



## Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Dr. Fred Luskin

### HOST

Kym Yancey

### SPEAKER

Dr. Fred Luskin

### PRESENTATION

Kym            Hey, good morning. Fantastic morning. In fact, just before we opened up the lines, I was talking to Dr. Fred Luskin about how beautiful it is where he's at there at Stanford University. Yes, I just want to tell you, think about the things you're grateful for, even right now. Think about what you're grateful for as we begin this whole series for today, close it out. This is part of our five-day series around waking up happy and really engaging in life and experiencing it in full color the way we need to be taking it in and being in the moment. So, I just want to say I can't think of a better place to be than with you right now, and I so appreciate that you're a part of our *Wake Up Happy!* series.

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My name is Kym Yancey. I am the co-founder and CEO of *Live Happy*. We are a magazine. We are a digital version of that magazine. So, for those of you that have been subscribers to *Live Happy* for the last year, we just broke through our one year anniversary, and you've got the physical version of our magazine. Hey, thank you for plugging in and being a part of us.

But, I'm especially excited that we now have gone digital, so that means that worldwide we've got people listening from all over the world to *Wake Up Happy!* this morning. For them, it's like in the evening. I just want to say welcome and now you can plug into our digital edition so you can really stay in the know and up to date with the hottest things, the hottest research and lifestyle news around happiness and how it can enhance your life in so many ways.

I want you to know that these sessions are all complimentary to you. By this being our last session for this week, I want you to know that our next one in December will be coming up and you can go to [LiveHappy.com](http://LiveHappy.com), and you can register for that right now. Right now you can register and have that plugged into your calendar so you can plan on being engaged with our whole *Wake Up Happy!* series.

All right. With that, let me tell you we want you to get social with us. Our hashtag is [wakeuphappy](https://www.instagram.com/wakeuphappy). We'd love to hear from you, so that's [#wakeuphappy](https://www.instagram.com/wakeuphappy). Our

Twitter is @mylivehappy. Our Facebook is Mylivehappy. So, feel free to plug into us.

I want to give you my personal – this is the e-mail that comes to me. It's called [wakeuphappy@livehappy.com](mailto:wakeuphappy@livehappy.com). So, if you've got anything you want to share or ideas or suggestions, all ears all the time to get your information and to hear what you've got to say. I love it. I love the notes; I love hearing from you.

With that, you ready to get started with forgiveness? I've been so looking forward to this. The focus here on our call is around forgiveness and happiness. So, let me introduce you to our special guest.

His name is Dr. Fred Luskin. He holds a Ph.D. in Counseling and Health Psychology from Stanford University. His work combines lecture with a hands on approach to the ancient tradition of forgiveness. His presentations explore the heal process of forgiveness that when learned can lead to enhanced wellbeing through self-care. Dr. Luskin continues to serve as the director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, an ongoing series of workshops and research projects that investigate the effectiveness of his forgiveness methods on a variety of populations. He currently serves as a senior consultant in health promotion at Stanford University and is a professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. He presents lectures, workshops, seminars, and trainings on the importance,

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health benefits, and training of forgiveness, stress management, and emotional competence throughout the United States.

Dr. Fred Luskin, I will also say that congratulations to you for being inducted into the Happiness Hall of Fame. I was there and I saw that induction. I loved your talk and your acceptance speech there. So, welcome to *Wake Up Happy!*

Fred Yes, thank you.

Kym Let's get right into understanding the research around forgiveness and how this is such an important skill to learn.

Fred You know, directly relating it to your focus on happiness, the reason that I started to push and promote forgiveness was I saw that when people held on to junk from their past, it was really hard for them to open up to right now and be happy. That was the motivation that I used to sell forgiveness to people who had no interest in forgiveness. This was almost twenty years ago. It's just interesting because I was interested in happiness before the culture was interested in happiness, and saw intuitively – I'm sure you had the same intuitive sense, which is why you asked me to talk here – that there's something there about people who don't forgive and how it gets in the way of their happiness.

Kym Yes. Tell us about some of the things that you've learned and that you share around forgiveness and your health and what this leads to, how it impacts you. Just give us the big picture of those items.

Fred Well, everybody's been hurt, or everybody's been disappointed and had people mistreat them. Some people are able to navigate that and some people aren't. And, the ones that aren't, the ones that kind of hold on to the wounds and the grudges and keep them going in their minds, they appear to have health consequences from that, from an inability to resolve and let stuff go.

