Introduction and Speaker Background

Welcome back to the event, everybody. I'm so happy. Today. We're talking with Ben, Premi Tal Ben Shahar, and he is the author and lecturer who were just, again, once, really, really happy to have here.

He taught two of the largest classes in Harvard University's history. Positive psychology and the psychology of leadership. Now, I guess you can see why we have him on our event.

Because these are incredibly important things to the health coaching world. So today, Tal consults and lectures around the world to executives in multinational corporations, the general public, and at risk populations.

So I'm looking forward to delving into what he means by at risk populations. And the topic he lectures on includes leadership and happiness, education, innovation, ethics, self-esteem, resilience, goal setting, and mindfulness.

Again, I think you see why we're featuring Tal today, and his books have been translated into more than 25 languages and have appeared on bestseller lists around the world.

Tells us so. He's a serial entrepreneur. I've heard that term a lot lately. He's the co-founder and chief learning officer of Happiness Studies Academy, potential life native and happier TV.

So he's an avid sportsman to win the US Intercollegiate and Israeli National Squash Championships. And today for exercise, he swims, dances and dances and practices yoga.

He obtained his PhD in organizational behavior and a bachelor's in philosophy and psychology from Harvard. So, again, I'm just tickled to have, Doctor Tal here today and, Hello, doctor Tal, can you tell us a little bit about your background and such?

I read, thank you. It's good to be here. You know, my background is actually in, computers. Or at least that's where I started. I went, as an undergraduate, find myself in my second year as a computer science major, doing pretty well academically, doing well in, in athletics, doing okay socially, and yet being very unhappy.

Yeah. And, I remember I remember waking up on very cold Boston morning going to my academic advisor and telling her that I'm switching majors. And she said what to?

And I said, well, I'm leaving computer science and moving over to philosophy and psychology. And she said, why? And I said, well, I have two questions.

That and I'm desperate for answers. The first question is, why aren't I happy? Second question, how can I become happier?

From Computer Science to Happiness Studies

And it's with these two questions that I then went on to get my undergraduate degree, and then for my PhD, also focusing on, on these questions and, and and then started to teach what, what I learned and I continue to learn.

And this was, you know, started 30 years ago, still, still going remarkable. Well, you're looking great, I hope. I hope you're happy because, that's a big goal of health coaches is to help people get healthier so they can be happy.

So there's. I mean, why would someone want to be healthy? Because you're happier. You know, it's better to have good energy and sleep well and, you know, not be overweight and and all these different things, clear thinking, all that.

And, you know, in your background too, you have the positive psychology. Personally, I'm glad you switched because there's enough tech people around. I think.

And who knows? I must say, I'm I know, yeah. No, I'm glad to, but, you know, read you talk about the connection between health and happiness and, it's only, in the West and only over the past couple of hundred years that we have created this, the distinction between mind and body.

And there are two sides of the same coin. You know, a healthier mind leads to a healthier body. A healthier body leads to a healthier mind. And they and we need to look at both.

We need to look at physical logy as well as psychology. Yeah, I totally agree. And, most of the people in our world, it seems like to get people to work on themselves.

It takes more than just some symptom, like, you know, they have headaches or, you know, some ache or pain or somewhere. And you know what? They kind of learn to live with it.

Like they start to think it's normal. So let's talk a little bit about that. How do you get them from there to realizing that you're not happy like that?

You like, doesn't being happy matter to you? Like, do you have a comment on that? Yeah. You know, Henry David Thoreau, close to 200 years ago, said most men live, lead lives of quiet desperation.

And, as you say, you know, we sort of get used to it. And when we don't think twice about it. And until something radical happens, and radical, I mean, something physical, of course, or psychological, you know, depression or extreme anxiety.

And the thing is, we don't need to wait, and we shouldn't wait because the the real power of coaching in general is in prevention. And, and if we begin the process early on, we can save ourselves a lot of trouble, a lot of heartache.

