

EPISODE 179

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 179 of Live Happy Now. This is your host Paula Felps and today we have a special treat for you. Live happy CEO, Deborah Heisz, joins us to talk with author and happiness researcher, Talben Shahar, who tells us about some very important lessons he learned from his barber.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:21.3] DH: I am thrilled to have on today's Live Happy Now, one of our favorite people, one of the thought leaders in the happiness space. He's someone we've talked to before. I've read his books, he's really been an inspiration to many people around the world on their happiness journeys. But we have Talben Shahar who taught the historically largest course at Harvard, which was called *Positive Psychology*, and the third largest, *The Psychology of Leadership*, teaching more than 1,400 students per semester, which is approximately 20% of all Harvard graduates.

So if you think about this, Tal has had an influence on 20% of Harvard graduates for the time period he was there, which is phenomenal because hopefully he created a lot more happy Harvard graduates and happy Ivy League students that we typically see. In addition, he's got his own BA and PhD from Harvard and for the last 15 years, has been teaching leadership, happiness, and mindfulness to audiences all over the world. He is the author of five books including the international bestsellers, *Happier* and *Being Happy*, which if you haven't read, you need to check out and he's here with us today to talk about his latest book, *Short Cuts to Happiness: Life-Changing Lessons from My Barber*.

Welcome to the show, Tal.

[0:01:32.7] TS: Thank you very much, great to be back.

[0:01:36.0] DH: So the obvious question is, how is someone with a PhD from Harvard who has taught the largest course on happiness ever, how does a person like that find life-changing lessons on happiness from their barber?

[0:01:49.7] TS: Yeah, I must admit, it came as a surprise to me. But let me share with you the minute I decided, you know, "There's a book in this." I went for a haircut, it was just before a long trip, I didn't feel like getting on a plane, I was exhausted, not in a great mood but I needed a haircut. So you know, basic needs need to be fulfilled. So I went to the barber and I sat down and I got up to 20 minutes, feeling so much better and it cost me \$18, plus I got a free haircut.

I was walking home, you know, was just around the corner, I was walking home and I said, "I've got to write about this guy because he has such, you know, pearls of wisdom that I want to share with others," and I started doing it so each so each time I went and I started going more and more frequently, sometimes dragging my kids for a haircut, even if they didn't need it but it was for a cause.

I started to going to him more often and extracting these pearls and writing about them and it just evolved from there. It was two years to the day actually before I told him that I was writing a book about him, asked for his permission to publish it and I must say, very special experience for me, very different from what I was used to. You know, sitting in lecture halls and reading Aristotle or Seligman.

[0:03:11.2] DH: How did Avi, which is the name of the Barber, how did Avi react when you told him you wanted to write this book?

[0:03:16.9] TS: I didn't tell him that I wanted to write this book, I told him that I wrote this book. I didn't, for two years, no one but my wife knew that I was actually working on this because I didn't want to take away the spontaneity and the authenticity of his words.

He didn't know and when he did hear, he was understandably shocked but once he recovered from the initial shock, was also very happy, very pleased.

[0:03:44.2] DH: What are some of the examples, you know, obviously, I flipped through the book, it's tremendously organized in the sense that it's something that you can pick up and put

down. I don't need to sit down and read it cover to cover but it's great to sit down and you know, just read a couple of short pages on a specific topic and it's fascinating to me.

But, as opposed to being fascinating to me, what are your favorite stories? What is your favorite little tidbit or snippet within this book?

[0:04:09.0] TS: Yeah, I'll just share a couple and the reason why, you know, it can be read just you know, one short chapter at a time is because each chapter basically describes one encounter. So they are self-contained. But let me give you an example. You know, we were just chatting about a movie that he recommended, we had a really good conversation there and as I walked out, he said, "This was great! Tal, I love you."

Now, I felt very uncomfortable when he said that and I think, I've said I love you to a handful of people, you know, my family and very few other and here is a person who I didn't know that well, I had a haircut once a month or you know, once every three weeks but he's telling me, "I love you." I walked off and I thought about love and I thought back to Barbara Fredrickson's work who wrote a book called *Love 2.0*.

