

EPISODE 220

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 220 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us as we begin Season five of Live Happy Now. Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz, recently returned from the International Positive Psychology Association's sixth World Congress in Australia, and we thought a great way to start this new season would be to talk with her about how positive psychology is changing and how the way the world embraces it is changing, too.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:30.6] PF: Well, Deb, it's a start of a brand new season. Season five, if you can believe it. We're starting our fifth season of Live Happy Now, and what better way to start it than to have you come in and talk to us for a little bit?

[0:00:42.6] DH: Well, I'm excited to be here, and I can't believe it's her fifth season. How did that happen?

[0:00:48.6] PF: One season at a time, I guess.

[0:00:51.6] DH: One episode. Yeah. Okay. Don't be too logical.

[0:00:54.6] PF: Well, this is also perfect timing, because not only do we have this brand spanking new season starting, but we have — you've just returned from Australia, where you attended the International Positive Psychology Association World Congress.

[0:01:09.6] DH: I did. I did, it was phenomenal, actually. Obviously I go there to learn, and it just fills me up to be around those people and to be around all the research and all the wonderful stuff that's coming out in the area of positive psychology. And, you know, it was their Sixth World Congress, so they've been doing this for about 12 years. But it really for me, it's a bucket filler. You know, it really gets me excited about what we're doing all over again.

[0:01:33.6] PF: And you've been going to these the World Congress since it began. Is that correct?

[0:01:38.6] DH: No. It took a couple times for me to discover it. So this is my fourth.

[0:01:43.6] PF: Oh okay. All right, well, one thing that I really wanted to talk about was what you've seen change about the way we're approaching positive psychology because it's really getting legs. You know, it's a fairly new way of thinking, and the advantage of that is I think we're kind of growing up in it together, like people are in a relatively same you know, stages of going through and discovering it. So what are you seeing is changing as we get more mature in our understanding of positive psychology.

[0:02:13.6] DH: Well, I'm going to use a term or terms from positive psychology, which is I see a lot of broadening and building going on. You know?

[0:02:21.6] PF: I've heard that used before.

[0:02:23.6] DH: You might have hear that used a few times, but really, it draws people that are not only in the field of positive psychology, but you have a lot more people coming in there in the fields of wellness and education in particular, has gotten a lot more significant population in attendance and as a portion of the program. As well as, you know, neuroscience and, you know, physiological wellbeing. But there's a lot broader audience, and there's a lot more things that are adjacent to really positive, not just positive psychology, but human wellbeing.

But there's also more depth and more science actually coming out because this is such a young, really a young field of study that when I first started going, you know, and I didn't go to the second but actually got the privilege of watching the second on what video existed and listening to some of it. The amount and the depth of the science and research that's coming out, it's growing exponentially because it was such a young place to start. It's really exciting to see what's coming out.

One of the talks I didn't get to go to and and just hint, hint I really want to get him on a podcast is Michael Steger did a talk on finding meaning and in his talk or in his bio brief for his talk and from what other people said, a lot of it is about how we haven't really — we talk to people about

finding their purpose and meaning, but the how hasn't really been explored. So you know, it's really he kind of did a survey of this is what people are talking about when it comes to finding meaning. But it hasn't really been studied extensively yet. It doesn't really have the answers yet. So that's an example of when I went to the 1st one, there were a whole lot of things that are like, "We're studying this," but you know, now there's a lot more conclusions.

[0:04:01.6] PF: Yeah, it does seem that it's more a case of a lot of time was spent saying, "Oh, okay, this is what we need as a society and as individuals." And then there was this phase of trying to determine how we get those things, and now it's almost like we're working on the implementation part of it.

[0:04:20.6] DH: Well, we're certainly getting the results of a lot of those studies that were ideas at the 1st one I was in attendance at. You know, some very large names like [Dr. Sullivan] got on stage and said, "We should be studying these things," and, you know, the audience listened and they went and they found ways and they're designing studies and they're designing research to study these things. And it's been long enough now that we're starting to get results, and it's really, really a phenomenal experience to watch that grow up and to really see there's still a lot of the same stuff, but it's just it's just got more on it.

