



Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Dr. Chrstine Carter

HOST

Kym Yancey

SPEAKER

Dr. Christine Carter

PRESENTATION

Kym Good morning. This is Kym Yancey and this is *Wake Up Happy*. I'm so excited for today, but I was excited about yesterday, so we're going to have a great time. We have a phenomenal guest I'm really excited about.

Let me tell you what's in store for you. First of all you're going to learn about your sweet spot and how you can find yours. We're going to be talking about positive and negative emotions, the ratio that you want to have there. We're going to be discussing overwhelm in our lives. You're going to hear some really easy to implement strategies that can help you reduce your overwhelm. We're going to learn about the minimum effect dose, about finding the minimum effect dose of things in your life. This is really going to be phenomenal.

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Our guest today is Dr. Christine Carter and I'll tell you more about her. I want to let you know that if this is your first experience with us with *Wake Up Happy*, great, wonderful to have you with us. If you've been with us all week, I want to say bravo. When we started this several, several months ago we had no idea how we were going to judge the engagement of all the participants, the registrants for these *Wake Up Happy* sessions, and we're just thrilled. We're thrilled with what's happening.

I want to tell you what's nice about this is that we're recording all these calls and we have an artist who's taking what I call graphic notes. She's creating an infographic of all the top notes from the call from the session or this webinar, and you're going to be getting all that free. We also have a transcriptionist who is transcribing everything we talk about and we put that together for you. So, this is all to give you great information at your fingertips. But what makes happiness so special is when you can take what you learn and you spread it and share it and share it with others, because it really is contagious. It's a ton of fun and it really makes us all feel so much better, doesn't it?

All right, well, let's get right to it. Dr. Christine Carter is a sociologist and happiness expert at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, an interdisciplinary research center that translates the study of happiness, resilience

and emotional intelligence for the public. She's the author of the bestselling *Raising Happiness* and *The Sweet Spot: How to Find Your Groove at Home and Work*. Dr. Carter blogs regularly for *Greater Good*, *The Huffington Post*, *Psychology Today*; she has appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, the *Dr. Oz Show*, *Rachael Ray*, *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*, the *Today show*, NPR and now, and now ladies and gentlemen, she's appeared on *Wake Up Happy* and has helped thousands of people lead happier and more productive lives through her lectures and online classes.

Her latest book *The Sweet Spot: How to Find your Groove at Home and Work* presents the latest neurological and psychological research on positivity, productivity and elite performance. It demonstrates the sweetest paradox by doing less; I love this, by doing less we can actually accomplish more. We can stop trying to do everything right and learn to do the right things.

Dr. Carter, great to have you on *Wake Up Happy*.

Dr. Carter Thank you so much for having me.

Kym Let's get right to the sweet spot, how you defined it and how do you find yours?

Dr. Carter Well, I define the sweet spot as the overlap between the places where we have the greatest ease in our lives and also the greatest power or greatest personal strengths; so this is course an athletic metaphor when the ball hits that sweet spot on the racket or the bat, it launches with its most natural flight. It goes the farthest, but it also meets the least resistance, particularly when you think about the bat, for example. If we were to watch slow motion video of a batter hitting outside of his or her sweet spot, what you'd see is there'd be incredible impact on not just their body, their wrist, their shoulder, but also there'd be a lot of movement in the actual batter. Sometimes as we know with professional baseball players, the bat will actually break.

So this is a metaphor that I like us to think about in our everyday lives, because a lot of us are used to getting hits, but outside of that sweet spot where there isn't that ease, there isn't that natural flight with no resistance or no stress.

Kym Yes, that is a great metaphor. How do you find your sweet spot? How do people do that?

Dr. Carter Well, we look to maximize the area in our lives that bring ease or there's no resistance or no stress and also where we have our greatest strengths or our greatest power. So, the really good news here is that if you're human, you can make your sweet spot bigger, or the sweet spot that you live your everyday life

from, that you are able to work from. We can grow that overlap between ease and our strengths pretty easily. If you're a bat, you're out of luck. There's just one little small place.

