



Transcript: Wake Up Happy with Ken Kragen

HOST

Jeff Crilley

SPEAKER

Ken Kragen

PRESENTATION

Jeff

Good morning and welcome to day five of our *Wake Up Happy* series.

This is number seven in our *Wake Up Happy* series. I am Jeff Crilley, your host for the day. If you don't recognize my voice, it's because you're used to hearing Kym. Kym is off today. But we are so glad that you decided to Wake Up Happy with us today. We can't wait to introduce you to our special guest, Ken Kragen. He's a living legend.

I spent 25 years in TV news, that's my background. I now have a public relations firm. But Kym and I go way back. We're old friends. I was honored to slip into his very large shoes for the day. So we invite you to join the Live Happy community.

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We're on a mission to share with you the secrets and science of lasting, authentic happiness. We're not only a magazine, we're a movement to bring people to happiness and spread it around the world. And I invite you to engage us on social media too. Our Twitter handle is Live Happy, or you can find us on Facebook by searching Live Happy. So, we really want to hear from you. If you hear something that really resonates with you during this broadcast, something that you find interesting, tell us. Post us on your social channels. Be sure and use our hashtag, [wakeuphappy](#).

Now in honor of International Day of Happiness on March 20th, that's next Friday, we're inviting everyone to spread a little joy through happy acts acceptthechallenge@happyacts.org. Do as many happy things as you can from now until March 20th. There are lots of small things you can do that can have a big impact, whatever comes to mind. Holding the door for someone, paying someone's toll behind you, paying for someone's meal in the drive thru behind you; just whatever really touches your heart. And then make sure and share it on your Twitter and Instagram and Facebook using the hashtag [happyacts](#).

Also on this day, we ask you to join us for the world's first ever 24-hour happiness live stream that's coming up. Again, next Friday, March 19th

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through March 20th, we'll present an extraordinary lineup of bestselling authors and experts in the field of positive psychology. Registration is free and you can register today at livehappy.com.

So without further ado, we are going to introduce you to a man that I am so excited to interview. I've actually had the privilege of meeting him when he was in Dallas for the eWomen Conference last year, Ken Kragen.

I'll read a little bit of his bio, but to be honest with you, he's got so many awards and recognitions that this bio doesn't even do him justice. But he's a graduate of the Harvard Business School and his illustrious career spans decades of music and entertainment. He spent many, many successful years managing household names, entertainers like Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie, Trisha Yearwood, Olivia Newton-John, the BeeGees, Burt Reynolds, the Smothers Brothers, many, many others. You may best know him as the creator and organizer of the historic, humanitarian project "We Are The World". He was also the man behind "Hands Across America", Cisco Systems "Net Aid". Amazingly, 95% of the acts that he's managed have become stars and 90% of the projects he's created and spearheaded have achieved tremendous success.

During the past few years, Kragen has devoted an increasing amount of time to teaching, speaking, and writing as well as counseling work for leading corporations and many nonprofit organizations. He's done work for Cisco Systems, New York Life, Eastman Kodak, and the list goes on and on. Kragen is most proud of receiving the United Nations Peace Medal for the creation of "Hands Across America" and "We Are The World", making him one of the most renowned people on the planet to join us this morning. So Ken, we can't thank you enough for giving up some of your day. I know you're on the west coast so this was kind of early for you.

Ken Yes, just because of the time change, but it's a pleasure to be on with you and to talk about this particular subject—

Jeff Thank you.

Ken —because I think it's really important.

Jeff Well, when we're talking to somebody who has experienced as many things as you've experienced; talk about with the secret to your happiness. Do you find, does happiness go in waves or are you generally happy when you wake up in the morning?

Ken

You know, I get up every morning and kind of kiss the ground and thank God for the tremendous life I have had and am having. You know, it's such a small percentage of us that get to live in this terrific country and get to experience the kind of things that I seem to be able to do every day.

But I think the key is my philosophy that everything in life happens for a good reason. It isn't necessarily a religious one. It's a strange one where it just comes from a belief that if you take everything that happens in your life, if you're optimistic about it, positive, even the negative things that happen, all contain opportunities that everything that happens in your life, happens for a good reason.