And by when I, when I say early on. Yeah. Of course. You know, when we're adults. But wouldn't it be wonderful if schools could we could introduce, these ideas, these ideas that we teach adults as part of health coaching, happiness coaching?

Yeah. You know, it just gets more and more interesting as we go along here. I'm wondering because the the type of health coaching that I teach is very much physiology, anatomy, biochemistry and things.

I teach the use of functional laboratory work saliva, urine, blood, stool and, yet, you know, it's the more the interview that you would do what we would call an onboarding session where you find out what what you know, what's your main complaint.

But why is it important to you? You know, how does it keep you from being happy? And again, I just get over. Well, sometimes the people can tell you. Well, my main complaint is migraines.

Well, how often does bother you? Or three times a week. And, well, you know, how long has it been going on this? About five years, you know, and and we ask him, what have you tried so far?

And I. Well, how does this prevent you from being happy? I'm looking for a motivating factor. And you people, whatever the symptom was, and it's been going on for years, and they've had you have it all the time.

And then you say, well, so how does this prevent you from being happy? And they say, oh, I get my it's like it's really hard to get them to connect how that physical ailment is like they just really make the people not care about being happy.

You said that the disease is becoming more prevalent, but why don't people care about being happy here? You know, I think part of it is because, well, there are many reasons for it, but but part of it is because people don't

realize that connection that that exists, you know?

So there is, fascinating work that that was done by the late John Sarno, who was, professor at New York University. And, what his work essentially showed is that most not all, but most backaches are as a result of some psychological disease rather than, something being wrong with the alignment or or or tissue.

Most backaches are a result of suppressed, rejected emotion. So when he tells people this and they and they understand the rejected emotion, understand the connection between mind and body, the back, the back pain sometimes simply disappears, goes away.

So mind affects, affects the body. Body, of course affects mind. You know, one of the, top, generators of not just unhappiness, of misery is physical pain.

Another is, of course, fatigue that's, physically unpleasant, also psychologically unpleasant. So all these things just point to one thing, and that is the oneness, the connection of the mind and body.

And the question is, how do you get people to understand to get it?

Mind-Body Connection in Health Coaching

And the way to get them to understand is a by telling them stories and be. And that is more important to get them to experiment, to get them to try things out and to to, experience small victories.

And these small victories can motivate them, to do more. And of course, you can build on that in an an upward spiral. Unfortunately, too many people are on this downward spiral where they don't feel well psychologically.

And then that affects their physiology, which makes them feel worse psychologically and and on and on. And then they get to a point when where they can no longer take the pain or the discomfort, and then they come to you.

But they should be doing that much, much earlier. And I mean a failure completely. And I'm just wondering, you made me think about what came first, you know, because if someone's unhappy about something, they might put their head down and then, you know, they got the rounded shoulders, you know, and then they, of course, are breathing properly.

They're not sitting back getting all the oxygen and, and things into their. But it's so then next thing you know, they, they're sitting there going to a chiropractor thinking something's wrong with their back, like you just said.

And so I just wonder if, I mean, you just said that's true, that that happens. And then you also get people with pain, like maybe you're in a car accident and you actually do have a bad back.

And but the same thing happens in reverse where you get the bean bag. You sure? You know, you start something. You're sure that now you're not breathing, right now you're not oxygenating head, and now you sort of get foggy thinking, and then you do this, and now you're depressed.

Like, you know, it takes us. But I think health coaching can help people do sort that out, don't you think? Exactly. I couldn't agree more. You know, read what you what you're describing essentially, is that there is a system.

And in this system the parts are interconnected, meaning your mind is connected to the body, your back is connected to your shoulders, your shoulders are connected to your, you know, to your, sympathetic and parasympathetic system.

You know, everything is interconnected. Your nutrition, of course, is affected and affects, and what, a health coach does is, help the, the coach understand the system and how everything affects everything else.

