

EPISODE 175**[INTRODUCTION]**

[0:00:03.1] PF: Hi and welcome to episode 175 of Live Happy Now. This is Paula Felps. Today, we're talking with Rick Hanson about his latest book, *Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness*. You already know Rick for his work on brain plasticity and neuroscience. Now, he gives us an amazing blueprint for finding and sustaining happiness by building resilience.

Let's listen to what Rick has to say about the role resilience plays in our overall happiness.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:30.3] PF: Well Rick, it's such an honor to have you on this show. Thank you so much for joining us and welcome to Live Happy Now.

[0:00:35.9] RH: Paula, I'm really happy to be here actually and greetings to everybody listening.

[0:00:40.2] PF: I've been reading your book *Resilient*, and you've given us so many practical applications for neuroscience with your previous books. This one has a different feel and I wondered why you chose the topic of resilience this time around.

[0:00:55.1] RH: That's interesting is you picked up on that. You're right. There a couple reasons. One, I wanted to write a book that really summarized most probably of what I've learned in 40 plus years of being a psychologist and also very involved myself with personal growth and healing and to some extent, mindfulness practice. That was one part. Another part was that these times seem to call for more self-reliance than ever, old school values.

From the inside out, when the world seems to be changing rapidly around us and isn't, so the cavalry doesn't seem to be coming. Meanwhile therefore, it's particularly important to grow inner strengths of various kinds inside. For me, that was a timeliness I guess to this topic of resilience.

[0:01:40.9] PF: Yeah, because I'm glad you mentioned all the change, because there is so much of that going on. Some of it's good, some of it's less good, shall we say? How is that making resilience even more important?

[0:01:53.3] RH: There's this fundamental framework in healthcare in psychology. This is useful and I'll cut right to the chase here. It basically says that what happens in our life is the result of three kinds of factors, three kinds of things; one, the challenges that we're upon us and second, the vulnerabilities they land on offset third, by the resources we have. Those challenges, vulnerabilities and resources are out in the world, in the body, in the mind, which in effect gives you nine different ways to make things better.

I'm zeroed in on growing resources, especially in the mind because that typically is where we have both the greatest power, you can have the most impact and second, that's where we take the results with us wherever we go. As challenges increase, as the world becomes faster paced, more topsy-turvy, as external resources in the world, like civil society, or in politics, or in government seem to decrease, then it becomes more important than ever to grow strengths inside yourself like self-worth, calm, compassion, even happiness altogether, growing these resources inside yourself helps you deal with increased challenges outside yourself and decreased resources outside yourself.

[0:03:10.0] PF: Because those same challenges that we're trying to overcome are what makes it more difficult to cultivate these traits that lead to resilience.

[0:03:19.5] RH: I think that is really interesting. Can you say more of what you mean by that, like why do you say that?

[0:03:24.3] PF: Well, I think a lot of people feel a little a see right now and I just don't have – I'm not grounded, I don't have the gratitude that I need to get through this day. We feel a little jangled a little, maybe defensive. That makes it a little bit more difficult to cultivate some of the things that we feel and some of the principles that you talk about in your book.

[0:03:47.0] RH: Now I get it. I certainly agree with you, and that's why I think that it's so important to look for those little opportunities. In other words, the worse your life is, in fact, the more important it is to look for those little opportunities in your day authentically to experience

something good, like gratitude, or determination, or grit, patience, or some greater skillfulness in dealing with someone who isn't like you maybe in some way. It's more important than ever to look for those little opportunities, to have those experiences and then using what's called as positive neuroplasticity helped those experiences that would otherwise be fleeting and passing with no lasting value, help them actually leave lasting residues behind hardwired into your nervous system.

My own bottom line view about that, having worked with people whose lives have been much, much than my own, even in their lives they would tell you that every day has multiple opportunities, a breath or two at a time, sometimes longer, to feel something useful, often enjoyable, feel it and then stay with it for a breath or two or longer to really help it sink in. I'm with Captain Kirk in the Star Trek movies. I reject the know-in scenario. I'm also with Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor who just said, "No matter where you are, deep down inside your mind there's a sacred freedom and autonomy there in how you can choose your responses to circumstances and how you can learn and grow from them."

