



## Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Barbara Fredrickson

### HOST

Kym Yancey

### SPEAKER

Barbara Fredrickson

### PRESENTATION

Kym        Hey, good morning. It's so wonderful to be here with you. This is Kym Yancey. I'm the Co-Founder and CEO of *Live Happy*, and it is truly a pleasure to share this time with you.

We have an extraordinary guest, someone that I've been following for quite some time, and I'm so thrilled to bring to you today Barbara Fredrickson, and we're going to be talking about positive organizing and human flourishing, and I'll tell you a little bit more about her.

I want you to know that any time during this conversation you can reach out to us. For those of you that are on your computers and you see the screen that we've got up here, it's great, it allows you to join in on our chat, or maybe there might be

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something that she says that you think, "Oh my gosh, I wish I could ask her this."

Pretty much most of the time we're able to get to most of the things you want to get to, but I just want you to know you can just send in something there for us.

Also, you can communicate with me through [wakeuphappy@livehappy.com](mailto:wakeuphappy@livehappy.com), our whole Wake Up Happy team gets this e-mail and we can connect with you and discuss things.

Also, you can engage with us through our social media, so with Twitter it's My Live Happy and with Facebook it's My Live Happy, and you can connect with us there. So, I just want to invite you to engage with us. And of course you pull up [livehappy.com](http://livehappy.com) on your computer so you can really have the Live Happy experience, and we're going to have just a great time.

Okay, so with that, let's move right into this fantastic, fantastic session we've got this morning. Again, we're featuring Barbara Fredrickson. She is a Kenan Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Principal Investigator of the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research reveals how positive emotions, fleeting as they are, can tip the scales toward a life of flourishing. She's the winner of several awards for her research in teaching, including the American Psychological Association's inaugural

Templeton Prize in Positive Psychology, and the Society of Experimental Social Psychology's Career Trajectory Award.

Barb created her "broaden and build" theory to describe how positive emotions evolved for our human ancestors, and how today they vitally shape people's health and wellbeing. Barb's scientific contributions have influenced scholars and practitioners worldwide in disciplines ranging from education to business and beyond. Her research has been featured in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine, CNN, PBS, *US News & World Report*, *USA Today*, *Oprah* magazine, and other places, and she was invited to brief his holiness, the Dalai Lama, on her research.

Barbara, it's so nice to have you this morning on *Wake Up Happy*.

Barbara      Oh, it's great to be here, Kym. Thanks for the invitation.

Kym          Barbara, let's get right to why should we care about whether we wake up happy? What difference does that make to how our day unfolds?

Barbara      Oh, it makes a lot of difference. Emotions, and positive emotions in particular, affect the way your mind works, so if you wake up happy you wake up with a more open, flexible mindset. That open, flexible mindset can help you deal with any difficulties that may come your way in the morning or throughout the day, basically

help you bounce back, be resilient, certainly makes you into someone that others are drawn to because that open, at ease feeling that you have, it's broadcast through your body posture, your facial expressions, how you move, and that can draw people towards you in a good way.

And probably one of the bigger reasons to wake up happy today is because it makes it easier to wake up happy tomorrow, and wake up happy next week, and wake up happy next season. It builds on itself in an upward spiral.

Kym I had someone, I just want you to address this, someone said to me, because one of the hottest terms in the positive psychology movement is simple, is that you can choose to be happy. Happiness is a choice. And I had someone just the other day say to me, "I don't get it. How do I just choose happiness?" What do you say to people about that, the whole notion of choosing happiness and the people who struggle with that whole concept that I can just choose it?

Barbara Right. Well, sometimes we feel like emotions are just like the weather, like they just happen to us, like this amazingly cold day. But emotions aren't just automatic reflexes. They hinge on how we interpret our circumstances. And so those interpretations, or what psychologists call "appraisals," are the real levers where we have choice over how we feel. We can walk through the world thinking that everything is ho-hum, or we can walk through the world thinking that wow, this is a

gift. This is something I should treasure. That's where our lines of thinking are things that we choose, and we can choose to have more fruitful lines of thinking that will plant the seeds for happiness.

