



Wake Up Happy with Elise Ballard

HOST

Kym Yancey

SPEAKER

Elise Ballard

PRESENTATION

Kym Good morning. This is Kym Yancey. Welcome to *Wake Up Happy*. You know, it almost feels like forever since the last time we were together, and it was just a month ago, but these *Wake Up Happy* sessions really do so much for us at Live Happy Central that we hope that this same effect is taking place with you, where you crave it, and you want to get more.

We've got a fascinating, fascinating program this morning with an incredible woman by the name of Elise Ballard and her whole focus is on epiphanies. Let me tell you a little bit about her. She's a writer, a speaker, a host, and producer. She is the author of *Epiphany: True Stories of Sudden Insight to Inspire, Encourage and Transform*. It's a collection of over 50 interviews with amazing people from all walks of life, recounting the stories of their greatest epiphanies.

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Elise, welcome to *Wake Up Happy*.

Elise Thank you so much, Kym. It's my honor to be here.

Kym Hey. Listen, let's jump right into your definition of an epiphany.

Elise Okay, great. So when I started this project, I had an epiphany that drastically changed my life and I was so amazed by this that I started asking people, do you think you've ever had an epiphany? And when I did, and I started asking people about their stories more officially, and wanted to film them even, people started saying, what do you mean by an epiphany, exactly?

We all have our ideas and definitions of an epiphany, but I went to the dictionary and the dictionary definition is a moment of sudden or great revelation, an illumination, a discovery, a realization. But when I'm asking people, I'm asking people about their greatest epiphanies, the epiphanies that had the greatest impact on their lives. So I define epiphanies in that context as a moment of sudden or great revelation that usually changes your life in some way.

Kym Usually changes your life in some way. I've got to tell you, I spent a lot of time looking at your different videos. I just want to encourage everyone, check out –

that's E-L-I-S-E Ballard, B-A-L-L-A-R-D. I was checking out your TED Talks and, right away, and I'm going to challenge everybody that's listening. In fact, I'd love for you to send a note in to us about what you consider to be one of your, one or two, biggest epiphanies at wakeuphappy@livehappy.com.

But would you tell me, yes, I mean, it really immediately got me thinking about my own epiphanies. I mean, you changed my thinking about that. Would you mind sharing – because you have some great stories there, but would you share some of your epiphany stories to use as examples?

Elise Sure. You mean my personal ones –

Kym Yes.

Elise Or do you mean some of the ones I've collected?

Kym Some of the ones you've collected, I'm sorry. Yes, some of the ones you've collected.

Elise Yes, yes, no, well, yes, definitely. That's why I love talking about this because, and it happened it to me, too. When I started doing this project and people not only were like, what do you mean by epiphany, exactly, but they were like, why are you

doing this? I was like, because I had an epiphany that so drastically changed everything for me and I was able to finally take action in my life to change my life that I wanted to know about other people's. Then they were like, well, what's your story, and I was like, oh, I don't want to tell mine.

Kym Right.

Elise Because a lot of times these stories are so personal but, to your point, when I started having to – when I got a book deal with Random House and I started having to write about how I got to that moment, I realized that I had had other epiphanies in the past, I just never thought about them in that way. So I'm so happy that you're saying from hearing me talk about it, the whole point is for me to get people to start thinking about their own moments and develop their own stories so that they can use them as inspiration and wisdom and as building blocks for life, which is what so many of the successful people I interviewed have done.

Some of the different people I've interviewed have been like Dr. Oz and Deepak Chopra and to my fifth grade teacher here in Dallas, Texas. One of the stories that I would say, I guess Dr. Oz is one of the very first epiphanies that I got because I had produced for him. I produced a bunch of his exercise videos and so he was one of the first people I got his interview from.

