Start by having small conversations about minor concerns.** Address little performance issues as they occur, so that the conversations can be about improvement versus "your job is in jeopardy."
2. **Rehearse your conversations with a coach or colleague.** Many times the fear of delivering a difficult message dissipates when you speak it aloud in a practice session – so by the time you have the 'real' conversation, your system is already used to the message.
3. **When a change is imminent, start talking with people about the high-level issues and direction even before you know all the details.** By the time the final details emerge you and the team will have already gotten gradually used to the idea(s).
4. **Have difficult conversations as quickly as you can after an issue emerges.** 90%+ of the "drama" and discomfort comes not from the issue but from your thinking (and thinking and thinking) about it, and creating stories about what might happen. Act before your imagination freaks you out.

**Remember: Leadership is not about a title.** Anyone can be a leader who can step into the discomfort of a difficult conversation, knowing that on the other side of that discomfort lays greater potential for progress, accomplishment, and a more positive workplace experience.

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**IV. SMILE LIKE A BABY**

**As of the moment I'm writing this, our first grandbaby's due date has come... and gone.** And my daughter is still (very) pregnant.

**Babies don't pay much attention to deadlines and schedules, do they?** Yet they hold a great deal of wisdom about life. A couple months ago we saw the documentary, *Babies*, at the movie theatre, and were struck by how much babies smile. A lot. From very early on.





## Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

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](#).

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

**How will YOU decide today?**

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