There's still a lot on strengths. You know, there was 4 or 5 very distinct presentations on character strengths and using character strengths in various methods. And so it's also the hardening. When I say broaden, we have more people there. When I say build, there's more and more science coming out in various areas. There's also a hardening of the science in the sense that there's been more research to confirm other research, which is, you know, what happens in scientific fields. You know, somebody has an idea, they think they're right. Somebody studies that, "Hey, we might be right," and then two or three other people do more studies to confirm it, and you're really seeing that happen. It's starting to happen in this field. It's kind of like having a front row seat to an evolution.

[0:05:39.6] PF: It really is, and I think one thing that I've noticed at some of the events that I've gone to more recently, just the past couple of years is it takes less of an introduction to a topic for people to understand it. Because, you know, I remember going like on character strengths and they would have to really explain, "Hey, these are these are what character strengths are these are what they do for us," and then get into the meat of it. It seems like we're a little bit

farther along than that now. People have a better fundamental understanding of these different tenants of positive psychology.

[0:06:11.6] DH: And how to apply them. There's still a lot of application that comes out. How do I use this information to do something. Like, there's a lot of gratitude practices. You and I talk about gratitude all the time. There's a lot of gratitude practices that have come out of a lot of research. But there's other areas, like I was talking about with meaning, where there isn't necessarily a lot of practices yet that have come out. But they're coming, and I'm excited to be there to have them show up.

[0:06:37.6] PF: In addition to meaning, what are some of the things that you see emerging as kind of the next hot areas that you think there's gonna be a lot of research?

[0:06:46.6] DH: Oh, you know, I still think there's just a ton of research going on and on-going in the area of physical wellbeing, physiological wellbeing and its relationship to optimism and hope and meaning and purpose. And, you know, the whole there's been a lot on, you know, optimistic people live longer. Well, why? How do you get optimistic? There's there's still a ton of research going on not just by positive psychologists but by neuroscientists and biologists and, you know, medical doctors on how these things can be implemented into health. And I still think that's a really key emerging research and I think we're gonna see research around that very, very long term. I think there's been a turn recently and I don't know if it's a turn recently, or if it's a Deborah suddenly aware, which it could also be.

[0:07:32.6] PF: It's one of those two things.

[0:07:33.6] DH: It's one of those two things. You know, it's kind of like you by the car and you think you're the only one with that car and you drive home and suddenly there's 18,000 cars just like it, and you just noticed it. You're like, "Why'd I buy this one?" But, you know, that happens. So in this particular area, I do think there's a lot more of a bent towards wellbeing as a benefit to societies. How do we use what we're learning about human wellbeing, positivity, and happiness to not just benefit the individual, but to impact society as a whole? And I'm starting to hear, not seeing necessary a ton more research on it, but I'm hearing starting to hear a lot more dialogue about that. But it's not just how are we going to impact individuals, but how are we then going to

use this as a science to impact societies is a whole? And I think that's that's really something that's our emerging still, and it's fascinating,

[0:08:23.6] PF: And the application seems to be, to talk about broaden and build, the application seems to be broadening as well, because I see more and more where the medical community is endorsing meditation as a form of physical practice for health. And we see the medical community where previously they might have said, “Okay, that's kind of unproven. You might want to stick with this,” but they're really embracing the idea of these practices and how they benefit the health of a human being.

[0:08:53.6] DH: No, I absolutely see that as well. You know, things that used to be considered “woo-woo”, yeah, that's nice people. There is now enough substantive evidence that these things matter and that they can make a difference and that a meditation intervention could make a difference in your blood pressure, for example. I mean, there's there's tons of research, empirical research that now the credible skeptics, which a lot of our medical field is — they're credible, but they're also skeptical — can embrace there's enough. That's why I talk about, you know, the building of the research. It's it's just so important that they continue to do this because it could have an impact on humans in a way that will only work if you start doing something. It's great to study it. But we also have to have some behaviors people can change.