His was really interesting that he was running the ER when he was a young doctor; not that he's not young now, but more towards the beginning of his career. A woman came in and was bleeding to death internally, and so they'd rushed her into the emergency room. She was there with a bunch of her family, and they were Jehovah's Witnesses. He came back out and they'd done the operation. She was going to be okay, but she needed a blood transfusion. He told the family and they said, we can't give her that. It was out of their belief system that they – blood transfusions were not part of their belief system.

He was so angry. He felt like he wasn't communicating to them the severity of the issue and that he had not done a good job as a doctor and, also, he said his ego was like, I have just busted my butt to save this woman, and ripped her from the jaws of death, and now this is happening. But later he said he was thinking about it and he realized that from their perspective, from their belief system, from their world view, they were doing the best thing for their loved one and it was her belief system, as well.

So that moment that he had that realization that the hard – he said, really, the hard decision was their decision. He said that wasn't an easy decision for them, but that is what they believed was the best thing. Not that he agreed with it, because he didn't, but it changed something in him in starting to listen to people's perspectives, to start listening and talking to people from their perspective,

respecting other people's world perspectives. He said we don't have to agree on it, but to be able to truly listen.

He said that it changed his whole life and the way he started talking to his patients, also how he started talking and listening to people in his life and that it changed his whole practice. Now, he has a talk show where a big theme is listening. If you watch him, one of the reasons he gets such great interviews, and has such great information, is the way he listens.

For me, a big component of epiphanies – and he said one of the things it also led to was at Columbia University in New York is where he worked. He still operates on people, still a leading heart surgeon. He said that the patients wanted a complementary medicine, alternative practices, in the hospital and they opened a wing for that. They're one of the first hospitals to do that and it's because they were listening from their patients' perspectives and incorporating that.

His epiphany, for me, is complicated but it's also, if you think about, what if we could all listen from that perspective? What if we could all listen in politics and in leadership positions and in our own families and in friends? What if we could actually, absolutely, listen to each other with great respect, even if we don't agree?

One of the components of epiphanies, the very first component that I found, as far as patterns go, is that people were listening. They were paying attention. They were open to these moments for some reason. That, for me, is actually a big one for me lately and it was one of the first ones. I guess I didn't talk about that one in the Ted Talk, did I?

Kym No, no, you didn't talk about it. Let me ask you, let me shift the course a little bit. Once you have that epiphany, how do you know what to do next? How do you know?

Elise Well, that's an interesting thing. There are four things in every epiphany's pattern that I found. There is a listening and openness, of paying attention that I touched on. That will mean someone might be in prayer meditation. Someone might be just contemplating the sky or, perhaps, they are in a state of absolute crisis, whether they've lost a job, they're facing a really serious illness, or even have lost a loved one. For whatever reason, people are open to these moments.

The second quality of these moments, which is I call them such a gift and they're a little bit different than an everyday realization, is that people have absolute belief in these moments. It may seem nuts to everybody else, even to our own rational minds, but for the quality of the moment, of the realization, that person realizes that it is true for them and they are compelled to take action.

For instance, in my epiphany, my epiphany was to finally leave. That it was time for me to leave a marriage that had not been working for years and years. When I had the epiphany about what was really keeping me there, and you can read about it in the book or watch –

Kym Oh, I remember that in the Ted Talk and I do want to ask you, just on that, because I think relationships are so central to everything because I've got a relationship story, too, to share but –

Elise Oh you do? Good.

Kym Yes, yes, but I just want to – that epiphany. I mean, did you have that – I mean, first of all, was it like just were you driving, were you at home, were you – like did it hit you and immediately you put in action and change?

Elise Well, no. What happened is that I was standing over a printer. I'd done all this research for this acting role I had and because of the research I had an epiphany about my own life. It happened literally printing out a prop for a play that I was in and so in that moment I had the epiphany. But a lot of times, most of the time, except for nowadays for me because I've been observing this and living this and

teaching this and studying this now for years, now soon after I have an epiphany, I'm like, oh, I just had epiphany. Do you know I mean?