Kym So, let me ask you then would sweet spot also, and I'm going to throw out some other words and you give me your reaction to this, but is sweet spot also like finding your calling, finding your purpose first of all to know where time almost stands still for you, because you're in such I don't know, such flow, you're in such engagement. Would that be your sweet spot?

Dr. Carter Well, I think finding your life's purpose or your calling or even just finding inspiration in life is a way to increase both ease and power, so yes. So, when you have those things it makes finding your sweet spot easier and living from it, but I don't actually think that it's always that complicated. People start to feel overwhelmed and just thinking about finding their purpose and their calling. One of the more important things actually is just finding social meaning, so the understanding the value and the impact and the purpose you have not just for yourself, but for other people that is actually a very quick route to the sweet spot; but those aren't the only things.

Kym Do you find—because of what you do, you're teaching and you're researching things that you do, do you find that people find it difficult to lock into their sweet

spot? Or do they usually pretty well identify with it and are able to say you're right I know what my sweet spot is and I've got to focus more first of all focus more on that and play in that area more? Do people typically know where their sweet spot is?

Dr. Carter I think that once I start talking about it, most people have had the experience of being—so the difference between our everyday lives usually and being in our sweet spot is something that Sam Sneed called the difference between making a powerful effort. So, they understand how it feels in their bodies and their brains to make a powerful effort versus the sweet spot is having the experience of effortless power. The two things are very different in terms of how they feel to us. It feels very different to make a powerful effort towards something than it does to experience effortless power.

So, as we get older our mastery, hopefully, builds in lots of different areas and that mastery is a great source of strength or power, and so the possibilities builds where we can live from our sweet spot. A lot of people at work, for example, have had the experience of flow or in some sort of creative project where time stands still. They feel they're really productive; they're really creative, but it feels effortless. They don't feel the exertion of making that powerful effort, and so that's a great place to start to look in your life where you've already felt it and know that

it's really possible to make even the everyday little efforts feel like they're coming from this sweet spot.

It's not really even mostly about our work. It's good to find your sweet spot at work, but in today's day and age, I think we're hitting up against a lot of resistance and a lot of stress outside of work as well just trying to get through our everyday lives, and so that's where it's important to really bring this understanding that we can grow our sweet spot, so that we can move and live from this other place.

Kym I love effortless power. That really puts it in perspective for me and I've not ever heard it stated that way, effortless power. I just want to suggest something because we like to engage with our social media for everybody that you can tag us at *Wake Up Happy*, but on Facebook we're Live Happy on Facebook. I would love it if everybody or those that feel inclined just write down or send in or talk about your effortless power. What is it that you do or where do you find that the effort that you put into it to use your phraseology, effortless power, that'd be fascinating just to see what other people have to say about that. Let's talk about—

Dr. Carter Think back to a time in your life when you felt that and what generated the ease there, so probably you had some mastery in whatever you were doing, but where we usually need help is to think about what generates the ease. A lot of times it's habits that we haven't consciously gotten ourselves into or it's other people or it's

positive emotions not just like pleasure seeking, but an actual, positive emotion like a sense of inspiration or awe or love or compassion. So, it's an important thing to think about what's generating that effortless power, and where is the ease piece and where's the effortless piece coming from it.

And then, of course, where the power piece of it is coming from, but in our culture we tend to be really keyed into what contributes to our strengths and to our power, but less keyed into the ease piece of things. In fact we often believe the opposite. If it's easy, it must not be good. It must not be good.

Kym Yes, yes. And you know it's funny, I really equate because I'm also a musician, so I just remember being with the band that I used to be in years ago, how we'd have all these sets; and it became effortless and powerful because we knew every step, knew where we were going. So, when you ask that question think back to when, that's one of the things that came up for me was how it took a lot of precision, but we knew, everybody knew what everybody else was going to do and what everybody else was going to play and it felt glorious.

Dr. Carter Yes, absolutely.

Kym Tell me about what you say is the myth of more that it's the greatest lie of our current culture, talk about that.

Dr. Carter Yes, you know what it really is, so we live in a culture where busyness is a sign of importance and significance and success and productivity and that in and of itself is a great big lie. We actually know that busyness is not a sign of productivity. It's not a sign of success or significance or anything. It's a sign of overwhelm usually, but that myth comes from this overarching sense in our culture that more is going to be better.