She basically helped to redefine the concept of love and what she claims is that you experience love when you experience positivity resonance, these are her words and positivity resonance means, essentially, when you connect to someone. For example, if I look on the street and there is another person walking and we both see a little puppy. We look at the puppy and we look at one another and we smile at one another, that's positivity resonance. So you connect over a positive emotion with someone else and what she shows and shows it physiologically is that this is the experience of love. This is the manifestation of love.

In other words, what she's doing is she's lowering the bar for our experience of love and I was thinking about Avi, you know, we certainly experienced positivity resonance when we were talking about that film and I thought, "You know, maybe I understand love better than I do. Maybe we don't need to wait for an extraordinary life-changing experience to label it as love."

Now, does that cheapen the emotion of love? I don't think so because there can be romantic love and there can be love among friends and I must say, ever since then, I've been a lot more liberal about not giving myself the permission to experience and express love.

This is just one small – well, big example or big difference that he made in my life and my rethinking. Even though I knew the research and positivity resonance, I didn't encounter it as directly as I did with Avi. He is also a very wise business man and I often ask him, "So why don't you open other barber shops?" He could start a chain, he could run a large operation. He said that he has thought about it a few times and maybe at some point, he'll do it but the most important thing for him was the personal connection with people.

He said, this is what provides him the meaning in his life. You know, it's a thought, it's a way of life that he's so missing from our world because if we have an opportunity for growth, for development, for financial growth, we very often take it not thinking about the consequences. Now, if the consequences are being away from people, then maybe it's not a step worth taking.

If it's losing touch with the most important things in life, maybe it's a step not worth taking and you know, it really inspired me think about, "Okay, what are the most important things in my life? What are the things that provide me with meaning, what are my equivalence of you know, him, standing there for eight hours a day and talking to people and being at, you know, this is his strength, it's his passion? You know, what are my strength and my passions, independent of the external benefits thereof?"

[0:08:01.0] DH: So, can you describe atmospherically what it's like? Because obviously, you had a connection with this barber but also, just from the experience you just described, him taking the other patron out to talk to him and make his point?

What is this barber shop look like? How many people are there, what's the atmosphere that you're experiencing when you go in for this?

[0:08:20.3] TS: Yeah, you know, so I thought about it a lot, you know? What's unique about it and then I thought back to research by one of my ex-colleagues, Amy Edmonson, she is now teaching at Harvard Business School and her idea of psychological safety. Psychological safety is the feeling that we can speak out that we can take risks that failure is okay and when there is psychological safety, there is a great deal of creativity, when there's psychological safety, there is high levels off team performance, individual performance, so it's a great thing.

Psychological safety also leads to higher levels of wellbeing and this is what people experience in Avi's Salon. You can just be yourself, you don't have to be, you don't have to prove yourself, it's okay if you say things which are not to the point, which are not smart, it's okay if you don't say anything as well, you know? Sometimes there will just be silence there, permission to be quiet and in that atmosphere of psychological safety, it's a great environment for personal and group development.

[0:09:24.2] DH: Is this — in all sorts of American culture, there is an element of, you know, from the 1940's forward and I realized that this is a barber shop that's not in the United States, it's in Israel. But that typical, "Hey, everybody," you see the same people there all the time, is it really a community gathering place as well as a place that you go to get your haircut? Or is it simply that I don't know how to describe it or is it simply that he's such a charismatic character that the people who are there are involved in discussions and activities in an open place, or pretty much a private congregation between you and your barber? I'm just curious whether it relates to something that many people are experiencing here.

[0:10:03.1] TS: I absolutely think it is and I'll extend that even further. I don't just think it's in the barber shop. I think the similar experiences, we have in a taxi. I think we have similar experiences in cafes and in some stores and I think the main element there is, yes you need a person who sort of will orchestrate or will facilitate in a sense as Avi did but I think the most important thing is that people there are, I mean it in the positive sense of the word. People there are stuck.

