



Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Kristin Neff

HOST

Kym Yancey

SPEAKER

Kristen Neff

PRESENTATION

Kym Hey, good morning, good morning. It is a great, great morning. Now, I know, depending on where you live in the country and the world it might be a little nippy out there for you. It's a little nippy here in Dallas.

I was telling the person as I was coming up the elevator into our Live Happy central center here, we've got our own little Live Happy Wake Up Happy Center command center, and I'm here with Brittany on computer, and then we have Emily here, and she's into the chat box and that kind of thing, so if you are tuned into us, I know that you could be listening to us through a variety of different systems. Some of you are going to be on your computers. Some of you are going to be on your smartphones. Some of you are calling in from just your line, or just listening

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that way, and I just want to say whichever way you got here, welcome. It's great to have you here with us.

We have a fabulous, fabulous guest for our show. For the first Wake Up Happy call of the year, 2015, we have Kristin Neff, and I can't wait to share more with you about her.

But let me update you. I want you to know that we want you to engage with us. Our handle is MyLiveHappy, or find us on Facebook by searching MyLiveHappy. And we want to hear from you. I want you to know I've set up, we have a special e-mail account called wakeuphappy@livehappy.com, and that really just goes to me and Brittany and we're able to take your notes, and take your suggestions to constantly make sure that we're providing you with great cutting edge information. That's what this is all about for us.

If this is your first time tuning into us, Live Happy is leading the global movement to make our world a happier place. We are completely dedicated and focused on ways to bring the latest research from positive psychologists, from the academic world, from research studies around happiness. If you're here with us this morning I know that you're probably already a very happy person. And here's what I've discovered about happy people, they also have a huge capacity to want to be happier. They want to spread it. They want to share it. Happiness is

contagious. It gets into you and you want to share it with other people. There's really an energy around happiness. And you've got to be willing to open up to it and dial into it, tap into it to really experience it fully.

My name is Kym Yancey and I am the CEO and Co-Founder of Live Happy. And I also want to tell you, we've had an incredible year this year because we took our name and we put it on gear and on clothing, and people are just loving the whole Live Happy experience, with the Live Happy caps and those kinds of things.

I just want to let you know that you can go to livehappy.com, you can go to our store, and you're going to find things like subscriptions to our magazine, which are just going fantastic. We are so thankful for the people that are buying *Live Happy* magazine. And it comes in two forms. You can get the physical edition, which is on newsstands and at Barnes & Noble's and all over the country, in airports and that kind of thing. You can also subscribe to it. We've got thousands and thousands of subscribers from all over North America and the world. But you can also, we launched in October our digital edition, so now if you just want the digital version you can just get the digital version of our award-winning magazine. Yes, it's award-winning. We got a big award in New York for our magazine last year, and we're so excited about that.

But anyway, we also have a book that we've come out with called the *Live Happy 50 Happiness Facts and Quotes*, and that's doing fantastic. And I want to encourage you to, I will tell you, doing what we do it was nice to be able to get our hands on something that had all the latest facts. And while these aren't all of them, it's 50 of the hottest facts as it relates to relationships and career and life and business, all around, again, the research that we've done in this area around happiness, and it's now in our happiness book. Then one of our biggest items are our Post-It Notes, we call them Live Happy Notes, Happy Notes, very, very cool. And we'll share more with you about that.

Also, I want to encourage you, if you've seen it, our banana smiles. I know in my Facebook, my personal profile picture on Facebook, I have a little banana smile, where I have a banana under my chin with a smile, and this really started as just a fun thing to do and now it's really, really growing, and we're doing more and more of that. I'm going to tell you more about that in the weeks ahead, about what's happening with our banana smile campaign and the big record that we're going to break in April of this year around banana smiles. So, we'll keep you updated.

Also, just make a note of this before we start with Kristin, and that is there's a spotlight event. It's called Leading to Well-being in Workplaces, Organizations, and Communities Conference. It is a phenomenal, phenomenal event. It's

produced by George Mason University. It's hosting its sixth annual conference in Washington, D.C. in March. It also includes an optional half day intensive.

