



Wake Up Happy with Shannon Polly

HOST

Kym Yancey

SPEAKER

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PRESENTATION

Kym

Hi, good morning. Welcome to Wake Up Happy. This is Kym Yancey with Live Happy. It's wonderful to have you a part of this very special day. Hope that wherever you are, things are just going wonderfully well for you and you're having nothing but great opportunities heading your way.

Listen, we've got a fabulous show. I want you to know, to be aware of, at any time, be sure to tag us at Wake Up Happy. You can search Live Happy on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest. For those of you that this is your first experience with us, LiveHappy.com is an unbelievable resource of incredible content, ideas, and strategies for you, so I just want to make sure you're aware of that.

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You might not even be aware, and I'm sure many of you are, that we have a award-winning world-class magazine called *Live Happy* which is on newsstands all over the country. As a matter of fact, I just found out that we're number one in our space in total science-based content around happiness. But, we're also in the health category which we're listed out of 114 different titles in the health category. We've just been in business for just a little over a year, and we're 14th in that health category, so we're constantly growing and moving forward.

It's really a testament to the incredible gifted writers and editors we have at Live Happy who really just comb through tons of research and ideas and create great information and write incredible stories. I'm just so very, very proud of them and the team that we've got at Live Happy. They're just doing a great job.

All right, so let's talk about our incredible guest today. We're going to be talking about positive business with Shannon Polly. In fact, she was on Wake Up Happy earlier, and we had talked about presence. She's an expert in your presence and how you present yourself. That's a whole another conversation, but that was great. So it's wonderful to have her back to talk about positive business.

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Now, Shannon Polly is one of the first 150 people in the world who've received their Master in Applied Positive Psychology degree from the University of Pennsylvania under Dr. Martin Seligman. She is a facilitator, certified leadership coach, speaker, and founder of Shannon Polly and Associates which is a leadership development company in downtown D.C., one of my favorite cities. Shannon works with Fortune 500 companies in two domain areas, executive presence and positive psychology.

Shannon uses the empirical research from positive psychology with her organizational clients to foster positive and flourishing workplaces. She has taught at West Point, Columbia Business School, Wharton Business School, and has been a facilitator for the Master Resilience Training Program for the U.S. Army.

Now, you might not know this but the army is the largest consumer of positive psychology in the world today. It totally makes sense, right, and has plans to train 1.1 million soldiers in resilience. She is also a co-founder of Positive Business DC, whose mission is to increase well-being in our nation's capital.

Shannon, it's great to have you with me here on Wake Up Happy.

- Shannon Thank you so much for having me back, Kym. Always a pleasure, and congratulations on *Live Happy* magazine. It seems like you have been creating a flourishing positive business.
- Kym Yes. You know what it really speaks to, and I know you've seen this in your life with what you do in positive psychology, is there's a hunger. There's a desire. People want to know more. They want to understand more, and above all, when you peel back everything, Shannon, we want to be happier. Right?
- Shannon Exactly. Yes. We want to know how to do it, what the research is, what the myths are. Absolutely.
- Kym All right. Let's get right into positive business. Give us your definition of what is positive business.
- Shannon Well, positive business is a focus on the practices that lead to flourishing companies and flourishing employees. We spend the majority of our lives at work, and it seems natural that that's the first place we would go to to try to figure out well-being. And it's complex. You have systems in place. Different companies have different cultures. There's the hierarchy. So, it's a complex subject area, and it's really exciting to think about how can we increase well-being in the workplace.

Kym Yes. First of all, I love this concept of positive business. The organizations that you go into and you help them with that, do you find that corporations or businesses, large or small, are really embracing this notion of positive business in terms of making sure that the culture is positive, there's a positive experience? I love your word flourishing. What do you find with where the market is and how people are embracing this?

Shannon I find that companies—we're really reaching a tipping point as far as focus on well-being. I think it started in the health space of employees worried about their healthcare cost and saying if I provide an in-house gym, maybe that'll lower my healthcare cost. But, I think that now they're really seeing that focus on strength increases performance, increases the bottom line, but it also increases the well-being of their employees, which makes them want to stay longer, which works on retention.

I think there's a twofold focus on it. One is a focus on strengths. Instead of having performance reviews that just focus on what's wrong with you and how to fix it, which is not very motivating—

Kym Right.