Now, the important thing, and this is taken from the the wonderful work of Peter Sanghi, who's a professor at MIT

on systems thinking. He says the important thing about systems thinking is that it allows us to identify leverage points, leverage points for change.

And isn't that the kind of work that you do? I mean, why are you interviewing even and before before your intervention to understand where the leverage point is, it can affect the entire the entire system, right? Right.

So these leverage points, I'm putting that in my own framework, of course. Because we use the system, it's very system based. What I teach was based on the thousands of lives I ran on, thousands of people, and I had good mentoring, but I also was able to make my own observations about the commonalities, the patterns that existed, and sort of recognize certain patterns.

And, and then people would come along and, and I would just realize that here's the pattern. I'm seeing it. And, and it developed into a system, at least an investigation into underlying causes and conditions.

At least, you know, physiological. So, yeah, it's interesting what you're saying. You know, it's interesting what you were saying read because you know what you were saying.

So you, accumulated a lot of information, a lot of data, and then it created a pattern for new for you. And now you can already see the connections. So it is almost you've internalized it and it seems like intuition, but it's much more than that.

It's based on a lot of tuition, a lot of, learning and as you say, mentoring as well as experimentation. And, it reminds me, about another thing that that I think is very important for, for us as coaches to, to highlight.

And that is. Yes, look at research and, you know, and, and of course, we provide them with evidence based interventions and research in physiology, in psychology, these are all very important elements.

No less important is we need to encourage our coaches, in addition to research, to experiment with me, search. And me search is about trying things on themselves.

So yeah, you know here is something you should try. Here is something else. You should try and see what works for you and, that's no less important than the universal research is the particular research.

How do you get someone to be willing to do me search? Because people tend to be pretty stuck in their ways. And sometimes we want to go. We want to shake and go, go look in the mirror.

You look like you're you're getting old. You know, this is important. You know, like and I also train my coaches to not want it more than they want it.

We can't want more than them. And there's the psychology behind that. But but how is there some, some tricks, that we can convey about getting people to do the research?

I love that term. And it's fantastic. Yeah. So, you know, obviously, you know, I think about this a lot like, let me share with you a story which, which is always in the back of my mind when, when I introduce someone to changing, especially when, when, when I'm struggling to get them to move.

So this is, a friend of mine was was, invited by an organization. And the problem, the, the pain point in the organization was, stress and burnout. And, and, physical as well as psychological, consequences of the ongoing stress.

And so they invited him and he talked to them about the importance of taking time out for recovery. And, you know, they they loved his talk. And at the end of the talk, this was a training company.

At the end of the talk, they said, yeah, doctor, we love what you have to say. What do you want us to do? And said, here is what I want you to do. What I want you to do is every, every two hours to take a 15 minute break during that

15 minute break.

And you can go, this was in New York. You can go for a walk around the block. You can, you know, have a cup of coffee, whatever it is, but break for 15 minutes.

They said, you know, you're joking, right? He said, why? Said, you know, 15 minutes. We're traders. You know how much what can happen on world markets in 15 minutes?

We have to stay on that screen. And all the time, you know, we have our lunch in front of that screen. We don't have recovery. So first of all, he understood the source of the problem.

But he also understood that, you know, this wasn't going to work. So he said, okay, not 15. How about five minutes? They said, no, he he said, okay, how about 30s do you have that?

They said, okay, 30s will give you what have you got quickly. And he said this. He said, here is what I'd like to do every two hours to take 30s during which I want you to ideally close your eyes and take in three deep breaths.

So five seconds in fact, you know, all the way to the belly, five seconds out. And, he said, but what I want you to do is promise me that you do it consistently throughout the day, and not just today and tomorrow, but you do it continuously for the next month or two.

And they said, you've got a deal. And they did it. That brought about significant change in the organization because that was his way in sort of the foot in the door.

Systems Thinking and Small Behavior Changes

Moreover, as we know, you know, even three deep breaths can shift us from the fight or flight response to the relaxation response, which is what he did.

