

EPISODE 184

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.8] PF: Welcome to Live Happy Now. This is your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today for a special Thanksgiving episode. This week, we're hearing a lot about thankfulness. Here at Live Happy, it's something we like to talk about all year long. Live Happy CEO Deborah Heisz drops in this week to talk more about why gratitude is so important, what it really means and what it can do for us.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:25.9] PF: Well Deborah, it's always wonderful to have you in the studio and on the line. Thank you so much for taking time to talk to us today.

[0:00:33.3] DH: Well, it is my pleasure and I know we're going to talk about one of my favorite topics, so that even makes it more my pleasure, getting to spend 20 to 30 minutes talking about stuff you love is never a burden. As you all know, I love Live Happy and I love our topic for today.

[0:00:48.0] PF: Yeah, this is one of my favorites too. That's why I was really excited to talk to you about it, because I like it, you like it, it's going to be fun. I guess we should let everyone else know that what we're alluding to is gratitude.

[0:01:00.3] DH: Yup. Being grateful; a key part of living a happy life.

[0:01:05.8] PF: What's so interesting is that we get so much about gratitude during November. Thanksgiving is coming up and we talk about thankfulness. Outside of Live Happy walls, it tends to often get neglected the rest of the year. We don't give a whole lot of attention to gratitude, or to being thankful. Do you see that tide turning at all?

[0:01:26.8] DH: I think I do. Maybe it's because I live in a little bit of a bubble just like you do and that this is what we do. We're out building this and we talk about it all the time. We have a civil discourse problem right now and it's –

[0:01:39.8] **PF:** Really?

[0:01:40.5] **DH:** Yeah, and it's an obvious problem. For those of you who you are going to hear this much later, you got to know we're recording this on election day, so if you know what I mean by a civil discourse. It's really an incivil discourse right now, or an uncivil discourse. I think there's a bit of a backlash to that in that there's a certain group of the population that isn't grateful and/or expressing gratitude. Perhaps they're grateful, but they aren't expressing it.

There's a lot of negativity out there and the closer you get to election day, which is today, the more you see it and the more you hear it and feel it. I also see buried underneath all that on social media and on social media channels is a large group of people who are really just trying to promote gratitude and being grateful.

I guess you have two extremes going on, but if I open up – if I look at Facebook, if I look at Instagram, if I read articles online, there's this sneaky little backdoor of people saying, "Hey, you know what? We should be happy, we should be kinder, we should be nicer, we should be more grateful for what we have." That I think is almost spawned by what people are seeing on the media.

[0:02:50.9] **PF:** Yeah. It's almost like it's been so extreme and so negative, that even people who maybe didn't, like three years ago weren't practicing this, they're trying to find how do I manage my life in the face of so much negativity? That's where they're finding things like gratitude and kindness as a means of coping with it.

[0:03:14.4] **DH:** Yeah, I think you're right. I mean, obviously neither – well not obviously, but to me and you, it's obvious. Neither one of us are psychologists or social psychologists, but observationally, I do think there's a fatigue of being bombarded with negative messaging and people try and find their way out of that. What I love about gratitude is it's an internal practice that doesn't require anybody else, that you can use to really take yourself out of negative situations from an emotional perspective.

[0:03:44.5] **PF:** Can you explain? That's a really great point. Can you explain how that works, like how do you use gratitude in that practice? Because we might not normally think, like that

wouldn't be the first thing you go to. There's this incivility going on, so I'm going to be grateful. What's the connection and how do you bridge that?

[0:04:04.2] DH: Well for me, it's really – I'm going to take it out of the incivility conversation, because I try and stay out of that conversation. I mean, I have personal beliefs. I feel strongly about some things, but I try not to engage in – I'm going to use the word 'aggressive' dialogue. Constructive dialogue, I'll be happy to have, but aggressive dialogue, I just think that's not healthy for the world really.

Let's talk about it from another perspective, which is our natural impulse to want more, or to want to be right, or to want our way, which I guess does tie back into a lot of the discourse that's going on. A lot of times when we don't get our way, we're frustrated when we don't get what we want. We're frustrated when we want more than we can afford. We're frustrated, we tend to do negative activities, like if you want something that you can't afford, but you have a credit limit that might allow you to buy it, you may buy it anyway and have buyer's remorse for the next 30 years while you pay it off and you look at that credit card bill where it says, "If you pay just the minimum balance, you're going to pay six times what you owed over the next 13 years."