We've got complete details on this for you. It's really incredible; phenomenal speakers, great content. This organization, this university is just doing phenomenal work in the space of positive psychology, and tickets are on sale now. And now here's the big thing, here's the website address, just go to wellbeing.onmason.com and you can find out all about that.

Okay, are you ready to meet Kristin? You ready to go with this fantastic expert? I am looking for something here on my desk as I'm doing this. I've got all these great facts and things to share with you. I just found what I was looking for, so let's get going. It makes me happy.

Alright, Kristin studied communications as an undergraduate at the University of California at Los Angeles. She did her graduate work at the University of California at Berkeley, earning a Ph.D. Her dissertation research was conducted in Mysore, India, where she examined children's moral reasoning. She then spent two years of post-doctoral study with Dr. Susan Harter at Denver University studying issues of authenticity and self-concept development. Her current position, she is an associate professor at the University of Texas in Austin.

Now, during Kristin's last year of graduate school she became interested in Buddhism and has been practicing meditation in the insight meditation tradition ever since. While doing her post-doctoral work she decided to conduct research on self-compassion, a central construct in Buddhist psychology and one that had not been examined empirically. In addition to her pioneering research into self-compassion she has developed an eight week program to teach self-compassion skills. The program, co-created with her colleague, Chris Germer, at Harvard University is called Mindful Self-Compassion. Her book titled *Self-Compassion* was published by William Morrow.

Kristin, so wonderful to have you here with us on *Wake Up Happy*.

Kristin Thank you. You made me happy just listening to you.

Kym That's great.

Kristin You're exuberant. It's wonderful to be here.

Kym Thank you so much. Tell us, how do you define self-compassion?

Kristin Okay, the short answer to that is treating yourself with the same kindness, care, concern when you're suffering in some way that you would show to a good friend you cared about. But unfortunately, especially when our suffering comes from

feeling inadequate, we made a mistake, or we're feeling we aren't good enough, we don't treat ourselves like we treat a good friend. We are often much more judgmental, much crueler really, to ourselves than anyone else in our life, even than the people we don't like very much. So, self-compassion, we're kind to ourselves, we're supportive, we're caring.

Also really important about self-compassion that makes it different than self-pity is it embraces the shared human condition. In other words, it recognizes that everybody is imperfect, everyone leads an imperfect life.

And of course we know this logically, but if you look closely, what happens illogically, irrationally when we fail, or we get that diagnosis, something happens, we feel something has gone wrong, this should not be happening. It's like we assume that baseline is everything's perfect, and when it's not, when we fail or life goes astray, we feel something has gone wrong, and that creates a real sense of abnormality. It makes us feel isolated from everyone else who are presumably living happy, normal lives. So, with self-compassion when you remember common humanity, when you remember the difficulty, suffering, imperfection that is what makes us human, then really every moment of suffering can become a moment of connection.

And then just one last thing. It's my three component definition. So, you have to bear with me.

Kym Sure.

Kristin The last component, and it's really important, is mindfulness. Mindfulness and self-compassion are very related constructs. And so with mindfulness it means we have to notice when we're suffering, we have to be able to turn toward it and be with it long enough for us to open our hearts to ourselves. And we usually don't like to, we like to ignore things, or run away from them, or fight them. But with self-compassion we're with our pain, we're with the pain of imperfection, we recognize it's human, and we open our hearts to ourselves just like a good friend would. That's self-compassion.

Kym The timeliness of this is pretty incredible because here we are with a brand new year and it's really easy for us to really beat up on ourselves, to feel inadequate, to not feel self-compassion for who we are and what's going on. What would you say to people right now specifically, because everyone processes the beginning of a new year differently?

Kristin Yes, well it's interesting, a lot of times with New Year's resolutions and stuff, oh, I'll get to the gym, or I will do this to somehow be better, to be more perfect, and

self-compassion really isn't about that. It's relating to whoever you are with a great sense of kindness and encouragement and care.

A lot of people, I should just say, confuse self-compassion with self-esteem. Our entire culture is predicated on self-esteem, which means judging yourself positively. I'm thin enough. I'm beautiful enough. I'm successful enough. And that's really the barometer for most of us of our happiness, how positively do we judge ourselves.

