



## Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Dan Tomasulo

### HOST

Kym Yancey

### SPEAKER

Dan Tomasulo

### PRESENTATION

Kym            Good morning, it is another great morning. This is the first day in our five day series for the month of December for *Wake Up Happy*, and it's wonderful, wonderful to have you here with us.

Let me just first say in North Idaho, Angelique, I want to say welcome to *Wake Up Happy*. James, we've got you on the line from Ontario. It's Bethany from Odessa, California, welcome to *Wake Up Happy* this morning. Kelly in Calgary, Alberta, we're saying hello to you this morning; and Suzanne, Little Rock, Arkansas, I want to welcome each and every one of you to *Wake Up Happy*. If this is your first time participating in our *Wake Up Happy* sessions, I want to say you're in the right place at the right time, because everything we're going to be talking about this entire week is going to be on ways to expand and take your happiness to a whole other level.

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We have a fantastic guest with us today, Dan Tomasulo, and we're going to really get into his concept of Dare to be Happy. Again, Live Happy is leading a global movement to help make our world a happier place. We have a fantastic magazine. If you've not have the opportunity to plug into our magazine, you can find us on newsstands like at Barnes & Noble, in airports, in grocery stores like Whole Foods across the country. We also are digital, so if you are listening to us in a market that you can't get your hands on a physical piece—we're having a little mute problem. Let me fix this for you everybody, so you—I think we're good now. So you now can connect with us digitally and that's really opened up the whole world for the Live Happy organization to share our content with you.

Our entire focus is on helping you really get in touch with the, really what I think is the success lubricant as it relates to happiness. That's really understanding the principles behind it, how you can make it work for you. Happiness is more than a feeling. It's a decision, it's an attitude, it's a way of life. Here at Live Happy our holistic science based approach gives you the keys necessary to unlock authentic happiness, and we provide the tools that will help you overcome everyday stresses and find purpose, meaning and greater connection in all areas of you life, so it's an exciting time right now.

I got to tell you I'm curious if you find this in your own life that never before have I seen more mindfulness and more attention and more interest in the field of happiness. We're

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having a few problems here. I'm just letting our people know to mute that mic. Okay, great; we got it. For some reason we're having a strange problem this morning and hopefully that doesn't happen too much more, but we'll get it under control if it does.

Okay, so let me tell you about our very, very special guest. His name is Dan Tomasulo. Dan holds a PhD in Psychology and a Master in Fine Arts and Writing and is the first licensed psychologist and psychodramatist to graduate from the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program from the University of Pennsylvania in 2012. In addition to teaching at New Jersey City University, he is Assistant Instructor for Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, at the University of Pennsylvania for the MAPP program.

He writes for *Psychology Today* as an expert on group therapy, the healing crowd, and authors the daily column, Ask the Therapist, for PsychCentral.com, as well as their proof positive blog on practical applications of positive psychology. He is also the creator of Interactive Behavioral Therapy and the Dare to Be Happy experiential workshops and is an Associate Professor of Psychology at New Jersey University where he created the first positive psychology course to become a permanent full term offering in the state. He is co-author of *Healing Trauma: The Power of Group Treatment for People With Intellectual Disabilities* and the American Psychological Association's first book on this subject and the first psychologist to win the statewide Healthcare Provider of the Year award from the ARC of New Jersey.

Dr. Dan Tomasulo, welcome to *Wake Up Happy*.

Dan Hello, Kym, thank you so much. I feel honored to be here.

Kym It's great to have you on with us to kick off this wonderful morning. I also want to tell everyone you can get social with us. You can tag us at *Wake Up Happy* and our Twitter handle is MyLiveHappy and Facebook.com My Live Happy if you want to plug into us from that standpoint.

So Dare to be Happy, I want to start right away with the title of that program, Dare to be Happy. What drew you to that concept and explain to us what you mean by Dare to be Happy?

