

EPISODE 238**[INTRODUCTION]**

[00:00:02] PF: Welcome to episode 238 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us again today.

Like many people, today's guest was concerned by the growing anxiety and restlessness that we're experiencing as a society, and what he's done about it truly has the power to change lives around the world. After leaving a successful career in the finance industry, Peter Montoya founded Thrive Union, an organization whose mission is to help people go from loneliness and isolation to purposeful belonging.

His free online videos provide a life school to teach the things we need to know to have a thriving and happier life. Let's hear what Peter has to say about how this all came about and how each of us can benefit from it.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:45] PF: Peter, welcome to this episode of Live Happy Now.

[00:00:48 PM: Thank you, Paula. I'm thrilled to be here.

[00:00:50] PF: Well, I think our listeners are going to love hearing what you have to talk about, because it's something that is very necessary and it's something we're not seeing a lot of. I guess to – Now, we've built that up. You talk about Thrive Union as being this real world community, and it's a life school. So to set this all up, can you tell us what that means?

[00:01:09] PM: First of all, I think that it is pretty widely known that we are suffering from epidemic levels of both anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Loneliness may be the underlying cause for much of our anxiety and depression. This loneliness is not only affecting us individually where we're feeling lives of less fulfillment and meaning, of less connection. But also I think it's hurting us at a macro level as well, whereas we as a country are having more and

more difficulty connecting with one another, talking about problems, and most importantly solving problems that affect us both locally and nationally and globally.

[00:01:47] PF: So how did you come up with the idea to solve that, because that's a big problem to solve?

[00:01:53] PM: It is.

[00:01:54] PF: But you're a little ambitious. So how did you come up with this as the solution? I guess tell us what exactly this is.

[00:02:02] PM: So I'm a creature of the personal development world. I mean, my last job was I'm a software entrepreneur. I built two different companies, first an advertising agency and then a software company.

But for the last 30 years, I've been really involved in a lot of personal and professional development. Always loved it. There is so much transformation, self-awareness, and transcendence available out there to us through podcasts like this, great books, and courses. I really transformed my life because of that. But it also had some problems is that your community was only very, very transactional. You're only in community with these great people as long as you kept on going to courses.

So that was one of the problems I wanted to solve was create an ongoing community of people who were not only learning and transforming together but also connecting on a regular basis. Then in my own life as an entrepreneur, I really was hyper-individualistic. To be an entrepreneur in America, you have to be very self-focused and focused on your problems and learn how to get things done almost on your own. I was – I had an organization of 25 people, but it was always command-and-control.

I really realized that my depth of friendships wasn't very deep when I sold my business in 2018. I've got an amazing marriage but I didn't have a whole lot of friends I could be a lot social with on a regular basis and I was feeling some lacking in my own wholeheartedness. Through my exploration and talking with friends, I realized what was missing was community.

So I wanted to create an organization of people who not only were involved in transformational work together. They were learning in a regular basis but also they were there as a community, supporting each other on a weekly basis.

Then I also discovered that people want to get out and solve problems, and they want to do it with people they know, like, and trust. So we are both a life school. We're learning together. We are a community, which means we're supporting each other on a regular basis. Then we also do a ton of community service, trying to make the world better around us.

[00:03:57] PF: What are some of the topics that you teach at life school, because it's not like we have to go there for algebra?

[00:04:02] PM: Right. So a life school, the way I describe it is this. Do you remember the class that you took in high school that taught you how to live life and taught you about emotional intelligence, relationships, career success?

[00:04:17] PF: Yeah. I miss that day.

[00:04:20] PM: Are you sure?

[00:04:21] PF: Yeah.

[00:04:21] PM: Because I swore you in the class with Dr. Hard Knocks. Were you in Dr. Hard Knocks' class?

[00:04:24] PF: Yeah, there I was.

[00:04:26] PM: Right. Yeah. So we're kind of left to trial and error to actually solve some of the hardest things in our life like how to be in a relationship with groups of people on a regular basis. What most people have come to realize because we have so many attractive things in our houses these days. We have the Internet, we have these phones, we have these big-screen TVs, and we've got gaming.

Most of us forgot how to even set boundaries for examples in such that we go into a group of people, we see something that we don't like, we just leave, and we just don't come back ever again. Someone has bad breath or talks too close to us or looks a little bit weird. We just abandon the whole group and just retreat back to our houses, and that is not healthy for us.

So we teach people. Once again, how do we have conversations? How do you contribute to somebody else? How do you give? How do you receive? That's just one of the many topics we talk about. But more or less, we cover leadership, relationships. Communication empowerment is one of our big ongoing topics. Resentment releasing, all the things you need to be a happy, healthy, productive member of society.

