



Wake Up Happy with Thomas Bradbury

HOST

Kym Yancey

SPEAKER

Thomas Bradbury

PRESENTATION

Kym

Hi, welcome. This is Kym Yancey, and you are at the right place if you're ready to wake up happy. I always say, the name of our program is *Wake Up Happy*, but when you talk about waking up it's really about waking up to all the opportunities and all the possibilities for you to be as happy, and have a full expression of your own happiness. We're going to really dive into some great content here this morning. I've got a very, very special guest, his name is Thomas Bradbury.

He's a professor of clinical psychology. After earning his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in 1990 from the University of Illinois, he moved to Los Angeles to start the Marriage and Family Development Laboratory at

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UCLA. Since then his team has conducted studies that help explain how marriages change and how couples can keep their relationships healthy and strong.

Now, with funding from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and The John Templeton Foundation, Bradbury and his collaborators have published more than 100 research articles, and edited three books, including *The Psychology of Marriage*. He is the recipient of the distinguished teaching award from the UCLA Psychology Department. He has also been honored with several awards for his research on marriage and intimate relationships, including the distinguished scientific award for early career achievements from the American Psychological Association.

Thomas, it's great to have you a part of our *Wake up Happy*. Welcome to this session with us.

Thomas I'm delighted to be here, Kym. Thanks for having me.

Kym Thomas, let's delve right into how does being in a relationship tend to affect someone's physical health?

Thomas Well, people who are in great relationships tend to have better physical health, and the opposite is also true. We know, for example, that people who have a very serious health concern like a heart attack, for example, actually recover more quickly if they have a partner who they can talk with about the experience and who will keep them on track during the recovery process. In some ways they can be the intermediary between the medical staff and what's going on within the home. In all kinds of ways having a great relationship allows us to really feel better about ourselves physically and emotionally.

Kym Yes, and that's one of the foundational pillars to happiness is having a strong social connection, you being in love or loving others and others loving you back.

Thomas Absolutely. We know that one of the best predictors, probably the best predictor of how happy you're going to be in your life is the quality of the relationships that you have with your family members, with your friends, but probably more importantly that person who you're waking up with every day, your intimate partner, your husband or wife or mate.

Kym Yes. I want to ask you something. I think about—and this is perhaps a little different question. I notice that when it comes to technology the phone that you and I used 20 years ago is over and done. Technology

keeps moving forward, and it keeps building on itself so that it doesn't replicate the old technology; it's constantly refining itself. Why is it with our relationships, with our marriages, that we seem to repeat the same patterns over and over again? What's your view of that, and what's going on with why we are so challenged with having these healthy relationships?

Thomas

It's a great question. To support your point, we know not only that although the divorce rate in the United States has been going down for quite a long time we know that it's still around 40%; 40% of all first marriages will end in separation or divorce. But what's interesting is that the remarriages are often even riskier. They have an even higher level of divorce and dissolution.

Naturally that leads to your question of, why is it so hard. Why is it so difficult for us to learn about ourselves and to learn about our relationships? A big part of it, I think, is that our personalities matter; who we are, what our temperaments are like. Those are going to be determining factors in our relationships.

Often we try to change ourselves or change our partners. Sometimes that's a really good thing to do and sometimes when our relationships are really struggling it's a great thing to do. A big part of what we have to do is accept who we are and accept our partners for who we are—who they

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are. When we do that we recognize that our partners, we're not going to be perfect people; we're going to have foibles and quirks and characteristics that make us prickly sometimes, make us a little bit annoying sometimes.

If you go into the game knowing that that's part of the process then you say, oh, I get it. I can accept that and understand it about my partner hoping that they'll do the same to me; they'll understand me, they'll accept me for warts and all. But if we go into the process thinking that we have to change things and everything must change and I have to get this person and this relationship to be perfect for me then I think that's where a lot of the friction comes in.

Kym

Do you hear a lot about that where couples' expectations—let's talk about unmet expectations or unrealistic expectations. Is that one of the things that you hear that comes up a lot about not giving each other a break or expecting too much? Because of these expectations it's like you can almost find yourself in a state of constant disappointment.