We unfortunately see with that, and this happens I think at the end of the year, is our sense of self-worth comes from comparing ourselves to others. Did I do better than others? Or how about this, our self-esteem has to come from being special and above average. Think about that, everyone, every person has to feel special and above average, which is logically impossible. So this need to be special means we're always comparing ourselves to others, and that can lead to all sorts of unpleasant consequences, like narcissism, like prejudice, like bullying, for instance.

Self-compassion is really different. It's not about judging yourself positively. It's not contingent on success. It just means relating to ourselves kindly. And the beautiful thing about that is we can always do it. You may make a New Year's resolution to relate to yourself kindly, you can do that, but you can't make a New

Year's resolution to do things perfectly or to get it right, or whatever the tangible goals we set for ourselves. We can try our best, and we may or may not succeed. But, yes, self-compassion is always available, when we succeed and when we fail, and that's one of its real powers.

Kym So let's look at, right now you're saying to yourself, I want to be more successful in my life. And whatever feelings you may be feeling, alright, I'm going to go and attack this, I'm going to work harder, I'm going to work longer, whatever it may be, but again, to your point, so often we're trying to measure ourselves against someone else, keeping up with the Joneses in some way. Now, with those—

Kristin Or just measuring ourselves by success. In other words, of course we want to do our best. Of course we want to succeed. We care about ourselves. We want to support and encourage ourselves just like a good coach would or a good parent.

But does your sense of self-worth, is it contingent on success, right? And if it's contingent on success, in other words if you succeed you feel good about yourselves, if you fail you feel bad about yourself, it really brings with it a whole host of problems. First of all, you probably will fail at some point, so your self-esteem's going to go out the window. But also when our sense of self-worth is contingent on success what happens is we actually start becoming afraid of failure. We don't really want to try. We don't really want to put ourselves out

there because if we fail the consequences are too devastating if we slam ourselves with self-criticism.

Again, self-compassion, all the research shows that it's a much better motivating force than self-criticism. People think self-criticism motivates us. It doesn't. It makes us afraid of failure. It undermines our self-confidence, because we're also telling ourselves basically how crap we are, right?

Self-compassion, which again, think of the supportive parent, think of the supportive coach, if you have a voice in your head that says, "I believe in you. I know you can do it. I want you to be happy. That's why I want you to try. But if you fail I've still got your back." That type of emotionally supportive mindset is much better for motivation. People are less afraid of failure. When they do fail they're more likely to try again. So, I would say, especially at this time of year, we should really focus on having self-compassion and supporting ourselves and being the best friend to ourselves that we can.

Kym Yes, yes. That's great. That's great. What are some misgivings people have about self-compassion? Tell us about those.

Kristin Well, there are a lot. There's a lot of reasons why people aren't more self-compassionate. The biggest one probably is what I just discussed, people think it

will undermine their motivation, again, which research now, we have a lot of research saying that that's totally false. It helps your motivation. It doesn't undermine it.

But there are also other things. Again, people can view it as self-pity, even though self-compassion isn't "woe is me" it's just saying hey, life is difficult for all of us. That people often feel comfortable [sic] being kind to themselves because they've been told that means it's self-pity, it's feeling sorry for yourself as opposed to others.

People think it's selfish, right? Oh, I can't be kind to myself. That's selfish. Again, the research shows just the opposite. When you're able to meet some of your own needs, when you're able to be kind and supportive to yourself, you make a better relationship partner. People are much more satisfied in romantic relationships with self-compassionate partners, for instance, because when you fill up your own resources you have more to give to others. You're more compassionate to others. You're more empathetic. You have more energy to sustain a relationship. It's definitely not selfish.

Oh, and just one more. This is good for this time of year. People confuse it with self-indulgence. Doesn't self-compassion just mean, oh, I don't really feel like going back to work after the holidays, I think I'm just going to stay home and eat

some more pecan pie, right? Isn't that self-compassionate? But of course again think of a parent, a compassionate mother wouldn't tell a kid, oh yes, fine, skip school, eat that whole tub of Ben & Jerry's, right? A compassionate mother, when you really care about someone you say, "Do your homework. Eat your vegetables." You're going to make boundaries for yourself to support your wellbeing.