And I think that that what I find so fascinating about this story, you know, and a real success story, is that he introduced small changes consistently.

And that is the key. Once you introduce small changes consistently, they'll see change. And once they see change, that reinforces their willingness. That opens them up.

You know, and there's a lot of work on, influenced by, psychologist by John Dini. And he talks about this foot in the door technique, you know, just start.

And once you start, that can become a, a snowball in, in the positive sense of the word, an upward spiral rather than the downward one. It's a great response.

I like how you brought in the parasympathetic, getting the, you know, the, the rest and digest, relaxation response in the because we do tend to be very sympathetic dominant these days.

The amount of stress and what we're willing to to do, it's amazing that we're surviving, you know, all in the other name of progress. Right. But, yeah.

So when you're invoking this, relaxation response, which I could see how it could change organization, it changes community and, and families if they just get together and have a good time, play a game, do something that isn't, you know, the the doldrums.

It can be very, very useful and helpful. Anything else you want to add about that would be great. And also wanted to make sure that I asked you about, something a little bit deeper.

We talked about brain, body and relaxation response and getting to a space. And I don't want to go too far out into

space. But what I find when I do that moment, because I try to do that for 15 minutes every morning and I'm like you, I start early, I work hard, I've been doing it for years.

I'm just just used to always go, go, go. And then I sort of crap out, you know? But what I found really helps me is doing this at least once a day. At least I just did it before this call.

You know, a very, very busy day when it's, in bare feet and put my feet on the rocks. And it just took a few breaths in. What I find is that some other, type of information seems to, to bubble up that I was ignoring until that I.

And if I do that, I find, oh, yeah. You know, some little inspiration. Something I think is coming from my subconscious or something like, can you explain it to us a little bit?

Yeah. You know, I think that there are so many points here that I, that I would like to, to, to respond to, you know, the first thing and what you did was you essentially took out take out time for recovery.

And, if you think about it, you know, many people have a misperception, of, of stress. So, you know, stress is, you know, public enemy number one when, when it shouldn't be.

Because if you think about it, stress potentially is good for us. So you know what happens when you go to the gym lifting weights. You're stressing your muscles now.

Not necessarily a bad thing because you stress your muscles and you know, two days after you go back to the gym and you stress them again, and then, you know, after six months a year, you get bigger, healthier, stronger.

So stress in and of itself is actually good for us, potentially. When do the problems begin? The problems begin when we go to the gym and we lift weights, and the minute later we lift more weights and then more weights and then more weights.

That's when we get injured. That's when we get weaker rather than stronger. The problem, therefore, is not the stress. The problem, rather, is the lack of recovery.

When, when we do not engage the sympathetic system, when we are constantly in, in, in, stress the fight or flight, that's when the problems begin. However, if we fluctuate between sympathetic and parasympathetic as our nature dictates, that's how we actually potentially get stronger and healthier over time.

Now, interestingly, you know, when people, attack stress, they pay high price for it. Now, there's, some wonderful work by a Kelly McGonigal who's, who teaches at Stanford.

On the up side of stress, showing that people who have, who negatively evaluate stress in their lives are less healthy, whereas people who also not only but also see the upside of stress actually turn out to be, healthy, healthier, and of course, happier because two sides of the same coin again.

So the recovery issue is, is so important. And as you said, you know, going outside and, you know, breathing some fresh air if possible. Closing your eyes and taking some deep breaths, playing games, you know, having your, your cup of coffee, whatever it is that can go a long way in, giving us exactly what we need in terms of the recovery that creates a beneficial cycle with stress.

Stress recovery. Stress recovery. This this is the healthy approach. Yeah, I really like that. And, you know, it doesn't take that long. I guess it depends on the stress and the level and the damage it's done as to how much recovery you might need.

Like, sometimes you hear, I need a vacation, you know, like, and, you might need a v, you know, you might take 3 or 4 days to overcome some traumatic experience.