Shannon But how you focus on what you do well. Gallup has been studying this for over 40 years. So, the strength focus is part of it. Then I think there's a focus on doing well in the world. David Cooperrider out of Case Western Reserve has started the business as an agent of world benefit. It's saying how can businesses actually benefit the world with sustainability, with focus on giving back to the community. They're finding that tapping into people's meaning and giving back really makes people more engaged and has a whole host of benefits.

Kym Yes. I know in well-being, both of us attended the Leading to Well-Being Conference that was at George Mason University. There are, I guess, five main pillars to well-being. I know the purpose and meaning, right? The social connectedness, the engagement that employee has, financial, how they play in the community, how they feel within their own community, and the other is health.

Shannon Yes.

Kym And, you're right. It seems like across the board, because I know they were talking about there's like a 24% engagement in well-being programs across the country according to Gallup in terms of engagement, but it seems like

they've always kind of focused on the health side only. Out of those five areas, it with the health side that got all the attention.

So, moving into the other areas, I'm really curious about what do you advise people—so both, Shannon, the employee within the company, what do you say to them to help their company be more positive, and what do you say to the businesses to help them to understand the implications and the power of having a positive business?

Shannon That's a great question. I think that employees in an organization [audio disruption] want to think about how to leverage their strengths. There are two strength surveys that I use when I do work in businesses. One is from the VIA strength survey, VIACharacter.org, and the other is StrengthsFinder. They're different schools of thought. Some say that the VIA survey is more about intrinsic strength and StrengthsFinder is more extrinsic, business-focused, so it really depends on your culture. I would encourage people to check both of those out.

What I found when I do work in businesses is that it's better for the company when it becomes part of the culture. So, it's great if you take the survey and your team takes the survey and we do a workshop and your coaching based

on strengths. But if you can embed it in the whole culture, that's where you'll really see a culture shift.

An example is GMU. They have every freshman take StrengthsFinder and they talk about. Some of the research they presented at the conference was that it actually takes five conversations about someone's strengths to really start to embed the concept, which I thought was interesting and high. I was chatting with some of the other people who work at GMU and they said we talk about it, but we've discussed, like, having five conversations is a high bar. But it's a good place to start that they already started embedding it.

As far as businesses go, Dr. Kim Cameron out of the University of Michigan has started Positive Organizational Scholarship. He has a very strong grounding in the theory of how businesses can focus on four things. They can focus on positive climates, so developing positive energy networks. Those people you go to that give you energy are actually more influential than the people who have positional power in an organization.

Focusing on positive relationships, how do you deliver feedback in a positive way, even if it's a negative feedback, and how do you deliver specific behavioral feedback. The third is positive communication, and that goes with feedback and establishing goals. Then, the fourth is positive meaning, so

creating a culture of abundance and the idea that there's more—we have lots of resources, and we can give them away and not feel like there's scarcity. I think the company focus on positive climate relationships, communication, and meaning really helps to embed these concepts and get at it from all angles.

Kym Yes. You know, no doubt about it that this crosses over into your personal relationships. There's nothing you're talking about here that you can't use in your personal life, that isn't a cross over into your family, right? I mean, really.

Shannon Absolutely. And that was fascinating about listening to Tom Rath at the conference, which was I had been studying for years the focus on engagements, competency, autonomy, mastery, this Dusty and Ryan's theory of employee engagement and self-determination theory. Then Tom Rath was talking about how some of the research is showing that daily well-being might be more important than thinking about your whole life, and instead of thinking about engagement or just thinking about strengths, that focusing on the three things to improve your daily well-being, which are meaning but making progress on your goals, your interactions.

We have Daniel Kahneman says we have over 19,000 interactions or moments in a day, so trying to make them more positive than negative. And, the third

one is energy. If you're not sleeping, if you're not eating well, that health component that has been a part of organizational well-being project is incredibly important. I always joke that when I was a new parent, it didn't matter which positive psychology interventions I tried. If I hadn't slept that night, they didn't work.

Kym Right, no matter what.

Shannon Yes. So Rath's focus on meaning, interactions, and energy was really fascinating.

Kym Are people challenged with meaning? Are they challenged with that? Do you find that in their careers, especially with their careers, that when you asked a question, what you do, how does this bring meaning to your life and purpose to your life, do people pause? Do they do the old, "Uh, mmm, uh"? At some level, it's a pretty heady statement in a way for people, meaning.