[0:05:19.2] PF: How do people better choose their responses right now, because –

[0:05:22.9] RH: In the moment.

[0:05:23.5] PF: - we seem to be very reactive and everyone's got their pot button is a little hot her these days. How do we make those choices better? How do we ease back into ourselves and find those traits that are going to navigate us through this better?

[0:05:37.0] RH: Yeah. I think there's a two-part answer to that, and it's one I relate to myself. I've definitely have noticed people in the last year or two in America just casually, they seem more snappish, or on edge, or quicker to get angry, or aggressive, or to feel rattled by something. To me, the two-part answer is first, the long-term process is like train off stage for what you've got to draw upon when the oatmeal hits the fan.

When you're not in the moment, when someone's come at you, or there's been some news that's upsetting, or anything has happened, when that's not happening, look for those little opportunities formally and especially informally over the course of your day to experience a moment of calm that you take into yourself. Experience a moment of connecting with another

person, take it into yourself, a moment of feeling your own worth, take it into yourself. Then you grow literally, psychological resources based on lasting physical changes in the brain that you can draw upon in the moment when it's crazy.

All right, that said, in the moment I think people do different things. I could tell you a few that I do. I have this internal first-aid kit. It's very practical. One, notice you're getting upset right there is huge. Just notice you're getting rattled and start to step back from that reaction and observe it, rather than being hijacked by it. That's probably 50% of what you can do in the moment right there. Second, and the clock is ticking for me. We're now five seconds into what's happened, or five minutes in. Have a sense of compassion for yourself. It doesn't make you weaker, it will make you stronger.

A lot of research shows that is a moment of bringing yourself a warmth, or concern, or support, like you would for a friend who were in the same situation, that moment of self-compassion. That's where we start now where we end. Then the third thing for me happens on the heels of that, is a muscular sense of hey, wait a minute here. A sense of being on your own side for yourself. Not against others, but a certain wait a minute here, what do I want to do in this moment given the range of options I have to have it go as well for me as possible? Now maybe you're 10 seconds in to the situation, or 10 minutes in to the situation, and then based on that make a plan for what you're actually going to do. Those for me are really practical, really useful, and I would say over all of it, it's just this funny knowing that if I lose my cool, it's not going to be good for me or other people later.

I imagine maybe a video camera recording everything. It'll be to my kids wedding, or my memorial service, or the mortal psychology. I don't know, that keeps me right in a straight and narrow, and also realize that if I let myself get swept away by my own reactions, it's one thing for reactions to arise, it's a different thing to fuel them, to add to them and pour fertilizer, or gasoline on them. That to me is the key distinction. When I realize if I get into this, it's just going to be bad for me. I don't want to do that as tempting as it may be. That helps me keep my cool as well.

[0:08:39.3] PF: Yeah. I think if we can look at it like, well gosh, look how many opportunities I get every day to work on this now. Maybe we can view it differently.

[0:08:48.8] RH: It is really true. I mean, you're getting at something actually very deep, which is that you can't get at unconscious material when it's unconscious. In a funny way when a person comes along and what they actually did was on the 0 to 10 yuk scale, it's really a 2, but it lands on your whole history, or that person, or your parents, or the kids you grew up with, or whatever, and it feels like a 7. It hits the preamp, right? It's a bigger reaction.

In a weird way, a person can get delighted by that, because now that that old reactive material has been surfaced, has been pulled up, now you can process it. You can experience it out as it were, you can use methods like I and others teach, to start associating it with some positive antidote that's matched to and feeling cared about by others when old material about feeling rejected starts coming up for you.

Then in a weird way, I'm this way, it's like, I'm glad I'm upset. Not really. It's not like I want to look for it, but in a weird perverse way, it's a way to reframe it and you go, "Oh, great. Another learning opportunity. Thanks. Thanks reality." At least it changes the take on it. Yeah.