I am a guy that just kind of older, sort of macho type, you know, like, nothing bothers me. Things like that. Some of

it's a facade, but, you know, but truly, I really think I'm kind of invincible.

I've been through a lot of stuff. But the other day I had a fire on my property, and I have a big property. It's it's really beautiful and kind of a Paradise.

I built, overlooking a lake and everyone comes here and. Oh, my God, it's so beautiful. The other day, I woke up and there was a fire in the village. It's fire season here in Southern California.

So I got sick and there's smoke, and it was coming right up to some of my property, and I wasn't dressed well. I went up there and I with my fire extinguisher and it just exhausted.

Anyway, I started breathing smoke and I fell and I twisted my ankle and I like I said, I just barely had even pants on, and I just I can't panic, you know?

And it's remarkable. The fire department showed up. They were looking for it because I'd been asleep on the sofa taking a little afternoon nap, and it just the whole thing just was very, very stressful.

And I can handle a lot of stress. I mean, I've, I've had things happen to me, but that took a lot out of me. That took me a few days. I found that that happened on a Wednesday.

And, I had to finish the week, the work week, and but Saturday and Sunday I was completely drained, and I didn't know why. I just thought, what? Why am I so tired?

I, I, you know, was it is okay because your house is almost burnt down and you twisted your ankle and you inhaled smoke to the point where you're choking in that man.

You better take that recovery time. And I'm not ashamed to admit that took the wind out of my sails, man. Yeah. And I think you, you know, you're spot on in your body was telling you I need recovery.

Stress, Recovery, and the Importance of Rest

Yeah. And, you know, that recovery is, is is is critical. And, you know, you describe, a very difficult situation that, that you experienced and your body needed recovery.

We also need recovery after very powerful, emotionally powerful, positive experiences. You know, people who, you know, talk about how after a wedding, you know, it's it's a real high, perhaps, but you need time for recovery because it's it's it's emotionally taxing.

And, again, the key is going back to the idea of research we need to listen to to the messages. So if your body mind telling you that you need to sleep, go to sleep.

If, you know, it tells you that, that you need time off. Take time off because, you know, 30s will not, be. That is not the panacea. It's not. It's not always enough.

You know, JP Morgan, the father of a North American investment banking, once said I can do the work of a year in nine months. But not in 12. And it's funny, I can do the work of rehabbing in nine months, but not in 12.

You know, that's, not most of us can't afford perhaps three months off, but but but the message is clear. You know, if you want to be at your best and if you want to perform at, you know, a high, high levels, you must, must have, have, periods of recovery.

And that could be, you know, the 30s, the 50 minutes, the, the good night's sleep, the day off or two days off a week, as well as the vacations. Yeah.

And, you know, you were talking earlier. You were talking earlier about how it's, difficult to get people to to follow

prescriptions from, you know, a health coach or a happiness coach.

And, here I find, it very challenging when it comes to taking time off, especially with Type A's, because, you know, as you say, you know, you know, I can do anything, and I don't need the break.

And when I take a break, other people are taking over. And the example, the analogy I always give is of a racing car. So imagine a race car going around the track over and over again and the, you know, 30, 30 laps, and the driver says, I'm not going to take a pit stop because when I take a pit stop, it means others are continuing.

So you don't take a pit stop. What happens? Either your tire will blow out, will blow up, or you'll run out of fuel, which is exactly metaphorically what burnout is.

We run out of fuel, our tires burn out. We must have those pit stop if we want to perform at our best, not to mention be at our happiest and healthiest.

It's a really good point. One of the people that helped me early on was, Stephen Covey, and he talked about sharpening the saw. You know, that you can't just keep your saw an away and your saw in a way.

And, man, you're really productive. You're cutting down a lot of trees. You get a lot. And pretty soon your work starts going downhill and you're not sharpening your summit until you get real quick.

Funny story. You might have a reflection on it. So I have this picture to use him in some of my lectures. It's just full on. It's my son. He's about 30. He's flying through the air.