But at the time, most people, we don't say in that moment, I just had an epiphany. You have a realization and it compels you to take action. What I did is only go on Craigslist every day, for weeks, and look at sublets; that was all I had the energy to do. And most people, we have an epiphany, a moment of realization, you believe in it and you start taking action.

I tell people to practice taking action in life so that when these moments do come, you're more ready to do that, but you can take the tiniest baby step like I did. I just looked on Craigslist at sublets for weeks until I emailed one and the one that I emailed ended up being the one that I ended up in, which has led me to a whole other life and actually a whole other book that I'm writing but that to me is serendipity; that's what I refer to it to.

But if everyone can just take one baby step even towards what they feel compelled to do about that epiphany, and this is what every single person that had a life-changing epiphany was telling me in their stories and you'll see it when you read them or hear about them or if you examine your own life. The second step will be revealed and then the third step and the fourth step. It's as if the universe, or life,

is saying to you, yes, this is true for you; yes, keep going and that is how we know.

Before you know it, your life is changed.

If you can keep noticing serendipity in your life, circumstances falling into place, random happenings, notice it, be excited about it, be grateful for it, and act on it and cultivate these four things of listening, belief, action, and serendipity in your lives. You will have more and more epiphanies and will get on track because I think epiphanies really are what are waking us up to our own unique paths and gifts and talents in life.

Kym Well, there's no doubt they can save us, too, right? I mean –

Elise Yes.

Kym I want to stay with you because I thought your story was very powerful when I saw it in your Ted Talk. The whole notion was you were fearful that by ending your relationship with your – at the time, the marriage you were in, that you would not have that child. You wanted to have a child. I mean, it was a timing thing. I thought that was awful, first of all, very brave of you but it also sparked the realization that you could adopt, that you had other options in your life. I just thought that was the epiphany, right?

Elise Yes.

Kym Can you expand on that a little bit more, just to bring everybody in on the story?

Elise Oh, sure. I was doing a role in a play. It was about Texas politics and I was in Austin, Texas at the time and I'd been in a marriage that had not been working for years. Neither one of us had been happy. I'd get even separated and I'd come back. It was kind of one of those things in life where you couldn't extricate yourself from the situation. I was stuck in life, which, I don't know, maybe a lot of people find themselves stuck in life and I was in whatever area.

I was doing this play where I was playing a woman who desperately wanted to have a baby with her husband. She finds out that she's infertile; she's unable to have a baby. She then finds out, when she goes to tell her husband this, that the husband reveals that he's had a one-night stand with someone and then we find out that the woman is also pregnant with his child.

It was this whole drama. Of course it's a play and my character goes to this other woman in the second to last scene of the play, and hands her an adoption brochure and confronts her. The last scene of the play we see that my husband and I have adopted this child and everybody lives happily ever after.

So in doing research for that role, I researched all types of fertility treatments as well as adoption. In my life, I didn't have any close friends or family that had been adopted. I just didn't know anything about it and what happened is after hours and hours of research I learned about all the myriad of ways that someone can become a parent in this day and age.

It was the day before we were opening. We were supposed to have a full audience for a dress rehearsal and I had told the stage prop guy that I would provide this adoption brochure and I finally found one online that worked and I thought was great. So I'm on my way to the theater that night, I'm standing over the printer, and this adoption brochure is printing out towards me and I had the thought, I could do that. I don't have to stay. In that millisecond, the fear was revealed to me and released from me in the exact same instant.

That fear was the true reason I had been staying in that marriage, the real, real reason, which is why nothing else is working, but I still hadn't left was that I was scared if I left I might never have a biological child of my own.

Kym Yes.

Elise And when that fear – it was so deep in me that I wasn't even aware of it. That was the gift of the epiphany and it came from all the knowledge and the research I had

done for this role. So I was finally able to take real action in my life and keep going with it. Like I said, the serendipity came in play where things kept happening that it worked out. But it gave me freedom. It felt like that when that fear was revealed to me and released from me, it literally felt like a 50-pound weight dropped free from my body and I didn't realize I had been carrying it.

