

EPISODE 187**[INTRODUCTION]**

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to episode 187 of Live Happy Now. This is your host Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. As the new year approaches, our thoughts are starting to turn to how we want to improve our lives over the next 12 months. This week, we're talking with Megan McDonough of the Wholebeing Institute, who explains how the principles of SPIRE can help us live with greater ease and develop new skills that lead to greater creativity, better health, and happier living. Then, she'll explain how we can learn those new skills as we move in to the new year.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:33.4] PF: Well Megan, welcome to the show. I know you've been a guest before and I'm really excited to have you here today and talk about Wholebeing and happiness.

[0:00:42.3] MM: My pleasure, I'm so glad to be here with you Paula, thanks for asking me.

[0:00:46.1] PF: Absolutely. I saw that you had this Wholebeing Happiness course and it just seemed like such a great thing, something our listeners would love to learn more about. So I do want to have you talk about that, but instead of putting the cart before the horse, I wanted to – before we start talking about that, can you explain to us what you mean by “wholebeing”.

[0:01:04.6] MM: Yeah. That word, wholebeing is a mashup of two words. Whole person, and wellbeing, wholebeing. So here's the deal: you know, most of the time, when we think about human flourishing, we may look at say one or two things. Either eat well and exercise or perhaps in positive psychology, looking at positive emotions. But in wholebeing, it really asks a question, what are the holistic or multidimensional ways in which we think of human flourishing? That indeed is what we mean by wholebeing, that bigger view.

[0:01:44.5] PF: I love that concept because I do think that too oftentimes, we compartmentalize different areas of our lives and your approach really brings it all together and to me, I think that's the only way that we can do this, isn't it?

[0:01:58.2] MM: Well I think so. Because these human species, we do love to compartmentalize everything. What is the thinking brain versus what is the feeling heart versus what is the moving body? Well, we're not chopped up into this little division are we? If you really look at how life is lived, it really is a whole person experience but what we tend to do cognitively is take this whole person experience and break it into little compartments and we do that not so we can fragment ourselves but so that we can understand it better and understand it more deeply.

So we do it with all good intentions but we end up sort of taking one or two dimensions and thinking, "Ah, that has to be the magic bullet or that has the answer." So we try and look at this thing called human flourishing in a very limited way and what we think about for a wholebeing is, how do we actually see all the parts of ourselves in a way that allows us to not only describe what's happening in our life but also prescribe how to increase our wellbeing.

Maybe I should be pragmatic and actually give you an example of this so that people understand. Is this a philosophy class or does this really mean something? Let me get concrete. We use a model in Wholebeing, which is called the SPIRE Model. SPIRE, which is S for spiritual meaning and mindfulness, being able to see the bigger picture of our life. Physical meaning, are we eating and taking care of our body and exercising and are we moving in a way that heads us towards our best?

Intellectual, meaning are we cultivating curiosity and things that we're interested in every day? Relational, the R in SPIRE is how are we in relationship with ourselves, cultivating self-compassion and also being in relationship with others? Last but certainly not least, E in SPIRE is raising up our positive emotions and actually, dealing with the difficulties and building resiliency when a difficult emotions arise.

So that's SPIRE, and what it really all points to Paula is this idea that we can head towards our ideal self in every day. So that every day becomes a way of practicing the wholebeing approach of SPIRE, each and every day.

[0:04:31.6] PF: I love the SPIRE model and I've seen you speak on that before and I wondered, is there one area where we tend to ignore more than the others, or is it different for every person?

[0:04:43.1] MM: What a great question. So we do what's called a SPIRE check in and we'll give people these free resources in your podcast, which is a way that people can just check in for themselves, "Do I have a go to tendency for wellbeing? Is it to go running in a physical wellbeing? Does that really support me and how does that interact with my emotional wellbeing?"

So doing the SPIRE check in allows you to see, "Do I have a natural tendency, am I underusing some of these ways of increasing my wellbeing?" So it gives you a way of looking at it. I can ask you a list of it now, when you think about the environment that you're in, what are the ways maybe for example if you work in your corporate job all day and don't get outside at all for physical walking around, your intellectual might be very highly engaged because you do great work that you're interested in but physically, you're sitting too much. That's an example of being able to be more aware of how is your environment, whether you're [inaudible] or in a corporate office play out to your overall wellbeing?