Dan That's a good question. I think what was most important to me is trying to refine the elements in positive psychology. Positive psychology is work. People want to talk about getting happy or being happy, but the ultimate goal is sustainable happiness, and what that means is that there needs to be a sustained effort in order to keep that coming. By definition emotions are fleeting, so if something makes us happy on one day at one point in time, we need to be doing a variety of different things in order to sustain happiness. We need a lot of tools in that toolbox until we've reached pretty much a tipping point where it becomes easier, but it never goes away.

The struggle is always there, so the idea behind Dare to be Happy is how do we put a number of these positive interventions into place. And then eventually how do we, as Barbara Fredrickson might say, broaden and build our approach? How do we keep adding to the toolbox so that when the inevitable feces hits the oscillator we have tools that we can use to respond?

Kym            Let me ask you; what drew you into positive psychology, what was the tipping point for you?

Dan            I went through a really rough time in my personal life that was sustainable. It was several months and it was wearing me down and I was fortunate enough to have a best friend who was a positive psychologist; and when you're in a miserable spot and when you're feeling depressed, and it's not a good thing for a psychologist to be depressed. You listen to people and what they're bringing to you and if you're not in a good place, you're not really going to help them, so I was really looking for something to help bring about change. My friend was all wired into positive psychology and he started turning me on little by little to Marty Seligman's work and Barbara Fredrickson's work and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the guy who wrote *Flow*, and started bringing me into that field a little at a time.

And eventually what happened is I could not ignore the research, it was so good and then I thought it's worth a try. I'm not feeling better, I'm not getting better and the

situation wasn't changing; and little by little I started using the positive interventions that had been so well researched. And I started to climb out of that not okay place and then I wanted to learn more and more and more and more.

I started writing about it. I have a number of different blogs, and then I realized that I don't want to just be on the perimeter. I didn't need another degree, I didn't need to go back to school, but this was so powerful that I said let me go learn right from the fountain, let me see what this is about and I was very lucky to get into the program. It's a tough program to get in, probably even a tougher program to get out, but it's like drinking from the fire hose for a year. They make sure you're in touch with all the research that's coming out, at least in a marginal way, and in most cases in a very in depth way.

What happened during that year was a real transformation. I started using the positive interventions and really found them to be amazingly effective and I couldn't ignore the research. I couldn't ignore the feelings that I was having and then it made me crave wanting to pass that on to others and that's where the Dare to be Happy concept came from.

Kym

You know it's so fascinating to me that I have found that one of the key links to the people that I have spoken to that like yourself that have their masters in positive psychology and doctorates, etc., that they came from a place of deep depression or

some deep traumatic personal situation brought them to this place. Do you find that to be across the board? Do you notice that, too, in the people that you meet, the people in the industry that they tended to move into this as a result of just going through a very dark space within themselves?

Dan That is very true, and you know what's funny? My cohort, the group that I went through with, we started to become aware of it in talking to ourselves and I certainly don't think that's a prerequisite for getting into the program, but I do think what's happened is there's something called PTG, post traumatic growth, and they found out that somewhere around a third of the people who go through trauma use that experience as the springboard in their life; that instead of it creating a post traumatic stress disorder or a malaise of some kind, they take the traumatic incident and reconfigure, reinvent themselves and use it as a springboard to become what they've wanted to become.

I think what's happened in many ways is that the people who are drawn to the research and the practical application of positive psychology have had that personal dynamic in them, a strong resilience, and then when they come to the program, they're looking for the other factors and a like minded group to support each other. The MAPP community, the Master of Applied Positive Psychology community, is extraordinary. It's about 350 of us now scattered around the world and I know I can travel to any country—I was in Moscow a couple of years ago, I can travel anywhere and I can call up a MAPPs of that listing. We have MAPPs in China, in Canada and all over the globe, and I know if I go

anywhere near there, I can call up somebody I've never met and we're bonded already because of our experiences.