Shannon That's true. That's true. You sort of want to break it down. I think Amy Wrzesniewski out of Yale Business School has done a good job of breaking it down into jobs, careers, and callings and how do you view your job. I love the story about there were three stone cutters in the middle ages. You ask the first one, "What are you doing?" And he says, "Well, I cut the stone, I walk it

over, and I put it over here. And I've been doing this since I was born." The second stone cutter says, "Well, I'm doing this because it's my job. It feeds my family and makes sure my kids are healthy." And the third stone cutter says, "Because of this job, I'm building a cathedral that will stand for thousands of years."

So, one of the exercises I do with people and employees to try to find meaning is write your job description and then rewrite it and write it as if it's your calling. How are you tying that into how you impact other people? And sometimes it takes a little more coaching, and sometimes the coaching leads people to say they want to move to a new job. But I think people get the concept of what's just a job, what are you doing just for the money, what are you doing for a career, and what's your calling?

Kym When you walk into an organization, would you just walk us through that process a little bit? I want to stay focused a little bit on small businesses. The fact of the matter is when you look at all the small businesses across the country and they outnumber all the Fortune 500s combined, the small business culture. You're a small business, right, yourself?

Shannon Right. Yes.

Kym What do you say to people with, I don't know, five, six, ten employees in their company and they want to have a positive business, a positive culture? What are some of the key things you would tell them?

Shannon Great question. I would probably do a self-assessment. I would do an assessment, needs assessment first, to see where things are, do some interviews. Then, I would see how much time they have. What are they willing to commit to? Of my qualitative research that I've done in businesses, the two things that have had the biggest impact, especially to create positive culture, are focus on strengths, which we've talked about, and there is more of the strengths revolution happening these days. More people now can name their top five strengths than they could 10 or 15 years ago. So I really feel like were reaching a tipping point. Some of the new research out of VIA survey says that.

I focus on strengths, figure out which survey they relate to, how we embed that. The second thing that I found is using a tool called Appreciative Inquiry which is a changed management process. It's a focus on what are you doing well, what's your vision of the future, what do you want to create, and then getting down to brass tacks of how to do it. So, some of those things might be a focus on gratitude. How do we celebrate wins in our organization rather than just focusing on what didn't go well? How do you start a meeting with

what went well this week? So, you reorient from maybe the complaining that happens at the beginning of a meeting to what went well.

Kym I love it. I love that right off the bat. Begin the whole thing with hey, what are you most excited about? What went well? I love that.

Shannon It's such a small thing and has such a huge, huge impact on organizations and meetings. Sometimes I'll have them end a workshop or end a meeting with just a round of appreciation—like I want to thank Kym for giving away a free subscription for everyone who've signed up for Live Happy at the GMU Conference. That was such a generous move. Then you would point to someone else across the circle, and I'd like to thank Sandra for doing X, Y, and Z.

Kym Yes.

Shannon And sort of doing a round robin of thanking each other.

Kym Yes. I love it.

Shannon So there are all sort of practices you can implement.

Kym First of all, I love that. I love the simplicity of it, but it's a shift, it's a shift of energy to your whole point. I remember when our kids were younger and going to school. I remember my wife, she started this thing at the dinner table and she would start and say, "Okay, so what's the most exciting thing that happened to you today?" I thought that's a nice twist. It just forced the conversation in a whole another area. You know what I mean? Sometimes with teenagers, they're a little slow on the draw with that sometimes.

Shannon Yes. That's brilliant. I've actually started with my two kids, who are four and two, at the end of the day, what was the best part of the day for you? Now my two-year-old wants to know what's the best part of daddy's day? It's like, I don't know. Let's ask him.

Kym Right.

Shannon But instead of going to bed thinking about I have to do this and then this happens, it is a refocus to refocus that negativity bias.

Kym Let's go back to the soul open door side for a second. Like, every day in your life and the things that you do, I would imagine, Shannon, at your skill level, you can tell, you can size up the situation very, very quickly by the language

they use, by the way they talk. Right? I mean, you hear it. People reveal themselves, right, by how they talk about circumstances.

What do you do when you walk into corporations or businesses and you want to amp up the positivity? Realizing you're only there for a meeting, what are some of the things that you can suggest to us, to any of us? You're going to meet with a new client today. Here are some things you can do to shift the axis of wherever they might be coming from. They might not be coming from a positive place, you know?