[0:05:04.6] PF: It will take you the rest of your life.

[0:05:06.7] DH: Will take you the rest of your life. We all do these things. We all do these negative things when we're unhappy, because we don't or we don't get our way. Well, the way I use gratitude is sometimes when I don't get what I want, I remind myself of what I have and what I'm really genuinely grateful for.

I might think about how I'm frustrated that for me, I've got to get on another airplane and I've got to take another business trip and I don't want to be away from my family. Then I can think about the fact that my career, my profession allows me to care for my family and to give them things that are important for their development, to send my children to private school, to pay for their sports, to be able to take them on a vacation, to be able to have quality time with them. I'm grateful for the job that is taking me to a negative space, because I've got to get on a plane and be away from home for a week. That's one example.

Another example might be reminding myself that I have enough. That wanting more, I have enough, or being grateful that little things happen in the world. Maybe we didn't get all of what we wanted from the last election, but maybe there's a small victory, or maybe we did get what we wanted from the last election, but we're frustrated that people are unhappy about it. There's something in there to be grateful for. Largely when it comes to that discourse, I know people around the world listen to this podcast, so please don't take offense, but I am happy that I was born here and I'm free to make choices and I'm free to choose my own profession and I'm free to choose to live how I want to do, well how I want to, regardless of what the rest of the world thinks about the choices I've made.

At least in this country, provided you're not hurting someone else, you have that ability. I do find a lot of gratitude in that. A lot of gratitude and the fact that the world is changing to become more accepting of different types of people and I consider a lot of the negative commentary to be a backlash to this change that the world is undergoing. I'm grateful for the change, even though it's causing this discourse.

I've talked about this for a long time. I've gone on and on. I use gratitude in a multitude of ways to really make my world manageable, for lack of a better description, because the reality is you can't be grateful and angry at the same time. You really can't.

[0:07:37.0] PF: You bring up such a great point in the fact that you're finding those little nuggets, even in the midst of everything seems not great, you find something to be grateful for. That's really where true gratitude starts flourishing within us, isn't it? Because if you can take a negative situation, like say the loss of a loved one and as difficult as it is, if you can focus on the fact that you're grateful for the time you had with them, you're grateful for the amount of love that you shared, things like that, just find that little piece in all the darkness, that little piece of light and that's really where gratitude can start to grow.

[0:08:12.8] DH: It is. I think sometimes people forget it's okay to be sad. I mean, it's okay to be upset. It's okay to be angry. You don't want to live there, so you have to find little nuggets to walk out and gratitude is a great way to re-center your thinking. It also, I think for me it reduces anxiety, because you can transition into a fear mode if what you're doing is always pursuing and sometimes you have to stop and take stock in the world and go, "Hey, you know what? I've got this. I'm grateful for this. I've got what I need. I may not have what I want, but it reduces the

anxiety." I don't need the new car that I thought I was going to get, but now I'm not going to get because I had to pay a medical bill.

People get upset about crazy stuff and that's not necessarily a crazy thing, but people get upset crazy stuff. Sometimes it's just reminding yourself where you are in the world. Another piece that we're not talking about is sharing your gratitude and how that impacts others.

[0:09:19.5] PF: Yeah. That is a huge part of the practice, because I love that upward spiral that it creates.

[0:09:25.6] DH: Yeah. It does make an impact. I mean, just to stop someone in the office and say thank you, it's such an easy thing to do, but there was a study done where only a third of people have ever say, believe they have ever been thanked for their work in an office.

[0:09:43.2] PF: Oh, my gosh. No wonder people hate going to work.

[0:09:46.3] DH: Right. Think about how easy it is to say – obviously I'm a manager. Lots of people work for me. How easy it is for me to say, "You know what? Thank you for that. I really appreciate it. You made my life easier by doing that." It really does make the person who receives that compliment, or that thank you feel so much better.

Then here's the kicker, it makes me feel so much better too because you're taking the time to express appreciation. It actually makes you feel better. These are all things we forget. Gratitude actually grows when you share it. I mean, it's really a – if I share it with somebody else, they're grateful. Well, if you're grateful, you're more likely to share it with somebody else and so on and so on and so on. Like you said, it's an upward spiral.