So, you know, in the management days, if a client left me I always felt like, gee, I've got more time. I can do other things. I can spend more time with my family. I don't have to worry about the problems that client had and a better thing is going to come along. A bigger client, a better situation is going to happen. And sure enough, when you go into the situations thinking that positive way, you almost seem to make it happen that way. At the very least you find the positive in it, and it can be tragedy.

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I mean I lost a client, Harry Chapin, to a car accident in 1981 on the freeway in New York, expressway of New York, Long Island Freeway, I think. And you know that was a terrible tragedy. But in terms of the work that Harry was trying to accomplish in the areas of hunger and homelessness, a much bigger client, Kenny Rogers, picked up the torch that had fallen with Harry, carried it forward in a more dramatic way and it ended up being "We Are The World", "Hands Across America", "Net Aid", all of those big projects.

And I wouldn't say that we certainly wished Harry had lived to see all that because he was a tremendous inspiration. But even out of that horrible negative something positive came. Much like it did for Mothers Against Drunk Driving, who you know the worst loss in the world lost their child and yet they formed an organization that saved millions of lives.

Jeff Right.

Ken I can go on and on with a list of things that have come from the negative.

Jeff Right.

Ken By the way, I don't know if you know this yet. The entire home shopping industry started because an advertiser on a radio station down in Florida didn't pay his bills.

Jeff Is that right.

Ken And, yes. And Bud Paxson, you know, the Pax network guy. Bud Paxson at the time, was the manager of that station. He took the product, which was little can openers, and he started selling them on the air because he hadn't gotten paid. He took a few hundred of the product and sold them in an hour. And a light bulb went off and he went, "Oh my gosh, we can make more money for the station selling the product than we can getting the advertiser."

So he started taking in products, selling it on the air—on radio now, couldn't even see it. And then they went to television and the entire home shopping industry is built out of a negative.

Jeff Wow. So if I'm hearing you right, let's suppose, you know, you're stuck in traffic. You're running late. I know all of us get kind of caught up in that little stress of day to day life. Are you saying that in a way, everything's happening for a reason, so kind of look for the miracle of that moment?

Ken Yes, I mean this is terrible to say but I mean I kind of, if I get a delay, I think, gee that was meant to be. It probably saved me from an accident somewhere. It saved me from being whatever. In other words, I always view everything as happening for a good reason and then it doesn't stress you as much.

Jeff Right.

Ken You know, I am a person who likes to be on time. On the other hand, if I'm not for some reason, I don't view it as a catastrophe. Try and put it in the context of your whole life.

Jeff Right.

Ken You know, really and truly, I do that with my wife all the time. She'll get down about something and I'll say, "Okay, now let's take a look at the total perspective. You, you're healthy. Your daughter is currently doing phenomenally well. You know, your life is good. I love you. Now let's, you know, forget that stuff. Let's concentrate on the positive." And—

Jeff

You know, I have a philosophy and I want to share it with you and just get your feedback. You know, not that I've got it figured out. I don't know that anybody does. But I kind of have this idea that if I'm blessed enough to go to heaven and I'm shown the movie of my life, I am probably going to be shown clips that I didn't anticipate.

We make things out of our own life very important. But something tells me, it's those little moments when you said a kind word to a waiter and that kept him from, you know, committing suicide. These little moments, I kind of feel like, Ken, I mean, in your life, you've accomplished so much. But when you get to the pearly gates, I think God's going to show you some things that you didn't anticipate. Like, "You don't remember this moment, Ken, but that stranger that you talked to that day, that was when I was most proud of you." What are your thoughts?

Ken

Let me give you an example from the eWoman Network conference which I've now spoken at four times, you know, four years in a row. I, one of the things I talk about is that the cheapest and easiest and best thing you can give to anybody is appreciation. And I talk about telling that waiter or waitress that's been waiting on you what a good job they're doing. It's more important even than the tip that you can make their day

by saying, "My gosh, you're just sensational at what you do." And you can do that in any field or area.

