

EPISODE 192

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 192 of Live Happy Now. This is your host, Paula Felps thanking you for being with us today. Obviously, we talk a lot about happiness here on Live Happy Now. When we discovered the book, *The Year of Living Happy*, we knew we wanted to talk to its author, but Alli Worthington isn't just an author. She's also a speaker, a podcaster, business coach, and maybe most importantly, the mother of five boys.

She's helped both individuals and businesses learn the techniques they need to become more successful. This week, she talks with us about the small steps we can take to have a happier year.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:38.4] PF: Alli, welcome to the show. I am so excited to talk to you. I just wanted to thank you for coming, first of all.

[0:00:45.0] AW: Well, thank you. I'm thrilled to be with you. Thanks so much.

[0:00:48.4] PF: You've written a book that is very relevant to our readers, and it's called *The Year of Living Happy*. First of all, what made you want to write that?

[0:00:56.7] AW: Well, I spent a year researching as much as I could about the science of happiness and what research has been done, what actually have been proven to help. I built an e-mail series on my website, where I sent out a little note every Sunday afternoon to give mostly women a tip on how they can be happier each week. After a year of research and sending out little tips, I knew it was time to go ahead and put everything together in a book.

[0:01:26.5] PF: That's terrific, because you've done other books prior to this.

[0:01:30.0] AW: Yes. This was my first – I call it a gift book, so it's a hardback book with journaling space. Not only is there something – a short segment to read every day, but an action step and something to do really to crystallize new habits in your life.

[0:01:45.9] PF: That's terrific around this time of year, because people – we can do it any time of the year if we emphasize that. What people are really in the mode of I'm going to make this year rock and I'm going to make everything good. They're really in that space where they want some guidance and they want to be able to see what am I going to do to make these changes?

[0:02:04.0] AW: Right, exactly. For me, I find January is a good time for that June and then again in September. For me, I have a New Year mindset about three times a year that I've just noticed that that's my normal rhythm.

[0:02:18.4] PF: Oh, really? Where do you think that comes from?

[0:02:20.5] AW: I think it must be the calendar of my children. I have five boys, they're from elementary school to college. I think June is the beginning of summer, so we're going into a new season and maybe September is the beginning of the school year, so it seems like a whole new year all over again.

Generally in January, for me personally, I'm just recovering from the holiday, so I never put in a lot of effort to go, "Okay, what are my resolutions? What am I going to do different?" I'm more likely to do that in June or September; interesting enough, just from my own rhythms, because there's nothing magic about January. It's just the time when most of us start doing new things.

[0:02:58.1] PF: Right. I love the fact that with your book, you can start this year any time.

[0:03:03.0] AW: Right.

[0:03:04.2] PF: If they picked it up just now they don't have to say, "Oh, well now I've got to wait 11 months and two months."

[0:03:10.5] AW: That's why we didn't give it specific days, because it's just too stressful. You miss a few days and then you think, "Well, forget it. I'm out of it." Yeah, it's much easier that way. We want to give everybody grace. I feel we're all hard enough on ourselves, right?

[0:03:26.0] PF: Absolutely. Why did you decide to focus on the topic of happiness?

[0:03:30.6] AW: Oh, I think happiness is one of those things that's just inherent in us. No one looks around and goes, "You know what? I just don't want to be happy. I don't want to be any happier. I think I'll just – I think I would like to hang out in a melancholy state and not have fun in my life." I mean, it's just one of those things that everyone needs more of.

For me, we were – my family, we were coming out of a really hard season. My husband had a chronic illness for a long time and things were just really tough. The idea to start researching happiness was one of those things that was almost self-preservation for me and for the whole family to go, "Let's see what small little things we can do in our lives that really will change the tide from just merely surviving to thriving and being happy."

[0:04:21.0] PF: Where did you start looking? Because there's so many different entry points and I think every person probably has their own way of going about it, but how did you go about starting that search?

[0:04:31.5] AW: Well, with most everything that I've started a search with, the Google search bar, and I feel with the Google search bar we can take over the world. I just one-by-one started reading all of the research that's been done on happiness. I read a lot of super nerdy books, and put things together and discovered that the things that create a happy life are not necessarily things that are revolutionary to us.