So, it likely impacts the blood pressure, or some of their hormonal levels because they're constantly churning. There's a [indiscernible] over it, and over it, and over it long past where it makes any sense. My guess is that the human body and the brain are designed to struggle with particular issues only for so long. And then it's time to let them go, and then they go on for too long, the stress of that appears to have health consequences.

Kym Yes. Let me ask you something. You know when you hear about a murder, someone says, "You know, my son or my daughter, my husband or wife has been murdered." And, you hear people say, "I forgive you," and they say that that's not an option; that I have to forgive you. You watch that and you're like, "Geez, how did you do that? How did you find the strength to want to forgive someone

who did such a horrendous thing?" Can you talk about that, about the ability to do that, and why that's so important?

Fred           The strength when it comes from people comes either from one of two directions. One is many people have a spiritual background or a religious kind of infusion where they're already primed to do something like that. So, they know that their faith expects that. They know that it's important to their faith. So, they've created mental patterns around it that they can access.

The other type of person who gets to that is the one who just can't take the suffering anymore. They wake up one morning where or they wake up for ten mornings and feel like their life is lost. And, one stray thought comes in and says, "Well, wait a second. Your life is lost, but it doesn't have to be. You can put this down." That doesn't happen for everybody, but there's a place where many people just can't take the pain any more.

Kym           Right.

Fred           Often, the only way to resolve that pain is to forgive what happened and move on.

Kym Right. To forgive what happened and move on. You know, there was a good— another by the name of Hyrum W. Smith, who is the founder of Franklin Covey Company. I remember he had a statement that pain is inevitable, but misery is optional.

Let me say this a different way. Are there specific skills that one can practice or one needs to engage in to come to a place of forgiveness and the ability to forgive with all hurt that that person is feeling inside?

Fred You know, the ability to forgive is inside of everybody. Now, see that's one of the – now I teach happiness classes and other things. That's one of the really good news things is research is showing that the capacity to have positiveness, to feel differently, to transcend pain, it's kind of hardwired in us. What we need to learn is how to access it and what to do, and even what element or what to pay attention to.

So, in terms of the happiness thing for forgiveness is it's very easy to remind people that you can wake up every morning and really remember how awful something was, which is one thing. Or, you can remember how awful something was and that it's still a beautiful day and you have the capacity to love and there are opportunities ahead of you. Those are very different choices of what you pay attention to. So much of forgiveness is moving from the only thing you pay

attention to is how bad you've been hurt to many other potential things to bring into your life.

Kym Yes. Is there what you would call a hierarchy on the forgiveness ladder? In other words, I get a note, woman said to me that she's not been able to get over, you know they stayed together, but her husband cheated on her. So, they stayed together, but she's not been able to. And, she's told him that she's forgiven him, but in the depths of her soul she hasn't, and she knows it.

Fred That's not uncommon. You know, that's a tricky question because – I mean it's a complicated thing because (1) that's called reconciliation without forgiveness; that you reconcile, you come back into the relationship, but you haven't forgiven him. The process for that is this: that it could be that the damage done by the affair was so great that there is no real healing possible. Sometimes people have to accept that and they have to either say, "My heart's never going to open" or "I may need to find somebody else who I can open my heart to." There's no judgment on this.

But, if somebody has reconciled with a man who really is repentant and really has tried to change themselves and has become what they should have been all along; loyal and faithful, then somebody who writes to you like that I would suggest they go to therapy about it. That they need to know whether it's them or



the affair, that some people they're so woundable and they don't have certain capacities that not only is she unable to join back with her husband fully, but she may never be able to join back with anyone. And that would be a real [indiscernible]. So, it's a subtle and complicated question when you get something like that.

Fred Do you find that people that hold on to the "I can't forgive them. I can't." whether it be with their family, significant others, maybe there was an incident at their place of employment. These things can compound on themselves, can't they? All of a sudden you've got these layers and layers of these issues where you're not forgiving and forgiving.

Physically, what might a person who is holding on to the notion that they can't forgive someone, what might they be experiencing on a day in and day out basis? I'm trying to understand how this shows up for them, how they can look in the mirror and say, "Look, by me not forgiving this person or this situation, this is what this is doing to me." These are some signs of what you might be feeling or what you might be experiencing on a day to day level by not forgiving.

