



Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Roko Belic

HOST

Kym Yancey

SPEAKER

Roko Belic

PRESENTATION

Kym

Hey, good morning. This is Kym Yancey. Welcome to our special *Wake Up Happy* Webinar Series. It's thrilling to have you here with us. We've got a very, very special guest with us this morning. The director and the creator behind the movie "Happy", and we're going to jump right into that in just a few minutes. I just want to make sure that you know you can really get social with us and engage with us, tag us by using our hashtag which is #wakeuphappy. You can also search Live Happy to get into all the various content, the depth of the science behind what we do here at Live Happy, and our Facebook account is Live Happy as well.

Right now, we're heavily engaged in our Happy Acts program.

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You may not be aware that March the 20th is the International Day of Happiness as established by the United Nations, and we are the biggest supporter of that whole campaign through all the activities that we're doing around the country. We've got what we call these happy walls set up in 40 plus cities across the country all on the International Day of Happiness, which will be the 20th, and we really encourage people to get involved by just participating in an act of kindness, act of happiness that you can easily incorporate into your day. You know it's going to make you feel so much better, so we've got great ideas for you, too, at happyacts.org to find everything related to happiness though, including the happy acts.

If you only remember one website, just remember livehappy.com, Live Happy. We also have our big 24-hour happiness live stream coming up. That's the 19th and 20th of March. And again, go to livehappy.com. You can get all the details about that right there waiting for you.

If you've been with us since Monday, you know you've heard some great information and we're just going to continue with that tradition. Let me tell you about our special guest.

Roko Belić's directorial debut was the "Genghis Blues", and it won the Sundance Audience Award, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Roko directed the documentary "Dreams: Cinema of the Subconscious", which was released on the Inception Blu-ray, he associate produced "Beyond the Call", co-produced and shot "Indestructible", and directed the "Batmobile", which was released on the Dark Knight Rises Blu-ray. For his current project, "Happy", Roko teamed up with Tom Shadyac, who executive produced to direct the awarding feature documentary. "Happy" takes us on a journey from the swamps of Louisiana to the slums of Calcutta in search of what really makes people happy, combining real life stories of people from around the world and powerful interviews with the leading scientists in happiness research. "Happy" explores the secrets behind our most valued emotion.

So Roko, welcome to *Wake up Happy*.

Roko Thank you so much, Kym. It's good to be here.

Kym How did you come up with the idea for this film?

Roko The idea started with a phone call and I have to say it was not my idea. My friend, Tom Shadyac, who you mentioned, called one day and said he

read an article in the *New York Times* about happiness. And it was right at the beginning of the positive psychology movement, or I should say, the beginning of the mainstreamization of that movement. The article essentially said that we're very rich in America compared to other people in the world, but we're not very happy.

Tom, at the time, was sort of at the peak of his career, he was making millions of dollars every movie he directed and he said, "Look, I understand how this can be possible, that we can have a lot of money and not be happy because—" He didn't quite say it like this, but essentially he said, "Every day I've been living in this huge mansion, I noticed that the people who sweep my floors and mow my lawn are happier than many of my friends in Hollywood who make even more money than I do. So I know what doesn't necessarily make us happy, I want to know what does. Would you be interested in making a documentary about it?"

And I said, "Of course." I just immediately thought it was a wonderful idea.

Kym

Yes, isn't that interesting. But just that statement you just made about him saying that the people who sweep his floors and clean up his place are happier than many of the people he knows in Hollywood who are

millionaires. That in and of itself is the telling sign for so much of the research around happiness.

What surprised you about happiness from your exploration?

Roko

Well, a lot of things, but one thing that kind of stands out is how important our values are. Scientists differentiate our values in two broad categories: being intrinsic and extrinsic. And extrinsic values are if you prioritize things like money, power, fame, good looks. If you prioritize those external things, you are less likely to be happy than if your priorities revolve around what they call intrinsics, which is wanting to make the world a better place. Valuing your friendships, your community, wanting to do something meaningful in the world. If you prioritize those things, you're more likely to be happy.