Kym Dan, tell me from your view, what are some of the big myths around happiness that you think people really need to get in touch with as it relates to happiness and fulfillment in their lives?

Dan There are probably three things that would come to the top of my mind. The first is what makes you happy. I think the concept of happiness has been around forever and everybody from Aristotle, Buddha, everybody is taking a swing at it, and the long and the short of it is most people don't really know what it is that makes them happy. So here we are on the Cyber Monday after Black Friday and all these materialistic approaches, what we know about that is that material things are likely to make us feel happy for a brief time, but after a while they fall into something called the hedonic treadmill. It's sort of like it's good for a while, but then it becomes passé or it loses value, so the first thing is learning how to choose the right thing to make you happy.

As an example if you have \$1,000 to spend, you would do much better crafting and buying yourself some amazing experience in the future, a great vacation, a great trip, something really exciting because that would give you something to really look forward to, enjoy when you have it and then to have a very strong positive memory afterwards. Whereas if you were to buy something for \$1,000 that you think will make you happy, I



don't know, a new lawnmower or something, then that thing will make you happy for a while, but in the long run it's not going to be sustainable, so that's the first thing.

The second thing I think is that people know at some level, but maybe not at the level that we see at research that relationships are the most important thing in life, and forget about experiences and forget about material things; but investing in relationships is where it's at. If you want to talk about sustainable happiness invest in your family and friends and have happy people and people that you want to be with around you.

I guess the Dare to be Happy part I would say also limit the people that are the energy vampires. It's not just a matter of being around people that you want to be with, but don't be around the people that are so draining that you don't have enough positive energy left for the people you'd want to be with.

I guess the final thing about happiness is about how as human beings we don't do very well at all at predicting the future. Dan Gilbert up at Harvard does some great research on what he calls nexting [ph], or he wrote a book called *Stumbling on Happiness*; and he does some great research on something called the end of history illusion. He took people in their 30s and their 40s and their 50s and 60s all the way on up and he asked the 30 year olds, what was the last ten years like; and they said my God, I went through this and I went through that; it was horrible. It was terrible; I got married. I got divorced. I have eight kids, you know whatever they did and then they ask how do you think the next

ten years is going to be? I'm okay; everything is pretty cool now. It should be smooth sailing here on out.

Then he asked the 40 year olds and they said the same thing. Oh, my God, from 30 and 40 I got remarried, now I have 12 kids, there's this, there's that, [indiscernible] they do. And then he asked them what do you think about the next ten years? They go, oh, I'm pretty much done. Things are good, smooth sailing now. And he finds that every group believes that the last ten years they lived through has been the worst and that everything is going to be smooth sailing, so we don't really prepare well for the future; and that's where I think resilience comes in, being able to have tools that are amplifying your resilience.

Kym

I want to get into some of those tools and I also want to talk with you about what you have found to be the most effective interventions for yourself and your clients. But before I do that, this is a great time to talk about some great Tweets that I heard speaking with you. So one of them was myths, what makes you happy. Most people don't really know what makes them happy. There's one Tweet. Another one is, material things will make us feel happy briefly; not in the long term. Material things will make us feel happy briefly; not in long term. Another thing that you said is, instead of material things, spend your dollars on experiences; and he's not saying don't spend money on things, but just what you're going to get your greatest bang for your happiness buck, your happiness buck is instead of material things, spend your dollars on experiences.

I tell you what's so incredible. Recently I did a swim with the dolphins with my family and to your point we talked about it before we did it; we were blown away while we were doing it and all we've done since is talk about it, and continue to relive that experience. And you were so right. I know that that will be one of those topics, one of those subjects that will constantly be, will surface again and again and again, so that's a great point that you made on material things versus those experiences.

Dan           That's good.

