

EPISODE 216

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 216 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. We all have people in our lives that we love and appreciate. But have you ever thought about how good it is for you to show appreciation for others?

A new study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies, shows that learning how to show appreciation for others can help you feel less stressed and can even reduce symptoms of depression. How does that work? We brought in Live Happy Editor, Chris Libby to explain it to us.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:30.3] PF: Well Chris, welcome into the studio. Well, I guess you're here with me every week, we just don't usually hear from you but welcome to a live microphone.

[0:00:39.0] CL: Thank you. I appreciate you for having me on.

[0:00:42.3] PF: You just gave away what we're going to talk about. I saw what you did there. Yes, once again, I saw this study and it was about appreciation and it's like, who can I talk to about this and you're it, you're always the guy that I talk to with these studies. I appreciate you being available to do so.

[0:01:00.9] CL: Yeah, this is a great study because it not only talks about gratitude into how positive emotions really have an effect on your health and your wellbeing but it really singles out the different components to gratitude and which parts are stronger than others as far as wellbeing is concerned.

[0:01:19.8] PF: What was interesting to me is that we talk a lot about gratitude. But this one really took that one little angle of gratitude and talked about appreciation.

[0:01:28.9] CL: Yes.

[0:01:29.8] PF: I hadn't – you know, I don't think I'd ever consciously separated those two but what is the difference between appreciation and gratitude? Because they're kind of cut from the same cloth.

[0:01:39.3] CL: Yeah, according to this study, there are four to five different components to gratitude. One thanking the other, appreciating others, another one is thanking a higher power or you know, in a more spiritual sense, you can cherish your blessings that be thankful for all the good that I have. You can appreciate hardship that you've been through or just savoring the moment, thankful for the moment that you're in.

All of them have to have to do with gratitude, that's what makes up gratitude. I think the strongest one as far as just rapport is concerned is that appreciating others that you have in your life because that aspect, you're really thinking out, you're taking the self-centeredness away from yourself and you're focusing on others, your other centered. That's you know, you build strong bonds, you build relationships.

You feel embedded within a community and so those are all things that they say that is a buffer to stress, that's what buffers the stress the most as far as gratitude is concerned

[0:02:43.7] PF: It's interesting because appreciation for others can be a difficult thing sometimes, you know? We take for granted the community of people that we have around us. Did it talk at all about some of the ways that you can kind of nurture that appreciation for other people?

[0:02:59.6] CL: Well, I think we've talked about this before, it's writing a gratitude letter, which is Martin Seldom and who is one of the founders of positive psychology, this is one of his experiments and he have, in his first book, he wrote, it had a profound or maybe this is second, I don't know. It had a profound –

[0:03:14.8] PF: It was one of those podcast.

[0:03:16.4] CL: It had a profound effect on his class and it became the most popular part of his class, people would write a gratitude letter. How much another person meant to them and just that exercise

alone can do positive things to your wellbeing. But the next step which was even more powerful was to read it to that person and preferably in person, face to face and then you have this exercise where both people are feeling this great sense of gratitude, one person receiving it, the other person giving it and it just a real connection between two people in a relationship.

There's also another one, Dan Tomasulo who is a frequent contributor to Live Happy. He came up with the virtual gratitude visit and that is practicing gratitude the same way but you're doing it to somebody who isn't there that could possibly not be around miles away, they could be deceased. It's just your opportunity to write something, write down why you appreciate and then another thing that I was thinking of is think of somebody who you don't necessarily have fond feelings for and try to find something that you appreciate in that person, that could be a probably a pretty good exercise. Just teaching yourself to be more grateful.

[0:04:32.5] PF: That is an excellent one and that's one that we really try to use in our house when we have someone who is frustrating us, we try to find that one thing that we appreciate like, "Yes, we're aggravated by XYZ but we do appreciate A about them."

It does help because it kind of mentally takes your focus of what you're upset about or what you're struggling with and it's kind of a reminder that okay, they're human and there is something good that's going on and we do get this gift from them. I love that approach.