[0:10:35.7] DH: Yeah.

[0:10:37.4] TS: We're just present, we're there and in today's world, especially, these experiences are rare because we're constantly running around. Henry David Thorough once said, "Life is too short to be in a hurry." It's true and unfortunately in today's world, we're always in a hurry. But when we go to the barber, we're not, you know, we're just letting go and we are there, whether it's for our 20 minutes or for much longer than that, you know we are just stuck there and it is a wonderful opportunity to be stuck together and to interact.

You know, the same in the taxi. You know you are on your way back from the airport and you are just there and if you just – and again this is one of the most important lessons that I learned,

use that time to connect and even though you'll never see the taxi driver again, it's an opportunity. You may want to be just silent and quiet and meditate. That's fine, but sometimes you may want to connect and all of these opportunities are what I've come to call islands of sanity in our crazy busy world.

[0:11:37.7] DH: I love that. Where can people pick up the book?

[0:11:41.9] TS: Yeah, so it will be in the stores starting any day now and either on Amazon and hopefully in the bookstore next to your barbershop.

[0:11:53.3] DH: And so last thing I want to ask is, what did you learn about yourself by spending so much time at Avi's shops?

[0:11:58.9] TS: I think that my most important lesson is that A, it reinforced my understanding of my level of learning. So my top strength, which we talked about, the values in action, my top strength is love or learning but it expanded my love of learning from books and university classrooms to every day experiences. So I am a lot more mindful conscious now of having conversations in different places and coming in with what David Cooper Rudder talks about, with an appreciative eye or an appreciative ear of how much I can learn. I mean I learned so much from my conversations with Avi and I ain't stopping, to continue to learn from him and from others. So this has been so refreshing and such a gift.

[0:12:48.1] DH: Well thank you for sharing today Tal, it has been a joy having you on the show again. Personally, I read a lot of the books that we talk about on the show. I'd like to say I read all of them, but as many as we get in I at least skim all of them. But I have to tell everybody this is one of my favorites because it is easy to digest. It is a great piece that will just make me stop and think and if you are not stopping and having those conversations with every day people or you are not making the room to interact with people on a daily basis and learn more, it will make you think twice about that and really get you started doing it. Because to me my favorite kind of book is something where I can pick up and spend five minutes in it and learn something every day. You can spend five minutes in this book at a time and still get something out of every day. So I am going to recommend all of our listeners to take time to pick it up and check it out and Tal, thanks for being with us today.

[0:13:40.4] TS: Thank you very much and thank you for the amazing things that you do at Live Happy.

[0:13:44.3] DH: Well, we have a great time. You know we're living happy, so to speak. Thank you so much.

[0:13:50.8] TS: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:13:55.6] PF: That was Talben Shahar talking with Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz about his latest book, *Shortcuts to Happiness: Life-Changing Lessons from My Barber*. Visit us at Live Happy now to find out more about Tal and his book and now, in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Live Happy's Donna Stokes talks with breast cancer survivor, Dana. Dana is founder of AnaOno, a lingerie company that caters to women who have had reconstruction surgery following breast cancer. She is also featured in the article, *Finding Joy Again*, in this issue of Live Happy Magazine that's on newsstands now.

Let's listen in as Dana talks about how her own experience with breast cancer opened the door to helping other cancer survivors.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:14:36.4] DS: What do you wish the world knew about breast cancer that isn't often talked about?

[0:14:42.0] DD: You know there was a lot I wish the world knew about breast cancer, but I think the biggest piece to take home is that breast cancer isn't just during the month of October. It is a yearlong struggle for many women and men and many families and just keep in mind that Breast Cancer Awareness Month is an incredible time to take note of your health and ways to help other men and women that have breast cancer and it is an all year long struggle for us.

[0:15:12.3] DS: From your experience, what made you decide to start a business after your cancer diagnosis?

[0:15:17.4] DD: I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010. I was 27 years old and I also was a fashion designer. So when I went through the cancer process and went through chemo and did all of my medications and all of my infusions, after my mastectomy I realized that my body was just completely different than it had been before cancer and I couldn't find any traditional bras to wear in the market place and what was available for other mastectomy patients was just really awful.