If one pair of cute shoes is good, then more must be better, more food, more alcohol, more social media, more friends on Facebook and more work, more lessons for our kids. We just have this sense that we're always, our whole culture is always striving for more and in fact what we know is that of course more is not necessarily better. We're human. We don't have infinite capacity, and we get overwhelmed actually fairly easily.

When we have less of certain things, the truth is that usually we enjoy those things more, so not just with things, but also with activities in our lives. This applies to pretty much everything in modern life that when we take a step back and really question why we're working more to earn more money to go on more fancy vacations or to buy more stuff, it doesn't actually make a ton of sense when it comes to happiness.

Kym So how do you guide people, because I'm total harmony in agreement with you on this, what do you say to people? What do you say to us to say, look, here's how you want to start to approaching this, or this is how you want to start to either reprogram your thinking or something? What's the word here to fix that more drive that we've got?

Dr. Carter Well, I use the term from doctors really, doctors always talk about wanting to be able to find the minimum effective dose of any medication to give their patients—their patients so that—we need to give this to parents, too, just the minimum effective dose, so that that will still be effective. This is not about not being effective, or having what we need in our lives, but it's about finding the MED, or the minimum effective dose of anything.

So, in my life I got to a place where I had a lot, my life was very full, but I was really tired all the time and actually pretty like I caught every virus on every airplane. I had a chronic strep infection. I really needed to make some changes. This is all the personal work that happened before I wrote *The Sweet Spot* and the main thing that I needed to do was find the minimum effective dose of everything in my life. How often did I need to blog? How much did I actually have to exercise? What was the minimum amount of sleep that I needed to get, the minimum amount of medication and the minimum amount of time I could spend helping my kids with their homework and still feel involved like I knew what was going on and

they could get the help that they needed, the minimum number of activities for my kids after school? We found instead of looking for the balance, I was looking for how little I could get away with and still have something in my life and it was life changing.

Kym Yes, it's important. Before we started I asked Christine, I asked how many kids you got, and what did you say? It's four, right, and you have two in the sixth grade did you say?

Dr. Carter Yes, and an eighth grader and a ninth grader.

Kym Yes, and all of us that are parents know all you have to do is ask another person do you have kids, they say yes, then you know everything you need to know about them, right, because we all know. We all know what parenting is like, but you're right. My gosh, with your schedule, your books with all the things that you have to do, but the notion of that's a great way to look at it to the minimum effective dose of things, because you're right. Busy, busy, busy doesn't mean you're effective; it doesn't.

Dr. Carter No, it really doesn't and it certainly doesn't mean that you're happy. We tend to think of ourselves as having a fixed intelligence and a fixed amount of things that we can get done in a day, but the reality is our human brains are incredibly flexible

and they require a lot of specific conditions in order to function optimally. And so what that means is that our intelligence, our problem solving ability, our productivity, these are not fixed things. They're very dependent on our environment and the conditions in which we're trying to get something done, and so it's really important for us to create the conditions in which we can be our most intelligent, creative productive selves that our brain can really function in an optimal way. Most of us just don't do that.

Busyness is as I said earlier it's a sign of cognitive overload, that's what researchers call it when we just feel really overwhelmed. That cognitive overload makes it really hard for us to think clearly, to plan, to organize. It makes it very difficult for us to resist temptation to make decisions. It hinders our ability to think creatively, to innovate, to solve problems. It really hinders our ability to remember social information, so like the name of our daughter's boss or our boss' daughter and it makes it very difficult for us to control our emotions, so it hinders our emotional or social and our emotional intelligence.

So basically being overwhelmed hinders just about everything that we want to get out of our brains in a day. It really is important for us to realize that if after is that effortless power, it's not going to happen if we're busy.

Kym Right, it's not going to happen. I'll pass this on and I'm curious what your response will be to this, but I just notice how no matter who you are—I've been around billionaires and I've been around people who can't rub two nickels together. There's a common thing that I've seen so often at the end of the day, and I call it, it's how they breathe at the end of the day, and this is all I mean.