Fred Well, (1) they're going to feel anxious that because everyone when they can't get over something, they become anxious that they may be hurt again, and so they recognize that they can't handle it. So, they're more frightened than they would

be. So there's anxiety. I'm told there's generally muscle tension that comes with that because anxiety creates muscle tension. It requires the body to tighten up to protect one from what we're afraid of. So, there'd be tightness and there'd be anxiety.

Then, there'd be some mistrust. They would feel less trusting because their trust has been shattered and they don't have the capacity to fully open back to it. So, there'd be a general sense of unease, a sense that they're more threatened, and a physical body that isn't quite as fluid and smooth as it might be.

You know, inside there's no way of knowing because everybody's physiology reacts differently to different things and it could be one of the causes of long term high blood pressure, or long term changes in other physical things. But, short term the physical danger isn't that high. It's more like that sense of the world isn't a safe place and I'm uncomfortable and kind of disoriented because of that. That would be the strongest sense that one would have if you can't forgive. You're always on guard that either that will come back or something else will occur.

Kym Yes. As I'm writing down and taking notes of this, the anxiety, the muscle tension, the mistrust, unease, threatened, all of that. Then, I wrote emotional imprisonment. It's like you've imprisoned your emotions is what it almost feels like to me. Is that a fair depiction?

Fred Ask me that. I didn't quite get what you asked me.

Kym I said that as I wrote down all these things, these threats, the unease, the anxiety, the muscle tension. As I wrote down all of those words, what came to mind to me is that you're really creating emotional imprisonment for yourself. Is that a fair depiction of that?

Fred Yes. That is not just fair and what you said before was people who say that I'll never get over it, it's by saying that that they make sure that they'll never get over it. They don't know whether they'll get over it. But, by saying I'll never get over it, they create very strong mental pathways that make getting over it much more difficult.

Kym Okay. So, take me down this journey, all right? This is something else. You'll hear people say, "All right. I've got to move. I've got to move out of this town. I've got to move out of this city. I've got to get away from this area where I feel emotionally trapped or I feel emotionally imprisoned. And, I'm going to move to someplace else."

Does that work? Does that work where you can go and you can move to someplace else? Or, is that same imprisoned – because I'm thinking a fresh start,

fresh environment, fresh everything. What's your opinion about that? Would something like that work?

Fred Well, it's a good question. You have to understand that some of that feeling comes simply from stress. That stress causes the fight or flight response in the body and that's just one manifestation of flight. I need to get away. I'm not safe here. It's not good. So, that's one thing.

On the other hand, asking if it's a good idea, sometimes it is a good idea. So, let's say that you had a long decent marriage and then the partner changes dramatically, either has an affair or becomes an alcoholic or decides they never want to work again; like your marriage crumbles. You're not somebody who has in their past done impetuous things. Sometimes it can be a good idea to just say, "Hey, a chapter's closed and I want to open a new chapter."

But, if somebody has done a lot of impetuous stuff or they've moved around a bit and so another move is not going to help. If that's a pattern, fitting into that pattern, it will not do them any good.

Kym Forgiveness, like happiness, is a choice, isn't it? It's a decision that you make.

Fred You got it.

Kym Right. It's a choice. And, if you are feeling imprisoned, if you're feeling – this comes to mind to me and it's current because of someone that I was talking to that's been going through a tough time. This happened to be a teenager that's going through just a tough time and finding what they love, finding their passion and getting in touch.

You've got to – help me with this. But, you've got to hold up the mirror. You've got to be willing that when you shut that door, hold up the mirror and ask yourself, are you really letting go? Are you really forgiving? Have you made the decision? Have you made the decision that I'm going to forgive the situation? That's one of the major keys, is it not, Dr. Luskin?

Fred You know, when you compare it to happiness, I believe you're on the right track. That at some point is a decision that we need to make about what kind of life we want. I don't believe that the forgiveness decision is that different than the happiness decision. It may actually be a sub-section of a happiness decision, which is I've suffered enough. There's nothing I can do about this.

Sometimes, I hear stories that my husband left me and now he's got a new younger model and they have new kids and he's happy as a clam. And, I'm sitting

here stewing in my stew. Then the question that comes is, "So, change." Your husband's fine. You become fine.