Kym           And the other thing you mentioned was relationships are the most important thing in the life. I don't think we should—and when you say that, and I think in fact I'd love to hear your take on this, because I think this is so big. Relationships are the most important thing in life. I think it's easy to say of course they are. Well, let's talk about that. When you look at the new relationships you're cultivating or the things that you're doing if you're saying to yourself I don't have any new relationships. I'm busy. I'm so focused on the things I'm doing with my life and career and work and those kinds of things. What tips would you give people today that they could apply to their life or the way they can apply it to the way they think about relationships to start cultivating or engaging more in relationship development activities? What comes to mind for you?

Dan First of all, I think that's a great question because one of the things that tends to happen if you think about what happens in marriages, what happens in intimate relationships, what happens with friendships, what happens when you know people for an extended period of time somehow they don't really get on your to-do list. When I wake up in the morning, I have a to-do list that is breathing down my neck. It's like this amazing to-do list and one of the things I realized is that if I'm just giving to that, I'll be very productive; I'll get a lot of things done. But what I really have to get on my priority list is nurturing my friendships. I make sure that I build in time for friends, and it might sound crazy, but I don't let it be something random. It's like when I'm with my best friend and my pals and the folks that I really love and know I really want that time to be precious and preserve and make it happen.

Too often what happens is we get so wrapped up in what we're doing that the relationships that we need to be nurturing it's sort of like me saying these are beautiful flowers. I'm going to water them tomorrow. I'm too busy now to water them; and if I do that for a couple of days, they start to wither. It's the same thing with friendships and intimate relationships. It's like if you keep the reciprocal and mutual nurturing alive, you have to invest in it and that means making it a priority. So with my friends we schedule time to be together and just chill out and we catch up with what's going on in the world, what's going on in their lives and have some fun and not let the things I have to do eclipse the important things I have to do, which is nurture those relationships.

Kym That's great, and I couldn't agree with you more, so let's talk about most effective interventions. What are some of the key interventions that you've incorporated into your daily life and things for your clients that you find to be very effective?

Dan First of all let me just say I am really, really honored to be here and I really like the work that you guys are doing and Live Happy is like it's an amazing program managing, you guys are doing the right things. The idea here is what you're doing for the world is what we each have to do for ourselves, which is keep it constant. Keep something on the agenda that you're doing in order to be happy. Don't let it be a passive thing. You have to do something active.

The number one thing on the list, and if people don't get anything other than this today—well, that would be said, but if they only get one thing from it, it would be gratitude. I do a daily gratitude review the moment I wake up. That to-do list that's breathing down my neck, the first thing I do is I push it away and I review the last 24 hours very specifically about what I have gratitude for, and it can be global things. It was a nice day or I had a good meal, but the more specific I can be about that gratitude, the better it will work, so I try to generate as many memories as possible about that gratitude.

Now that's kind of an amazing intervention. It sounds simple. I recently wrote an article called "Mental Floss," don't judge me on the title.

Kym I like it, I like it.

Dan But it was in the time it takes you to brush your teeth, you can do a gratitude review of the last 24 hours; and what happens is gratitude is one of those interventions that has the power to warp time. If I'm thinking about yesterday and maybe yesterday wasn't such a great day, but if I start thinking about the day and highlight all the things I have gratitude for; my friend came to see me, I took a great walk with another friend of mine. We went out for breakfast; that was great. I got an email inviting me to keynote something. Something comes along that in the middle of the day that might have been a struggle, now I've highlighted maybe five, six, ten good things and gratitude has now warped my perception of the past.

Maybe when I woke up this morning I didn't think yesterday was such a great day, but guess what? Now it's filled with a different memory, and when you do that, you feel better in the moment, so it changes the past. It changes the present and what we know from the research is that you'll have a more optimistic outlook for about two weeks by having done that, so if you do it on a regular basis. I try to do it every morning. Some mornings I just don't get to it, but I put it on the agenda every day and I'm pretty good. I'll get a minimum of three times and usually closer to five or six times a week, and I know that that intervention alone starts me off in a very different way. And when I work with my patients or I teach or train or do keynotes, I make sure that people know that that is a really viable way to start your day.