[0:09:59.0] PF: I love that. I love that approach. I imagine that's taken a year or two of practicing to start feeling that way start thinking that way.

[0:10:05.7] RH: 14 or 15. Yeah. No –

[0:10:08.5] PF: How? How do you start thinking that way?

[0:10:12.3] RH: Well for me, honestly going back to in my 20s is really when it came forward in. I think for me, the heart of it is in a sense, enlightened self-interest. You just realize it's in your own interest to look for opportunities to clear out the crud in your basement. It's in your interest to reframe crummy things that are happening. Not at all to look at them through rose-colored glasses, or look on the bright side, or all that stuff. I don't believe in that stuff. Forget positive thinking. I want to think realistically, right?

Realistic thinking is to recognize that if you look at the situation, actually as an opportunity for learning and healing, as uncomfortable as it is, it changes how you relate to it. The root of that for me is a self-interest, where you realize, "Hey, it's really good for Bob, or Mary, or Rick to act in that way." That was a big shift for me.

[0:11:07.7] PF: Again, something that I guess surprised me about the book, but then as I read more it, shouldn't have surprised me, were some of the skills that you introduced that we normally think of being associated with resilience. When you talk about compassion and generosity, that's not – I really didn't expect to see that. Do you find that surprises people to learn that these are traits that can help them with their resilience journey?

[0:11:32.3] RH: I think many people are surprised by the fact that what could be seen as forms of tenderness, or softness, actually as much research shows, make people tougher. You're right, I think people wouldn't normally consider something as soft as compassion for others, or especially, compassion for yourself, or large-hearted forgiving. That's one of the themes, topics in the chapter on generosity and forgiveness, about forgiving yourself and forgiving others.

What actually makes you tougher, more able to bounce back from traumatic experiences and were able to keep on going in the face of challenges, there's two fundamental aspects of resilience there. In fact, a lot of research shows that as people lack compassion for themselves and also as they hold on to grudges and grievances and generosity for others, those tears down.

On the other hand, warm-heartedness, whether you're receiving it from others, or whether it's flowing out from you because we're profoundly social mammals, warm-heartedness in various ways, particularly authentic. You're not getting drained or exploited by others. Warm-heartedness feeds us. It actually calms us down, it does lots of good things in terms of the immune system and long-term health and it makes us more able to recover from adversity of various kinds for example. You could say the same for other softer, more tender things in the book, such as generosity. It actually makes us more able to deal with the hardest things in life, to in a certain way build up a tender heart.

[0:13:09.8] PF: That is so fascinating. There's so much that can be gleaned out of this book. We could talk for a couple hours and not really covered at all.

[0:13:15.9] RH: Nice. Thank you. Thank you.

[0:13:18.0] PF: You don't think they'd shut us off, do you?

[0:13:22.8] RH: Well, I want to drop one more thing in ,which is that even ambition research is showing that people are more likely to sustain highest levels of performance and top settings; academically, in business, professionally. They're more willing to really go for it as they build up this core of some of these softer things inside, such as self-compassion, or a sense of self-worth, because they're more unwilling to risk failure. They're not so freaked out by the possibility of criticism because they have more resources inside.

I think that there are a lot of myths that pain is what makes you stronger. Most of the time, pain makes you weaker. A lot of research on that. Most pain has no gain either, and then there's always a question could I have acquired that fill-in-the-blank, that determination, that fortitude sense of purpose, sense of meaning, sense of connection with others, could I've acquired those things without having to have had gone through that horrible, horrible experience.

I think as someone who's been in the world now and getting older, I've been in business, I've been in a lot of situations. I've done a ton of wilderness activity, rock climbing and other very scary things. I've been in working with many, many people over the years. One thing that's really striking is to appreciate that there are a lot of myths about what makes us stronger and that actually, pain is weirdly overrated and there's a lot of negativity about happiness. One of the most powerful ways to make yourself stronger is to find more of an authentic happiness.

[0:14:51.7] PF: Well, that's good news for everybody out there.