So, there's that elemental decision of whether I want to continue arguing with my life and arguing with how it turned out; or, I want to embrace however it turned out and do the best I can with it. I think the happiness decision is the actual decision and one of the ways it manifests itself is through forgiveness.

Kym Yes. I want to share with you guys some Tweets or some things that you can put up that we've been making notes on. So, here's a couple of them. Number one, when you hold on to junk from your past, it's very difficult to be happy. That's one.

Fred That is flat out true. It's even deeper than that. When you hold on to junk from your past and you blame anybody from your past for why you're not happy today, that's a real problem.

Kym That's – say more, yes. You blame anyone for why you're not from the past. Say more about that.

Fred Well, so many people say, "The reason I'm not successful in life is I didn't have good parents." Or, "The reason my life turned out the way it did is I married the

wrong person at nineteen.” Or, “The reason my life turned out the way it did is because my boss screwed me over and passed me over for the job promotion I deserved.”

If you’re saying that five, ten, fifteen, three years later, if you’re blaming something that happened in the past for why you’re not okay or successful now, then you’re stopping yourself from doing anything about it. It’s your boss’s fault or your mother’s fault or your ex’s fault. What can you do?

It’s your life and how you want to read it. That’s something you can do something about very quickly.

Kym            That is so key to this. That no matter what we’re feeling, guys, we can do something about it immediately. We can do something about it quickly because right now before we finish this to make that decision that I am done with this. You know, it’s a heavy burden carrying around this angst, this mistrust, the thing that you don’t want to forgive someone for. It’s a heavy burden and it consumes a person, doesn’t it, Dr. Luskin?

Fred            Yes. What the decision means is this. Please don’t create the impression that once you make a decision it’s smooth sailing or always easy. You know that as well as I do that the decision turns the switch and then there’s still work to be do.

But, what the decision to be happy or to forgive or to live your life today does is when you get out of it – let's say you decide to be happy and you found yourself in a bad mood, which is going to happen. Instead of looking at the bad mood and thinking what's wrong with my life, you decide that you want to be happy so you choose to do something else. So, you choose to find something else. So, you don't stay in the bad mood.

But, it's not that they don't come. When your decision is to be unhappy or unforgiving, you stay in the negative space because you believe that's more true. So, if you believe that your mother ruined your life and twenty years later you're having a fight with somebody, and then you say to yourself, "Well, look at the damage my mother did to me." That's continuing it.

But, if you say, "I had a bad childhood, but it's up to me." Then, the minute you feel bad you then say, "Well, it's up to me to get out of it. It has nothing to do with my mother." So, that's how you have to make it work in the present. You have to practice doing the choice that you made to be happy or more forgiving. You have to work at it.

Kym Yes. That is the one continuing theme that happiness and forgiveness takes work. It's work. But, I think we're so far ahead if we acknowledge it. Like you said, just – let me ask you something.



It's interesting that you mentioned something about mothers, because I know all of us in our generation and us '50s babies, '60s babies, that kind of thing. But, it doesn't matter, even today. You know something happens. Mom or Dad or someone says something, does something that you never let go of. You just haven't.

But, I remember I was going through a tough patch years ago and went to a psychologist to talk about the fact that I was successful in my business and these kinds of things. But, deep down I wasn't happy. You know, deep down I wasn't happy.

What was so powerful about it is that a lot of what I was feeling kind of hinged from some conversations and some of the things that were said to me from my mother, who I loved dearly. But, you know what I did is I got a piece of paper. She suggested this to me. She said, "Get a piece of paper and write a letter to your mother about all these things that you feel and don't send it to her. It's just really for you."

I thought it was somewhat a little bit silly at the time. But, one day, I don't know, something emotionally hit me and I did it. I got out a piece of paper and wrote

this down, and feverishly wrote it down. Fast. I was writing down all these things that I needed to get out to tell her about how I was feeling.

I did not mail it to her; it was for me. It was my own. I could not get over how good that made me feel. I couldn't.

You know –

Fred      You know, there are two things that I know we're running out of time. So, what I want to emphasize is (1) being happy or forgiving doesn't mean you have no bad feelings. The thing is to get them out and move on. That's what you said, like you had bad feelings, you wrote them down. They were expressed. But, you don't linger with them.