The shocking part to me is, it doesn't really matter if you achieve these goals or not. Simply caring about them, simply caring about your community and your friends and your neighbors makes you more likely to be happy than if you care about money, power and fame. That I thought was fascinating because we cannot all chose to be millionaires or beautiful, good looking, smart, talented. We cannot necessarily chose those things, but we can choose to be a good friend, we can chose to be

a good neighbor, we can chose to be kind to people. And that was very exciting for me to realize how one of these critical components of happiness is within our control.

Kym What did you see happen to yourself in the process of doing this film and your interaction with people? What emerged for you?

Roko That is an interesting question, Kym, because when I started the project, and I think one of the reasons Tom asked me to do it is because I was a pretty happy guy already and I've often looked at the bright side of situations, and so I didn't think I was making this movie for myself. But the process took about six years and only looking back did I realize that some of this happiness wisdom that was coming from the scientists and from people I met along the path really sunk into me and I'll give you a brief explanation of that.

One is, friendships are very, very important for happiness and it's very common, at least in America and many western societies, as adults we don't see our good friends very often. We might see them at weddings, funerals, or birthdays but we don't hang out like we used to when we were in school. Learning about the importance of relationships and friendships, I decided to move to another city to be closer to some of my

childhood friends. People I knew, I realized I wouldn't see unless I made a proactive move.

I specifically moved to a neighborhood, which is a mobile home park because it was a very tight-knit community where Tom lives and I got to see my friend, because he's in the neighborhood, and I met more of his neighbors in first few times I visited him than I knew in ten years living in a suburb outside of San Francisco just because of how tight-knit this mobile home community is. Again, community has a big impact on your happiness.

The community happens to be near the beach where there's some waves and I can go surfing again. Something that I had stopped doing as adult because I sort of bought into the idea that surfing isn't that important for you. But after speaking with scientists about the importance of play and getting into flow, I reprioritized it in my life.

In many ways, the movie changed my life and in being this wonderful place, in this great community, my partner and I, who we've been together for 12 years at that point, decided oh, what a great place to raise kids. Why don't we have a kid? Seven months ago, our second child was born, our son, Dino, and four years ago our daughter, Viva, was born. I

can say I have kids at least in large part related to the fact that I made this move.

Kym How about that? I'm really impacted because I understand this too. The whole meaning behind friendships and that social connectedness, and this movie allowed you to see that it was so important that you would make that move. To have a closer bond, a closer connection to friends and the cultivation of relationships. It's magical isn't? And we're not taught these things, Roko. I mean and –

Roko No, we're kind of taught against them, right. We're taught that as a grownup you should prioritize your career, maybe your income, even to be more explicit, and that hanging out with your friends is something you do on your off time or if you're a slacker. If you're somebody who's not achieving the things you're supposed to achieve in life, those are the people who spend the time with their friends and I—that's totally wrong. The science is showing that that's wrong, that our friendships are extremely important. Something that we kind of know intuitively. But you're right; our society kind of pushes us in the opposite direction.

Kym How's it with the learnings and everything you got that you learned from the movie. Can you share some of things that you know today are like

big myths? Like for example, just like you just said, we've learned through science that the cultivation of relationships is very important, don't push them away. Are there other myths or things that you discovered along the way that have impacted your life?

Roko Sure, money is one that people are all interested in. It's kind of the first thing you think about. Do I need to be rich to be happy? There's the phrase money doesn't buy you love or money doesn't buy you happiness. We've all heard that and yet I don't know anybody who wants less money.

Kym Right.

Roko Right. Almost everybody I know, even close friends who have great values, we're all striving to have more money. One thing about money that's interesting is that you don't need to have a lot, or you don't need to have a little to be happy. Money is sort of a byproduct of these other things, like I mentioned your values, and if you spend your money on stuff, like fancy cars, or fancy jewelry, it will not have a positive impact on your life as much as if you spend that money on experiences.