Thomas

Expectations matter a lot. When I study marriages I study newlyweds who've never been married before, and I study them usually for the first four years of their marriage because that's actually when the divorce rates are highest, in years two, three and four in marriage. What I'm always

fascinated by is that there is a subgroup of people who rapidly decline in their satisfaction. They really go downhill fairly quickly at that stage; not everybody. In fact, it's not even the majority of couples. There's really a significant subgroup of couples who didn't quite realize that this relationship wasn't going to work out for them.

For me, I think that really underscores the importance of knowing who you are at the beginning of your relationships, knowing what you're hoping for in a partner at the beginning of a relationship so that those expectations are a little clearer so you're not surprised, so you're not disappointed and you really roll with the new information that comes your way. I think expectations are not the only factor that matters, but certainly a significant one.

Kym

I have to ask you; here's the thing. Who you are—obviously, think about us for a second. With your studies and everything else, who you were in the beginning and how you evolve almost moment by moment, but definitely year by year by year, you evolve.

I have to tell you this; me and my wife joke all the time. We've been together—we're going into our 38th year, but our little joke is that I've been married to 8 different women and she's been married to 8 different

men because we evolve; we're not that same person. What are your thoughts about that and relationships?

Thomas

I think we cannot think about relationships separately from the fact that we are developing as people over time. We tend to really think about relationships as a static entity. In order to have a good relationship you have to follow this prescription.

A big part of what happens, especially for a relationship that has the longevity that yours does, is an encouragement of as we develop we want our partners to encourage us to become that person. We want them to encourage us to be people who work hard, especially when that matters a lot early in our relationship. We want people to encourage us to be really good parents when we're raising children and we're in, say, our late 20s or early 30s. We want people who are going to encourage us to develop new interests when work becomes less critical in our lives. We want people who encourage us and support us and nurture us to be grandparents or aunts and uncles. We want somebody who sees us in all our complex, multifaceted capacities and helps us to become more of who we are.

I think that is, in a healthy relationship, that's natural and inevitable. But when you start to get upset about who your partner is or you get

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frustrated about who they are and you evaluate them from your reference point rather than who they're trying to become, then sometimes we do run into difficulties.

Kym

I will tell you, the whole connection between relationships and health; you're really bringing something really new to light I know for me personally, but I think for a lot of us to really make the connection that your health and the health of—or being in a relationship rather—in fact, does it make a difference if the relationship is a romantic relationship or just a close friendship relationship? Does it make a difference? Does it apply to both?

Thomas

I think it does. I think it does. The same ideas apply to both, but I think they take on additional force when we think about our committed partnerships, a husband, a wife, the person we're living with in a real long-term established partnership. For example, many of the couples that I've studied will tell us that what really matters to me is knowing that my best friend is going to meet me at the high school running track or that I'm going to get into the swimming pool with them. We know that it really is great, and all [indiscernible] of life is to have someone who's supporting us.

But there's something special about an intimate partnership because this is the person that you share a kitchen with, this is the person you share a bed with, this is the person who really can make decisions that help you spend your time more wisely. Just think, you may have dinner with a close friend once a week maybe, once a month, once a week perhaps, but typically you're having a meal with your partner at least once a day, or they're putting the food that you eat in the refrigerator. So this is a person who has really exquisite control over what you're eating, whether you have time and energy and inclination to exercise.

I think there is—well, certainly it's the case that our friends matter and they can really mobilize us and keep us active, keep us healthy. That intimate partner, that person you share a home with, the person you share a life with is really able to say, honey, did you take your vitamins today? I actually want to make sure that you get to your doctor's appointment today. I notice you seem a little tired lately, is there something you and I should be doing that will add a little life to our day? I think our intimate partners are seeing us in such a unique way that they have great potential to keep us healthy and get us healthy.

Kym

I love that. Let's go to the other side of that just for a second, and that is, you're in a partnership and you are the healthy one exercising, but your partner isn't. You're frustrated with that and you're like, I wish my partner

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would really get onboard with this but you're doing it; you're doing yoga, you're doing all that. What's your advice about that, about getting your partner engaged?

Thomas

One thing is to recognize that you are not your partner and vice versa. Your partner is not you, they have their own preferences, their own ways, what they like to eat, how much they like to exercise. The fact that you are healthy and taking steps to maintain your health that often rubs off in small and subtle ways.