And again the research shows it's just the same with self-compassionate people; they're more likely to exercise, they're more likely to visit the doctor, they're more likely to take care of themselves, again, precisely for that reason, because they care. So, there's a lot of misconceptions about self-compassion, because our culture does not promote it. You have to be a bit of a rebel to take this new way of being with yourself.

Kym Okay, so I'm going to ask you, because I want to make sure everyone's getting this, and I want to really get it, and that is, I want to give you a couple of scenarios. Here's one. I'm going to start exercising, and now there are two paths that a person can take, it's the I need to start exercising, I'm out of shape. I don't look good in my clothes, everything's tight. And I want to hear what it sounds like when you are using self-compassion to engage your desire or your understanding around exercise. What might that sound like?

Kristin Okay. Maybe I'll first start with the opposite, which we know which is, oh my God, I'm so fat. I can't believe I ate so much. What a loser. Who's going to want me? I look horrible in my clothes. That's normally the approach we take with ourselves, thinking it's going to motivate us to get to the gym, right? A self-compassionate approach, first of all, it acknowledges the suffering. That's the mindfulness.

So you aren't going to say, oh well, who cares if your clothes are a bit tight. You're going to say, oh, I can see it's—and you speak in the “you” form—but I can see you're really uncomfortable here. You don't feel good in your body. You don't feel good in your clothes, and it's making you feel unhappy. So, again, like a supportive friend, well, why don't we try to go to the gym more often? You'll enjoy it. Let's think of ways that might be more pleasant, like taking a yoga class instead of just going to the gym.

But here's what the self-compassionate voice says: I care about you and I don't want you to suffer, right? [Indiscernible] yourself, I care about myself and I don't want to suffer. I have gained a lot of weight. I might be suffering. And so I care about myself. I don't want to suffer. I want to do something about it, but not because I'm inadequate, not because I'm bad, not because I'm worthless, but because I care about myself and I don't want to suffer. So therefore you're going to use these supportive, encouraging ways with yourself which are going to be much more effective than just saying, “I'm a fat slob. I'm hopeless.”

Kym I love that. I want to just share some of these, what I consider to be tweetable moments. One of them is “I care about myself and I don’t want to suffer.” That’s right, right?

Kristin Yes.

Kym “I care about myself and I don’t want to suffer.” What a great tweetable moment.

Kristin Yes.

Kym Another one you had here—

Kristin Yes, which means you very well might want to change behavior. The behavior’s causing suffering. Change it.

Kym Yes.

Kristin But why? Because I care.

Kym I like this one, too. “Treat yourself with the same care you would show to a friend.” That’s really—

Kristin Absolutely.

Kym That's a nice way you framed that, the whole notion of treat yourself with the same care you would show to a friend. That really does help shape it. Go ahead.

Kristin Yes, and a lot of people say, "I don't know how to speak compassionately to myself. I've been a self-critic all my life, it's what I do." The things we do know how to be kind and compassionate, most of us are kind and compassionate to those people we care about. Let's say you're in a difficult situation; romantic, work, whatever, just say okay, imagine, what would I say to a close friend in the exact same situation? And then say that to yourself, right? We do know what to say. We haven't really given ourselves permission to be kind.

Kym I love that. I love that. Yes, and another one you said, another great tweetable moment, is "When we are kind to ourselves we make better partners, too." I love that.

Kristin Absolutely, better relationships. Think about it, if I expect you to meet all my needs exactly when I want them met, if I can't meet any of my own emotional needs then I'm going to be unhappy with you a lot of the time. I'm going to be

dissatisfied and I'm going to be demanding. But if I can give myself some of the support and care and love I need, I just have more to give to you.

Self-criticism is one of the most self-focused states we can be in, if you think about it. Self-compassion softens the sense of separate self. It's not about me. It's about us. This is the human condition. Can we be present with it? And again, the research shows that really helps relationships.

You can tell I'm a fan, huh? I've devoted my life to this. Well, again, the research base is so large now, it's one of the strongest resilient factors we have at our disposal. That's why I think it's so important for people to learn about it.

Kym Another one I just want to mention is: "Every moment of suffering can be a moment of connection."

Kristin Yes.

Kym Just speak more to that. I love that as a tweetable moment, "Every moment of suffering can be a moment of connection." What's behind that?