[0:05:09.8] CL: Sure, also, you can appreciate like if you see somebody that's having bad behavior, you can appreciate the fact that you witness this person and have a bad behavior and you now know what not to do. You could be thankful for that.

[0:05:23.1] PF: That's right. There is also some interesting correlations between appreciation of others and the symptoms of depression. Do you know why that is?

[0:05:32.6] CL: Well, again it's because of the personal relationship and the connectedness, appreciation for others according to this study, it improves your coping skills to negative events so you're better

equipped to handle these situations whereas if you don't have appreciation for others, you kind of fall into this hole and you don't know how to – you don't have the tools to get yourself out.

[0:05:56.3] PF: It does kind of become a downward spiral when you don't have appreciation.

[0:06:00.3] CL: Yes. Gratitude allows you to essentially reinterpret a stressful situation in a more positive way. People who practice gratitude and appreciation for others. They know if a stressful event comes their way, they already know it's like, "Well, let's look at the positive in this situation and see what can happen."

That right there, it also reinforces kindness and it also changes the way how you perceive someone else's help. When you're more thankful for that person's help instead of thinking, well, they should have done it because they have the resources to do that. Instead, just be thankful that somebody is helping you and you're more embedded and connected into this basically this higher form, higher thing.

[0:06:46.4] PF: Yeah.

[0:06:46.8] CL: It's proving yourself.

[0:06:47.6] PF: Yeah, it's interesting how it's not changing the other person, it's just reframing where you're coming from on it and what a huge difference that can make in how you feel about it, the whole experience and what kind of outcomes you get.

[0:07:02.8] CL: You know, it increases the likelihood of experiencing positive emotions in the future, of course, we say it lowers your depression anxiety, it increases longevity and all kinds of – I mean, when it increases this positive emotions, you get all these health benefits, not just physical but mental,

[0:07:20.6] PF: Yeah, we know that the mental health affects the physical health and vice versa so it really is a great investment in your overall wellbeing. To be able to practice appreciation.

[0:07:30.4] CL: Yeah, I mean, basically when they say buffers stress, it's just how you react physically and psychologically to stress and we all know we can go on and on about the damaging effects of stress.

[0:07:42.2] PF: Yeah, let's do that, let's just go on and on about it. Another thing is, we were talking about doing this podcast, another thing that was interesting, I know that the study was about appreciation of others. But from the standpoint of character strengths, appreciation of beauty is actually a character strength. So how do appreciation of others and appreciation of beauty, they walk the same path.

[0:08:08.1] CL: Essentially yeah, it's more along the transcendence virtue and you are more of in a sense of awe and admiration and you go into this place of wonder. You elevate sort of and that just increases your kindness and compassion.

[0:08:24.4] PF: And it seems like if you practice one type of appreciation like I know in Ryan Niemiec's latest book on character strengths, which is *The Power of Character Strengths*, available at a book store near you. Do they have bookstores anymore, I don't know but in his book he really talks about how you develop, really ignite your appreciation of beauty and some of the exercises you can do to become aware of literature and the arts and flowers and nature and things like that and it seems like you'd be able to use many of those same practices to cultivate appreciation of others.

[0:08:58.5] CL: Sure, it's just habit and once you form those positive habits, I always say it is on automatic and it works into that broadened build theory from Barbara Frederickson where it just builds upon each other and then you get this positive train moving and that is how it works. I mean the research that Marty Seligman did they said that just practicing these gratitude interventions for just a few weeks just increases your happiness by months. So it does have a profound effect if you really practice it and really believe in it.

[0:09:33.9] PF: And it is a pretty easy prescription overall. It is not like I am telling people to run a marathon.

[0:09:43.1] CL: Yeah, it is very easy. I will give you some examples like here at work. We have this call up sessions every week or every other week and it's basically anybody is open to the floor to say, to thank somebody and appreciate somebody for the job that they've done and how they've helped them and I

think it really helps in the workplace, cohesion and it makes it more likely to that person will help you again in the future and it just makes people feel like there were something.

And they have value and what they're doing matters. And that is something that can have a profound effect on the workplace and the business as a whole even just placing like sticky notes on desks for others. I constantly express my gratitude for people around here because I know they are working hard and they know more than me. So you know every chance that I get I say thank you for everybody helping me and it is just a nice thing to do.