When we get the plan, here are all the things that create a happy life, here are the things that suck the happiness out of life. It's very few people who go, "I never could have imagined that would make a happy life." I think what it is is we just need constant reminders to guardrails to keep us on the path. These are the mindset shifts, these are the behaviors, these are the things you want to work toward and these are the things we want to avoid. As long as we have a system set up in our lives and an endpoint that we're moving toward, we'll be able to live in a happier way, because living a happier life it's not about more work and having to do all this

grand stuff to make life better, a lot of it just very small little shifts and changes that we can do in our lives.

[0:05:46.7] PF: Were you surprised as you got into the research? Were you surprised at any of the findings?

[0:05:51.4] AW: I was surprised honestly at the real power of gratitude. That gratitude seems to be such a magical thing for happiness in our life, but also thought I was the most surprised at the fact that most people have a happiness set point. Some of it is genetic, some of it isn't.

Research designed for people who went through traumatic experiences, as well as people who have won the lottery say that after a certain period of time, their happiness level is about the same as what it was before the incident, or the life change happened. So much of our happiness is really up to us and we can change this happiness set point. The fact that winning 10 million dollars isn't going to make me dramatically happier after a period of time, or going through a tragedy isn't going to necessarily rob me of happiness after a period of time, I found very comforting, because we are less at the mercy of the storms of life, up or downs than we think we are.

[0:06:58.7] PF: I think that's so important. We talk about the happiness set point and some of the things that you can do to adjust that, because I know people who say, "Well, I wasn't born happy. I'm just not a happy person." They accept that as their fate. The research and things like your book show us that there is a way that you can – no matter what your set point is, you can change how that is. Maybe you're not going to be as joyous as that person that bounces out of bed every morning ready to seize the day, but you can change it. You can be a little bit happier, as Dan Harris talks about 10% happier.

[0:07:35.5] AW: Yeah. You know what? I wouldn't even necessarily want to be that super happy person that bounces out of bed every morning, because I would find myself annoying.

[0:07:44.6] PF: Your family will too.

[0:07:46.3] AW: Yeah. It's just the small little changes that we make in life that do bring so much happiness. You write that there's one thing that can make you as happy is getting a \$133,000 raise. I've had some good raises in my life, but never that good of a raise.

[0:08:03.9] AW: Wouldn't it be great?

[0:08:05.5] PF: Oh, my gosh. What is that thing? We got to know now.

[0:08:08.4] AW: This is fascinating. Another piece of research that showed that spending time with friends you like, which I think is funny. Spending time with friends you like increases your happiness, as much as getting a \$133,000 raise. They don't say spending time with friends. It's spending time with friends you like. That's the difference.

[0:08:28.8] PF: That's an important distinction.

[0:08:30.5] AW: It really is, because I think we all have friends that we go, "Oh, okay. I guess, I need to be around, but we don't really enjoy it." When we identify those friends, like you love to be around, we love those friends, we like to spend time with them, spending more time with them actually increases our happiness level, as much as that massive raise.

Other research has shown that your income after you make, I'm sure you know this, after you make about \$75,000, it really doesn't increase your happiness that much. However, there is a bit of a boost. Whatever that small boost is, the same boost you would get from a \$133,000 raise, you get from hanging out with your friends who you really enjoy.

[0:09:10.5] PF: That's really good to know, because we sometimes think of just hanging out with our friends as being extra. We're going to do that after we've done all the things that we need to do.

[0:09:20.8] AW: Right.

[0:09:21.8] PF: This is a great way to understand why it's so important to prioritize spending time with people we truly enjoy.

[0:09:28.5] AW: Because it's so easy for that type of behavior to – like you say, to be thought of as extra and to go by the wayside, because we all get so busy with work and our families and all the responsibilities on us, it's so easy to forget to invest that time. Investing time with the friends you like is really just investing in your own happiness. When we are happier, everybody we're around are happier.

[0:09:53.5] PF: Now as you learned all these things, did you start – did it change the way you applied some of your own practices, such as spending time with friends? Or what changes did it create in you as you did this work?

[0:10:05.6] AW: Well, the biggest change in me was I made myself practice what I preached.

[0:10:11.5] PF: Which is a great trait, because I know a lot of people who are writing one thing and doing something else.

[0:10:18.4] AW: Yeah, it's very convicting. I mean, one thing I do with my sons and I've done it for years is at the end of the day, I make them say three things that they're grateful for, but I trick them into it. Because if you look at young boys and say, "What three things are you grateful for?" They'll look at you like you have four heads. I will say, "What are your three wins for today? What three things happen that were good?"