[0:09:40.6] PF: And we need the medical community to endorse that because there are a lot of people who are not going to accept it unless they hear from a doctor. A medical doctor.

[0:09:49.6] DH: Absolutely. That's true for a lot of things.

[0:09:54.6] PF: Because I saw her recently, it made me smile because, you know, Chris and I did something recently talking about biophilia and being out in nature, and I just did a podcast that, when this airs, it'll have run last week about having houseplants inside and how good that is for you. And I also this past week saw something from a medical journal that was talking about advising heart patients to get out in nature, because here's what we now know it does for you. What amused me is the way it was presented. It's like they had never heard this before.

[0:10:26.6] DH: No one ever told you getting outside was good before.

[0:10:28.6] PF: Exactly. It was like breaking news and it made me smile because it's like that's something that we have been talking about, gosh, since the beginning of Live Happy about the importance of that and it's really gratifying to see other outlets picking that up, other mainstream forms of communication.

[0:10:47.6] DH: That's ironic because — not ironic, it's it's amusing to me because I also, about three weeks ago, came across an article where they and it was, and I can't remember the article, but I do remember the results of the study they were talking about showed that in order, in order for nature to actually have an impact on your health and on your outlook and on your wellbeing, you need two hours of it a week.

[0:11:10.6] PF: Yeah.

[0:11:11.6] DH: Literally 100, like one hour and 55 minutes did not make a difference. Their study, it was — I'm serious. It was a really hard line and it didn't matter if those were in 20 minute increments or it was all two hours at once. But you need to be outside two hours a week. I was like, "Wow, how prescriptive is that? And how easy is that?"

[0:11:30.6] PF: I know, and I did like the fact that they said that they did put it like, "Okay, this is a two hour time frame that you need," because we do tend to get like, "Oh, you need to take walks, you need to do this, you need to do that," and it is kind of vague, so it's nice.

[0:11:46.6] DH: If you took a 15 minute walk every day, you wouldn't hit two hours. That's really what they're saying. You've got to take a 20 minute walk every day, right? It's that small. But it's that small difference, and that's what a lot of this research will show us that you know, there are very specific things that if you're to flip about, you say, "Yeah, that works." But it's like if you practice meditation and your entire practice of meditation is one minute today, once every six months, it's probably not gonna help so much.

[0:12:14.6] PF: Oh, shoot. I'm going to have to rethink my life.

[0:12:17.6] DH: But you know what I mean? Yeah, that didn't work. The favorite gratitude practice, which I originally encountered in Shawn Achor's book. But he got it from another study, and it's been everywhere, is that write down three things you're grateful for, you know, 21

days in a row. Well, is 21 of magical day, magical number? And apparently the answer is yes. You know that 15 isn't the same impact as 21, you know? There are very specific things that we can do to improve her own happiness, but we need to actually do them according to what, you know, the studies show us to do not just whimsically go, "Well, I did that three days in a row, and that didn't really help so much."

[0:12:54.6] PF: And as you mentioned, the more research we do in the harder the science behind it gets, the more prescriptive people can be with it.

[0:13:03.6] DH: Absolutely. I want to diverge for a second because like I said, this is a bucket filler for me, and I went to — I'm going to just call out, can I call three sessions that I went to?

[0:13:13.6] PF: Do it.

[0:13:14.6] DH: One of them was Kim Cameron, and he's a professor at the University of Michigan and he studies Positive Leadership. And, you know, it was really interesting because he talks about positive leadership a lot. But I just want to — he has something, the eight dimensions of positive organizations, you know, where are we? And if people want to know more about this, it's a Centerforpos.com. But I thought it was interesting he was posing the question, "How do we use positive leadership to solve our culture issues?" You know, how do we take positive leadership out of the business environment and actually start applying it to solve, you know, societal issues?