Shannon Right.

Kym What are some of the things that you can recommend to people to help them change that energy?

Shannon Yes. I think one thing goes back to your question about—your comment about the kids—what's the most exciting thing that happened to you today? Asking an unconditionally positive question, so, a question that can't be answered in a negative way. If you ask, "How was your day," which is neutral, most people go to the negative.

I would go in and if it's a coaching client, I'll ask them "What's the best thing that's happened in the last two weeks since we've spoken?" I might ask the same thing about an organization—what strengths are you leveraging? How have you been successful? Sometimes I'll use a scaling technique too—on a scale of one to ten, where would you put yourself, your business today—if I'm meeting a new client. If they're like, oh, we're only at a four. Oh, really, why aren't you at a three? What did you do to get from three to four? So, you focus on what they've already accomplished, and that usually shifts the conversation.

Kym First of all, I just learned something really special from you, several things. When you said how did you go from a three to a four, I would've never thought of that angle. I would've been thinking about, so what's going on here? I'm glad you helped me with this. I would've gone to so what's preventing you from being an eight, a nine? But I like what you just did. Oh, that's great. What helped you go from a three to a four? That's really good. I'm using that.

Shannon Good. Good. I had one client once who told me she was a zero. I did have a moment of being stumped. Then I said, "But you got out of bed this morning, and you got into work. How did you do that?" And, that shifted the conversation for her. So, it's a paradigm shift.

Kym Totally. Tell me about in terms of innovative work being done in positive business. What can you tell us about the new innovations as it relates to positive business?

Shannon Yes. I would say that the Positive Organizational Scholarship at the University of Michigan is really doing some innovative work. If people are interested, the International Positive Psychology Association Conference is happening in Orlando in June. The day before the IPPA Conference happens in June, there's actually a Positive Business Conference happening the day before. I believe it's June 24th, but you can find that on IPPANetwork.org. That is where all of the leading scholars who are doing this kind of work are gathering.

I highly recommend—there's a great book called *Practicing Positive Leadership* by Kim Cameron. It gives you strategies for how to implement some of these practices in your organization.

Kym Yes. I have to ask you, what is driving the movement? What are you finding that's fueling the energy around positive business? Is it because they're quantifying it, actually they're seeing how their sales are going up, their employees are happy at work? Talk to me about what do you think is helping to move it along for it to gain traction.

Shannon That's a great, great question. I think your first answer is right, that finally we're seeing data. Back when Marty Seligman was assessing optimism of sales people and they saw that it translated to the bottom line, then businesses started to say, ooh, this is interesting.

I was part of an Appreciative Inquiry Conference Summit for the entire city of Cleveland, and it was for sustainability. They incorporated an economic element of the task of the summit because businesses. Like a VP of Continental Airlines said, "I am here because sustainability actually helps my bottom line. I'm here because it's good for the environment, but I also see the business benefit of it." So, I think they're quantifying it, and they're seeing that it really does translate to the bottom line.

Kym Yes. That is an important part to this. I think what has us and so many people excited about what's happening in the world of positive psychology is, as we've mentioned, we both hear is in the fact that it's being quantified, the whole notion. I love some of these stats that the science and all the studies have proven that there's a reduction in stress of 23%, better health 39%. Productivity increases by 31%—more creativity, three times more creativity. And here's a big one, that your positive emotions, that whole positive brain generates 37% more sales. Once those numbers started to come in and

people are saying, "Wait, there's much more to this that I need to be thinking about to make sure that I've got a lot of positive energy and positive emotions running through my organization." It's really big.

Let me ask you, I'd love to hear from you what have been some of your personal epiphanies or "ahas" as it relates to all the learning, all the things that in your own life that you've applied to your own life. But what are some of the things through positive psychology that were epiphanies for you?

Shannon

Good question. You know, I think one of the first epiphanies is that it takes work. I had this vision that I would come through this Masters program and I would be happy forever and I wouldn't have to work at it. I found that Barbara Fredrickson used a great image. She says it's like moving a river. You can move the river, but it takes effort to move the river. So, this concept of daily practices of going to the gym, I still have to work at it. And there are benefits to negative emotions, so it's not to say that those things don't spur you on.