I think the advice is keep doing what you're doing and do it in such a way that you love it just for the sake of doing it, but also help your partner to know not that they're threatened by you being healthy but that you're ready, willing and able to encourage them and enable them and to bring them along on their own schedule, not yours.

Kym

Yes. Do people tend to overlook or undervalue the health advantages of being in a relationship? Right from the start I'm wondering if most people are even aware of the health connection.

Thomas

Oh, right. One of my favorite studies, Kym, is—and, in fact, this is a finding that has been replicated many times. You and I read the newspaper, we hear about diet studies all the time. We hear about if you

get the Mediterranean diet you do better than a group of people who do their typical diet or a high-carb diet or whatever the study might be. What's interesting is that there's often another study that you won't hear about which says that if you then follow up the partners of the people who go the Mediterranean diet they often lose weight, too, without actually having participated in the study. It's called the halo effect or the spillover effect.

The idea that if one person starts to gradually make changes, they start to eat leafy green vegetables, they start to say, I feel like taking a walk around the block today or there's that gym on the way home or the Y. I'm going to start jumping in the pool twice a week. The other partner starts to say, "Hey, that sounds like a good idea. I want to be with you, too. I want to do that, too, or while you're in the pool I'm going to get on one of the stationary bikes."

There are all kinds of subtle effects that research shows really do spill over to affect our health. Even beyond what we—in the book called *Mutual Influence*, that we have great ability to influence the kinds of food that are in the house, whether or not there's a box of cookies on the table versus a bowl full of fruit. Not only do we do those kinds of things, but we're uniquely situated when we're in an intimate partnership to say to our partner, "Honey, I would love it if you and I went for a bike ride today. I'd

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Yes, you're doing okay. You're a good person, I know you're really well intentioned. I wonder if we could maybe instead of getting out for that walk once every two weeks, I wonder if we could ump that up to once a week. I wonder if we could start eating another vegetable once a day or maybe a piece of fruit on the way out of the house, and take small steps instead of saying, "Oh, things aren't going well; it's never going to go well. You're not so good at this; you just don't like to exercise, so what's the point?"

We need to work hard to make our partner feel good and then make them feel better. Criticism almost never works. I've never seen a partner say, "Oh, thanks for criticizing the way I look and how [indiscernible]." It just doesn't work that way.

Lots of times I get it, the partner says, "I am this kind of person where I am the healthy one and you're not doing as much as I am." Criticizing that person just doesn't help. I understand the motivation, I understand that, but what you need to do is make your partner feel good about themselves and then they'll want to take the step to become even stronger. That's a very common second mistake.

Kym

Criticizing them, yes. What would be the—

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Thomas Too much criticism.

Kym Too much criticism. Give me the third one, the most popular issues that you find yourself dealing with, with couples. What's the third one?

Thomas Yes. Another one is really subtle, and it's that what we need in order to make change is reassurance that we can make those changes. We want to know that we're in a relationship with a person that—when we have doubts and we're thinking about the kinds of changes we want to make in order to become a healthy person, we want reassurance. We want our partner believing in us, helping us to know that we're a good person, that we're on the right track, but we also need a person who's not going to let us off the hook.

We need a person—and we often talk about this as the tough love approach. We want someone who says, "I understand you're tired, you had a long day at work. I understand that, but I also understand that maybe now is the perfect time for you to get on the stationary bike that we have in the garage. This is the perfect time to get a little time to yourself. If you only do it for five minutes that's great, but you're going to feel better."

We want a person who holds us to a standard, who really says, "I love you so much that I'm going to say, honey, I'm going to have to insist on this. I really, really don't want you to have that dessert tonight. I know it's a comfort food for you, I get that, but maybe tomorrow. Let's exercise tonight. I'll go for a walk with you. Let's get our sneaks on and go out the door. I'm going to reassure you. I'm going to tell you you're the greatest person in the world, but I'm also not going to be the one who says, it's okay to slip; it's okay to take a couple weeks off because you've had some hard times at work. Let's stay the course, I know you can do it, and I am willing to be there right by your side."

Kym

Great. I want to delve into specific things that men and women can do for each other. If it's okay with you, I'd like for you to speak to the men for just a second. What are two or three things that men could do to really engage their partner whether it be with the health or with the relationship in general? What are three classic things that men could do? Then I want to flip it and find out what women could do.