That's the piece of happiness. It doesn't mean there isn't pain or suffering or difficulty. In fact, happy people have a wide range of emotions. They feel all the negative stuff. They just don't get stuck in it.

But, the other thing that I want to say and that people don't realize, when you talked about it takes a lot of work to be happy, it also takes a lot of work to be unhappy.

Kym Yes.

Fred And, you don't want to minimize that. In order to be unhappy, you have to ignore bright blue sky and people's smiles and food and the opportunity to do work. You have to ignore so much to be unhappy that people should recognize how much effort that also takes.

Kym Oh, yes. Go ahead.

Fred So, you're more trying to decide where you want to put your effort. You've got to put effort somewhere. So, you might as well decide to put effort towards something that would give you a better reward. That's how I would put it.

Kym You might as well put your effort towards something that's going to give you a better reward. That is great. You know what? Because we're so happy really, and we focus on happiness so much with *Live Happy*, but the way you put that, it takes a lot of work to be unhappy.

Fred It does.

Kym You know, that's powerful. You think about with anyone, there's a lot, yes, there's a lot of work. You're putting a lot of effort into this if you're unhappy.

Fred Yes.

Kym You're putting a lot of effort into being unhappy. You know –

Kym Yes. The pendulum swings both ways. A lot of work to be unhappy. It's work to be happy. Why not choose the one that's going to help you the most, right? I love that.

Fred That's where I sit with it now.

Kym Yes. So, listen. I want to ask you one thing. We got all of these people, thousands of people all over the world. What would you – I just want them to hang up and I want you to give them today. Just say, "Look, just for today. This is Dr. Fred Luskin. This is what I want you to do today when you hang up to start you on this journey." What would you tell them to do; kind of marching orders for today?

Fred To choose one person that they might have been unkind to, and do something kind to that person.

Kym Wow. Say that one more time, please. Guys, write this down. Go ahead, one more time.

Fred Just you want to bring goodness into the world. That's the purpose of being happy. You know, it's not just for your own emotion. It's so that you spread it, that you're of value. So, from a forgiveness perspective, I always ask people think of someone that you hurt. It doesn't matter how deeply, and give them a kindness immediately.

Call somebody you've been unkind to. Call somebody you ignored. Call somebody you mistreated and just do something nice. Let's send them something or think of them. But, substitute an unkindness that you gave to the world and patch it over with goodwill.

Kym Substitute an unkindness you gave to the world and patch it over with something good. Love that.

Dr. Fred Luskin, so appreciate you. Love having you as a part of *Wake Up Happy!* I know some of you might have heard some what we were having a little bit of audio challenge there. You know, Dr. Luskin had to do this from his cell phone today. So, I just want to let you know. But, I think we've got it. I think we really got it all.

I want to say to all of you that plug in to *Live Happy*. We really are a movement. I mean we are a movement for positive change, positive opportunity, and really being the gateway to happiness for you and how it affects every part of your life. So, just go to LiveHappy.com. You can subscribe to us. When you subscribe you get the digital publication.

I want to tell you just do me one thing. Go to our *Live Happy* store and check out what we've got going in there. We've got these new *Live Happy* notes that we're spreading all over the world. You've got to see our *Live Happy* notes and our *Live Happy* 50 Happiness Facts and Quotes. It's all at LiveHappy.com.

I hope you enjoyed this as really a fourth as much as I've enjoyed it. This has been a tremendous week. Dr. Luskin, you've been just the cherry on top of the sundae. I mean it's just great having you giving us this information around happiness and stirring up solutions for us and ideas to make it work better.

So, with that, everybody –

Fred Thank you very much.

Kym Oh, you're very, very welcome. I will hopefully see your name up on our screen for our December *Wake Up Happy!*

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Kym            One through five. So, it's December 1 through 5. Go to LiveHappy.com. You can register for it. It's free. And, remember all of you Live Happy subscribers, the best news is not only do you have these sessions, but we've audio taped them. We're going to send them to you.

We've got the transcripts and we've got an infographic all coming to you as our gift for you being a *Live Happy* subscriber. That's all coming to you. That's going to go out no later than is it November 17<sup>th</sup>, Brittney? No later than November 17<sup>th</sup>, it's going to be in your hands.

With that, I send love. I send gratitude. And, above all else, I'm sending you happiness. Bye-bye for now.