[0:05:44.2] PF: You know, when I look at what you teach, the principles are — they're simple, they're effective but they're so hard, you know? It's like, "Why is that?" If you look at it, it should not be difficult. But why is it so hard for us to follow the right path sometimes?

[0:06:02.4] MM: Yeah. Gosh, wouldn't it be nice if we could just like press a button and we could change behavior we know that's not serving us anymore? I sigh because I can so relate and I think everybody can relate to the fact that change is hard but it's not impossible and that's where we come up with this hope that we have that we actually can take action on a daily basis towards our ideal self.

I often think about the real and the ideal that I can be grounded in the reality of how this moment is and I could also hold aspirational thoughts about the ideal of where I'd like to head. In between the real and the ideal, are these habits that you speak of, are these ways in which we work towards habit change that can feel at times stressful, difficult, challenging, but we know that any amount of positive action to change a habit isn't wasted action.

Each time you try and instill that new habit by taking new action, it does lead towards change over time. That's the trick, isn't it? It's over time. We get frustrated with the lack of progress that

we think we should be making towards something. So when we look at stress and we look at challenges, they could be exhausting if we think that within a certain timeframe, within a certain ease, it should happen and it doesn't.

This mindset of how we're looking at challenges and how we're looking at stress can be actually reframed and how we look at it. Giving us the ability to go back to the drawing board again with SPIRE, with our resilience and say, "Okay, here's a new day. Let me try it again." That's looking at – instead of stress being exhausting to instead, stress being elevating. That we can use the circumstances of everyday life to elevate.

[0:08:05.4] PF: I'm guessing that that's a lot of what the Wholebeing Happiness course will help us learn.

[0:08:10.9] MM: So we have a couple of ways in which people can learn about SPIRE and actually practice these habits overtime. One is an online course. So Wholebeing Happiness goes over what this this SPIRE model? The spiritual, the physical, the intellectual, the relational, the emotional? What are the ways in which we harnessed our own biology for example, our breathing, what are the ways in which we focus our attention to our ideal self, versus kind of the challenges and stress and crankiness of the stuff of everyday life? How do we really focus on what's working in our strength and how do we focus on the meaning and long term directional heading of our life?

The main point is that if we have a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo, in other words if we find ourselves in habits of thinking and doing that are not serving our highest and best, that there are things and skills and techniques that are evidence based that we can use to improve that. We have a learning methodology where people first take the wisdom in. In other words there is certain things you need to learn about that we are not taught in school, right? Wouldn't it be nice if we taught Human Flourishing 101 when you start in kindergarten? That is not how it goes.

[0:09:27.5] PF: Oh my gosh, how would that change the world!

[0:09:28.9] MM: Right, yeah I am all for that. We didn't used to have that. At least, I didn't have that. So there are skills to learn first of all. So part of the online learning and even the in person

learning is the education about what is the evidence-based science saying about human flourishing? So you can learn that in video lectures where you actually are exposed to the science, the methodology, the reading, and the reflections that will help you learn that.

So first in learning it, then you actually have to test it out. You have to try it out for yourself. Like, "What works for me?" If this is what the science says, science is based on a bell curve of averages. Well, you might be on a different part of that bell curve. So you have to try it on for yourself. You have to learn it, try it out and then you have to live into it. So then you pick something of that and you live into it every single day as best as you can as you begin to see what works for you, how do I live into this every day, and then it becomes a habit and that's how change happens over time. That is how we actually keep taking course corrections in our life step by step.

So first online, you would watch a video tape. You would actually do some reflecting on it and do some writing about it. You would be part of the webinar where you would meet up with the faculty to discuss it, see how it works for you and then you'd go out and you'd have an action plan based on what you learned from that.

So that is sort of the pragmatics of how you learn online but it is also how you learn in person. We learn best not only when we just get exposed to the material but when we actually try it out, test it out, and then live into it. So the only way you actually live into human flourishing is to live into it. You are not going to pick up a book and then, "Boom, I'm done. I get it."