Well, I told that particular story and the next day a woman stood up actually at the conference and talked about how right after that she went into the restroom there in the hotel and a woman was cleaning. She was sweeping the floor and cleaning the mirrors. And she told the woman how much she appreciated the fact that the woman kept that bathroom so spotlessly clean and what a wonderful job she was doing. And the woman lit up like a candle. I mean, she just lit up and thought I bet nobody has ever done that.

Jeff

Wow.

Ken

Nobody's ever done that. And the little things that don't even, just appreciation or small gifts. I mean I teach a class at UCLA, quite a big class, about 140 students, on something called [indiscernible] strategies. And the other day one of my students was saying I had set him up for a meeting with a very, very important guy named Kevin Wall, who produces some of the biggest events in the world. And he couldn't get the meeting date set. They kept giving him excuses and I said, "Well, is his assistant treating you well?" And he said, "Absolutely. She's been very

nice, but she just keeps running into problems and I haven't got a meeting." I said, "Why don't you just send her just an inexpensive thing of flowers with a thank you note for all the efforts she's making on your behalf."

He called me yesterday and said, "You know, it worked totally. She called me up and said, 'Most people are giving me a bad time because they can't get together with him. And you send me flowers. It's so wonderful. We're setting a meeting. Here's the date.'"

Jeff Wow. Tell me how good are you at living in the moment? I know, we're supposed to, but it's so easy to live in the future. You know, when I get this opportunity then I'll be happy and it seems like the goal line keeps moving. How are you able to stay present and appreciate the now?

Ken Well, one thing is I try to do things that I really enjoy and I really find fun. But I think none of us are perfect at that. I mean, I think back to the recording night of "We Are The World" and wish that I was realizing while it was going on how significant it would be, both in the world in general and in my life. I can remember lots of anecdotes and moments from that, but it's a great lesson to me that you have to really appreciate every

moment in your life. You really never know the significance of the impact that it's going to have.

And, you know, we just sent our daughter off on a fantastic expedition to Antarctica where she's been picked as the cinematographer for it. And you spend those moments with her and you think, nothing ever happens here because it's quite an adventure.

But you have to appreciate every single moment in your life, I think. Life's just too short. I think that's one you asked me in the beginning; what philosophy drives you. And a lot of it is understanding that you know you've got this one life to live and you want to enjoy every moment of it and appreciate every moment of it.

Jeff Right. And maybe enjoy the chapter of the book that you're living while you're in it. We would never grab a book and then say, "Well, I'm not going to read chapter four, five and six. I'm just going to skip, right?" So we've got to enjoy the chapter that we're living while we're living it, right?

Ken Yes. Absolutely. We just lost a relative, very close. My brother-in-law passed away, and somebody wrote me a note that I thought was significant. They said, "Morality sucks but it sure makes life precious."

Jeff Wow.

Ken And you know, I said morality, mortality is the word. "Mortality sucks but it sure makes life precious." And I try to hang on to that thought because I want to make every moment in my life meaningful and of value, but I want to have a good time.

Jeff Right. Right.

Ken People say, "What's the most important thing to you when you take on a client or a project or anything?" I said, "That I think I'm gonna have fun."

Jeff Right.

Ken And I'm going to be excited about it. You know if I'm excited about something it's amazing the difference I can make.

Jeff Right.

Ken You know, because I go enthusiastically to people and talk about it, in fact I embarrass my wife and daughter a lot because I talk to everybody

about it. I'm on a plane, I talk to somebody. We're in a restaurant, I say,
"Oh yeah, well, you know, I'm working on—"

Jeff That's awesome. You've worked with so many big acts, let me ask you this. Do you think we're caught up, all of us I think through the media, caught up with fame and fortune? It's all about fame and fortune. I have a theory that when Paul and Ringo get together they don't talk about Beatlemania. They're talking about before they were famous. They're talking about when they were in Liverpool and no one knew them.

You've worked with so many incredible artists, is that true? Do many of them miss the days when nobody knew them?

Ken Well, first you've got to understand they're people. They're not larger than life, although occasionally in their heads they may be on occasion. And you have to have a lot of ego to do that kind of thing, generally. But you know, I always tell my clients when I was managing, you know, "Be careful what you wish for; you may get it."