[0:10:32.2] PF: There's no downside to it. It's not like, "If I do this, I have to –" okay, you have to lose some of your negativity, you have to lose some of your grumpiness. Other than that, if you want to consider that a downside, there's a really no negative side effect to gratitude.

[0:10:48.1] DH: No, there's no negative side effect and it's free every single moment; free and easy to access every single moment of your life.

[0:10:58.1] PF: Well here's something that I do know about you is you and I are similar in the fact that for both of us, gratitude comes easily. It's one of our top five character strengths. We get a little day pass, I think when it comes to practicing it, because it does – it's something that's very easy for us. It comes naturally. What about people who don't have that as a natural strength? How do they go about cultivating that and really nurturing it, so it becomes more natural for them?

[0:11:26.1] DH: Well, one of my favorite exercises and this comes out of the [inaudible 0:11:29.0] book, Shawn Anchor talks about in his book. In fact, almost every happiness practices book, it's in *Live Happy: Ten Practices for Choosing Joy*. Gratitude is one of the practices. It's an almost every book you could ever pick up, because it works.

If you want to work on your gratitude and believe me, gratitude has a massive impact on your life. You don't have to believe me. There's all sorts of statistics out there, studies out there that show that gratitude has an impact on your overall happiness and well-being without a doubt. I'll try and get – actually, we'll get the editors to post some of those – some of that information on the website when this podcast is posted, so people can go there and look at it.

One of the easiest practices to do, it's easy to do and it's easy not to do, so you actually have to do it for it to work, is take a journal and put it next to your bed. Every day at the end of the evening, write down three things you're grateful for. They have to be specific. It can't be, "I'm grateful for my three children Zach, Em and Quinn," every single day. Because yes, you're grateful for them. A more specific instance might be, "I am grateful that my son Zach gave me a big hug when I came through the door today, because I really needed it." That's a very specific example. Those are the things you need to write down. You only need to write down three.

Some days you might just be grateful that you made it home and it's time to go to bed and you want to turn off the lights and that's it and that's okay, because there are days like that for all of us. Even those of us at Live Happy, we have days like that. What will happen if you do this for 21 days, you're going to start practicing gratitude naturally, because you're going to start thinking of things to be grateful for. More importantly, you're going to be noticing things to be grateful for in your day, because you're going to know at the end of the day, you need to write that down.

A study that was done on this shows us is that if you do this for just 21 days and then you stop, six months later your overall well-being is still perceived to be higher than it was before. That's self-perceived. You yourself will perceive your overall well-being to be better. Six months from now, even if you stop that practice on the 21st day and don't continue it. That's a really good way to become a gratitude junkie, to really get into it. Because then you're noticing things to be grateful for and suddenly, the world isn't full of negativity, it's full of things to be thankful for. What a great practice to input into your life.

[0:13:56.6] PF: Right. We know that as you – one of the things that happens is each of those 21 days, your brain is waking up going, "Oh, my gosh. I got to think about what I'm going to be grateful for tonight." You're spending that day looking for what am I grateful for. You turn that mechanism on and it'll stay on after that 21 days. You'll continue to look for things that you should be thankful for.

[0:14:17.1] DH: If you stop doing it, you might even miss it. You might say, "Hey, I got to write that down." Because it's a great reference too. I mean, once you've done it, if you look back over those 21 days and you read those things that you've written down, it really does jog your memory. You have this things to be grateful for book at the end, right? I've got, what is it? 21 times 3, I've got 63 things to be grateful for. I'm normally good at math. It was a momentary lapse. We have 63 things to be grateful for. It's a phenomenal reference; if you start feeling down, open it up and look at it. It's great.

Another practice that is recommended in the [inaudible 0:14:53.8] book, which I also like is if you feel you haven't thanked somebody appropriately for something, if you think about somebody who did something for you, maybe it was a teacher, maybe it was your mom, maybe it was a friend down the street, maybe it was somebody who gave you a listening ear in a very down moment of your life and they don't even know it, take the moment and write them a letter.