Another key thing that we can choose is the situations that we put ourselves in. And what we've been learning is that when people prioritize putting themselves in situations that they know they'll enjoy, well, that's one way to choose happy, too.

Kym Yes, and you have likened positive emotions to nutrients, so explain that a little bit for us.

Barbara Well, positive emotions, they certainly affect us in the here and now. They change the way our brains work, creating that greater openness. They certainly feel good. Those are the in the moment benefits of positive emotions. But positive emotions also have these downstream benefits, this is what I've articulated in my broaden and build theory that you mentioned, and those downstream consequences, basically they build our resources for survival and thriving, and those resources become durable parts of our character. So, we are nourishing our development toward our best selves when we experience positive emotions in the here and now.

Positive emotions have an effect right when you feel them, and then as they accumulate and compound they make us better next season than we are today. And that's in the same way that the nutrients that we get from the fruits and

vegetables that we eat, they're good for us today, they give us energy today, but they also build up our capacity and our health for next season. So, I really think of positive emotions and positive social connections as important daily health behaviors.

Kym        Talk to us about, and I loved this when I read this from you, about cell renewal and positive emotions. I'm going to give you some time to really talk about your body and the cells and the role that positive emotions play in that.

Barbara    Right. One of the things that my research lab tests most, is our main focus these days, are the biological effects of the experience of positive emotions, and we are especially looking at these days changes in gene expression in the immune system. The gene expression work is interesting because it's how our daily experience shape who we physically become in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

We think about our DNA all the time as kind of being, well, your DNA is set in stone. Your DNA doesn't change, so your genes don't change. But they're basically just a blueprint or a recipe for who you are. And when your cells are actually engaged in cell renewal and building the next version of yourself, because your cells renew and change repeatedly, all the time, some parts of your body, like your taste buds, your cells renew in a matter of hours. But on average across all different systems of the body you might have 1% cell renewal today, 30% in a

month, close to 100% in a season, and so that's how cells are remade is affected by all kinds of things about our daily experience, including emotion experience.

And what we've learned is that people, if they learn to increase their daily experience of positive emotions, self-generate positive emotions, if they learn to choose happy, if you will, that gene expression in the immune system is affected in ways that are associated with health. Specifically, it's a reduced expression of pro-inflammatory genes and an increased expression of antiviral and antibody synthesis genes, so that in two ways our bodies, our immune systems become better equipped to keep us healthy.

Kym        What this really underscores for me is also the reverse effect of this. If you're not putting in positive emotions, if you don't have a positive high gene, a happiness high gene, what that's doing to you, the reverse of that has got to be really pretty devastating, I would think. And I think we don't realize it, right, Barbara, what we're carrying within ourselves within that gene expression?

Barbara    Yes, I think that's really compelling to think about, but it's really important to avoid the logical fallacy of looking at—this isn't what you're saying but it's closely related, of looking at somebody who's ill, or seeing that once you're dealing with an illness yourself and thinking, oh, that must be because I wasn't happy enough.

Kym Yes, yes.

Barbara That illness is so multiply determined and you can't infer by an illness that the emotions weren't right. But what we do know is that emotional experience is embodied. Emotions by definition are not just something that rolls around in the mind, but they're deeply embodied and affect our biochemistries, our physiological activity and attributes. And so emotions help to shape who we are and what our health is like, that is becoming more and more clear, but it's one of many contributors to health.

Kym The science of happiness and making our point, whether it be in corporate life, home life, whatever the case may be, that being happy is not some frivolous thing. Help me through this one, Barbara, okay, because I remember being a kid and Dad would give me the assignment to cut the grass and all that, and I remember one day saying to my dad, "You know, Dad, I'm not very happy right now."

Barbara Yes.

Kym But the best part was his response is, "Well, that's just too bad. You're just going to have to be unhappy."

Barbara Right.