Kym So, Elise, I think epiphanies can be very, very scary then because they reveal a truth within you. I mean, talk to me about that. Do you agree that it can reveal a truth within you and then the decision then is now that you've had this epiphany, there is a path, there is an opening, there is something that you should do, act on? What are your thoughts about that?

Elise Well, I think that the quality of the epiphanies, like I said, they're like this interesting gift in that they give you – they have such this – you know, researchers, we can't put people in a lab and make them have life-changing epiphanies. They've done research on just a-ha moments about problem solving and creative problem solving and they've even like put electronic – that they've measured our brainwaves and stuff and alpha waves will come out of the right side of the brain. They can't tell where they're coming from.

It's sort of this beautiful thing about the magic, or the mystery of life, so to speak, is contained in these kinds of moments that we're talking about. I really do feel like

rarely is the person scared of it. You may have to sit with it for a while, but you are changed because of it and you may look back and see how things have like –

All the knowledge and research that I had gotten had led up to that moment that I finally had the realization where I was changed, the fear was released. That's why I say people go – if you feel stuck in life, go look and see what you might be scared about in your life and research. Knowledge and research and finding, reaching out for teachers. Like what people [indiscernible], right?

Kym Right.

Elise That they're reaching out to you, the material you put out in the world –

Kym Right.

Elise – with *Live Happy*. These are the kinds of tools people can use to cultivate epiphanies in their lives, but I think, because of the nature, that people will usually take the baby step and then they're guided.

Kym Right.

Elise But again, to your point, if people can be developing these four elements of listening, belief, taking action in life, and noticing serendipity, they'll come more easily and they'll be easier to take action on them.

Kym Well, the interesting thing is *Live Happy* is really, is an epiphany for many people. It was an epiphany for me, the whole notion that happiness is the precursor to the success. The whole notion of work hard, study, have a great job, and when you get that special house, or when you get that car, that dream car, you've always been thinking about, then you'll be happy.

Clearly, the research shows, and the reality is that people aren't happy like they think they're going to be. They have a fleeting moment then all of a sudden it's like they go right back to where they were before the epiphany, that the happiness is always there for you. It was there from the beginning, you just had to learn how to tap into it. I find your study around epiphanies really to be fascinating and liberating and I think your point about listening to what you really feel. You have this epiphany for a reason. I mean, something brings you to that point.

Elise Yes. I believe these epiphanies are awakenings to what – I didn't really believe, actually, before I started this project that we all had a purpose or a path, like a specific one to each person. I thought we all had – I wasn't sure if that was absolutely accurate and now I think that that is true, that we all come in with unique

gifts and talents, that we can all hook into those, develop those, and get on, for lack of better words, on purpose for you. Everybody's different and unique and these are wake up calls.

These are wake up calls to our heart's desires, which are usually calling us to that, and if we can all get on that we can live a fulfill – I just notice this over and over and over again by every successful person I've interviewed. Whether we all know their names – Dr. Oz, Barry Manilow, Clive Davis, if we all [indiscernible] we knew all these famous people maybe or everyday people who are successful because they're fulfilled in their lives. If we can find fulfillment in life, and I believe that's what epiphanies can get us on track with, if we're listening to them and taking action on them.

First of all, you don't usually find yourself in a huge crisis to have to – you might find yourself in crisis, but it's really not necessarily an epiphany will [ph] come out of that because you're already on path. If you are living a fulfilled life, you're energized by life. You're energized by everything in life. You're energized in your work, you're energized in your personal life, and then you're energized to reach out into the world in much bigger ways.

If we can all get on that, we can make this perfect tapestry here where we can all help each other and everybody will be – and when we hit the dark times, because

we all have dark times, we all have challenges. This is what this plan is about, right? But when we do, we can still see beauty. We come out of it quicker and it doesn't devastate us to where we can't get out of bed for years. When we have moments of joy, we're completely present for them.