Now sending it is better, but you don't have to send it, but take the moment and write down how grateful you are for what they did for you and share that with them. Imagine how they're going to feel receiving that letter. It's really a positive thing to do to actually share your gratitude outwardly. Not just do it for yourself in your journal, but also take that moment to share that with someone else, because like you said, that spiral, that upward spiral is only driven when we share our gratitude.

[0:15:45.1] PF: That's terrific. Those are both really fantastic practices and very effective. As you know, this is airing the week of Thanksgiving, so there's a lot of people that are going to be gathering with family who may or may not share their views, or their likes. What's the big secret for actually experiencing gratitude and thankfulness on Thanksgiving?

[0:16:09.0] DH: I think it's the same as it is every day, because we're always surrounded by people who don't necessarily share our views, or our likes, or approve of who we are. We don't always know it like we do with family, because family will tell you.

[0:16:19.9] PF: Yeah, family's a little more closer to the surface.

[0:16:23.8] DH: Like anything else that's focused on the positive. Remember, it's a moment in time. You're having dinner with someone who has completely different political views than you do, or doesn't approve of your spouse, or thinks that you're raising your children wrong. I know there are many, many people listening to this podcast who are going to experience that on Thanksgiving. It's a moment in time, it's a moment to be thankful. Don't engage in the negative.

There's a certain element of walking away. There's also a certain element of turning the conversation. That somebody says something negative to you, you don't have to respond in kind. You could always say, "Thank you very much for your opinion," and move on. They gave you their opinion, you don't have to appreciate what they said. There is an element of just remember to be thankful.

Remember it's a moment in time. Thanksgiving is Thursday. Saturday or Monday, you're going to be back in your normal elements, or those people who drive you crazy aren't going to be in your house. I do think there's a certain element of being – it does take all kinds. It's okay that people think and believe differently than we do. We don't control what they think or believe. We do control how we behave. We do control our own thoughts to a certain extent.

Take the time to manage yourself through those difficult holiday weekends. Then there's also things to be grateful for, because I'm willing to bet depending on whose house it is, I'm willing to bet that there's somebody there that you do bond with, there's some situation there that you are grateful for, whether it's for the food, whether it's for sharing memories of childhood, whether it's

for enjoying your children or enjoying your grandparents, people you don't usually get to be around. Or just being part of something greater than yourself, which is what a family is.

Many of us might be spending holidays with our families of choice. It might be a little more grateful in those situations, because you've chosen to be there. Holidays are a difficult time, because everybody feels like they have to be perfect; the turkey's got to be perfect, we have to have the perfect gift when it gets to December holidays. It's a difficult time and it's very stressful for a lot of people. If you can interject gratitude into your life, it will help relieve the stress. It's a moment in time. The Monday after Thanksgiving shows up every year.

[0:18:35.3] PF: Consistently. It hasn't missed one yet.

[0:18:37.4] DH: It hasn't.

[0:18:38.9] PF: Well, that's wonderful. Well Deborah, this was fantastic information. I knew that that you'd just be a great person to come in and talk about Thanksgiving and gratitude. I'm thankful that you were able to do that.

[0:18:50.7] DH: Well, I am so thankful for you Paula. You do a fantastic job on the Live Happy Now Podcast. and Chris Libby, our editor/sound engineer today also does a phenomenal job. I'm thankful for our listeners. I'm thankful to be able to be part of Live Happy. It's not often that you get the opportunity to change the world, which is what we're trying to do and I think we were making a lot of great strides in that direction. I really am thankful to all of our listeners. Thank you for joining us. We hope that you enjoy your Thanksgiving, if you listen to this before then. If you're listening to it after, we hope you enjoyed it. Either way, there's a lot to be grateful for. Just look for it.

[0:19:27.1] PF: Fantastic. I can add nothing to that, other than thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:19:34.7] PF: That was Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz, talking about gratitude and how we can make it last long past this Thanksgiving holiday. If you'd like to learn more about the practice of gratitude, pick up Deb's book, *Live Happy: Ten Practices for Choosing Joy*. You can

find her book and all kinds of other great happiness merchandise at the Live Happy Store at livehappy.com.

If you like what you've heard here today and you want to hear more, go to Apple podcast or to wherever you get your favorite podcast, search for Live Happy Now and subscribe today, so you'll never miss an episode.

That is all we have time for today, so please join us back here again next week. Until then, this is Paula Felps, reminding you to make every day a happy one.

[END]