Kym           And it makes me laugh, but it was really good, but I think with the whole term of happy, and happiness, and career life, and personal life, for those of us that are happy people can say oh, my gosh, you're one of them, because they're not used to it. They're not looking at it through the lens, or been exposed to the research behind it to understand, it isn't about us being one of them, one of these happy people, it's about understanding that everything in my life works better when I'm happy. Can you talk about that from a science, the validation of what happiness is all about for humanity in general?

Barbara       Right. Well, positive emotions, feeling happy and upbeat, they're ways that by evolution's design those are psychological states that put us on trajectories of growth and of greater social connection. And so they're not just about that they feel good, it's that they help us become better versions of ourselves, they help us become more close-knit in community, they signal what trajectory that we're on.

So, in a way, I mean, I'm a parent, too, and I've had those moments where my kids aren't doing their chores and they're not happy [indiscernible], but when you can find a way to do the dreaded work but still be reasonably upbeat while you do it, like, well, this is what I've got to do, that actually arguably does help build your resilience, help connect you better into your network and your community. So, it's not a trivial difference whether you approach that dreaded task with dread and

gloom, or acceptance, openness, and just sort of like, what will I learn out of doing this? Maybe it's just, oh, I hate mowing the grass.

Kym Right.

Barbara But there's a way to take it in a more casual way. Those choices that we make about whether to hold on to a grudge, or negativity, or just a downness versus move on—when you say happiness is a choice I agree that that makes it sound almost too easy.

Kym Yes.

Barbara Too simple. And one of my former doctoral students has got a great way of phrasing this, this is Lana Catalino [ph], she does work on prioritizing positivity, but argues that the pursuit of happiness is a delicate art. It's not something that's necessarily so simple. There are ways that it can backfire, like if people just say, okay, I'm just going to be happy no matter what, and they just try to strong arm their feelings—

Kym Yes.

Barbara      Focus on okay, I'm going to be happy, I'm going to be happy, I'm going to be happy.

Kym          Right.

Barbara      It just doesn't work that way. I actually think that a little knowledge of positive psychology can be a dangerous thing because it can set people off with these expectations for how they should feel. And then they beat themselves up when they don't feel that way, or they value happiness excessively, which the research shows actually that can backfire and ironically chase happiness away and make people feel lonelier and less happy. What we've found is a much more effective way to increase one's own feelings of happiness is not to just worship happiness in that, say, or just wish it or will it into being, but instead to prioritize positivity in your to-do list.

We all know things that we enjoy, or people that when we connect with them they help us feel more upbeat and alive, or are passionate about our favorite activities. The problem is we often don't give ourselves permission to do those things frequently. Our to-do list is filled with a number of obligations and duties and chores, and there's not as much enjoyment on there. A very simple thing that people who are happier in life do is they prioritize the positivity, so rather than regulating their happiness by trying to will it into being, they regulate their

happiness by setting aside time to do things that they enjoy. That part is a more skillful way to get into the choice of happiness.

Kym        How do you get people to really engage what you just said here? How do people prioritize their positivity, and how do they differ from those who don't? Let's build on that a little bit.

Barbara    Yes, well one of the things that we find is that how people do that is, first of all, we've created ways to measure the degree to which people naturally do this. And we find that that scale that assesses people's degree of prioritizing positivity predicts how much effort that they'll put into securing an experience of joy or amusement.

In a way, they're willing to put in the effort to create a good experience. And that's like suppose having dinner with friends is something that really makes you feel alive and connected and joyful. Well, the person who prioritizes positivity is willing to put in the work to send out the invitations, create a menu, do all the other things that may not be as fun as sitting down and having dinner with your friends, but they're willing to put in the advance effort.

We also find that people who prioritize positivity are better at savoring, so when a good thing is unfolding in front of them they linger with it longer and really extract all the joy that they can out of it. And we also find that they're more likely to really

throw themselves into opportunities to express their appreciation to others in ways that stokes their own gratitude and the good feelings, but also gives it away in terms of expressing to other people.

