

The Building Blocks Of Happiness



With Erica Terblanche on the Lundi Khoisan show
on Mix FM 93.8

Tune in every Wednesday at 10h10 for your weekly
soundbite of scientifically validated, practical happiness
coaching and learn one new happiness habit every week.

WEEK 4

Relationships

We learn ways to improve our relationships and deepen our connection, even with strangers.

Science tells us that the single most important predictor of happiness is the quality of our relationships.

Let's look at one of the world's longest studies on happiness. It was started 80 years ago with a cohort of 350 Harvard students and every year since then, as the students grow up, they were interviewed about their life and happiness.

The single most powerful predictor of whether a study participant would be alive at 85 years old and report satisfaction with their life and a high level of emotional well-being is the quality of that person's relationships throughout their life.



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There was one single question that most accurately predicted longevity and happiness and that question was 'do you have someone to call at 4 am in the morning should you run into trouble?'.

Having positive relationships is vital for our emotional, mental, and even physical health.

The question we need to ask is whether we give enough attention to our relationships - to cultivating positive ones and finding ways to improve or exit negative relationships. And my sense is that in our society we prioritize work, achievement, individual striving, making money, and rising above others somehow.
It is a poor trade-off.

The question is which relationships matter most for our happiness. The science suggests it is not just our close relationships eg with our significant other or our family. It is our relationships even with strangers.

Dr. Barbara Frederickson's research shows that the positive physiological effects of connection - eg. lowered stress-related cortisol and improved heart health - are the same whether we are connecting with a total stranger or with our spouse of 25 years.

Dr. Frederickson advocates for people to make an effort to connect at every possible opportunity during their daily life - With the uber driver and the barista - because these micro-moments of connection boost our mental and physical health...

The reality is that our phones are robbing us of these precious moments because what do we do instead when we wait to be served our coffee - we do our email or text messages - and lose the golden opportunity to connect with another human being.

I want to finish the talk by talking about the quality of our connection. The research done by the heart math institute shows that the electromagnetic fields around our head - same as the saints - and around our heart - can be measured - by an electromagnetometer.

It also turns out that these electromagnetic fields carry information that we subtly can discern in the way our biomarkers respond.

When two people are within each other's fields and think positively of each other, their heart rate goes into coherence. If they don't the opposite happens and both parties produce stress hormones. This is fascinating. People can feel how you feel about them. But why is this important?

Because we can use our mindsets and the practices of appreciation to help us get into positive emotional states with someone else.

Think of someone at work or a neighbour etc that you are having a tough time with. One tad of harbouring dark thought about them the next time you have to negotiate something, make it your work to list five things about your neighbour you appreciate - I don't mean being blind to the things that are not pleasant or good for your well being, no not at all.

The practice simply served to get you into a positive emotional state of greater calm and equanimity which in turn helps you to better choose your behaviour and response. You also create a positive atmosphere which may serve your neighbour to show up better too.



The Dalai Lama says there is no position of a greater emotional and mental advantage than genuine compassionate warm-heartedness..

So that's it for this week.

Please take the time to consider how much of your time you give to your relationships and whether it is proportionate to their importance for your happiness and longevity.

Put your phone away and be deliberate in making micro-moments of connection with strangers - it will boost your health and theirs.

And the next time you speak to anyone - whether friend or foe - focus on something about them that you appreciate and see how the quality of the conversation lifts.

