Happiness@ TheSpeedofLife

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter
Edition 75: Practice for Positive Change

1,289 words of content including **7 Ideas to Start a New Habit**. Approximate reading time required: **5.1** minutes (plus an optional 5 minute video). 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. WATCH THE MESSAGE

This month's edition revisits one of the most fundamental aspects of personal growth and change – the power of PRACTICE. Last week I was a guest of Kathy Dawson, the Relationship Coach, on her local talk show, where we discussed why Practice is important, and reviewed two foundational practices that support positive emotional strength. For a quick review, watch my 5-minute segment (from 1:00 thru 6:00) of this YouTube video **http://youtu.be/tHoq5GpUIV0**.

Warning: You may receive an unexpected Happiness Boost as a result of your viewing!

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II. PRACTICE BUILDS NEW HABITS

A moment, take 1: I'm watching my four-month old grandson as he flails his hands about, trying so hard to get his fist into his mouth. He fails 100% of the time. He hits his cheek, his forehead, his ears.

A moment, take 2: I'm swimming laps in the pool, lost in thought about my day. I glance at the clock and realize I've lost track of time. I've just swum a half mile on autopilot.

A moment, take 3: My client shows up excited to tell me how well she did on her presentation to the executive board. Every day for the past month she has practiced a calm, grounded body so that she could deliver her message from a place of confidence instead a place of panic.

A moment, take 4: One month later, my grandson reaches out with purpose, grasps a plastic ring and, with intense concentration, moves it purposefully and directly toward his mouth. He succeeds every time.

Your Body, Brain, and Heart Are the Same System

My colleague who studies Neurobiology says, "Nothing changes unless the brain changes." A colleague who uses martial arts in his leadership work says, "Every habit starts and ends in the body." Hmm.

Who is more correct? I believe they both hold the truth. You cannot change your behavior JUST by thinking about it; you must actually DO something with your body, creating muscle memory. AND since you are essentially one big nervous system, everything you do engages your brain and creates new neural connections.

This is why physical practices and movement are equally important for those seeking to change a habit, become better leaders, or live a happier life. Whatever you seek to change, you must think it AND do it, many times.

After counting my grandson's fidgeting one day, I calculated that he did that "hand-to-mouth" move over 1,000 times before he could hit the target. He'll repeat the same relentless practice for rolling over, standing up, and speaking.

My ability to swim on autopilot happened the same way. Having swum competitively for eight years, plus some practice for another 30, I estimate I've done 500,000+ flip turns in my life – my body can execute a clean flip off the wall without my even having to think it.

This is the essence: You become what you repeatedly do. The corollaries: You ARE what you've repeatedly done in the past; and, You can BECOME what you repeatedly do from today forward. Muscle memory, emotional memory, brain chemistry – all part of the same system.

Seven Places to Start a New Habit

Here are some simple emotional practices that can help recalibrate your base mood. Approach these with an intention to engage your ***physical*** senses which will influence your ***emotional*** state and rewire your ***brain.***

1. **Smile more often**
   (it improves "muscle memory" on your face and invokes positive feelings)
2. **Keep a Joy List or write down daily blessings**
   (the physical writing engages your body as it tones your "awareness muscle")
3. **Take two deep breaths and relax your shoulders, ten times a day**
   (trains your body to find a calm place under pressure)
4. **List what's RIGHT in a situation before listing the problems**
   (balances your attention and your perspective)
5. **Count to ten before reacting to any situation**
   (trains your emotions to wait – until your brain catches up)
6. **Hold your arms at your sides – *uncrossed* -- in all conversations**
   (helps your body experience the feeling of openness/acceptance to other ideas and people and improves your listening skills)

7. **Hang out with people who already live in the place you want to live**
   (As mammals, we learn our emotional cues from others. If you want to be more positive, hang out with optimists. If you want to eat better, hang out with the health buffs)

Consider a physical or emotional aspect of yourself that you want to recalibrate. What is a practice that you might use to help you get used to a new way of being? Start with just one tiny thing – one food, one habit, one choice, one relationship, even just one word you use. Shift it, **then practice it regularly from this day forward**. Just one…

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The 13 Principles of Happiness establish a framework for creating new habits. Visit http://www.theexecutivehappinesscoach.com/happiness/philosophies.cfm, to download a colorful 1-page PDF Poster. Post it on your workplace wall or your fridge at home, and use it to coach yourself and others to create Happiness Habits.

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II. IN THE WORKPLACE: PRACTICING A NEW BEHAVIOR

New habits can be tough to change in the workplace. People like predictability. When you show up differently – even if the change is for the better – it is still different, and you may feel pressure from others to go back to how you were "before."

Still, change starts with you. Choose a specific situation, conversation, or relationship that sometimes creates difficulty or unhappiness for you. Notice how you behave or choose in that situation. Now, notice the internal conversation you have with yourself each time it occurs. Finally, try shifting that conversation to something more positive.

> **An executive client was having difficulty working with his CEO because he felt the boss was too hard to pin down.** His perception was that the CEO changed her mind too often and was unable to make a decision. He found himself so focused on taking notes and analyzing ideas that he was constantly exhausted after their meetings.
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> **We looked at the situation from different angles** and my client considered the fact that the CEO, a high-energy extravert, was perhaps just "thinking out loud" and did not need him to create action plans. So he shifted his internal conversation from, "Oh no, here we go again" to "Let's have some fun with this!" He stopped taking notes and began to practice active listening when the boss went off on tangents.
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> **A few weeks later she thanked him for being such a great listener,** saying, "I really appreciate being able to talk things over with you. Sometimes I just need to sort out the issues before I talk with the rest of the team."

Practice does not make perfect. Practice does, however, build capacity and can serve to recalibrate us at whatever level we aim.

Remember, Leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader who stretches new "muscles" and practices new behaviors that improve their relationships with others.

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IV. PERSONAL: LEARNING LANGUAGE, REDUX

Sigh! I am feeling slow and stupid as I work through my Italian lessons. Every time I think I'm "getting it" I have a conversation with my son-in-law – who is several lessons ahead of me – and I find myself fumbling on my words. In those moments I am SO ready to give up and declare myself a failure at learning language.

When this happens I go back to my story about watching Jonathan fail, fail, fail, and I trust that I'm making progress. It's all about the practice, practice, practice and letting my system remain immersed in the learning.

For now, my favorite phrase is *capisco un po l'Italiano* – I understand only a little Italian. But that's changing!

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V. ABOUT THE COACH

Hi, I'm Jim Smith, PCC, The Executive Happiness Coach®. I work with smart, successful people like you, who secretly struggle with overwhelm and fear that you won't have what it takes to succeed at the next level. I help you expand awareness of your strengths and limits, explore new paths to effectiveness, then support 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. 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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The Executive Happiness Coach®