Kym        Tell us about your recipe, let's just talk about a prescription for everybody around here are the things that you tell people, you coach people around when it comes to improving your happiness, we're touching on all the points, but I'm talking about some specific things each day that we should be thinking about from your perspective that will help us with our positive emotions.

Barbara    Right. Well, I think there are a couple of things that I can point out. One is, again, following up on this idea that prioritizing positivity is a far more effective way to pursue happiness than just to excessively value happiness and just wishful thinking it into being. You can think about what you could do today to take something that you're passionate about, excited about, really know you enjoy, and add that to your to-do list, have it to look forward to, have it as part of your day to experience. One of the items on our scale to measure prioritizing positivity is I admire people who make decisions in life based on how happy those choices will make them, so be one of those people. What makes people feel happy, connected, and joyful, that's very personal. But I feel like we all know what they are. We just need to give ourselves permission.

Another thing that we found is really helpful in boosting positive moods, feelings, and connection, and this I write about in *Love 2.0*, is just reflecting on connection each day, that if we just end our days thinking about the longest interactions that we had that day and just ask ourselves how connected did I feel, how in tune did I feel? We find that asking that question every day for several weeks raises people's positive emotions but also affects heart rhythms in ways that create more cardiovascular health.

So, it's definitely what we call a psychoactive question, reflecting on connection every night. And that could be that it just makes us value connections that we already have more dearly, it helps give us a time of the day to really cherish them, or it may just nudge us to create better connections tomorrow because I didn't feel like I was very connected today. Either one of those ways is really helpful.

Kym        I have a couple of true or false questions for you. One of them is, true or false, does happiness take work?

Barbara    I think it does. I think our research actually shows that people who prioritize positivity are happier, have more wellbeing, less depression, all those kinds of things, but they also are willing to work, to put in the effort to create experiences for themselves and for others that bring happiness.

- Kym True or false, when you're happy you're not going to go through stress?
- Barbara False, for sure. That stuff happens to all of us. It will help you weather the storm better, but it's not going to prevent the storm from coming.
- Kym Tell us about *Love 2.0*, an exciting, exciting book, but tell us about why you wrote it, what it's all about.
- Barbara Yes, my aim in that book is to challenge people to think about love in a different way. So often we think about love in terms of romance and marriage and soulmates and exclusivity, and I think that that frame around love inadvertently blinds us to everyday connections that are equally as important, or can potentially be equally as important to our health and wellbeing. So, that's why I suggest that our views of love need an upgrade.
- Kym Yes. Barbara, what do you do, I just really want to hear, when you're having, I don't want to go as far as to say it's stinking thinking or anything like that, but when you're having one of those days, one of those moments where you're just not very happy, or you're a little, oh, it bothered me, whatever, what do you do? Because obviously you know, you identify the symptoms right away, what do you do to change your emotions to more positive emotions when you're faced with that right on the spot?

Barbara Right. I think about the mindset that goes along with positivity, even if I'm not feeling good, that in positive emotional states you have a do anything attitude, and so I think, oh, to get out of this I need to do anything different. Like whatever course of action I'm on I just try to break set from that, and sometimes it's go find someone who's more upbeat, sometimes it's just go find my meditation cushion and just take five minutes in a different mind space. I do a lot of research on the effects of love and kindness meditation, I've seen in the data that it has huge effects on people, and so I think, okay, I need some of that. I need some of that right now. And so I try to practice what we study in our research.

Kym Share with them the tipping point for you on why you even got into this, how you made this your focus, your focus and life mission, your tipping point?

Barbara Well, yes, I was back in graduate school beginning to study emotions and started a post-doc on emotions research, and this was back when psychology hardly studied emotions at all. It was just really a new renaissance where we could admit that people had emotions and study them from the scientific perspective, and all of the research, virtually all of it was on negative emotions; anger, fear, disgust, anxiety.