I've paid attention to a guy that's very, very successful and he would walk into his house and he'd be there at dinner or whatever the case may be and here's how he would breathe. He would just go ah, like ah, just let it out. I noticed I would do that, at the end of the day I'm doing whatever I'm doing and I get to the end and I'm like ah ha, everybody does this deep breath or just exhale. And I find it, it's like all of us, it's like we've run some kind of a race for the day. You know what I mean? It's like ah, I got through another one.

Dr. Carter Yes.

Kym Just that, you know what I'm talking about.

Dr. Carter I know exactly what you're talking about, and if somebody said to you how are you, you would say I'm exhausted, right? And then you might recount how busy you were during the day, but it's kind of interesting because it's not really about time. We perceive this all to be about time and not having enough time and wishing we

had more, but it's actually more about what we do with our time because I could wake up and do a radio interview, which is really fun, and then sit down and write an op-ed piece and feel really creative and productive, get the whole thing done, and then take a nice long walk at lunch and throw the ball for my dog. And then go pick my kids up and actually have time to hang out with them a little bit, maybe I'll take them for ice cream or something. Then I have time to read a book.

So I could go through my whole day and every minute could be filled with something. But if all of those things are pretty energizing for me and I feel my most intelligent, productive, creative self, at the end of the day, I'm going to be more like a Labrador. People are going to walk in and I'm going to say my breathing is going to be really different. I'm going to say "Hi, hi, hi!" You know what I mean? It's going to be versus the ah, and I won't tell you that I'm busy. I will have been busy. I will have not—I would have done something all day, but I'm not going to tell you that I'm busy because busyness to us doesn't mean like we had a great day getting things that we wanted to have get done, but that also we had time to throw the ball for the dog and take our kids to ice cream.

That's not busy. That's enjoyable. By busy what we really mean is that we've subverted our own needs for the needs of our workplace or our children or just other people's perceptions about what a productive day looks like. But we haven't

actually paid attention to what we need to do during the day and that what would make us happy.

Kym Tell me about how we can improve our ratio of positive to negative emotions and what do the studies say are the optimal best, what those numbers should be.

Dr. Carter This is an interesting thing and this is a great way to tip your brain into its most optimal functioning really, so all emotions have an effect on our brain and on our physiology. Positive emotions like, so we always think of happiness, of course, but when I'm talking about positive emotions, we also need to think about positive emotions about the past like gratitude or appreciation. Other present-based positive emotions that go with happiness that could be like contentment or passion or engagement in something, the future, faith, hope, optimism, confidence is a very important positive emotion about the future. Then love and compassion are a positive emotions about other people, really, the most important ones or most powerful positive emotions that we have. And then there are the global ones, which I love so much and we've mentioned several times inspiration, it goes with elevation, awe, so that's what we're talking about here.

The function of positive emotions in our body and our brain is to really reverse any sort of fight or flight response. It brings us back to our natural state where our brain is functioning the most optimally, so when we feel a little bit stressed or

angry or anxious our body goes into that fight or flight response, which I'm sure most people are fairly familiar with. What you might not know is that when you go into even a low level fight or flight response, one of the things that happens—well, the reason that we call it fight or flight is because your brain and your body are preparing you to either fight something or to get the heck out of there, so it's like there's a lion that's about to attack you. It's very functional in those situations. If you're about to be physically attacked, your body is going to be prepared for that and your brain is going to be prepared for that.

Now what do you need to get out of a situation quickly or to fight something that's coming at you? You do not need to be slowed down by a pesky decision making process, because you will be dead in the water so to speak. So even a low level fight or flight response is going to shut down the newest part of our brain from an evolutionary standpoint that helps us think and plan and organize and be creative because it wants us to just act on instinct to get out of there or to fight. This is not very functional at all in our everyday lives, because we can just have something triggered minor and then all of a sudden be hindered in our ability to think about the best way to handle that situation.

So this is where our positive emotions come in. They act to reverse or put the brakes on that fight or flight response. You could be experiencing busyness and overwhelm or a full blown stress and then have a good laugh, watch a funny animal

video or a baby laughing video or something and have a good laugh. And that's going to slow your heart rate down; it's going to deepen your breathing a little bit. Laughter is a great one because it's a state of near total relaxation even just for a second that cues to your body that you're safe, and blood will start carrying oxygen and glucose or blood sugar back to the area of your brain that you need to be your most intelligent, most productive, most creative self.