Kristin Do I have time to tell a short story?

Kym Yes, yes.

Kristin I don't know how we are on time.

Kym Yes, yes.

Kristin Okay. Well, here's a good example. My son has autism, and luckily I had been practicing for self-compassion for a long time before he got diagnosed. And he was about three years old, and I was taking him to the park and we were playing, and I looked out at the park and I saw all these other little kids playing who were normal and happy, and I started to go down the path of self-pity. You know, poor me, why is my son looking strange, why isn't he interacting?

And then I remembered common humanity, and I thought, wait a second, Kristin, you're assuming that all these other mothers on the playground are going to have these perfectly wonderful happy lives with their children. You don't know what people are going through. One of these kids may grow up to be a drug addict or to have other sorts of serious problems.

Mothering is hard. Mothering is hard for every single mother on this planet. And in that moment my experience changed from feeling isolated to those mothers to feeling really connected. How we're suffering is different, but the fact is this is

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what it means to be a mother. And it completely changed my experience. And so the same with our own suffering, or imperfections, this is the human condition. We can celebrate that. Wouldn't it be boring if we were all perfect?

Kym Yes. Listen, I will tell you that is so important what you just shared, is it's so easy for us, isn't it, to take our experience and to feel that no one else is going through this like I'm going through this. No one else is having a tough time, or their life is different than mine. And to your point, you have no idea what they're going through. You have no idea what the undercurrent is in their life and the challenges that they're facing, so yes, very, very interesting.

Kristin Yes, it's very important.

Kym Tell me, what brought you to this space? This is something you're very passionate about. How did you get to this space, positive psychology and all of this, your doctorate in this, but was there a triggering point in your life where you said I'm going to go this path?

Kristin Well, it was actually during my last year in graduate school. I had gotten a divorce. I had been married previously. And it really did not go well. I was full of shame and self-loathing, a very ugly situation. And then I started learning to meditate, practicing Buddhism, and the woman leading the course talked about

self-compassion. And it really revolutionized my life. It happened much more quickly than I thought it could. And I thought, oh, my goodness I don't have to suffer as much. I can actually be kind and support myself.

And it was so powerful that when I got to UT-Austin I thought, this is such an important idea. And even though it's talked about, to some degree in psychotherapy people like Carl Rogers, also people in the Buddhist tradition, people like Sharon Salzberg, no one had done research on it. And since I had just been working with a self-esteem researcher I thought, shoot, if we can do it for self-esteem we can do it for self-compassion. So, yes, I created a scale to measure it, and it's taken off, so for me I'm just trying to be honest. I'm trying to prove it out. I know what works from my personal experience, but it's just nice to have the research to try to convince other people that it's worth giving it a go.

Kym What do you do for you to wake up happy, for you to have a happy experience through the day? What are some of the things that you bring mindfulness to that helps you to be happy and tap into there?

Kristin The interesting thing about the relationship with self-compassion and happiness is it is strongly related to happiness, but it's not about cultivating positive emotions per se. It's about how we relate to ourselves when we're suffering, right? The thing with happiness, if you're just focused on, okay, think about the

positive, which is very important to think about the positive and be grateful and savor, and all that, absolutely. But the thing is negative does happen. Negative things happen. Pain does happen. When you turn toward that also with an open heart, your definition of happiness changes from positive emotions to the open heart, because the open heart is what really makes us happy.

So, to answer your question, I think I just try to have my heart open, whether that's for good things, whether that's for suffering, whether that's for friends, whether that's for broken friendships, and open-hearted way of relating to yourself and your life. And to me that's the greatest source of happiness.

Kym What do you do when you're having one of those moments, you know, one of those moments when you're not very happy; you're facing your own major challenge or struggle in the moment or whatever. What do you do?

Kristin Well, you know what the answer's going to be.

Kym Yes. Right, right.

Kristin I give myself compassion. No, really, there are various techniques. We have something called the self-compassion break. If anyone's interested you can find some of these exercises and techniques on my website, which basically involves

saying this kind of mantra, "This is a moment of suffering." That's the mindfulness. "Suffering is part of life." That's common humanity. So I'm going to be kind to myself. Just reminding ourselves that this is what we need in this moment.