And I just asked the question, well, why isn't there any research on positive emotions, don't they exist too? And that just led me down this path to, it was



really just an intellectual curiosity about why isn't there any science on this, and just tried to pursue that question of why humans evolved to have positive emotions in the first place.

Kym        Are you in the mood, can you handle an on the spot question?

Barbara    Sure.

Kym        Tell us something that we'd be surprised to know about you, Barbara.

Barbara    Oh, what would you be surprised to know. Let's see, this is a crazy one that just popped into mind, that when I was in graduate school, it was mid-80s, and I had a crew cut.

Kym        That's good.

Barbara    I just came across an old picture of that the other day and I thought ooh.

Kym        I love it. I love it. You need to put that up. Send it to us, we'll put it up, Barbara.

Barbara    I just had a long strand of hair, it was a flat top but also just with a long strand of dyed hair that hung down in the front. So, yes, I was—

Kym        Barbara, I love it. I love it. I want to see that picture. Right, don't we guys?

              Alright, so listen, I want to give them a few little updates on a few things, and

              Barbara I want to come back for our last statement, or last advice from you is I

              really want you to share with us, okay, you've got this huge audience out here from

              all over the world listening to what we're doing, and I just want you to give

              everybody a call to action for today. We're going to send the world out with

              Barbara Fredrickson's request. This is what I want you to do today. Okay, so I'll

              come right back to you on that. Let me give you guys an update.

I want to remind you, if you've been listening to *Wake Up Happy*, that this show,

one of our sponsors is George Mason University, and they've got a phenomenal

event coming up in March, March 22<sup>nd</sup> through the 27<sup>th</sup>. It's called Leading the

Wellbeing in Workplaces, Organizations, and Communities Conference. This is a

Live Happy Spotlight event. And I want to tell you, you can get all the details

about this, and I really want to encourage you, just check it out. Tickets are on sale

now, so you can go to [wellbeing.onmason.com](http://wellbeing.onmason.com), and you can get all the

information about this incredible, incredible event all around positivity and positive

psychology and those kinds of things.

The other thing I want to tell you is tomorrow we have a phenomenal woman, in

fact, she was inducted into the Happiness Hall of Fame. Her name is Senia

Maymin, and she's going to be on our show tomorrow. I met Senia at the

Happiness Hall of Fame, but she is a tremendous writer. *Profit from the Positive*, is what our focus is going to be tomorrow, *Profit from the Positive*. She works a lot with Margaret Greenberg, they're partners and do a lot of great work, so I can't wait to have her on tomorrow.

I also want to ask you that help us spread the word about Live Happy. I know many of you already have subscriptions to the magazine, so first of all, thank you for doing that, thank you for being a part of that.

But the thing we want to do is continue to push this message around happiness and wellbeing all over the world. I want to suggest that if you've got a subscription maybe give someone else a subscription. Just go to [livehappy.com](http://livehappy.com) and you can send them the digital version, if they're over in China or someplace, or the Philippines, because we're digital now, or the physical magazine, whatever you want to do, but we have all kinds of options there, so I'd love for you to jump on board with us and be a part of that with us, okay? And remember, I'd also love your feedback at [wakeuphappy@livehappy.com](mailto:wakeuphappy@livehappy.com) to get your feedback.

Barbara, with that you're going to give us our send off for today. What do you want us to do?

Barbara      Oh, well, do something that you love and slow down and make a connection with anybody today, someone you already know, somebody you never met yet before. Just make a connection.

Kym            Love that. Slow down, make a connection. Just love that. And definitely check out Barbara's book, *Love 2.0*. You can get it at Amazon.com.

Barbara, thank you so much for the gift of your brilliance. Love it, love it, love it. Live Happy wants to have you back again, and *Wake Up Happy*, to be a part of this, so truly, truly appreciate it. And I know you guys will be thawing out soon, too.

Barbara      Yes. Well, thank you, Kym. This has been a lot of fun. I wish everybody a great warm day.

Kym            Alright, everybody, until tomorrow, be happy. Bye-bye for now.