



## Wake Up Happy with David Mezzapelle

### HOST

Kym Yancey

### SPEAKER

David Mezzapelle

### PRESENTATION

Kym Hello. Good morning. This is Kym Yancey. If you are tuned into *Wake Up Happy*, you, my friend, are at the right place, the right time. It's great to have you here. This is our fourth day in our five-day series for the month of April, and optimism is our focus here this morning.

I want to say, if you've not already become a subscriber of *Live Happy* magazine, I want to personally invite you to be part of Live Happy and part of this huge movement to, really, make our world a happier place by providing scientific, authentic happiness, wisdom, insight strategies, all based on academic proof and the studies that are done through numerous polls from Gallup poll, the different universities we work with, the professors, the experts in the field of positive

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psychology. That's what we're all about. The series that we do every single month is just a way for us to connect with you, to share the incredible wisdom and insight of experts from around the world.

Like our special guest this morning, we've got David Mezzapelle with us; he is the founder of the Contagious Optimism Movement and the author of *Contagious Optimism*. It's a bestselling book series that contains real stories from real people around the globe which demonstrates that every cloud has a silver lining. After a long career in technology, Mezzapelle launched several companies and philanthropic initiatives, and has served on various boards.

Throughout his life, David encountered great peaks and valleys for which he is grateful. It's really interesting, and we'll get into this with David, but the dips make the peaks so much more beautiful, don't they? He has always kept—

David Yes.

Kym Yes, they have really, David, yes. He has always kept his glass completely full. He is also a TED and Contagious Optimism live speaker. Now, you can learn all about him at [ContagiousOptimism.com](http://ContagiousOptimism.com). David, welcome to *Wake Up Happy*.

David Thank you. It's great to be here. I love Live Happy, I love your mission, and it's truly an honor.

Kym David, tell us about *Contagious Optimism*.

David Sure. Sure. Well, *Contagious Optimism*, as you mentioned, it's a book series. It's actually a compilation of real stories from real people around the globe. The purpose is to help people find their silver linings, no matter what they may be going through in life. People going through tough times, sometimes they need to hear stories about others have persevered to give them hope.

Because I believe that when people are going through tough times they tend to think they're alone, but when they hear stories about others have persevered, it gives them hope. Conversely, people going through good times and euphoria and prosperity, well, they tend to lose sight of what it took to get there. When they read or hear stories of perseverance, it helps keep them grounded and appreciate what they have and how hard they worked to get there.

Kym Yes. I've got to tell you, nothing impacts you like hearing the stories of other people. And you are so right, David: it's so easy for people to feel that whatever they're going through this morning, or whatever happened to them last week, no

one can understand how tough their particular situation is, or their specific challenge.

There's one thing I've learned through all of this, David, through all the different conversations, is that you never know what someone else is going through. Everybody deals with their share of drama, their share of challenge. Right, David?

David Absolutely. It's really true. I believe that everybody, like you said, has a peak, has a valley. People either know people or themselves that have been through all kinds of adversity and obstacles, and somebody else around the globe could benefit from hearing that story because they're in the same situation and they need to know that they can potentially emulate a positive outcome.

One thing that's wonderful, what we do, it's one of my favorite parts of this project, is that we go into senior living facilities and we capture stories from the greatest generation, the silent generation, all these older generations that have been through all kinds of scenarios. It's such a wake-up call, and not just for myself but for the people who read these stories from these amazing people. I love it; I can't get enough of it.

Kym           That is really fascinating. When you're speaking to people in their senior years— help me with this, David. I would envision that it's unfiltered, they're being transparent, they're really pouring into you. Tell us about that experience and some of the things that you've heard, or some of the things that you've gleaned from that.

David          Sure. Absolutely. I appreciate this topic; it's one of my favorites. Well, first of all, when we go into senior communities we give a presentation, we tell stories, and then at the end we not only encourage residents to share their stories with us for potential publication in a future book, but we also go through a checklist to make it really easy for them to share their stories.

If they're in such a position that they can't share their stories for health reasons, we either encourage a family member, friend, or even one of our interns to capture the stories for them, because their stories are just so good, and we want them to last in perpetuity. Some of the scenarios are just amazing. One of the greatest experiences for me at a senior community was a few months ago, I was at a community in San Diego in an area called Carmel Valley. We're in this community and we're sharing all kinds of stories, and I had— you remember Sherry Hursey from Smile TV.

Kym           Yes.