He's he's on a freefall on a skydiver. He's skydiving and he's not tandem. He's by himself and he's just flying. The photographer took it right there.

He's so high up you can see the curvature of the earth behind him. And down below is the desert. And just this beautiful, beautiful skin. The sky is perfectly blue, like he's on top of the world, literally.

And he's falling probably 100 miles an hour or more. And I said to the I say to the crowd, is this you stress or is this distress? And, the guys all go, that's your stress, you know?

And then the mothers in the crowd go, that's distress. And it is really funny how you see these different reactions. So what I'm getting at is that perception can also be a big part of the problem.

Right? So let's talk a bit about perceived stress. You know, how come I can you know, I thought I got over that fire pretty quick because that was Wednesday, Thursday, Friday I was fine.

But the weekend, you know. So anyway, let's talk about perceived stress. Yeah. So perception obviously matters. A great deal. I'll share with you, research by an ex student of mine who today is a professor at Stanford, Leah Crum.

And now what you do is you went to, again, workplace organization, during a stressful period. There was a downturn in the economy. That so, she went to them and she, randomly divided them into two groups.

One group, business as usual was the control group. She didn't tell them anything. And their perception is what most people's perception of stress. And that is stress is bad.

Stress is negative. You know, it's being called the silent killer. It's, it's something we need to get rid of. That is the common now conventional wisdom.

So that's one group. Second group. She actually lectured to them. And she said to them, you know, stress potentially can be good for you. You know, just like in the gym.

You know what I, what I spoke about earlier, stress can actually make you, make you stronger. You need recovery, of course, but, change the perception of stress.

She spoke to them for a little bit over 15 minutes. Wasn't, a very heavy intervention as a result of that brief, intervention on stress, that group not just became happier, job satisfaction went up.

They actually became more effective, productive at work, and they became healthier just as a result of change of perception. Now, does that mean that everything is perception? No.

You know, let me give you another example, of how important perception is. This is the research reported by Herbert Benson. He's the relaxation response guy.

So, he's done a lot of research during his time in Harvard Medical School on the placebo effect. And what he showed, for example, one of his my, that's one of my all time favorite studies is, they brought in women who experienced, nausea, who were, throwing up, and what he did, they, he gave them, ipecac.

Now, ipecac is, something that you take if you want to throw up, if you want to, you know, clean out your, your insides. And he gave them, but he told them this is an anti nausea and vomiting drug.

And they took it and it actually reversed the effect of the drug. And they stopped feeling nausea and they stopped vomiting just because perception. They thought this was an anti nausea drug.

So perception has a lot of power. Having said that if you give someone and I don't recommend this, but if you give someone poison and you tell them this is actually vitamin C, it will make you feel better.

They'll die if you. No no no no no, no matter what their perception is. So the point I'm making, the point this research is making is that, yes, it's perception.

And it's about the external reality. Just like, you know, backache can be about your mind. It can also just be because, you know, you had an accident and, you know, one of the, you know, two of your vertebrae are misaligned.

So it's both and, and the system and this is where systems thinking is so important, needs to take into consideration the mind and the body, the perception as well as the physical reality.

You know, I love it, and there's so much I hope you have time for a few more questions. And because, you know, this idea of perception and the placebo effect is, is really important.

And one of the, you know, again, what I teach is laboratory work. And on the on the perceived stress, when we do what we call a cortisol awakening response, we actually can't find any physiological reason why someone's cortisol would, would go up high and stay there.

You know, it's supposed to come back down. So your waking cortisol is, you're waking cortisol. It's it's rising. You take it when you take a saliva sample, when you first wake up, you cortisol level, which is a stress indicator of sorts.

Now you take it again a half an hour later, it should be kind of peaking out at 30 to 40 minutes, for the research. And that's your pick. Now, when you another half hour later though, it should come down to within a, you know, closer to when you first woke up. Why.

Well because it's a physiological response. It's part of your circadian rhythm. And it's just supposed to elevate your blood sugar. Causal elevates blood sugar.