Another phrase of these three components: kindness, common humanity, mindfulness which I actually like a lot better is loving, connected presence. All day long we can be in a state of loving, connected presence, whether an experience is good or bad we just have to remember. So for me it's almost easier when I'm suffering, because it triggers oh yes, oh that's right. I need a loving, connected presence. And it reminds me. Sometimes it's a little harder when everything's going well, because then you just get into your work and you forget.

Kym Right.

Kristin Yes.

Kym I want everyone to know your website. Let me make sure I have this right, self-compassion.org.

Kristin Yes, but if you Google it you can spell it anyway and it comes up.

Kym Okay, self-compassion, got it. Got it.

Kristin Yes.

Kym And they can connect with you with Facebook with self-compassion, and then at Twitter at self_compassion.

Kristin Yes. My website I really tried to make a free resource. You can test your self-compassion level and free guided meditations exercises, all the PDFs of the research, if people are interested. So, it's a good place.

Kym Yes, that's great. And your book, which is titled *Self-Compassion*, is the book.

Kristin That's right.

Kym Absolutely, I want to get that. Listen, I want to ask you, we're at the end of this and I want you to think about this. I'm going to share a little news with our listeners, but while I'm doing that I want you to think about, Kristin, what you want done today, with what they've learned today what you want them to go out into the world and do today that they can start today. Just hold on to that and just think about that for a second. I'm going to ask all of you if you're not a subscriber to *Live Happy* to please join us, join the happiness movement. And I want you to

know what we're going to do for you, because I have a little thing for all of you that are listening.

Just, first of all, it's really easy to subscribe to us. Just go to livehappy.com. That's livehappy.com. And hit Subscribe, and when you subscribe you're going to receive three free Happiness reports that our editorial team has put together for you, and you're going to get the digital edition of the magazine, so you're going to get both.

And in addition to that, all of our magazine listeners, if you miss *Wake Up Happy*, this is all recorded and we actually have a transcriptionist who is transcribing this entire call, and we also have an artist who's creating an Infographic with quotes and some of the highlights from the call. And it's really great stuff just so you have on the go, on demand when you need it you can tap into Wake Up Happy, because this is not really about waking up in the morning. This is about waking yourself up to happiness and bringing it into your life.

I mentioned earlier about the incredible event that's taking place at George Mason University, what is it called, it's called "Leading to Wellbeing." That is in March. And again, for those of you, if you got on to this call late this is an incredible event that Live Happy is spotlighting, put on by George Mason University. They're hosting their sixth annual conference in the Washington, D.C.

area in March. All the details; the speakers, the breakdown, everything that's happening at this event's incredible, you've got to see this website, just go to wellbeing.onmason.com. That's wellbeing.onmason.com. And you'll get all the information in there. There are fabulous folks there at George Mason University.

The other thing I want you to know is that when you go to livehappy.com anything that you should happen to get from our store, it's 15% off and free shipping, and we've got a special discount code for you, which is "Wake Up Happy." Wake Up Happy to get that 15% off. But to get the free shipping just put in Wake Up Happy, as long as you're spending \$25 or more.

The other thing that Kristin did that I really liked, she gave us a quote, we call it the "Quote of the Day," and her quote was, "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am then I can change." Fantastic, by Carl Rogers, and it's provided to us from Kristin Neff.

So, Kristin, as we bring this call to a close what would be the marching orders to everybody on the phone today of what they could do or start today?

Kristin Yes, it's very easy. Every time today something happens, a positive or negative, but especially something unpleasant, ask yourself, how would I treat a friend right

now? What would I say to my friend to support them, to be there for them? And try saying it to yourself and just see what happens.

Kym That's beautiful. I love that. This helps tremendously, but especially the whole notion of treat yourself with the same care you would show to a friend. That's self-compassion.

Kristin That's right.

Kym That's beautiful. Kristin, thank you so, so much for the gift of your time. We so deeply appreciate it. And we wish you a fantastic day. Remember, join us tomorrow for another edition of *Wake Up Happy*. We will be with Darrin McMahon. Talk to you tomorrow. Everybody, have a fantastic, happy day. Bye-bye for now.

Kristin Bye-bye.