[0:14:53.9] RH: It's true.

[0:14:55.5] PF: Now are some people born more resilient than others? Because some people just seem they are more resilient coming out.

[0:15:02.2] RH: Yeah, it is true to an extent. Ballpark, about a third of our person's attributes on average are innate, so that's the born part that's the nature side of the nature-nurture question. Roughly two-thirds of the variation in individual characteristic, psychological attributes including resilience is acquired over time. Isn't that interesting?

That means that we have both tremendous power to gradually help ourselves, maybe overcome some vulnerabilities related to our temperament. I was lucky in some ways. I'm fairly calm in my temperament. On the other hand, I'm prone to anxiety. I've known people who are very be sensitive, or they had a hot temper, a quick temper. You work with your tendencies, but the other two-thirds is fundamentally under your own influence, both in how you do the best you can to arrange the circumstances in your life, as well as in how you react to them.

To me, both are true; nature and nurture both true, but again here too, there's a myth that overvalues nature, innate genetics and so forth, and sometimes that gets used politically in various ways too to justify not trying to nurture people as well as we possibly can, including in terms of social policy. The takeaway for me is that each one of us has tremendous influence over who we are becoming if you just keep at it. Also, because we have tremendous influence over that, we have tremendous responsibility as well. No one can do it for us.

[0:16:36.8] PF: I really can't think of a better book for our lives right now at this moment. I thank you and your son for writing it, because it's –

[0:16:44.7] RH: Well, thank you.

[0:16:45.9] PF: - it's so wise, it's so applicable and you really make it easy for us to become more resilient.

[0:16:52.0] RH: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:16:56.9] PF: That was Rick Hanson, author of *Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness*. In just a moment, we're going to tell you how you can learn more about his new book, but first, Live Happy's Chris Libby fills us in on the latest scoop about finding happiness at work. Welcome Chris.

[0:17:13.6] CL: Hello. Thanks for having me.

[0:17:15.4] PF: Always a pleasure. What a great topic, happiness and work, a lot of people don't think those two things should be in the same sentence.

[0:17:23.2] CL: Historically no, but the research is showing that it's critical that if you want your business to be successful, more and more research is pointing towards having a happy workforce. It improves productivity, which improves the bottom line and everybody's happy. The workplace is where we spend a third of our day essentially.

[0:17:43.5] PF: Sometimes it seems like a lot more.

[0:17:44.9] CL: Yeah. I mean, we navigate relationships there, we can bring meaning and purpose to our lives. To have a happy work environment is very important, not just for the employees, but for the employer too. One segment, the largest segment of the workforce are millennials and they are not very happy right now. They are burning out according to –

[0:18:05.5] PF: They don't like work, is that it?

[0:18:07.0] CL: No. According to Gallup, nearly 70% feel some burnout and why that's important to the employer when your employees are burnt out. They're disengaged, they're sick, they're using more sick days, they're more likely to go to the emergency room. All of that cost money and it costs productivity as well.

[0:18:26.8] PF: I think you bring up a really good point and we don't always equate burnout with doctor's appointments. You're saying, the more burned-out you are and the less you recharge, then you're going to have illnesses, whether they're psychosomatic to a certain degree, or whether just your immune system is just not functioning at its peak, because of your stress levels. It really does help employers from even just the cost benefit of their health insurance and the programs that they have to be able to provide a happier workplace.

[0:19:00.5] CL: Sure. It drags everything down. You can see how if your employees are burned out, they even – the personal level of the employee, they can take that home with them it brings down the household, so it's a vicious cycle. Some of the things that are contributing to the burnout in the workplace is unfair treatment, incivility, that's a big one, workload, a lack of clarity,

that is a big one for people as well because if you don't have a clear message on what you're doing, or what the company is doing. It's hard to be engaged.

Now something that employers can do to combat this problem is they can train their managers to be more like coaches, this is what Gallup recommends; you give proper feedback, you make sure the employees are connecting with the organization's mission, make sure they understand the mission. Millennials like a certain amount of autonomy and flexibility. Of course, we all do, but for this sake we're talking about Millennials, but that is very important micromanagement and I guess, nobody likes that.