For example up until very recently, I could not afford to travel to friends' weddings or funerals often. I just thought it was a luxury that I couldn't

afford to do because I didn't have a lot of money. Now that I've again recognized how important these things are in your relationships, if you spend your money on visiting friends, on having people stay at your house, having diners. One of your Happy Acts suggestions is to make dinner for a friend or a neighbor and these small acts, they have a big impact and sometimes you can do more with a little money. It's not that money does or doesn't make you happy, it's how you spend it that has an impact on whether it is positive or neutral or negative to your happiness.

Kym

Yes. I remember, too, my father saying something to me years ago. Everybody is waiting for somebody to be first. And he was referencing we moved into a new neighborhood and he wanted all of us to go out and be the first to knock on a neighbor's door and introduce ourselves and bring something to them. Mother made some homemade brownies and stuff, just to tell them that we were excited to be in the neighborhood. And he was so right about as you move around, I think so many of us don't know our neighbors. Don't know the people around us, because we're waiting for them to be first. We're waiting for them to come to us first. Knock on our door first.

Roko

Right.

Kym

Instead of being proactive and doing it first. I think if it's one thing you get out of this session among many from Roko is the importance of community, but also be first. You know that's something you can do today. You talk about a happy act. That's something you can do today is knock on your neighbor's apartment door or knock on your neighbor's door in your neighborhood and introduce yourself. Even if you got to say to them, "I've been here five years and I'm here to tell you I'm long overdue for saying hi and introducing myself and learning something about you and have you come over for some wine or something."

You agree?

Roko

Yes, absolutely and it relates to one of the myths about our culture that we feel that we need to protect ourselves. A security, safety of fear of strangers is something that I think is increased in our society since I was a kid. When I was a kid, me and my friends would have a lot of freedom. We'd ride our bikes around the neighborhood until nine at night and nobody worried about us getting kidnapped. Nowadays in my community now, in my actual community it's wonderful and people feel safe and free, but in the broader Los Angeles context, very few people feel good about their kids being alone out on the streets at night. I'm talking preteenagers.

But when I was growing up that was totally normal and essentially what it means is that we trusted strangers. It doesn't mean that there weren't bad people around, but they were so few and far between, and that's still the case. And that relates to one of these myths. You think well what if my neighbor is a weirdo? What if they start stalking me? These are the kinds of thoughts that go through people's heads and in fact it's possible, but it's extremely unlikely and much more likely in my experience is that you will find somebody very kind and friendly and somebody who is interesting.

Kym A positive experience. Yes.

Roko Absolutely, yes. I'm a pretty outgoing person and that's just been reinforced in my life over and over again ever since I've been a social person. Ever since I've been five years old, I just keep getting that positive feedback that people are generally friendly, wonderful, kind; you know, all those good things.

Kym But you also approach life that way. Don't you at some level attract what you send out?

Roko

Yes, of course. A smile is sort of the most basic symbol of it. If you smile at somebody, they're likely to smile back and that tiny little boost not only makes you happy, but it actually creates some sense of a bond and sense of community in a small but meaningful way.

When I was moving to Los Angeles, I came here from San Francisco and some people in San Francisco, I should say a lot of people in San Francisco don't like LA and I know that's a generalization, but it was very common, at least amongst the young, the crowd to sort of look down at LA and think that San Francisco was the creative capital of California and a wonderful place to be. My friends were very hesitant about me moving to LA. Why do you want to go down there? People aren't nice, there's road rage on the freeways and I said no, no, no, I have friends in LA, it's fine.

Sure enough, three days after I moved to Los Angeles, I was on the freeway and I was changing lanes. Normally when I change lanes, I kind of look over my shoulder and I make sure there's the space, and then I put my blinker on, turn in the lane and then I wave just as a reflex. I kind of wave in my rearview mirror just in case the person behind me is looking.

On this day, I did exactly that but when I looked in the mirror, I noticed that the driver behind me—and she was far enough back there was plenty enough space for me to move into that lane—she was just raising her middle finger. She was just in the process of flipping me off, but when she saw me wave, she immediately put her hand down and she kind of looked down. I mean while she's driving, I saw her head go down, and she raised her head again with this huge smile and she waved really exuberantly back at me. Like she was embarrassed that she had been upset for a second.