It's about being present in life and fulfilled and energized and this is just one tool that I think we overlook a lot. We all have them no matter who you are, no matter what age you are, no matter what belief system you have. I interviewed atheists to religious leaders and everyone in between. These are completely democratic and every human being has them.

Kym I mentioned to you when you were talking about relationships that I had a relationship epiphany. It was really through my father. My father has passed away, but my mother and father had been married for 50 years and I'll never forget just –

Elise Wow.

Kym Yes, it was a real wow, but I remember, they had their arguments and they had their disagreements but then they went through a period where things just seemed to be smooth to me. I remember going on a drive with my dad and I asked him, here was the epiphany for me, I asked him, I said, dad, what is the secret for you, you and mom, and making it work and all that? Your relationship has really gotten

strong. I remember as a kid how you guys used to fight [indiscernible] all the time but, I mean, you guys have really smoothed this out.

He said to me, he said, because so many of his friends had divorced, and the epiphany was that if I were to treat my wife every day like she was – he says, Kym, if I had divorced your mother and had a “girlfriend,” what do you think I would do? He says, I’d be bringing her flowers. I’d be leaving her notes. I’d be opening the door. I’d be complimenting her. I would be surprising her with a gift every now and then. I’d be making some dinner for her just to be charming. I’d be doing all those things. He says, and my epiphany was, well, what if I did that with my wife? What if I do that for her? And that was the epiphany. He said, I have this wonderful wife and we have a great time because I realize if I treat her like she’s this new girlfriend, which I’ll have a fabulous – and he was so right. That was the epiphany. It’s interesting how all these things present themselves. Do you find yourself, because you do this work, you’re far more intuitive than most of us when it comes to recognizing epiphanies. But how often do you have an epiphany? Is that a fair question to ask you? How often do you have them?

Elise I love – I mean, look, again, when I get stories from people when I interview them, I’m asking about the greatest epiphanies in life, but we have epiphanies every day. I mean, look, the a-ha moment, we all know that term. It doesn’t matter what you call these moments, of course, but the reason I used epiphany the word is because

it has more resonance with being more formal and more – people always have so much reverence for these moments.

There's such a quality of awe about them because, as I spoke about, they have this sort of mystery of life contained in them and they're such a gift. But we have little epiphanies all the time. In fact, I have them all the time now about this project. I always say, in my book and when I teach this stuff, I have exercises people can do and one of them is to write your greatest epiphanies and people will think, I don't have an epiphany and then later you'll remember some. Not a lot, but there are several people in my book that didn't think they had any and then they came back to me and we were both crying when they're telling me the story.

The other day I was putting like a meme on my – I love quotes. I'm a big quote person. Every one of my epiphanies starts with a quote from the people. I had this one that was like, when you go on the journey, most of the time you find out, you realize that you never even asked the right question.

What I realized, and what I say about epiphanies, too, is that you will find in your own stories, as well as other people's stories that you read or hear about, but in your own, too, when you examine it and you start using it as a tool of inspiration and wisdom in your own life, that it will change. You'll remember new things you didn't remember before or that meaning means something else now, depending

on where you are in your life, or you wouldn't have understood something then but now you do. It's fascinating how these things grow in depth and breadth.

The whole project for me I say now is my greatest epiphany in life and that's what it does. I keep discovering new things about these moments and that is like, epiphanies for me are that a lot of times you think you've had a – so you've had an epiphany and you move towards it. You take action and you end up on a journey that is even a more incredible journey, and a bigger blessing, or things came out of it that you never ever imagined could have happened.

I never thought I'd be teaching and speaking and doing what I've done with epiphany. I really didn't. I thought that I would just be like doing a film about it and maybe writing a book and then I would move on.

Elise I had no idea that they contained all of this information and that there were all these patterns and all of that. So, yes, I think that – I have epiphanies all the time about, you know, like just in my journey alone but all of us. Also, I'm teaching cultivating epiphanies, right? So I say think about epiphany you want [sic] and I think it's so funny because we might think we need something but then when you go ahead and have an epiphany it's an answer to something else and will answer the question you asked but you never even asked the right question. See what I mean?