Because that kind of celebrity and success and I've actually been there personally at times, certainly during the "We Are The World" and "Hands Across America" period, that kind of celebrity is two edged.

On the one hand, it's fun to be recognized. It's nice that people do a lot of good things for you. A friend of mine said, "You know, once you can afford everything then they give it to you free." But the fact of the matter is that it's two edged and it wears on you and some artists can handle that and some, unfortunately, can't, which you've seen with a variety of people from most recently, people like Robin Williams, [indiscernible], Kurt Cobain and so many others that have just escaped into drugs or, unfortunately, in some cases have taken their own lives.

When a client comes to me, in the management days, I sent him home and I said, "Look. Let's figure out what is important to your life. I want you to make a list of the priorities in your life. What things give you the most pleasure, the most fulfillment, the most enjoyment? What do you have the most passion for? List that. Prioritize it. On the other side, list the negatives. What are your dislikes, what are the list of things that you'd like to minimize in your life? Let's set career goals based on your career servicing your life."

It's the first thing I tell my students at UCLA. Your career's not your life. Your career is one of the tools for the best life possible. So let's find a career for you that services your life goals.

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Jeff Right.

Ken And it's amazing, I teach that to young managers because it's an incredible hook to get clients in because managers in general never go to an artist and say, "Let me talk about your life." They're talking about your career. I'd turn that around and say, "We've got to figure out your life first, then we'll deal with your career."

Jeff I also think that there's, there are these bubbles that we find ourselves trapped in and I think about the Hollywood bubble. You may have an actor like a Tom Hanks. He should be on top of the world. He's arguably one of the best actors on the planet. But if he really started to look back over his career and start to stress, he would say, "Gosh, I haven't won an Oscar in 20 years. Am I washed up?" And so you never win that game if you're judging your happiness based on some award or some dollar in your check. Would you agree?

Ken Yes. Well, in the first place you've picked somebody I'm quite friendly with, Tom Hanks. In fact I may have to call his office today, and you've also picked one of the more positive actors there is. I haven't spent enough intimate personal time with Tom to know if he has self doubts or

problems at all that I'm unaware of. But certainly, outwardly, and in every personal contact I've ever had with him, he's one of the nicest, most together, most seemingly adjusted people around. And that's unusual for a great acting talent.

It's a given, unfortunately, in the creative part of our industry, the actors, the musicians, the directors and other, that there is great underlying insecurity which seems to come from a fear you'll be found out. People will realize I'm not really the big deal that everybody says I am, kind of thing. There's almost a guilt about it. And some actors and some musicians are extremely able to not feel that way, but a majority, there's a certain amount of drive and even unhappiness that goes with extreme levels of creativity.

Jeff Among the legendary artists you've worked with, who was the happiest and why would you say they were so happy?

Ken Well, it's interesting. I'd probably pick Kenny Rogers because for most of his life, and I'm not as sure now because we've been separated, although we do talk periodically for about ten years. But Kenny Rogers is the most even person I know. The amazing thing about Kenny's approach, and it was built in to his personality, was he would never get terribly high when

things went great and he would never get terribly low when things didn't go good. He stayed on this middle even ground.

If you drew a line of his personality, it would have been a flat line. But thank God his heart didn't have a flat line. But he didn't ever outwardly get terribly excited when big things happen or terribly down when they didn't. And had a great philosophy about it. I think also part of what people love about Kenny was his self-deprecating humor. He always made big fun of himself and had fun with it, enjoy it. I think he had one of the best attitudes really of any of the people I know.

Lionel Richie, on the other hand, who outwardly is one of the greatest people you'd ever want to meet. He'll take time with you. It's frustrating to try to walk him through a crowd because you'll never get through it because he'll stop and talk to everybody. But Lionel didn't like to be in public, you know. Here he is a huge entertainer. Lionel really would prefer, I mean he would sort of do an Elvis Presley kind of thing and not be out where you could see him.

I think that's changed some as he's aged, but he got this huge success but it didn't particularly serve his life. He would rather be a creative artist

on his own, you know, in his own situation. And yet, if you encountered him, he was the most charming guy in the world. He still is.