Kym

Yes.

Roko

She clearly was just in a bad mood or in a hurry or something and just by changing lanes, I had irritated her. And just my wave, that tiny gesture sort of threw off her negative reaction and immediately brought out her positive side. It made me realize how important these tiny gestures are. Right, because if I had not waved, she would have flipped me off. I would've felt, "Oh my god, I just moved to LA and I'm already pissing people off on the freeway and maybe my friends were right. I shouldn't have moved down here."

And she would've said, "Oh, there's terrible drivers in LA, they're rude and they cut you off." And in fact that tiny wave changed everything, so it wasn't a negative experience for either one of us.

Kym Oh, great story, yes.

Roko Well, it's something I've taken with me since then. It's like how many times are we not courteous when we could be? And how many times are we courteous in a way that actually has a much bigger impact than we may ever think?

Kym Yes, you are so right. And the whole notion when someone—when you put on your blinker to get in that other lane, it doesn't mean hurry up and block me. You know what I mean? Rush up and block me.

Roko Exactly.

Kym As opposed to slow it down, let them in. You want the same for—yes, it's great. Let me ask you. Initially, were you concerned by making this film about happiness that it might seem superficial?

Roko

Absolutely. It's funny you bring that up. It was one of my main concerns when I started and, again, intuitively, I immediately said, "Yes, great idea, let's make the movie." But once I sort of got into it, I thought oh you know, and I talked to people about it. And they'd say, "Oh, happiness." Some people are just skeptical and sort of cynical and would say, "Well, happiness isn't something you should prioritize. You should prioritize your career or your work, or if you do well in school; then happiness comes as a byproduct."

And I thought, wow, I was getting this sort of blow-back that I didn't expect. Even when we were trying to figure out what to call the movie, and we finally came up with just the very basic phrase, "Happy", and our logo with a smiley face under it. I was worried it was superficial and then at some point, as a film maker, and as somebody interested in happiness. At some point, you just have to say screw it. If people have a problem with it, either they'll come around and see what we mean, they'll see that it's a deeper thing than what they may have thought, or they won't. At some point, you just have to march forward with what you believe in and hope that you've communicated things with a depth and sincerity that you intended to.

Kym I've seen the movie. The movie is fantastic and I saw it on Netflix. They can access this movie through video on demand and all that, right? I think it's everywhere.

Roko Absolutely. We've literally spent the last few years getting it in the position where as many people as possible can see it. We have a website, which is thehappymovie.com. It's on Netflix, it's on iTunes. It's all over the place. Hulu, lots of digital platforms. We have DVDs available for people who don't watch movies on the web. Yes, we've really made a big effort to get it out there.

Kym What makes you happy? I'm also curious about what makes you happy? What has changed as a result of making the film in your happiness, in your life?

Roko Okay, well I mentioned that I moved to a place where I can be closer to some good friends.

Kym Exactly.

Roko So that definitely has changed. Surfing is wonderful because I'm 43 years old now and although I was in denial for many years, I do realize my body

is getting older and it really helps to be consciously active a few times a week. So that helps.

This wonderful family that I have now has happened as a result of the film so two amazing kids who wake up happy and that even if they get grumpy sometimes during the day, the overall impact is extremely positive. And I feel like I'm doing something worthwhile with my life doing the work that I'm doing. So a lot of those things make me happy on a daily basis and I feel very fortunate.

Kym What do you do when you're having not necessarily a happy day, you're having a down moment, you're going through a challenging time? What's your method for rising above that or getting through that?

Roko That's a good question. I guess I have two, sort of, default things. I'll mention them both. One is if I really just feel like stressed and frustrated, I try and carve out some time to go surfing. Somehow being out on the ocean and seeing dolphins swim by, and recently there have been whales blowing spouts of air and water. I just mean surfing is something that really moves me and is a powerful, sort of neutralizing in a calming positive way experience for me.