So what you need to get up and get your feet on the ground and get going, you know, brush your teeth, make your bed, get the kids out of that, whatever it might be.

Now, most people that we would call a normal cortisol awakening response, it comes down to within about 15% of where it started. So we have our waking plus 30 minutes plus 30 more minutes.

And the from waking to plus 60 should be pretty close to each other. Some people's isn't.

Perception, Placebo, and the Power of Mindset

It just stays up there and it's actually, a coaching point or leverage, if you will, for, what's going on with you in the morning? You know, like like you can you can actually see it on paper.

I find it very interesting. Another thing that so I don't know if you have any, I'm interviewing you, but that would be interesting to do some kind of, research with this perceived just because we also know that there's a nocebo effect.

And it's why I don't particularly like genetic testing very much. I mean, it's good for me to know, but when you convey to, clients like, oh, you've got the gene for this, and the next thing you know, they've got that is, you know, because you put the thought there, oh, you've got the gene for colon cancer and, and that's yeah, my dad had it and my grandfather had it.

I'm getting it to. And they can actually get it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yeah. You know it really is fascinating what you say. So I didn't I didn't know about the, the cortisol rise and then and then drop that it makes obviously perfect sense.

You know, I think one of the reasons why many people, would struggle with the recovery from that cortisol high. One of the reasons I would suspect is because they are they exposed themselves to news as soon as they wake up in the morning.

And usually news is not good news, right? Usually news is bad news. And, and there's research by Michelle Gillen. She was, she was, television anchor turned, psychologist showing that even if we consume, you know, three minutes of bad news in the morning, it actually affects our entire day.

Yeah, it affects our, our well-being for the entire day. So I think starting the day with something like meditation, with something like, you know, reading that you enjoy or music or or hanging out with, you know, loved ones.

I think it's much healthier than, you know, starting by you know, picking up that phone and looking, okay, what's, you know, how's the world getting worse this morning?

Yeah, absolutely. I, I try to start off with a little a little gratitude and, you know, before we go, doctor, I really want to ask you two about happiness coaching, because it's fascinating.

I know everybody's going to want to hear more about that. And we certainly have established, that we know a little bit about stress and perceived stress.

And, by the way, if you ever want to run that test on some folks, I could help you out with, that is what we do. And I would like to do it on myself. Yeah. Okay.

Well, you have a test kit coming, and, you. Yeah. I'm serious. Yeah, we'll we'll do that. So, with your course to tell us about happiness coaching. Yeah.

You know, so, for, for 20 some years, I've been involved in, positive psychology, which is the science of happiness. And, so I would, introduced evidence based interventions to help us become happier.

And then I had a sort of a, a mini mini epiphany in, five years ago. So I was on a flight, one of those very long transatlantic flights. And the question suddenly came to me, and the question was, how is it that there is a field of study for, psychology, my field.

And there is a field of study for philosophy and physiology and business and history and geography, you name it. And yet there is no field of study for happiness.

You know, happiness is impossible for most people. And yes, to there is a positive psychology. But that's just the psychology of happiness. What about what, philosophers had to say about happiness and theologians and physiologists and biologists and neuroscientists and, and, and what about what film has to, to teach us about happiness?

And I, I resolved them to help create a field, or rather, an interdisciplinary field of study that brings together all of these, these areas, again, whether it's physiology, psychology and history, economics, neuroscience, bring them all together and create a new field of study.

And, a couple of years after that question, I launched, I created the Happiness Studies Academy. And, our first product is, our, flagship product is a certificate program in happiness studies, where, where we're students, participants are exposed to, a lot of, knowledge from psychology and neuroscience and, and philosophy.

But even more importantly, they gain evidence based interventions so that they can become happier and so that they can help others become happier. You know, it's so important to walk the talk, isn't it?

I mean, you can't be a grumpy guy and be a happiness coach, you know, I guess just like, dislike, I have two prerequisites for our course. It's that you want to help others and that you're willing to walk the talk.