Thomas

Sure. One classic thing is to recognize what your partner is already doing. What's your partner already doing to be healthy? What's your partner already doing to nurture and promote and strengthen you and your children and whoever lives in your household? What are they already doing?

Maybe it's going to be going to a new playground with our kids and finding out what that's about. We always go to the same playground with our kids; let's go to the one that's on the other side of town that I hear might be fun. They might have big jungle gyms, and we'll walk around, we'll bring a soccer ball. Let's do that."

A second thing is, let's take initiative, let's be in charge of our lives because, look, you and I both know that if we don't take care of our health as we age it's going to eventually take care of us. We have to be proactive, we have to take care of ourselves, we have to get up off the couch and we have to encourage our partner to do that and to do it in the most loving, sensitive, caring way possible.

Step number two is, take initiative and do it out of love and appreciation and just wanting to hang around with your partner, but really also in a way that gets your heart beating, that gets you moving, that gets you up on your feet and being active. That's a very big part [ph].

Kym

That is great. Because of time, let's shift to the female side now; the way that women ought to communicate with their partners to get them involved. Would it be the same kind of thing, or do you have different approaches for women?

Thomas

Often the exact same things often work, but another strategy that women need to take, that men can take, as well, is to really stop asking your partner about how you look in these clothes. Do these jeans make me look fat? A better strategy is to say, what can you—if you look in the mirror and say, wow, I wish I were 20 pounds lighter.

The thing to do isn't to try to find the outfit that makes you look better, the thing to do is to join up with your partner and say, "I'm going to start cooking this one recipe I want to try. I know it sounds strange, but it's this stuff called quinoa, and it's got kale in it. It sounds kind of crazy, but I think we should try it." Just suggest something new.

Often we find that women are in the role of bringing the groceries into the home, not always, but often. To make the active choice of saying, "I'm going to buy fruit today. I'm not buying chips. If he wants chips he can go to the store and get chips, but I'm not going to support his unhealthy habits."

"I love my partner so much," again, it gets back to this tough-love approach that, "if you want to do that, that's great. If you want to go out and have pizza do it on your own lunchtime, but I want to bring the healthy stuff into the house. I want to be the one who—given the responsibilities that I do have, I want to be the one who says, this is what

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we're going to eat and it's because I love you that I'm doing that. It's not because I don't love you or I want you to eat things that aren't good for you. I want you to be healthy and I want to get behind that. I want to exploit the role that I do have within this family to make us as healthy and happy as long as possible."

Kym Yes. Give me one more for women, one more that women can use with men.

Thomas Sure. Yes. Lots of time guys—and I don't want to stereotype because it's really not fair or accurate. Based on my research it's not that accurate to stereotype, but it's not unusual for a woman to be—a wife or a female partner to say, "Look, I'm the one who's taking the lead. I really want to take better care of myself, and all you want to do is eat red meat and sit on the couch and watch TV every weekend. I understand you work really hard and I want to cut you some slack. That's certainly something that I want to do."

One of the things that we see in our most effective couples is they say—and the guy will resist and say, "Yes, yes, whatever, whatever. Do whatever you want. Good luck trying to change me."

One of the things that we see our most effective couples doing is they say, "I'm not thinking about right now, honey. I'm not thinking short term. I'm thinking about where we're going to be in 20 years. If you're putting on a pound or two a year and that's where you are now just think where we're going to be in 20 years.

We're going to have grandchildren; we're going to want to spend every waking moment with our grandchildren. How can we be as healthy as possible then and think about that moment, us being retired, living the dream, traveling," whatever it is for a specific couple and say, "Let's not think short term let's think long term. Let's think about our goals as healthy couples, healthy grandparents, people who are really taking advantage of their retirement years and then think about where we are now."

Now how do you feel about sitting on the couch. Now how do you feel about eating those unhealthy foods? Let's take some small steps today, really small steps, have them accumulate, have them build on one another so that in five or ten or twenty years we're not thinking about diabetes, we're not going to the doctor all the time. We're the healthy ones. We're light on our feet, we can throw our luggage in the rack above our seat on the airplane, we can run around with our grandkids and we're living the life that we dreamed about.