The next is also what I mention, I just have to open my eyes and look around at other people who are suffering much more than me. Again, it's not that I'm using the newspaper to feel better about my life, but that is the impact that it has. When I read about what's going on in Syria or in Iraq or Afghanistan, places where people have suffered for years, years, and in some cases decades. I have never had a crappy enough day that my day trumps something that other places are experiencing.

The worst day in my life was when one of my good friends was killed. I was 22 years old and I think about that day as literally the low point of my life. It's a pinpoint and there are people who experience that multiple times in a single month or a year and thankfully I've not had to experience those things.

Kym

Let me ask you. I want you to think for a second based on the movie and all the things that you've learned, but want you to do kind of like give our audience a call to action for today. I've got a couple of brief things I want to tell everybody about. I want to come back to you for you just to give us our parting statement around today some actions that we should and could take today to bring more happiness to others and to ourselves. Is that okay? Okay, so I'll be right back with you on that one, Roko.

Roko

Of course.

Kym

I want to remind everybody that as part of your acts of happiness and the lists we've got there, just tons of nothing but free things to do, I want you to be aware of the happy notes. The Live Happy notes. They are a smash and this is a great way; really personally I refer to it as happy graffiti, but these are little Post-it stylized notes with ten different handwritten statements on them from 'you are unique; embrace it' to 'you make a difference, you matter, thank you,' to words like 'the beauty inside you makes me happy'. So these are all handwritten and there are 10 different notes in a deck multiplied by 5 times, so for a total of 50. Go to livehappy.com and please get some of those notes so that you can spread happiness around.

I also want to tell you about the big conference that's taking place that George Mason University is putting on that is called, "Leading to Well-Being in Workplaces, Organizations, Communities". The tickets are on sale at wellbeing.onmason.com. You can find out all about it and the speakers. They've got a tremendous program. In fact, the Chopra Center has got a program, a one-day intensive there during this

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workshop and again the website is wellbeing.onmason.com. Live Happy is going to be there and I'm just so looking forward to it.

Tomorrow, we've got, actually the founder of Live Happy, just a gifted entrepreneur. It's like everything he touches really feels like it's golden. Even if things don't work out just the perfect way for him, he turns them into gold and he's the author of the book, "The Slight Edge". The whole concept around little things matter. It's much like what Roko's saying, these simple things that make a difference. Jeff Olson will be with us tomorrow for *Wake Up Happy*. Alrighty?

So with that, Roko, give us, based on the movie, your experiences, what are the things you want us to do? We've got thousands of people participating in this session with us. What would you have us do for today?

Roko

Well, it relates to what you just said about these little things. One fundamental important thing is to recognize that they are not little things. Right. Being kind to people, smiling, saying nice things. Those are actually huge. Those are what those pieces put together make up our happy lives. It's often what we consider the bigger things, career moves, and things like that, that aren't as important as we once thought.

I would encourage people to take the cards that you just mentioned and go even one step farther with one, or two or three people in your lives and tell somebody, elaborate why that person means so much to you. What do you appreciate about somebody? Whether it's your mom or your kid or your teacher or your colleague.

Sometimes when I hear these kinds of directives I sort of cringe a little bit, it feels a little awkward, but one way you can do it is you can literally just start by saying, "You know, I was just thinking about how amazing you are." And then you just go down the list of whatever two, three or ten or fifteen things you were thinking about, about that person. I have done that with people and I have seen it transform them. And I'm not doing it to transform them because actually it has just as much of a positive impact on me as it does them. And that, I guess, is kind of the whole point. Doing something kind for somebody else, letting them know why you appreciate them is a big thing you can do and is worth doing, and I encourage people to do something like that today.

Kym

One thing in particular that I really appreciate and you did a great thing for me, and that is these little things are big things. You are so right. They are not to be fluffed off.

Roko Right.

Kym Those little things are actually big things. Great. Fantastic. Well listen everybody, the "Happy" movie, you've got to see this. You can watch it tonight. Roko, thank you so much for your time and your generosity. Appreciate you and the fabulous work you're doing.

Roko Kym, you're awesome. Thank you so much.

Kym Everybody have a great day. We'll see you again tomorrow for *Wake Up Happy*. Bye bye for now.