Jeff Right. You know I consider we're living in this age where the selfie, Facebook, we've all become the stars of our own movies. But it sounds like the people you've described are all other centered. And I would put you in there too, Ken. I mean, when we met in Dallas, you were interested in me and I was flattered that somebody as well known as you would take an interest in my life. So, do you think that's part of the secret of happiness, is to be other centered?

Ken Yes, I think it is. You know, I've read a bunch of books on networking because it's one of the things I teach and the book I wrote was called, "Life is a Contact Sport." And the same thing always comes up that the central theme of networking, again I teach this to my UCLA class, is what can I do for you? It's not what can you do for me?

If you honestly approach the situation with how can I be helpful to this person or how can I be helpful to this organization or situation, it comes back. I mean it just comes back to you. And certainly the most dramatic in my life is the incredible difference in my life doing "We Are The

World", "Hands Across America", Live Aid, Clinton's Inauguration, stuff like that I did, came back to me.

I did those things at tremendous financial cost, huge time cost. Granted, that I loved doing them, they were incredible events. But what came back to me in my life was spectacular. But I never approached it with that idea in mind. And today, just the small things I do, I mean, you know, exciting thing to me in the class I teach at UCLA is almost every student comes and says, "That was the most fun I ever had in class. The best class I ever took and it changed my life." Well, if you've got 140 students and 80 or 90 of them tell you that.

I wrote a letter to a friend at the university yesterday and said, "Look at these emails. What do I do with this? If I'm having that impact, how can I have more of it? How can I reach more people?" You know, it's kind of the best thing in life to get that kind of feedback. To know that you're making a—

Jeff

How do you keep your humility, because I think some people can instantly get caught up in it and others are unaffected by it. How do you stay humble?

Ken I don't know where it's come from, but I'm embarrassed. When I listen to you read my resume, it does not sound like me. I swear it's the weirdest thing in the world but I love it. I'm very proud of the fact that I don't feel comfortable being any kind of big deal. In fact, it's a bit of a gimmick but I usually open, if I have to give my credits, maybe for credibility sake on a call or something, I'll always preface it by saying, "I'm no big deal, but I've fortunately been able to be in the right place at the right time to do some pretty big things."

And it is truly the way I feel. I mean, I'm not making that up. Somebody may think, oh, that's a bunch of b.s., but it's the way I feel. And I hope I never lose it. I guess I'm at the age where I probably won't because it's much more valuable and important to do it that way and live that way.

Jeff How much of it, Ken, has to do with how you were raised? I mean you talked about Tom Hanks being humble and interested in other people. Does it come from mom and dad? Or where does that come from?

Ken Absolutely. I would have probably said that if you didn't bring it up because my parents were the most giving. In fact, I unfortunately, my mother was so giving to others that she started crying one day when I told her, "Mommy, sometime you gotta think about yourself and not just

Jeff

Wow.

Ken

"Don't you feel good that we were able to make their day, so to speak?"

I think live by example. That's the best way for parenting, in my opinion.

I know my wife and I, my daughter has a wonderful boyfriend that we adore. Hope it becomes more than just that, and a life together. And my wife and I were walking up the stairs the other day after spending time with him and I said, "Don't you feel really good about the judgment we seem to have passed on to our daughter about the people that she associates with?" I don't know how we did it exactly, but I guess by example.

Jeff

That's beautiful, Ken. Unfortunately, we're out of time. This was a really fast half hour. We could have talked all day. You're just an amazing guy and thank you for sharing your secrets to happiness with our audience.

Ken

Alright. Thank you very much, Jeff.

Jeff

Okay. Well that was an amazing interview and I just want to say before we leave you that the Live Happy movement is going to have a booth at an upcoming event here that you want to know about it.

George Mason University is hosting its sixth annual conference in Washington, D.C. That's March 26th and 27th we're going to have a booth. So please stop by and show us your smile. And again, there are more tips and more information than you can possibly use at livehappy.com.

It has been my privilege to join you this morning and help you, hopefully, make your day a little happier. Thanks once again. This is Jeff Crilley.