[00:05:27] PF: Can you talk about how you put the programs together? Because there's two components that I want to talk about. One is great videos, great illustrations, great job putting these things together. They're really engaging. Then also the content is part positive psychology, part evolutionary psychology, and part behavioral economics. So how did you develop that content?

[00:05:48] PM: I am absolutely an information carnivore. I am listening to podcasts, reading books, watching documentaries on YouTube for probably two or three hours every single day. It's just what I do day in and day out. As I came out of the personal development world, which was largely based on the prosperity doctrine, which more or less says, "Make a lot of money and you'll be happy."

What's funny is everyone knows that's not true, and they don't know how to get off of that rat wheel and that rat race that we're constantly running. I looked for what the solution was, and positive psychology I think provides probably the best worldview for explaining how we as human beings can live a fulfilling life that is not based on materialism and things and status. So that was kind of the school that I fumbled into and all of my research and dealings.

[00:06:42] PF: You've put it together in such a great way, because as you said, sometimes we forget these lessons. A lot of times now, we weren't taught them to begin with. So if there is something that – Like loneliness and someone really doesn't know how they're supposed to cope with that, they can go and not feel embarrassed to ask someone about it. That is there for them, and I think as you look at your YouTube channel and you look down on the side of all

these, “Oh! That one applies to me too. Oh! I need that one too,” you start feeling just from being on your side like that, you feel less alone because other people are going through a lot of the same things that you are.

[00:07:16] PM: Very true. So we've got a really robust YouTube channel, which is – Look for Thrive Union on YouTube and you'll find over 60 different videos. Most of them were about five minutes long, and they do a really great job of in five minutes giving you a little primer on how to change a little bit better.

So things from, yes, we talk about how to improve your sleep, the power of exercise, how important purpose is. Purpose is one of those buzzwords kind of going around, but most people either don't have a purpose and also don't know how to find purpose, how important hugs are how hard, how hard forgiveness is. Forgiveness is one of the hardest things to do in changing our mind to actually create a process for how to forgive. So just about anything someone might be facing in their life, we try to create a video that answers that problem.

[00:08:03] PF: Do people come to you with topics or do you just – How does this all evolve?

[00:08:07] PF: Yeah. Well, I'm constantly in community, in relationship with people. Almost every single day, I'm either having coffee or in conversation or coaching somebody, and an issue comes up. It's like, “Oh, gosh! We should create a video around that,” and then we do.

[00:08:20] PF: It's that easy, people. It's like there's an app for that but they do. So another thing I find really interesting is that this is a nonprofit and it's run by volunteers. So once people see the scope of what you're doing and realize it's completely volunteer-driven, this becomes even more amazing. So how did that format develop? How did you decide this was the way to do it?

[00:08:44] PM: There are a couple different ways that human beings build relationships and kind of bind each other together. One way is by sharing a belief system. Another way is by having the same ethnicity. Another one is by creating a tribal us versus them. Yet I think probably the best way for us to connect as human being is by sharing a common mission.

So we're a collection now of about a hundred people. We're all on the same mission, which is to live a fulfilling life. Part of living a fulfilling life is living a life of purpose. But we also want to share it, so other people can learn fulfilling lives too. So when you are with a group of people and we are – When you were energized and supercharged by a similar purpose and the values and mission, all sorts of amazing things can happen.

[00:09:29] PF: You are helping those things happen, and that's what's really exciting to see because it is an online platform, but you also do some live things.

[00:09:39] PM: We do.

[00:09:38] PF: You have meetups and you have events, which is wonderful because if we're lonely, then even though the videos are great, maybe staying inside and watching videos isn't what we should be doing.

[00:09:48] PM: Yes. So the videos are really meant as a gateway to our real world events. So I get a lot of questions. We do one or two or three meetings every single week here in Orange County, California. People say, "Gosh! I really like to go there, but the traffic. Do you stream this online, so I can watch it online?" The answer is no. That kind of defeats the whole purpose is that a symbolic social media, we're watching coming online, is not a substitute for real person-to-person contact.

Most likely, it's our mirror neurons that are being tripped on when we're actually in person empathize with another real human being. So we can't replace person-to-person contact.

[00:10:29] PF: What are some of the person-to-person contact events that you do?

[00:10:32] PM: Some of the things we do. Every single week, we have – On Sunday, we do a meeting called Thrive Sunday, which is like a two-hour, a little personal development workshop. It happens weekly where we do meditation. We do a lot of connection exercises. We have that benefit of feeling belonging and empathize with the people. Then we also do some content, which shows up as lessons for living. We try to share some ideas that everyone can take away to actually improve their life right away. We spend a lot of time working on relationships, a lot of

time talking about communication and empowerment, so people can actually start living a life by design versus living a life by accident.