[0:10:43.2] PF: Oh, nice.

[0:10:44.1] AW: I'm trying to teach them the discipline of gratitude, because gratitude we know is the key point of happiness, but we have to be taught to be grateful. It's not something that really just happens by accident. Like anything else in life, we have to discipline ourselves to do it.

As I'm going through with the boys every night what their three wins are, I realize I'm such a hypocrite. I teach these things, I'm teaching it to the boys, I'm writing a book about it, but I have been forgetting to do it myself. It's been keeping me accountable, making sure that even though I know all these things, I'm actually doing them. As I do them, it's life-changing. It really is. It just seems so simple, but sometimes the simplest things are the most powerful.

[0:11:28.6] PF: Oh, absolutely. I love the fact that you talk about gratitude, because and this is where listeners are going, “Oh, here she goes again,” because I talk about gratitude a lot. It's absolutely my favorite practice. I tell people, “If you have only one thing you can do to be happy, be grateful.” I love that you refer to this as the discipline of gratitude. Can you explain why you call it a discipline and how you then reinforce it as a discipline?

[0:11:56.2] AW: It takes discipline, I think to make ourselves do it. I mean, it's a practice, but getting ourselves to actually take action on that practice, that's where the discipline comes in. For me, it's the same discipline that I lean on to keep myself from eating that second piece of carrot cake after dinner. It's the same discipline that I go, “Okay, I know if I don't practice gratitude today, I'm not going to be happy.” Just like I know if I have the second or third piece of carrot cake, I'm going to feel terrible. It's a real discipline. When I started looking at it like a discipline, it helped me take it seriously.

[0:12:31.9] PF: That makes perfect sense. Have you found as you started practicing it, then it becomes more natural to you?

[0:12:39.8] AW: Yes, but I'm still just as likely to want to forget to do it.

[0:12:44.6] PF: Really?

[0:12:45.7] AW: Yes. I don't know what it is about me. I go, “Oh, yes. Gratitude. I'll do it.” Even though it's the key to everything, I'm still just as likely to go, “Oh, I can skip it tonight,” even though it's a natural part of my day now. It's so funny how the human mind sometime will just fight for things that aren't good for it.

[0:13:07.3] PF: Right. We want to be lazy sometimes.

[0:13:09.9] AW: A 100%. Sometimes, I just want to sit on my couch and watch This Is Us and not think about anything else.

[0:13:15.6] PF: I'll just be grateful that I can sit on my couch and watch.

[0:13:17.9] AW: Yeah.

[0:13:21.2] PF: You referenced – a little bit earlier, you talked about how busy we all are. That again is something that we've talked about here on the show several times and we are all busy and a lot of people wear it like a badge of honor. You really talk about how that busyness can wreak havoc on our lives. Can you talk about that just a little bit more?

[0:13:41.4] AW: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I think busyness is one of the most dangerous things in our culture right now, because most of us, I would say 99.9% of us, it's not a 100%, are busy doing good things. No one listening right now is busy doing bad things, or harmful things. We're busy taking care of our lives and going to work and doing our job and taking care of our homes and taking care of other people. We're busy being awesome people.

When we're busy doing good things, it makes it really hard to look at busyness as a happiness stealer. When we are so busy doing all of these good things that it's stealing our happiness, we have to force ourselves to go, "Okay, I have to take a look at this. I have to examine this in a different context and go, 'If I am so busy that I'm literally burning myself out and stealing my own happiness and it's having an effect on my health. Even though all of these things that I'm doing are good, I have to really create a hierarchy. What are the things that I'm doing that are good that I have to do?'" Then examine, "What are the things that I'm doing because I feel like I should do them?"

Once we look at things through that lens, the things that are good that we should be doing in our life or the things that we're doing because we think we need to do them to please other people, it helps us figure out what should stay and maybe what should go. Because if we don't have margin in our lives, if we're not taking care of ourselves, we're going to burn out it's going to steal our happiness.

[0:15:13.4] PF: That can be a really difficult thing to do. I know you're a business coach as well, so I know that – which is wonderful, because you bring this great application of a business world that you can apply in our personal lives. For a lot of people, that busyness becomes their identity and doing good for others becomes their identity. In those cases, how do they then step away from that? Because there's a sense of loss, like I have to do this.