I think the other epiphany is—well, two of them. One is around meditation and mindfulness as being one of the number one things that consistently leads to well-being. The second is around relationships, because I was focused on okay, I'll celebrate my wins and I'll get to my to-do list and oh, I'm not going to be able to have time to go out to dinner with my friends. I have

to pick up the kids from school. But, in reading the research, I realized that those connections with our friends and our family are really crucial to our well-being and to our overall functioning. So, I've really tried to engineer back in connecting with other people.

Kym That is so good. Gosh, that whole river thing, that is a different way, metaphorically, to look at this. You can move the river, but it's going to take work, and it is. It is just like your exercise program. It isn't like hey, I've energized my health today. I went to the gym and I worked out. I'll do that again in another three months.

Shannon Right. Exactly.

Kym Yes, and I think that was the "aha" for me. That was the epiphany for me too was that positive emotions, positivity is a work practice. It is like anything that you want to see yourself improve or to maintain. It doesn't just oh, I gave it a shot, and there I'm fixed now.

Shannon Right. I wrote down my three good things last night, so I'm good, right?

Kym Yes. I also love the whole thing that you mentioned three things. The interaction, what was it, 19,000 interactions a day, moments?

Shannon Yes. Daniel Kahneman, over 19,000 moments in a day. Yes.

Kym Shannon, listen, take a few minutes, would you, just tell us about your organization, Positive Business DC? Just give us a little bit more about the scope of what you do there.

Shannon Sure. We are an organization focused on well-being and increasing well-being in the nation's capital but by extension in the rest of the nation. We are a nonprofit. We provide free webinars and content and free meet-ups with interesting speakers to all our members. We have over 1,100 Twitter followers and almost 500 or 600 members in the D.C. area. We sort of think of it as a library. You want to come for resources, free resources, that we could share and share in the abundance of the information that's out there and really to galvanize people. It's been exciting.

We were chosen as a service living project for the Masters program at Penn for the current students. There've been people who've branched off who have created sort of versions in Lincoln, Nebraska and in Baltimore. People really want to connect in a direct way and to learn more about it. It's exciting to see where it's going, and we're open to any and all suggestions as to how we can be more helpful.

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Kym All right. So what's got you most excited about 2015? When you get to the end of 2015, what you want to see happen? What's your vision for that?

Shannon Just in general?

Kym Yes. Just in general.

Shannon Well, one of the things I'm excited about is a personal, one personal thing and then maybe one more global thing. The personal is that I'm helping to co-edit a book on character strengths that's going to benefit a scholarship at the University of Pennsylvania, and that's going to come out this year. It's called *Character Strengths Matter*, and I'm really excited to see that come to fruition. It's going to benefit the Chris Peterson's Scholarship who was one of the creators of the VA survey, so I'm excited about that.

I also am just excited to see where this movement is going because I feel like it has gained such traction since I graduated in '09 that I think it's really exploding. I'm trying to keep my finger on the pulse and see where it leads and see how many more people we can help.

Kym Yes. There's a ton going on. The expansiveness of positivity, the research is just incredible. Isn't it? As it's opened up, and it's really kind of energized everybody in the field to do more and more and find out more.

Shannon It really has. It's thanks to people like you who are doing things on a national scale and seeing the generosity of people in the field which is great that people in the field are practicing what they preach and are very generous in giving back and helping everybody succeed.

Kym Okay. So we're talking to Shannon Polly. Shannon, for people to reach you, the best way for people to reach you who want to find out more or maybe even get—do you offer coaching to people if people want to have some one-on-one coaching? Tell me about that.

Shannon I do. Yes. I offer leadership coaching and workshops and presentations and keynote speeches. People can reach me at ShannonPolly.com. Polly is like "Polly want a cracker."

Kym Oh gosh, that's really good. Shannon Polly, P-O-L-L-Y.com. All right. Shannon, thank you so much for the gift of your insight and your wisdom. We always love what you share with us here at Live Happy and our audience. It's great having you a part of our world.

Shannon Thank you so much for having me, Kym. I really appreciate it.

Kym Listen, I want everybody to know tomorrow, Get Sassy to Eat Happy with Sherry Lee White. Tune in tomorrow for our third day as part of our April series with Wake Up Happy. I hope you have a fantastic day. I want you to have nothing but a fantastic day, and by all means, keep smiling. Until tomorrow, bye-bye for now.