[00:11:09] PF: What about people like me? I'm in Nashville. Chris is in our studio in Dallas. So we can't make it to Orange County.

[00:11:16] PM: We desperately want to expand. We are using this YouTube channel as a way of us gathering more viewers out there, so we can start coming out to others' places around the country and then actually launching chapters.

[00:11:30] PF: So it would be a situation where someone says like, "I want to be a part of this. We'll do it," and say, "We'll do a national chapter." Then that person will do like the meetups, some things like that.

[00:11:39] PM: Exactly.

[00:11:40] PF: That's cool.

[00:11:40] PM: That's exactly our vision.

[00:11:42] PF: That's a great way to do it.

[00:11:43] PM: Yeah. Thank you.

[00:11:48] PF: We'll be right back with more of my conversation with Peter Montoya. But right now, I wanted to take 60 seconds to talk about one way you can make your busy holiday season just a little less hectic. Sizzlefish.com is a great way to have the top quality seafood you want for your family delivered right to your door. They offer an amazing selection of seafood that includes all your favorites like salmon, halibut, shrimp, scallops, and calamari. You need to check out this great tasting, all-natural, responsibly sourced fish and seafood.

You can find it at sizzlefish.com. Whether you want to order great seafood for a special meal or become a regular customer and sign up for a monthly subscription box, you can get exactly what you're looking for on their site. As an exclusive deal for being a listener, use the discount

code happy for 10% off your first order. That's discount code happy for 10% off your first order. Now, let's get back to our conversation with Peter Montoya.

Who is going to be the typical person that comes through this that join? Are they – What do we call them? Do you call them members? Do you call them –

[00:12:52] PM: We call them Thrivers.

[00:12:54] PF: Thrivers. There you go.

[00:12:56] PM: Yeah. Our audience ranges from as low as 25 years old. Occasionally, I can get my 16-year-old daughter to go to a meeting but not very often. 25 years old on the low end and then literally I had people in their mid-80s who come to our meetings. So we get 20-year-old, 30-year-olds, 40, 50, 60, 70s, and 80s. People are – In general, they lean more toward college-educated. If you know the OCEAN personality dynamics, the high O, open-minded, we usually get people who are very, very open-minded.

[00:13:26] PF: What kind of changes do you see and what kind of bonding takes place as they go through this?

[00:13:33] PM: Probably the biggest one that I see is we run to people – We probably have an equal number of both introverts and extroverts. But all these people are suffering from some level of – That's not true. Many of our members come to us and they have some degree of anxiety or depression. They know they need more relationships in their lives.

But especially here in Orange County, our whole infrastructure is architected, so we can be alone. I mean, we have these mobile isolation chambers called cars we have to get into. We have houses that have kind of been built [inaudible 00:14:04] with these big giant huge walls and doors that kind of wall off the house. We oftentimes go to work and we sit in a cubicle alone and then we have these apps in our phone, which allows have all these conveniences. We don't have to be with anybody else.

So kind of isolation is the default setting here in our society. So most people come to us and they're really just looking for relationships, so they can be part of something which is what we really do need at our kind of DNA level.

[00:14:33] PF: It's fantastic because these people are going to be more like-minded, because like you said, they have the open mind and there probably is a lot of great friendships and a lot of sharing that goes on that just would not have happened if they hadn't attended.

[00:14:46] PM: I'm constantly amazed when I look at our group, and there is so different as far as the ethnicities and the ages in our group. I see all these different people who you would not expect to be connecting, connect on a regular basis. I hear about how they're having lunches and going on hikes and helping each other move on a regular basis. It's so exciting for me as a leader to see the group flourish the way that it does.

[00:15:07] PF: A lot of it is just becoming aware of, one, the need to do that and then, two, the fact that it's offered that this is like where I can go and be part of a community.

[00:15:18] PM: That's exactly it, because most people are a very, very wary of communities. I mean, a lot of people come to our meetings and they go, "You know, it's a little weird here. Everyone's just so nice. What do you want from me?"

[00:15:27] PF: We got to stop that.

[00:15:31] PM: I really understand that, because friendship has been misused. I mean, the cults have misused friendship as a way of manipulating people. So I really understand why people are very skeptical of people who were just nice. But we are really just nice people who want to be around nice people and live good lives. That's it.

[00:15:50] PF: So do you get that? People are like coming and they realize, "Okay, they're nice. But what's the catch?" Like they're waiting for the hard sell or something like that.