David Sherry was singing and doing some stuff, and then I was talking and showing some slides of people and their stories, and then I encouraged residents to stand up or take their wheelchair up to the microphone and share a story. The amazing thing was, this was one of the higher-end, wealthier of the communities we've been in. We've been in all kinds of socioeconomic forums. This community was full of wealthy people, and not one of them talked about money or success or their positions in life or anything.

Every one of them talked about love, talked about how much they loved their spouse, that— most of them were all widows and widowers. They talked about how they met their spouse, and that's all they talked about. Some of them went on and on and on, and it was so refreshing that people that had the most amazing adventures, whether in the war or in business or in sports or whatever, all they wanted to talk about was their loved ones. It was incredible. I couldn't believe it. Everyone was crying on our staff.

Kym How would you put on your detective hat here? Why do you think that was? I have a feeling about this, because— but I want to hear what your thoughts are. Why do you think that revealed itself in that manner, that they would talk about their loved ones as opposed to the other things?

David I think because when you get to that age and that position in life, I think you realize that money, success, and materialism is fleeting and it's not really the focus of life. I think what happens when you get to that point, you realize that love is all that matters, and that in the end, you just want to be with the one you love, and when they're gone, your checking account or your mutual funds or your stocks do not matter. It's you really just want to be with your loved one.

Kym It's not to discount the fact that you do want to be comfortable in your elder years. You do want some money so you can feel comfortable. But to your point, when your basic needs are all being met, you really come to a place that— and it's really a place of a clarity and a purity in that, emotionally, the thing that matters most to you are those relationships. Loving someone and someone loving you.

David I couldn't agree more. That's right, spot-on perfect, what you just said. That's exactly how I feel.

Kym David, what has driven you to focus on optimism, to write about it, to study about it? Because that was not your career path, right? You're a technology— just, I want to hear about what was the tipping point for you, the something tipped in you that said this is important, I've got to share this, I've got to help people understand optimism.

David Sure. Well, what happened was—I don't want to say I stumbled on the Contagious Optimism project by accident, because people always correct me and say, "There are no accidents." For the people out there that would correct me, I'm not going to say that. But what actually happened was I had no intention on writing, I had no intention on doing anything like this.

But throughout the '90s and early 2000s, my alma mater, Fairfield University in Connecticut, they had been pushing me and pushing me to write a book on optimism and innovation in business because I had started a company right out of college. I had no money, but I needed to build a staff, so I started hiring interns, just like I was an intern at IBM for three and a half years. I thought, hey, I worked for free. I've got a ton of experience. It opened a lot of doors for me. I'm going to do the same for students now.

In 1990, mid-1990, I started recruiting interns like crazy. I was 22 years old. I built up a workforce, and within a few years we became one of the largest IT distribution companies out there, US and Europe. It was amazing for me. We did all kinds of innovative things in terms of hiring and retaining people and growing and marketing. It became a passion for me, and I always stayed very close to education in how I grew my company, even years later when we finally were making revenue.

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Basically, they wanted me to write a book on that, and the optimism that we use to positively reinforce our staff and the way we innovatively hire students and alumni. To make a long story short, that's what happened. By 2010 I said, "You know what? I'm going to do this. I will write the book, but I'm not going to make it just about me. I want it to be about lots of people, like *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. And I want it to be across many of life's themes, not just business."

I wrote the first book, started it 2010; it was finally published by 2013. Then started working on the second book probably 2011, 2012, and that just came out this past March. Now I'm working on future volumes. We're just going to keep it going now.

Kym                    That's great. Tell me about the five steps to finding or maintaining optimism in your life.

David                   Sure. Yes, there's five steps. The reason we came up with these five is we noticed that these five items were the common denominators in almost all the stories we've been capturing over the years. We're talking about thousands of stories that all have these common, common things.

The first is gratitude; we've heard that so many times. Gratitude for even the smallest things is so important. You wake up, be excited about the sun or the clouds and the smell of coffee or a glass of water. It's just important because when you appreciate the smallest, littlest things, the bigger things are that much greater, and anything else that's a trouble or adversity, you can deal with it because you're so excited about these small, little positive things.

The second one is stories; what you do, what we do. Capturing stories, because as I mentioned, when people hear stories of how others have persevered, it gives them hope. You always want to stay in touch with stories from others and what they've done to get through their tough times. That yields a lot of optimism in one's life.