Kym Oh, yes, I love that – cultivate.

Elise So that's my latest epiphany about epiphanies.

Kym Yes, there you go. There you go. But I love that whole thing of cultivating an epiphany and helping through an epiphany, helping you see and get to an answer or a clarity or a realization or something that's blocking you. These epiphanies help to unblock things for you, correct?

Elise That's exactly right, yes. They lead to successful, fulfilling lives. They lead to showing us our blocks in life. One of my blocks that I've seen as a pattern is that I will get so scared of something. I'm in denial about it. It like is so deep and so every one of my major epiphanies has revealed that fear, has released me from that fear. So in my life I'm very – I work on my fear factor, right? I work on not being scared in life because once you build that muscle, our epiphanies are – you'll see a theme and if you work on that area of life then you don't need those lessons any more. Do you see what I mean?

Kym I do.

Elise And you develop as a human being. It's about being aware. I mean, this is what you're putting out there. If we can start being aware and paying attention, especially to our own heart's desires, our own inner voices, and then to other people, we will just live much more congruent lives in my opinion. But we see it over and over again.

Kym Yes and the reason why I said that epiphanies can be scary – and the reason why I said that, and I'd like to know if you share this or not, but it is that I don't know of anything that when you're making a move to move forward or to change or transition or whatever the case may be, it's requiring action, some action that you've got to take. Now faced with that action, that's where either you stop, you get fearful, you're uncertain, you're, oh, my gosh, what would happen if I do this? That's where all that self-talk and everything comes in. I mean, are you tracking where I'm going here with this?

Elise Yes. It's that whole thing like, feel the fear and do it anyway. It is scary. Look, I mean, to be – what is that saying where it's like there's no such thing as not having fear. Courage is doing it anyway. Our greatest leaders from history admitted to being scared. It's part of being human but, again, I go back to if it's – I'm a person, in my life, out of those four things I keep talking about – listening, belief, action, and serendipity – usually people, one area of those they're the weakest in. Mine is belief. I basically when all this started had a very, not very strong belief in myself or

in the way life works. I always was worried about life and so I constantly have to bolster that.

Some people have a hard time taking action and, again, I encourage people. I get it, we're all scared to a degree and it's about taking action to bolster that in life so that you don't – I mean, the other thing is, about epiphanies, to have them, to actively want them, is you've got to get out of your comfort zone. We all want to be comfortable, kind of, but that comfort doesn't make us happy. You know what I mean? It's weird. We're such complex beings, aren't we?

Kym Yes. We humans are something else, aren't we?

Elise We really are. But I would say take little tiny things of action. Start practicing doing things out of your comfort zone. If you're drawn to do things like, even, it's to draw or do random things you've never done before, take that class, research that thing, get the books, listen to *Wake Up Happy*. You know what I mean? Do the things, you have to practice, build the muscle. [Indiscernible] therapist.

Kym Okay, so we've come to the end of our session. It's probably a good thing because all of a sudden we've got some interference coming in on our line.

Elise I know. I didn't know what that is.

Kym Yes, me either. So, hey, listen, Elise, thank you so much. I want to tell everybody, she is phenomenal. You can – Facebook is Elise Ballard. Her Twitter is eliseballard. Check out her books. Can you get it on amazon.com and learn about your work?

Elise Yes at Amazon and you can go to my website eliseballard.com or epiphanychannel.com.

Kym You will love it and you'll learn so much more. Elise, I'm sorry for the noise, for the interference here at the end, but thank goodness it happened at the end, right?

Elise I know. Kym, thank you so much for having me on. I just love what you all are doing in the world and I'm so honored to be part of it.

Kym Hey, thank you. We are so grateful for you, too. Until the next time we meet everybody, tomorrow, *Wake Up Happy*, be the same place, same time, look forward to it. Bye, bye for now.