[0:13:52.6] PF: Oh, interesting.

[0:13:53.6] DH: And I thought that was an interesting question to posit, but, you know, to really start thinking about and then, of course, you know I run an organization, so I'm always excited when I hear him talk. But in this particular talk, it was really generally how do we need to change to create positive organizations not within business but outside of business? So I thought that was an intriguing question to ask. Another session that I went to and it really was the opening session was the key. It was the keynote, and it was Dr. Martin Seligman and his wife, Mandy, and they were really reinforcing something we talked about all the time and it was that relationships matter more than anything.

We talk about having material prosperity. We have greater material prosperity right now that we have at any point in human timeline and we have more psychological poverty than we've had at any point in the human timeline and so why? But what they were really positing is that the causation of material prosperity and psychological poverty is that because of everything we've introduced in our lives and the way we start living our lives that were busy, busy, busy that we're on technology, that we're not being with other people is that we have a much poorer quality of connections and relationships that we have at any other point in human history.

So, you know, they're really showing or talking about the real time about how the research was that the quality of connections are the key and starting with our own family the people we live with, and the people we love have more of an impact on our happiness and our wellbeing than anything else. And I thought, you know, we're talking about broadening and building, and they did, too. But what they were using what, particularly Mandy was using in her discussion was that it's not broadening and building when it comes to relationships; relationships are necessary because they both bolster us and buffer us. They're crucial to our future. They bolster us in terms of lifting us up when we have challenges and they buffer us from the rest of the world because they create a bit of an insulation to us in terms of feeling loved.

So I thought that was a really interesting talk and also really key to a lot of stuff. We talk about how important relationships are to our own wellbeing, and we overlook that all the time.

[0:16:05.6] DH: Oh, yeah, because it's something we have a relationship, and so we tend to take that for granted. You know, if we were single and we're trying to find that relationship, we'd be putting all kinds of time into it. But it's like I already have this, "Yeah, you go ahead and watch TV, I'm gonna go check my phone," and, you know, and we're just, we don't put that same kind of effort into it

[0:16:24.6] DH: Or we have friends that we text, you know? [inaudible] We text. Maybe we're single, but we have friends and we just text him and maybe we made him for a drink every now and then. But we don't have that meaningful depth of relationship like we used to and our society isn't designed around that. Our society is designed around quickness, ease, not death. So it's interesting.

The third talk and this one was for me as a parent, probably the most phenomenal talking, you know, I really want to get him on the show again. We've had him on the show before, but it was that John Haidt's talk on *The Coddling of the American Mind*, which is his new book. There's —

[0:17:03.6] PF: What a great topic.

[0:17:04.6] DH: It is.

[0:17:04.6] PF: I mean, I love that. What a great title, I mean.

[0:17:06.6] DH: You know, and he's got a coauthor and I just acquired the book and I'm going to read it. But there was a couple things that I wanted to pull out of that, and the 1st one is I got a new word that I want to start exploring that I want to start thinking about in terms of positive psychology. And that word is anti-fragile. We always talk about resilience in positive psychology, but if you think about it, if you drop a plastic container on the floor, it doesn't break. So it's resilient, right? But does it get stronger?

[0:17:34.6] PF: Ah, not at all.

[0:17:36.6] DH: Anti—fragility is the strengthening not just being resilience, not getting knocked down over and over and over again? But getting to where when you're knocked down the next time it happens it's either a little harder to knock you down or you're standing up and you just feel the blow, so to speak. It's not — the key is not just building resilience, it's becoming anti-fragile, and he gave a couple of examples about where this is true. Your immune system; the more you're exposed to things, the stronger your immune system becomes, right? Bones; they are really weak if you don't use them. That's why astronauts, when they go into space, they have you know they have serious concerns about, you know, the ability for the humans to travel to Mars because of — or to traveled in deep space because of simply the deterioration in the of bones of muscle skeletal strength.