The third we call the magnet. The magnet is a quote from Mary Lou Retton, the Olympic gymnast, where she says, "Optimism is a happiness magnet." What that means is you want to be around people as much as you can that are positive and uplifting, because they'll bring you up.

Conversely, you want to avoid, as much as you can, the naysayers, the doomsday people. It's important to be around them; they're part of your life in some way, whether it's your dorm, your apartment, your office, your home. The world revolves around the fact that there's positive and negative people, but don't take

the negative to heart. Try to marinate yourself in the positivity of the people that are uplifting.

The fourth is reflection. What people do or say is a reflection of their own reality, not yours, so don't take things personally when you don't like what somebody says or does. It's their own problem, it's not yours, let it go. If you repeat that to yourself many times, you'll find that you start to believe in it.

The last is very important, and I know you agree with this, based on things you've done, is altruism. No matter what position you are in life, you always want to give back. It doesn't have to be about money; it could be time, talent, or treasure. Your time to help people, your talent, whatever you do, do some pro bono work.

Of course, if you can't afford a treasure, donate when you can. That's altruism. That's very important, because when you see what you've done for others and not for yourself, that yields optimism and positivity in your own world.

Kym Yes. I love these. Gratitude, stories, magnet, reflection, philanthropy, really. I will say something, though, and I think this is important for everybody, is your comment about stories.

What I've realized is that everybody that we encounter, and the people who become our deepest friends and so forth, it's really their story— isn't it, David, when you— it's because you've realized there's either shared experiences, there's something about what they've revealed or what they've shared, their transparency with you, that's connected with your heart, connected with your spirit.

When we go out, whether it be networking for business or you're meeting people, the things you always remember are their stories about what they've gone through, what they experience, or the things they share with you. I just love the fact that stories— this is the first I've heard this, where when you talk about optimism I've not heard the power of stories in there before. I just want to tell you, I love that.

You have this concept around positive forward thinking. Explain your intention behind that, and your interpretation of what you want us to know about positive forward thinking.

David Sure. Well, the way I define that is the ability to find the silver lining in every cloud, apply it to yesterday or today, with the confidence that tomorrow will be better. In other words, the wisdom we gain from whatever has happened to us, good or bad, in the past or even the present, will shape our future. Learn from it,

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don't stress about it, don't be depressed about it because you can't change it, but learn from it and take it into the future. That education will make things better for you in the future. That's why we call it positive forward thinking.

For example, we know many people back in 2000 that were hurt badly in the tech bubble when it burst in the stock market. Same thing when the real estate market collapsed more recently, or the banking problems. All those things were a wallop for people financially, but you know what? If you learn from it today, you're better and better. Today you're better at diversification. That's an example.

You could apply that to health. People that had poor diets that were—fortunately survived having a poor diet, and then were told you need to eat better, you need to exercise, you need this, you need that, and you live that way and you carry that into the future, remembering that your old habits almost killed you. Again, that's positive forward thinking; using that education of our experiences to move us forward. That's what [indiscernible].

Kym            David, are optimistic people unrealistic?

David         Say that again.

Kym            Are optimistic people unrealistic? In other words, a lot of times you hear people say, "Oh, you're one of those optimistic, positive people. You're not very realistic," you know what I mean? I guess [indiscernible] say optimistic people are realistic people, I guess I should say?

David           This is absolutely one of the topics I also love talking about. I'm glad you asked that. Basically, when I walk out on a stage or some kind of show, I usually open up with, "Don't worry, people, I'm not a pie-in-the-sky optimist." I believe that success happens when you combine effort, reality, and positive thinking.

If you're just optimistic and nothing else, well, you are in the clouds. You're just a daydreamer. You can't close your eyes and wish for that Porsche in your driveway or that money in your bank account or that perfect relationship. It doesn't work that way. You have to put in the effort. You have to look at reality.

If you're wanting to start a business, what is market demand? You can't be passionate about something and say I'm going to be successful at it if there's no market for it. Even if you think you could create the market, just do your diligence and make sure you can create it. For me, a true optimist is somebody that combines those elements of effort, reality, and positive thinking. That's the type of optimist that I admire and that's who I try to hold myself out as well.

Kym           Talk to us about resiliency from this standpoint. You've got to have challenging days, those moments where— what do you do when you realize that your thinking is not very optimistic, that you're not allowing that full expression of your optimistic power and the strength that you've learned? How do you navigate through that, and what do you tell other people?