Kym Dan, what do you do when you're having one of those moments where you went down the negative path or you're feeling like I'm like not in the best mood right now? I just want to hear, what kind of course corrections do you do, because I would surely imagine with your expertise, you immediately know it's an issue, I'm having it and I'm living it right now. What do you do when you're faced with that?

Dan I try to keep things uber simple and the very first thing, and this is really what the breakthrough issue is in positive psychology if you were to ask my opinion on it, and it's to keep it very, very simple and the breakthrough issue I think is to know that you have a choice about how you feel. And that's essential, because if I'm not in a good place and I don't think I have any control or any way to manage it or life is pressing on me too hard or something has gone wrong, if I don't know for certain that I have a choice, then I'm stuck. I'm going to be stuck in that whirlpool of depression or anxiety or malaise, whatever that is.

So the first thing is to recognize that you have a choice. The second thing is to recognize that you can change how you feel, and a lot of people really never thought about that. Some people wrote about it either back in the '60s and '70s, but the bottom line is that it's really only been the last maybe 20 years we've started to do the research. You have a choice and you can change how you feel, so starting with those two things is really important, so that you don't feel victimized by your thoughts.

And then once that happens, then you can choose a different path. I can do a gratitude review. I can mediate. I can exercise. I can call up a friend. I can nurture my relationships. If I really want to change it rapidly, the first thing I'll do is an act of kindness. If I'm in a really nasty spot, I'll go out and do something for somebody else. Kindness is one of the fastest way to break that tailspin, because you can do something for somebody else and the next thing you know, you're out of your space.

You're out of that negative spiral and there's something called the elevation effect, which means if I do something kind to somebody else, I feel good; they feel good, but here's the coolest thing. Anybody witnessing it will feel good, too, and that's an extraordinary thing, so you have a choice. You can change and you can cultivate sustainable positive feeling, so I might not be feeling good in the moment, but I if know I have a choice, then I know I can change. That starts this upward positive spiral, which at the very least can slow down the negative thought, hopefully neutralize them and in the best case start to turn them around; and once that happens, I realize I can start to cultivate a positive change, a positive spiral.

And then the cool thing is that if you go out and do something kind for somebody else, what starts to happen is you can create a positive feeling in others, so just like if you're around somebody who's really depressed and really in a bad spot, they can pull you down. It's really hard being with very negative people, but just in the other way you can



be a very positive influence on others, so those would be the four things to keep in mind. You have a choice. You can change. You can cultivate sustainable positive feelings, and you can help create those feelings, those four Cs. Choice, change, cultivate and create.

Kym Say that one more time, choice—

Dan Sure, you have a choice about what you think and feel; you can change how you feel; you can cultivate sustainable positive feelings; and you can create these feelings in others: choice, change, cultivate and create. That's the essence of the *Dare to be Happy* workshops. We work on that, so that people really start to understand that these four things are really important when you're not in a good place. And there are going to be times you're not going to be in a good place and it's not all about being happy. It's about how do you form patterns of resilience, so that you can cope with it and not stay in a dark place too long.

Kym That's fantastic. Dan, I want to come back to you and just do a quick wrap-up. I want to tell everyone you're listening and participating in *Wake Up Happy* brought to you by Live Happy.

I want to also invite you to, as we transition here to get ready for tomorrow's programs is to let you know please send me your banana smiles. I'm going to see if Britney can pull up on the screen for those of you that are on your computer, we are collecting these

banana smiles and, Dan, these are really cool where you hold up a banana and it's right under your smile, so we don't want it to cover your smile. We want it to be right under your smile, and we're just having a lot of fun.

We got big plans. We're planning on breaking a Guinness Book of World Records in April of 2015 and get the largest gathering of people doing a banana smile, and that's all to bring mindfulness to happiness just to be disruptive, what is this, what's going on and we bring mindfulness to what Living Happy is all about.