Kym Yes, yes, that's great. I want to ask one last thing that I want you to think about. I'm going to bring everybody up on a few things before we end our session today with you. That is, when we hang up the phone today, I want you to think about what are some things that you want to tell people today that do these things today, starting today, that can have an impact in your life as it relates to your happiness and your sweet spots. I'm going to come back to you in just one minute.

I want to let everybody know that *Live Happy* if you are not a subscriber of the magazine, please subscribe and do it, and so many people are doing, too, is think about getting a subscription for someone else. The whole point to this is that we are the number one magazine in this field around happiness based on science, academic studies, research. Everything we do is based on really the science behind it and listening to Dr. Christine Carter today, everything she's talking about is based on her research and the studies and the science behind this.

The other thing I want to share with you is that at LiveHappy.com we have incredible writers. There is phenomenal content there, great blogs. The range of content is just superb. I'm just so proud of our team, because they're in their sweet spot. Let me just say that. They are in their sweet spot and this is something to really dive into and have a lot of good fun with.

The other thing I want you to know is we've been talking about George Mason University is hosting its sixth annual conference in Washington DC. It's called "Leading to Well Being in Workplaces, Organizations and Communities" conference. You can find all about it, the line-up, what they've got planned, the programming. It's first rate, just top drawer, top shelf, and the website is Wellbeing.onmason.com.

And the other thing I want to mention to you because you're only hearing about it here. We've not started the big marketing program for this yet. We're doing the first worldwide 24 hour happiness live stream, and it's going to take place over two days, March 19th and March 20th. It's going to start at 8:00 Eastern time on the 19th and it's going to end at 8:00 Eastern Standard Time on the 20th, but just go to LiveHappy.com, sign up for it. It's completely free by the way, but it's 24 hours of the brightest minds, some of the brightest minds in the world covering every

aspect of happiness, kindness. It's just going to be incredible, showing short films. It's just going to be fun.

Listen I dare you stay up 24 hours with me and then our next *Wake Up Happy* series is March 9th through the 13th. That's March 9th through the 13th is our next *Wake Up Happy* series and one of our guests, by the way, happens to be Ken Kragen who is the man who produced and created *We Are the World* and *Hands Across America*. Wait until you hear about Ken Kragen and what that did for his life and the power of giving like nothing you've ever seen.

All right with that, Christine, what would you say, what do we need to do today, what would be your statement to all of us to implement starting today?

Dr. Carter So, the first thing I would say is to just spend the day practicing doing only one thing at a time. Our brains were not designed to multi-task. It's not a very efficient way to work. It creates errors and more than that it creates stress. So, practice today just doing one thing at a time. What we're trying to do is dial back that busyness and that overwhelm.

Another thing that we can do is check our email less frequently. If you can strategically check your email, decide when you're going to check your social media feeds, too, I would lump those two things together. Decide now when will

you check and limit it to maybe—research shows that if you can limit your checking to three to five times a day versus constantly and impulsively, you'll bring a lot more ease into your life and you'll actually get more done more quickly on that email site.

Kym Keep going.

Dr. Carter Okay, and I would say another thing I would do is help me try and change this mantra about how busyness equals importance in our lives. You now should have had the primer on why those things aren't true. It's not true that busyness is a sign of productivity for example, so the next time somebody asks you how you are and they may tell you that they are busy, that's our mantra how are you, I'm so busy. Don't match their busyness. Take a deep breath and tell them what you've been focused on while you've been single tasking or tell them something that brings you joy or about something that brought one of those other great positive emotions into you life today. Let's change this cultural dialog around busyness.

Kym You are such a gift, such a gift. Thank you so much. We have to have you back. You have to promise me you'll come back to *Wake Up Happy* again at another session in the future.

Dr. Carter I would love to.

Kym This is great having you with us. I hope everybody had a fantastic experience with us this morning. I know I sure did. Communicate with us. My email is Wakeuphappy@livehappy.com. Christine, thank you again and whatever you do be the first to smile, keep smiling, spread that kindness and we're going to make this world a happier place. Bye bye for now.