And the other example used, which I thought was fascinating was children. Children learn from the mistakes they make. You know, children fall down when they're learning to walk and they get back up. There's virtually nobody who fell down and never got back up, because I fell down on us, right. They — Children are incredibly anti-fragile. They aren't just resilient, they're anti-

fragile. And we built a society protecting them from failure, which is inhibiting their ability to develop this anti-fragility to becoming anti-fragile because they — we expect them to be resilient, but we protect them from anything that's going to allow them to develop their own anti-fragility. So I thought that was really interesting, totally worth, you see why I want him on a podcast?

[0:19:11.6] PF: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that's a really interesting topic.

[0:19:16.6] DH: And the other piece that he brought out was and we talked — he talked about this quite a bit. There's been a lot of research, and I think that we've done some stuff on this online on Live Happy, but the research is about the rise of skyrocketing anxiety and depression in girls in a Generation Z, which is, you know, under 18 right now. For boys it's up, for girls it's way up and there is a direct correlation and it's way up in the last 7 to 10 years. It's a direct correlation to the advent of social media and allowing children, you know, under -- he said, he actually said, "I recommend you don't let anybody under 16 on social media." Of course, you know that's nice. You know, we all live in the real world.

[0:19:58.6] PF: Good luck with that.

[0:19:59.6] DH: Tell your 14 year old that they can't have what everybody else does and he said that, he goes, "But society needs to move the direction of discouraging social media use until people are old enough to have critical judgment when they're looking at images that have been photoshopped or fear of missing out posts those sorts of things." But you know, it's not just that social media, the advent of it's caused this, but also their studies that shows that a reduction in social media use improves wellbeing and that's just something really, to think about as a parent. I've got two girls, one's seven, one's 10 and I worry about that all the time.

So I'd love to have him on the show to talk a little bit more about those two things. But it was a really fascinating talk. I literally wanted to email and post and do everything I could to get out until everybody to read that book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, because I just think it's such an important concept that we have. You know, people use the term "helicopter parenting", but it's really not that it's really about just not letting your children fail. And it's a fantastic concept, and what it has done to the youngest generation as a society is we haven't seen the

effects of that yet. But if you look at the rise in psychological disorders in that group, we're starting to.

[0:21:12.6] PF: Yeah, and it's concerning to what that means, not only to that generation, but to subsequent generations.

[0:21:19.6] DH: Exactly.

[0:21:20.6] PF: Because we've got to be able to, you know, you've got to have a good parenting to be able to raise the next one, so.

[0:21:26.6] DH: All of us as parents are terrified of something happen to our children. That is absolutely the most normal fear on the planet. But it's a broken arm — is playing on the jungle gym and falling off and breaking your arm catastrophic? Well, like my son did not Jungle gym, playing soccer broke his arm last month. It's not catastrophic. He gets over it. He'll heal. He's fine. We instead, we have all these parks where there's virtually no way to get hurt on anything in the highest fall you can make is three feet. You know, it's just a different — We've really changed the way the world is from when I was raised or from when you were raised. It's just it's interesting. It's a good book. I think everybody should to check it out. But these are the types of things you get to discover when you go to IPPA, it's a great, you know, like I said, it's a bucket filler for me. It's a great look at what's going on in the world of Positive Psychology.

[0:22:11.6] PF: Well, Deb, thanks for coming in. Thanks for sharing your experiences with us and for kicking off Season five.

[0:22:18.6] DH: Well, thank you. I really appreciate being on. You know, this is like once again, my favorite thing in the world do, Paula.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:22:27.6] PF: That was Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz. If you'd like to learn more about the International Positive Psychology Association or about the science of living a happier life, please visit us at LiveHappyNow.com. We hope you're already a subscriber to Live Happy Now, but if you're not, you can find us on the Pandora podcast network, Spotify, Soundcloud, Stitcher,

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That is all we have time for this week. We'll meet you back here again next week for an all new episode, and until then, this is Paula Felps, reminding you to make every day a happy one.

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