David         Sure. Well, you're going to laugh; my first answer is I read *Live Happy*. Basically, yes. I've been through it. I've been through financial crisis, I've been through divorce, I've been through loss of family and friends. I've been through what other people, at least in my world, have also been through. Essentially, you hear about support groups and everything else.

Well, to me, what we all do, capturing people's stories and understanding what people have done to be resilient to get through it, it's like the whole world is one big support group. That's why I love reading or hearing their stories. Literally, I will pick up *Live Happy*. Either I'll look at it online or I look at the hard copy or I look at *Chicken Soup for the Soul* or I look at the stories of my readers. I go in and just read, read stories that I've read multiple times already.

I love people's stories for that reason, because it makes me put in perspective whatever is troubling me. I could say it's all the time; it happens all the time. I'll have a rough day or whatever it may be, and I know it could be so much worse. I

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look outside, I see the glistening water, the blue sky, I know somebody else has been in much worse shape and got through it. I know I can too. That's been my attitude my whole life, actually.

Kym Are there certain tactics or things that you would suggest to people? I'll tell you what I mean by that. I'll have those days too, where I'm having— really, there are those days where I feel like, I'm going to go ahead and take a few minutes to feel a little, feel a little— I don't want to call it a pity party by any means. But those days where you say to yourself, I'm not very happy right now. In that moment.

Now, here's what I've learned through Live Happy and the whole positive psychology industry, is the things that you can do immediately to change that. I will get outside if the weather's nice, I'll take off my shoes so I can feel my feet going through the grass and walk around, I'll take a moment to bask in the sun, to— all of a sudden, to your point, and you said this, start to think about how beautiful it is, the air that I'm breathing, the fact that I can breathe unencumbered, and immediately start to think about things that bring me joy. And then of course take a walk, those kinds of things.

Do you do those kinds of things? What do you do? Like you said, you mentioned you read *Live Happy* magazine, which I do too, obviously. But that's

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a great thing. I love that. That wasn't even a paid plug. But what else do you do when you're having those— you're in your car and you have that— any other tips that you can give us that you do, that you put in the—

David Sure. Absolutely. Well, you hit it on the head about the walk. I'm a real firm believer in exercise. Every day I exercise; I work out every other day, and the days I don't work out I either go for a long walk or a swim or kayak. I have to work out. I have to exercise. That really helps me get through everything.

Say I'm traveling or whatever; the days I miss exercise by noon, I really feel it. Somebody needs some kind of movement in their life, even if it's just a mile walk. Go for a walk, something. Even in your chair, just stretch. That helps me get through a lot.

The other thing is just, essentially, meditating. I have so many writers that are coaches in some kind of— they're doctors in some way, and they talk about the importance of meditating, but I never really did until about a year ago. I kept reading about it, and I said, "You know what? I need to do this for myself."

I started getting into it, and I take that break, that five, ten minutes a day, and I just close my eyes and focus on my core, and boy, that really helps me a lot. In

terms of experiences, I had a life-changing experience last summer. I was the keynote speaker for Miss Wheelchair USA.

Kym Yes.

David Meeting these women, and not only what has happened to them, either the way they were born or an accident or an illness later on, these women have persevered and have put everybody else before themselves. It changed me, I believed, forever, because now everything else seems minor. It pales in comparison to these women's perseverance and their success. That really affects me when I have a tough day.

Kym Yes. That's beautiful. David, what else is important to get across to our audience this morning about optimism? I want to make sure that the range of thoughts that you have on this subject, that we're giving you the time to share that. What else can you share with us about optimism that's important for us to get?

David Sure. I appreciate that opportunity. My whole thing is that I believe we all have stories. What you may think is boring or uneventful is not; it will benefit somebody else around the globe, so everybody should be open to sharing their stories, sharing their experiences with others, whether they're sharing it with me,

sharing it with you, or sharing it with friends or family. Share your stories because they're so, so powerful. A lot of people don't realize that.

Going back to senior living communities, think about a grandparent or an aunt and uncle, years ago. They would, at dinner or a family event, tell that same story over and over again. Everybody rolls their eyes and they say, here goes Grandpa with that crazy story. Everybody is used to that, but what they don't realize, that when that person is gone, they will— they would kill to hear that story again. They would do anything to be reconnected with that relative and hear that again. You want to capture that, because it will be gone.

That's the importance of books and the internet and everything else. These things allow us to save these stories in perpetuity, so you want to hold onto that. The reason that's reflecting on optimism is because those stories help others find their optimism, because it gives them hope, that they too can emulate those outcomes or appreciate their own lives. That's it.