There were utilitarian and boring and it just made me feel like I didn't belong. So I took my fashion background and applied it to the unique needs I now had and AnaOno was born from that.

[0:16:02.8] DS: That is such an amazing story to turn your talents and your experience with something that could have put really your career on hold to just bring that all together and move forward with it. It's just so inspiring and I really, really love your story.

[0:16:17.0] DD: Thank you for that. It's been a long one but one I keep living day by day.

[0:16:22.6] DS: Why is finding a bra after breast cancer difficult, more difficult than just for every day shopping?

[0:16:31.2] DD: Well you know if you are undergoing a lumpectomy treatment where they only remove partial pieces of your breast tissue, you may have a sensitive scar in a place where maybe an underwire hits. Or you might even experience that a half a cup size to a full cup size different than your natural or unaffected breast and then there is the more aggressive treatment of the more aggressive therapies, which is the mastectomy, which removes all of the breast tissue.

So now you are talking about having a body that used to have a breast that may have still one on the other side and there is nothing there anymore. You know a big decision that people can make these days is you can choose or opt to reconstruct the breast that used to be there or you could live without your breast. You know, it is totally up to you. It is totally what path of treatment you want to go through and how you feel about your body.

And when your breast become reconstructed, they become very rigid and they are different than the natural breast tissue. So if you are looking to shop a molded cup or an underwire bra or something that you used to wear, it's just going to fit you very awkwardly and it is going to be likely be uncomfortable. You are going to really have to try to find a lot of different styles and a lot of different bras and really at the end of the day, you are most comfortable in a sports bra but you know sports bras aren't attractive for every day wear.

You know they are great when you go to the gym. I mean, that's not so great when you are going out with your girlfriends or you are going out to dinner with somebody that you love or care about. So I just really want to make sure that every facet of life was covered with something that is comfortable but beautiful at the same time and I didn't want to have to compromise one for the other and I don't think anybody should. So that's really what the solution is that we provide to women that have breast surgery and breast cancer that every bra is designed with the intent to fit their new body.

[0:18:21.4] DS: That's wonderful and I am sure you've learned a lot over the years in what people need and have had customers with special requests. What sort of changes have you made since you started the company? How has it grown?

[0:18:35.2] DD: Wow, you are so right. We have grown so much since we launched and really where that comes from is from our customers sharing their unique perspective, their unique experiences and we have women that comes to us that have no breasts at all but want a sexy bra that allows them to feel good about themselves and beautiful and maybe there is a peak of a black lace that flips out from underneath the dress or sort of whatever that confidence building pieces to you.

I mean, we have a growing audience now of women that don't necessarily feel like they need to replace their breasts, whether that be with a breast form or with breast reconstruction and just because you don't need a bra, doesn't mean that you don't want one, right?

[0:19:19.9] DD: Right.

[0:19:20.5] DS: So we just try to take all of these different, unique circumstances and perspective and apply different thoughts and ideas to them so that way, whoever you are, you know, we have a really beautiful solution to help you feel good and confident and empowered.

[0:19:35.8] DD: Thank you again so much, Dana. You have an amazing story and an amazing product and it's just, it's really inspiring to talk to you.

[0:19:44.2] DS: Well, thank you to Live Happy for helping us spread our message and our mission to your listeners and we're so honored to be a part of the family now, so thank you.

[OUTRO]

[0:19:54.1] PF: That's all for this episode of Live Happy Now. Be sure and visit us at livehappynow.com to learn more about Talben Shahaar and Dana Donofree, and if you go to AnaOno.com, you can type in "Live Happy" at checkout and get a 20% discount. If you like what you've heard here today and want to hear more, go to Apple podcasts, or wherever you get your favorite podcast, search for Live Happy Now and subscribe today so you'll never miss an episode.

That's all we have for today so please join us back here next week and until then, this is Paula Felps reminding you to make everyday a happy one.

[END]