[0:11:19.2] PF: Right, you just watch some videos and go, "Oh well that was it."

[0:11:22.7] MM: That's it, check it off. You could check off human flourishing on your life list of things to do.

[0:11:30.4] PF: What do you see as some of the biggest barriers that we put up to being able to move into wholebeing happiness?

[0:11:37.5] MM: Well you know what? Can I switch the question around from instead of what are the barriers but instead talk about what are the enablers? Because I think so often we look at what are the barrier thinking that, "If I only fixed myself or get rid of this one problem that

things would happen.” So I think instead of barriers, if we talked about enablers, the things that allow us to rise because again and again and again, no matter where we teach this and we now teach it in Mexico and California out here at Kripalu, no matter where it is that there are things that elevate and enable and the things that fall into that category are things like what are your strengths?

In other words, instead of trying to fix what’s wrong can you notice what’s right and elevate the strengths that you might have on a day to day basis. Another thing that gets barriers as a way and enables things is gratitude. Really looking at the day and saying what’s working here? What is going well? What can I be grateful for? Another thing that goes well and this is what Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar says, which I really love is “when you appreciate the good, the good appreciates”. So having appreciation and gratitude.

[0:12:51.2] PF: Oh I like that.

[0:12:52.3] MM: That is so nice, I love that. “When you appreciate the good, the good appreciates,” and this is a practice, a daily practice of appreciation and gratitude. So when you talk about things like strengths, when you talk about things like gratitude and appreciation, it changes the mental focus of your day. That is one way, you know, really thinking that through. Another way of really elevating and enabling flourishing is by being aware of your biology.

So for example, we know that shallow tight breathing increases a stress response. Whereas slow relaxed breathing triggers the relaxation response. So you can actually work with your biology on a day to day basis so that it’s helping your nervous system relax versus tense up. Those are the three concrete ways in which we can think about enabling and elevating versus getting rid of barriers.

[0:13:54.7] PF: That’s terrific and it’s so good that we have places like the Wholebeing Institute where we can look to that, where we can find like, “Okay what is next? What are my next steps and how do I get to that next place that I want to be?”

[0:14:07.1] MM: We’re happy to serve. That is what we’re here to do and when I think about the institutions I’ve run, whether it is Wholebeing Institute, whether it’s working with Kripalu on their stress resilience program, the question I ask myself on my personal dharma or work in the world

is really how do I harness the highest invest in people for the greatest good and that means myself too and that means I also have to do a personal practice every day. It is not just about teaching. It is about living into it.

So I encourage people who are interested, we do have a free course online at Wholebeing Institute that introduces what is a SPIRE check in? How is it that I live mindfully about that?

[0:14:49.4] PF: Right and we are going to put a link to that on our podcast page. So they'll be able to get that directly and download that.

[0:14:57.0] MM: Ah lovely. So in that is a SPIRE check in, I have a free ebook about living with ease, which is being mindful in everyday life and by the way, the book actually came out of my work in the corporate space when I felt I wasn't living very mindfully.

[0:15:12.8] PF: Oh excellent.

[0:15:13.8] MM: Yeah, those listeners who are in the corporate space may appreciate that and then we talk a little bit more about SPIRE and that free course.

[0:15:22.2] PF: Terrific. Well Megan, it is always a pleasure to talk to you. I appreciate you sitting down and talking to me again and I am really interested in Wholebeing Happiness course and seeing what else you have available. It's always a pleasure to check in with you.

[0:15:35.9] MM: Thank you my friend. It's always a pleasure connecting with you as well.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:15:43.6] PF: That was Megan McDonough, co-founder of The Wholebeing Institute. You can learn more about the SPIRE Model when you visit our website at livehappynow.com and you'll also find a link to download that free SPIRE eCourse and eBook that Megan talked about. You will also find a link to learn more about their online course, Wholebeing Happiness that starts in January.

As always, 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 is all we have time for today so please join us back here next week and until then, this is Paula Felps reminding you to make every day a happy one.

[END]