Kym No, that's great. In talking to you, it made me realize that it is so important, too, that we go to our grandparents and the elders in our lives to ask them about what they've learned— what they've learned to be true for them. To really just interview them, right? Just to interview them, and allow them to share with you what's brought them the most joy.

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I think the key is to ask them questions like, what's been the greatest, happiest moment for you? Or, what's brought you the most joy in your life? What's important when it comes to living happy and fulfilled? To hear what they've got to say about it. I think just giving them an opportunity to think about the positive can be very uplifting and very inspiring for both of you.

David            You've hit it on the head. So many people that we meet, of all ages and demographics, many of them have not been able to really share their stories. They're either shy or they've shared the story enough with family and friends that they just don't do it anymore for whatever reason, just some people just hold back. But when you give anybody the opportunity to share a story, once they get going they don't stop.

It's so obvious for us when we speak at a facility, whether it's a college or senior living facility, doesn't matter. When we speak in some kind of forum and we get to the end and we encourage people to share a story, it's usually the icicles in the room. Once we break those icicles, the line goes out the door. It's the same thing like clockwork.

People love to tell their story when they finally have the nerve to get up, the ability to get up, when they realize somebody else broke the ice. If for whatever

reason they can't physically speak and share that story, somebody else could capture it for them, or they could write it, or somebody else could recite it for them that knows what their story was. There's always that ability to be able to share it, even if you physically can't.

Kym Yes. Optimism, and I know, David, from meeting you personally, and if you're online you can see the picture of David, but what I can tell you is David brings sunshine. One thing about optimistic attitude, positive attitude, have positive emotions, is that it really creates a halo over the person you are. There's an attraction to the positive. I just want to say that there's nothing but good that can come out of this for you, just to his point, just practicing that.

David, I want to leave you with one last thing: is there one out of all those stories—you talked about how when you go into the senior citizen facilities—but is there one, in particular, story that just stands out to you out of all the different stories, that just rings true for you?

David Well, there's so many and they're all wonderful, but yes, I can give a couple quick examples. One other woman I met last year who's in our book, she had a brainstem stroke in her thirties; she was a healthy young woman, worked at IBM, two sons and a husband. She had a brainstem stroke and it left her permanently disabled in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

This woman, within six months of this stroke, was a first responder to the earthquake in Haiti. She then went on to compete and win the crown for not only Miss Wheelchair Georgia but Miss Wheelchair USA. Then she's now dedicated her life to traveling the globe to help children with literacy. That's an example of what I consider a silver lining. Another woman—

Kym            That's a beautiful story.

David            Isn't that great? Another woman developed encephalitis right after she graduated college. She lost her entire memory. She lost everything. She had to relearn everything from how to eat, how to talk, her education. It took about ten years to rebuild her life.

In the course of doing that, she actually met who is now her husband, has two children, but she lived in fear of a relapse. If you have encephalitis, there is a chance you could get it again and potentially lose your memory. Well, instead of living in fear she has truly taken on the whole seize-the-day attitude and helps others with similar fears seize their day. She's dedicated her life to this.

Or Alan Malizia, who— polio since birth, and now he's in his 60s; he's retired.

Alan was a volleyball coach in Connecticut with polio, on crutches and then in a

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little wheelchair thing, electric wheelchair. He brought the high school into volleyball, brought them into volleyball. They didn't even have a team before. Brings them in and then makes them state championship multiple years in a row, just for volleyball. A guy with polio. Just astonishing.

Kym Those are great, great, great stories. Great stories.

David These are examples of what I'm talking about, and what we love to share with others.

Kym Right, the inspirational side of it. David, thank you so, so much. It's ContagiousOptimism.com; you can go to David's website and find out so much more. I want to also encourage you to connect with David and his official— his Facebook page is official, Contagious Optimism.

David, thank you, thank you, thank you. I want to remind everyone tomorrow will be our last, for our series, for the five-day series, right here at the same time, 9:30 Central Standard Time, 10:30 Eastern Time. I just want to tell you, it's just such a pleasure to have this time with you. I hope you enjoy as much as we do. We're here to serve you, and by all means go to LiveHappy.com, check out what our incredible editor writing team has put together for you. It's constantly changing and constantly being updated.

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With that, David, have a great day and to everybody else, bye-bye for now.

David      You too.