[0:15:41.9] AW: True. I find for most high-capacity women, when we say yes to everything, because we feel we have to – we feel like, we are high-capacity women, we are the women who say yes. Sometimes the mindset shift that really helps this process is we need to look at opportunities when they come at us and go, “If I say yes to everything, I’m taking away an opportunity for another woman to step in to her strengths and step into her abilities. Maybe there’s a woman who hasn’t been asked to have this opportunity. Maybe it’s a volunteer opportunity.”

Whatever it is, there are women out there who haven’t yet developed that ability to go, “Hey, pick me. I want the opportunity to step into this role.” If we as high-capacity women take it all in ourselves and the process burning ourselves out and carrying too much weight, we’re not investing in other women by giving them an opportunity to step into that opportunity.

It’s a completely different mindset shift, because sometimes we go, “Well, if I don’t do it, who else will?” Well, somebody else will. Everyone’s created to take on different roles with different gifts and abilities, but what we need to do again, as the leaders, as women who do tend to do everything is go, “The best thing I can do for other women is to let women step into this role.”

[0:17:05.6] PF: I love that. I’m going to do that with my housework.

[0:17:11.2] AW: That’s great. Okay, you know what? Here’s another funny piece of research that I found; I found that money can’t truly buy you happiness. However, spending money to take care of the jobs you don’t enjoy, such as housework, does scientifically increase your happiness.

[0:17:29.6] PF: I absolutely believe that.

[0:17:31.3] AW: Oh, a 100%.

[0:17:33.1] PF: I am glad. We need to do an infographic on that, just on that one fact.

[0:17:37.5] AW: I paid my 12-year-old \$5 a week to put away all my lingerie and it’s a great system.

[0:17:42.5] PF: Really? Because you all don’t live that far from us, if it – Is he for hire?

[0:17:48.2] AW: I can't say he does it well, but it gets –

[0:17:51.6] PF: It does get done.

[0:17:53.1] AW: It does and I don't have to do it.

[0:17:55.2] PF: I have one more thing that I want to talk to you about. That is that we talk a lot here about our phones and how they're distracting us and how they separate us. You say that we can use our phones to bring us real happiness.

[0:18:10.4] AW: Yes. Oh, I'm so glad you brought that up. There are triggers in our lives. There are things that happen, words that get spoken, even photos that we can see that can trigger us for happiness or unhappiness. You can remember a memory and it can trigger you for it to be happy or unhappy. I am really purposeful with my camera roll on my phone, that when we're having a good time, I take a picture, that does everything I keep on my camera roll is happy.

If I'm having a day that's a little bit rough, or I'm having a time when I'm a little bit bored, waiting rooms and all that, I just pop open my phone and scroll through all of these happy memories and I find it increases my happiness so much, whether it's a picture of my dog out in the yard, or a vacation we took years ago, or even a baby picture of my husband. All these little things that I keep on my phone, which become happiness triggers.

Because when we go, "Okay, here's the mood I'm in, I actually have control over this mood." Just because we're feeling a feeling, doesn't necessarily make it truth. Just because we're a little bored, or we're in a bad mood it doesn't mean things are terrible, even though sometimes it can feel that way. If you open up your phone, you look through your camera roll and all of a sudden, your whole perspective is shifted and you see things in a different light. It's such a small easy thing to do, but it's really powerful.

[0:19:32.7] PF: It's way better than jumping on social media in those down times and –

[0:19:37.0] AW: It is.

[0:19:38.5] PF: - getting caught up in that, falling down that rabbit hole. That's a wonderful tip for us today.

[0:19:44.9] AW: Well, thanks. I'm so glad you like it.

[0:19:47.1] PF: Well Alli, boy I wish I had more time with you. It's been so fun talking with you. Your book is *The Year of Living Happy*. Listeners can go to our website, we're going to give them some links. I think we give them a download to a couple chapters. We give them a lot of things to work with and tools to see more about what you're about and how they can listen to your podcast and find out more about living happy.

[0:20:08.7] AW: Well, thanks so much. It's been wonderful to be on the show.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:20:15.3] PF: That was Alli Worthington, author of *The Year of Living Happy*. If you visit our website at livehappynow.com, you'll find a free download of seven chapters of her book, as well as information about her podcast and how you can learn more about what she has to say.

In case you haven't heard, Live Happy Now is part of the Pandora Podcast network, so you can now find us on the Pandora mobile app for Apple and Android phones. Of course, you can still find us on Apple podcast or wherever you get your favorite podcast. Just search for Live Happy Now and subscribe.

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

[END]