I want to ask you also and I want to invite you to join the happiness movement and I just want you to know that if you're not a subscriber to *Live Happy*, please I want to encourage you to be a part of us because the whole reason for our existence is to help raise the happiness level on this planet and provide you with the science and to provide you with the academic proof around and the studies around happiness and how to apply it to your life. So we've put together these three happiness reports for you and plus when you subscribe, you also get our digital edition.

And the other thing I want to tell you is all of the subscribers of *Live Happy* get a replay of these calls, plus a really cool infographic and transcripts, so we take all of this and we have a person that's listening, Dan, we have a person who is listening to this and is doing an infographic, a one pager to summarize this, along with transcripts.

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Dan How cool.

Kym Isn't that cool? Everyone gets that when you're a subscriber of *Live Happy*. The other thing I want to tell you that we're doing and, Dan, you'll really dig this is that we came out with our *Live Happy* notes, and these are notes where you can spread happiness just with a post-it note. You can put it in the elevator. You can put it on someone's computer, but they are custom made notes with fabulous handwritten statements like "Be thankful for the little things." Or another one says, "Someone in the world is thinking of you right now." Another one says, "You are loved and appreciated," so we wanted to do some things, I refer to them as happy graffiti. We wanted to do some things—

Dan That's great.

Kym You know what I mean, let you just spread it. It's just really great news and because it's like a post-it note thing, it comes right off if someone needs to take it off. And then we've got our Live Happy apparel, which is just going gangbusters, but the one thing I do want to say and I told someone this that we're getting lots of orders for this, so I just want to my goal here is to pass this onto everyone, so you know about ways that you can with the holidays incorporate happiness. Here's the story. I think this is really cute and it's fun.

We came out with this *Live Happy* 50 happiness facts and quotes. It's a beautiful book. It's a tabletop just beautiful book and with great quotes, great facts, and so here's what

you do. You get these. You order these at LiveHappy.com, just go to LiveHappy.com and when you put a wonderful ribbon and bow around it, and you say to someone with all the great things that you do and with all the impact that you make, it was hard for me to think of anything that could possibly be better than the gift of happiness; and then you give them the book. So it's a great way to have fun and put a smile on someone else's face and give them something that's easy for them to read and enjoy.

So I just wanted to pass along for you some of those things and, by the way, because it's Cyber Monday one day only, Monday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, you get 15% off the entire store, so everything at LiveHappy.com when you go to our website, click on Store; everything in the entire store is 15% off, free shipping on any order over \$25. So I just want you to be aware of what happiness is bringing to the world and what we got there for you.

So with that, Dan, everyone we're going to send everyone away and I want to make sure that there are two things that they get. One is your quote, your special quote that you have for us, which was, if you feel something, say something. If you feel something, say something.

And lastly as we sign off, give us one major specific action today. I've got thousands of people tuning in, what would you like them today, when they hang up the phone today that you'd like for them to do, Dan?

Dan I would hope that the one thing that people can incorporate into their life today and perhaps every day is kindness and being generous. When you go to the food store and they're collecting a dollar for the local food bank, give it. When you have a chance to help somebody, help somebody. The two most immediate ways that you can feel better is by being kind and being generous, so I hope you'll bring that into your lives today and to the lives of others.

Kym That was fantastic, and I love that reminder for everybody. Dan, listen, we so appreciate you being part of *Wake Up Happy*. I want to wish everyone today a phenomenal, phenomenal Monday. Tomorrow and for the rest of this week, every day we have a happiness expert. We're so blessed to have Dan with us today for our kick-off on Monday. Tomorrow will be Stacy Kaiser, *Secret Skills to Happiness*, so join us tomorrow.

Dan, have a fabulous day. To everyone, be happy and spread it because you know it's the right thing to do. Bye bye for now.