[0:20:00.7] PF: Well, is that why this generation is feeling burnout more than other generations?

[0:20:06.9] CL: Possibly, I think my opinion is more emotional now than it's ever been. I mean, typically when you thought about work back in this 60s, 70s, it was more habitual. You go in and do the same thing every day. Now I think since the landscape has changed for the workforce, we're used to everybody collaborating more ideas more creativity and I think maybe this generation grew up more like that. Probably a previous generation started to and as their parents, they instilled that on to their children and now the children are in the workforce.

[0:20:36.6] PF: That makes sense, because I know growing up, my dad ran a feed store. You didn't hear him talking about fulfillment and how much he loved going into work but, you didn't hear him complain about it either. It was just they would get – that generation would just get up and they'd do something and didn't really put much stock into whether or not they enjoyed it. We've really changed our view of what we need to get out of work.

[0:20:58.5] CL: For sure. One of the other things to help with that is that we're very under vacationed in this country. If we want to lessen the burden of our burnout, we can use all our vacation days because project time off, it's a group that's backed by the United States Travel Association. They say that people who do use all of their vacation days and don't leave anything on the table are a lot happier than the people who don't. Travel has lasting benefits to your physical health, your mental well-being and it's a good economy boost too. We have 200 million unused well-deserved vacation days and it's a loss of sixty two billion dollars with a B in benefits.

[0:21:38.0] PF: Oh, my gosh.

[0:21:39.4] CL: More than 50% of the American workforce, leaves vacations days on the table. We have this weird thing in our in our brains as Americans that we don't deserve our vacation.

[0:21:48.6] PF: That's so interesting, because we know that say there's say, there's more doctor's appointments people. I know I personally have individuals in my family who have more than used up all their doctors time. Times with their personal, time for doctor visits, but haven't used their vacation time. What is it that's making us not take advantage of something that's going to regenerate us and it's going to help us come back refreshed and it's going to improve our worker performance? Why are we not doing that?

[0:22:15.8] CL: I don't know. According to this survey, if we use more of the vacation days, we probably won't have to use as many PTO days. Your takeaway from this then is that everyone should start putting in for their vacation time right now?

[0:22:30.2] CL: Yup. Also yes, and a very important thing is don't be afraid to plan out your whole year vacation days, because it helps everybody.

[0:22:38.2] PF: That's very cool. It's actually a selfless act. If you're in trouble, if you're one of those workaholics and you're having trouble like, "I just can't walk away." It's do it for your co-workers, right and your company.

[0:22:48.8] CL: Yeah. I say if you leave your vacation day on the table, that's literally a waste of time.

[0:22:54.2] PF: This month's column, I really love it. I mean, you always give us something great to think about, a few great things to think about it. I really like this one, because it does look at finding happiness in the workplace. What's so wonderful about it is it makes you feel it could be done, like you might actually be able to find some happiness at work.

[0:23:12.3] CL: There you go.

[0:23:12.9] PF: All right. Well Chris, thank you so much. Next month, you'll be back again with a new way to find happiness in another area of our life.

[0:23:20.8] CL: Sure. If you want to find out more, just go on to our website livehappy.com and you look under finding happiness.

[0:23:26.8] PF: If you like what you've heard here today and want to hear more, go to Apple podcast, or wherever you get your favorite podcast, search for Live Happy Now and subscribe today. To learn more about Rick's book and to check out Chris's findings unhappiness at work, visit us at livehappynow.com. While you're on our site, you can swing on over to the Live Happy store, enter the promo code podcast deal and get 20% off anything and everything in the store. Finally, special thanks to our sponsor Momentous Institute, who is having their seventh annual changing the odds conference, September 27th, 28th, at the Omni Dallas Hotel. Visit momentousinstitute.org to learn more. That is all we have time for today, so please join us back here next week. Until then, remember to make every day a happy one.

[END]