[0:10:38.0] PF: And it makes you feel good too.

[0:10:39.5] CL: Absolutely.

[0:10:40.5] PF: You know, you can almost look at it as the selfish practice because one thing when you appreciate people, they are going to do more for you, you know? They are going to if you appreciate someone's work they're going to be more willing to as you mentioned, they are going to want to make you happy. They want to work harder because it's like, "Gosh you really do appreciate this." And the personal benefit that you get from showing appreciation is so strong and so it's like if nothing else do it for yourself, you know? Do that appreciation.

[0:11:13.6] CL: And if you model this behavior, for example at your home and in front of your children if you have children, there are studies out there that teens who have more appreciation for others and practice more gratitude, they are more likely to volunteer and help out the community. They are more likely to believe in that higher sense of purpose. So I mean there is that and that just benefits the community as a whole.

[0:11:36.6] PF: Yeah and one really effective way, and Ryan has talked about this is to keep a log of the things that you appreciate about, whether it's people or nature or things like that. If you start keeping – unlike a gratitude journal where you are writing down the things that you are grateful for, if you just make a note, a little running list of things you appreciate throughout the day, you really start compiling a pretty massive catalog of things that you have to appreciate in your life.

And that can be powerful to look at when you are having a bad day. It's like, "Yeah, well this is not happening and not working for me but my gosh, look at this huge list of things in my life that I have to appreciate."

[0:12:16.7] CL: Yeah that also plays into the downward comparison instead of the upward comparison when you are the downward comparison is, "I am grateful because I have this, this and this, and I don't need this other stuff because everything that I have right now is good for me so."

[0:12:33.7] PF: Yeah, what I have is enough.

[0:12:35.3] CL: Yeah and even just writing down things that you appreciate, it doesn't have to be these grand gestures like appreciating the beauty of a roaring ocean. It could be just small things like, "Wow the breeze is really nice today," or, "These plants, these trees out here they look really healthy and green and then that just staring at them makes me a little bit happier."

[0:12:56.5] PF: Yeah, there is always these little things and the little things start building up to become big things so.

[0:13:01.9] CL: Yeah, for sure.

[0:13:02.8] PF: Well pretty cool. So what is your parting wisdom that you can give us on appreciation?

[0:13:09.6] CL: Well, I think it all comes down to being connected. We all want to be connected. I mean that is just a human virtue and its innateness that we want to be connected to something. So when we connect to things bigger than ourselves, we have stronger bonds in our community, in our family, at work and you just get this sense that you are not alone and we've talked about it before. When you get this sense of isolation that's just really bad for you.

It takes years off your life and so it's just one life to live, you might as well enjoy it. You might as well be nice and thank people.

[0:13:45.2] PF: Yeah that's right. Might as well be nice and appreciate people.

[0:13:49.5] CL: Yeah, the alternative sucks really.

[0:13:51.4] PF: Yeah, for everybody. Well Chris, that's great. You always have such wonderful insight into these topics so I appreciate you sitting down and talking with us about it.

[0:14:01.1] CL: Yeah, thank you. I really like this report, I had a lot of good insight on how we should be living.

[0:14:07.0] PF: Yeah, we'll include a link on our website so that people can go find it, learn more for themselves, not just assume that we are talking about something real. They can go check it out, we did not make this up, you know?

[0:14:18.6] CL: Yeah, we are not experts.

[0:14:20.4] PF: That's terrific. All right, well, thank you Chris. I guess we'll talk again probably next month.

[0:14:25.0] CL: All right, thanks a lot.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:14:30.0] PF: That was Live Happy editor, Chris Libby talking to us about appreciation. If you'd like to learn more about the latest research on appreciation, please visit us at livehappynow.com and we'll give you a link to the study.

We hope that you are already a subscriber to Live Happy Now but if you are not, you can find us on the Pandora Podcast Network, Spotify, SoundCloud, Stitcher, iTunes and on Google Play. Just look for us on your favorite platform and hit subscribe and then you will never miss an episode.

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

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