[00:15:57] PM: All the time. Absolutely, all the time. People pull me aside and they go, "Peter, you seem really nice, but you just got to tell me straight up. Is this a cult?" The answer is no. Good God, no. We're not a cult.

[00:16:09] PF: No, and here is your Kool-Aid.

[00:16:12] PM: No.

[00:16:14] PF: Wow! That's fantastic, because it is. It's unusual right now. Like you said, we network for a purpose. We don't just go out and cultivate relationships oftentimes, unless there's something that we need out of that. So I love the fact that you're helping change that practice.

[00:16:31] PM: Thank you. It's a hard knob to dial, because the pull of technology is so incredibly powerful. It is so much easier to stay home with your Netflix and/or your cell phone than it is to get dressed and go out to see people who you do not know.

However, every longevity study out there says that the number one most important determinant for living a longer, happy or healthy life is quality relationships, both the ones that are closest to you like your spouse and your siblings and your friends but also the relationships you have that are oftentimes in passing. The neighbor that's walking on the street, the person you're ordering food from, the person who's just in transactions during the course of the day. You've got to be really nice with those people.

For some reason, most of us have two different ways of dealing with people. We're really nice to our friends and then we put on is better than vibe when we're out dealing with service people in restaurants or in stores, and I don't understand it.

[00:17:29] PF: Yeah, because that food is not coming to your table by itself.

[00:17:32] PM: No, it's not. Those are not robots. They're actual human beings with hopes and dreams and passions just like you do. Why don't we treat them that way? So we do.

[00:17:43] PF: That is terrific. The platform and your channel, your website, Facebook, everything is very robust, very exciting. But that's not enough, because you decided that, "Hey! We need a book too."

[00:17:54] PM: Yeah, we do.

[00:17:55] PF: You have a book, *Why We Live*. Can you tell us about that?

[00:17:58] PM: Yeah. I think that – I remember when the light bulb got turned on for me when I was reading my first book about positive psychology because I kind of felt the goal of life is to be happy, but that didn't quite resonate with me. Being happy and having a house and a car and a loving spouse and great kids, is that all life is? I never quite understood that.

Then I learned about the idea of thriving or well-being or flourishing. Those words are all synonymous. More or less is that we as human beings are – We can just survive if we want to, and that means just kind of having food on the table and a roof over your head. But that isn't really going to make us feel fulfilled and also momentary happiness.

If you're on this constant hedonic treadmill of looking for more things and experiences like you're looking for your next vacation or you want to buy a new car, you're looking for new clothes, that will always run out.

What really makes us feel most fulfilled is living a life of purpose where we're actually contributing to human beings in a way that makes us feel gratified. We have meaningful relationships. We have deep-seated belonging. So I wanted to write a book that kind of laid out that life is not just about chasing things and experiences. It's much more about giving relationships and purpose.

[00:19:13] PF: That's terrific. Is it available? Where is the easiest place for them to get that?

[00:19:17] PM: It will be available on December 1st on Amazon.

[00:19:21] PF: Just in time for Christmas.

[00:19:23] PM: It is Christmas. It is. We wanted to write a book that people could read in an hour and really get to reframe their understanding about what life is about. I mean, probably the most important question is also the shortest question in the world. That question is why, and very few people ask that question and really spend any time toiling with it. But the answer to that question will give you the most profound reasons for living.

[00:19:51] PF: That is fantastic insight. So as you look at this and you're going to continue adding to this and growing this, looking on the road, what do you hope is the end result of all this? What is your perfect outcome?

[00:20:04] PM: I would love to have a thousand chapters with a thousand people each and where we're really looking out to tackle global problems. When I asked myself the question, will I be leaving this planet and society better than I found it to my kids, my inclination is probably not based on the way that we're headed right now.

There are some really big problems looming on the horizon from climate change to income inequality to environmental destruction. Also, climate change is coming, so it's most likely we're looking to how to adapt to that. So I want to have a million people around the planet who are all united together and working to solve really big global problems. It seems to me that both corporations and our governments have let humanity down.

[00:20:53] PF: I would have to agree with that and I'm really glad that there are people like you who are saying like, "I'm not going to join politics. I'm not going to start a company. I'm going to start a movement." Movements have power. We can change things with people, because that's how it got this way.

[00:20:53] PM: That is absolutely right. Now, because of the Internet and modern technology, there is a legitimate way that we can actually connect a million people around the planet, around a really good united mission.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:21:26] PF: That was Peter Montoya, founder of the Thrive Union community and author of the new book, *Why We Live*. To learn more about Peter, Thrive Union, and to find out more about his free online resources, please visit us at livehappy.com for links and more information.

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

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