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One of the things that we see women doing when they're in a really effective mode is saying, "I get it. You're resisting me now, but I'm talking long term. Let's not lose sight of what our long-term goals are, and let's get there together because I am more than willing to do that with you."

Kym

Gosh, this is so good. Also, these same principles also would apply, right, I would think almost just equally to same-sex marriages or same-sex partners. As I listen to these, no matter where you are in your relationship and in what you're trying to accomplish as it relates to your health and relationship and your socialization, this is—because very often, too, even in any kind of relationship whoever's taking charge or whoever is taking lead, as you're describing this you can hear yourself in this to figure out which role you would play in your relationship to make everyone healthier. I love it.

I'd like for you, Thomas, just to hold on for a second. I'll give people some new, exciting news but I'd like for you to end, when I come back to you, with just today, just give us one charge that if you leave with one thing today I want you to leave with this. Hold on to that thought.

What I want to share with you guys is that we did a big study with Live Happy. I want to thank all of you that were able to participate in this because you gave us some incredible insight. Based on this research and your answers and contribution to what we're doing with the show, *Wake Up Happy* will re-launch with a new name. We're actually going to change our name, and it's going to be called *Live Happy Now*. This same series will be called *Live Happy Now*. It will now be a weekly webinar series that will run every Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. Central Standard Time starting with our first re-launch interview on Tuesday, June 23rd.

Instead of us doing five days in succession, based on a lot of your feedback we're going to do it once every week on Tuesday at 9:30 Central Time starting Tuesday, June 23rd. Again, it will be called *Live Happy Now*.

If you're listening now, you are already preregistered for the *Live Happy Now*, and no longer do you have to register again in the future. You're already registered. We've got you in the system, and we'll be sending you the notices and those kinds of things.

You can go to LiveHappy.com/LiveHappyNow; give you the list of upcoming experts that we're going to have here with our series. Over the next few weeks you'll receive information on how to access these weekly

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webinars and updates for our future experts and speakers and just additional exciting news that's coming soon. We've got a lot of great things coming based on your feedback and the things you shared with us. We'd love that. We so appreciate it.

Working together works. Having your input in what we're doing in our team, we bring it all together because at the end of the day the thing we want to do is serve you. The thing we want to do is give you information that you can use that's going to make you have a grander, happy experience for yourself and all of those that you touch because this is contagious.

Now, with that, Thomas, I'd love to hear your charge for the day. The one thing you're saying—look, if you only get one thing I want you to walk away with this today. What do you want them to walk away with?

Thomas

We all have that spark in us. We all have that idea that we want to be a little healthier; we want to live a good, long life; we want to have great relationships with the people we care about. We all have that little spark. Sometimes we really pay attention to that spark, sometimes we ignore it, but I know everybody listening to this show has that spark and has somebody near them who has that spark in them.

You have to nurture that spark. The specific tasks, the specific items, the specific steps to take are to say, that is a part of me. You have to have a conversation with the person closest to you; your husband, your wife, maybe it's someone who lives in your home.

You want to have that conversation and say, "Where are we with regards to our health? How are we feeling about that? Are there small steps that we can take today that'll lead us in a much better place even six months or a year from now? What can we do today that is going to get us on that path to health, get us on that path to wellness?" It begins with a loving conversation saying, "Let's take stock, let's see where we are. What can we do so that we live the long, healthy life that you and I both want to have?"

I think that's the best possible place is to find a moment at the end of your meal or when you're in the car with your partner and say, "You know, honey, I love you so much. I want us to just have a conversation about our health and our future because nothing matters more to me than that. What can you and I do? How can we get on track, get to a better place and nurture one another, take care of one another so that we have the absolute best and longest life together possible?"

Kym Gosh, I love that. Everybody, that's Thomas Bradbury, a professor of clinical psychology, teaches as a professor at UCLA. It's so wonderful having your wisdom and you sharing your expertise. Thomas, thank you so much for this.

Thomas Oh, my pleasure, Kym. Best to you and all of the folks listening. This is a very valuable service that you're providing, and I'm happy to a very small part of it.

Kym For everybody, you know what to do; keep smiling, it works; it's contagious. Do your job today; smile. Until the next time. Bye, bye for now.