So everyone runs the labs and yourself, and then you follow, you eat right, and you go to bed on time and you exercise. If you're going to help others, you probably want to walk the talk a bit.

So you said that the people taking your certification course kind of have to get happy first. Is that what you said or. Yeah, you know, it's it's like when people ask me, so how did you grade your Harvard students in the course on happiness?

And I said, well, if they were not happy at the end of the semester, they fail to know. And which yeah, I'm happy. No, that's not so. They come in the last day and they're all, yeah, thank you so much.

I'm so happy. I just this can't believe. Right. This course is right. Yeah. And if you're not happy, fake it. Right. So no. So you know, the important thing is, is not to be happy.

The important thing is to work on your happiness and become happier. You know, many people ask me, you know, so they when they hear that I got into this field because of my unhappiness, they say so, so today, are you happy, you know, 30 years down the line?

And, my answer is that I don't know how to answer this question. Why? Because, I don't think there is a point before which one is unhappy, after which one is happy, meaning it's not a binary zero one.

Instead it's a continuum. So, yes, today I'm certainly happier than I was 30 years ago. At the same time, I also hope that five years from now, I'll be happier than I am today in other words, it's a journey, and it's a lifelong journey that ends when life ends.

And what we see very clearly, and we have research on that, students who come into our program. Yeah, overall, they become happier. But our hope is and we tell them this time and time again, you know, this is not a one year journey, you know, okay, I graduated, I'm happy.

This is a life long journey that, that you are starting, with us. And we hope you continue and help others along the same journey. Yeah. Amen to that.

You know, there's a real parallel there stuck between, what you said and what I tell people because some people coming into the health coaching field feel like I'm not healthy enough.

You know, I'm not. I'm not able to. I'll be I'll be a, a false prophet, you know?

Happiness Coaching and the Happiness Studies Academy

I'll be an imposter. There's this thing called imposter syndrome, and I, I try to help them get over that. But saying, look is a stairway to health. I don't know anyone at the top.

I mean, people who've been doing health coaching, I've been doing it 20 years for people for 40 years. They still have something to work on. So we are just, you know, and and there's people with more steps to take than you do.

You know, they're just way kind of down there, you know, and they've got a lot of steps. And you're right, we can get earn a really good living as professional health coaches by, helping them take their steps and have and again, I don't know anyone at the top.

Well, who's at the top in the happiness? You know, the other gurus out there who. Just the man on the hill and they're just smiling all day long or what?

Yeah. You know, it's funny because they they actually have research, on it and what they found so far again, this, you know, that they may find something else, in the future.

And so far, the happiest people, and but they recorded that and that's all through brain scans, especially are the professional meditators. Oh, okay. So those who ask.

Yeah. So, so, so the Dalai Lama's, right hand man, you know, who are who are meditating, you know, 3 to 8 hours a day. They have the happiest brains. Yeah, yeah, they they, talk a lot about joy, you know, and joy and and expressing joy and being joyful and in these things in.

I listen to meditation almost every day and, especially at night time. It's just such a good wind down. And, again, the news all sucks. The only good news is on the sports page when your team is winning.

The rest of it. Right. If it's all bad, you know, maybe if Nelson is once in a while, you know, but, But, yeah, I really appreciate what you said. So a little bit more about your course.

Is it? All online is is yet to come to the university or, what do you have to do there now? So the course is 100% online. Having said that, all our, students then become obviously part of the, Happiness Studies Academy, alumni, group.

And, and what we do is we regularly have retreats. You know, I'm a big believer in, in face to face. So we have retreats, around the world, and they are free.

They're accessible to all our graduates. And that's where we meet. That's when we get together. And that's when, you know, beyond having a lot of fun, we also, you know, learn new things and interact.

But these are optional, you know, in order to get your certification 100% online. Beyond that, to we also we also really feel that face to face interactions are important.

So there is this option. And we have, as I said, retreats, in Asia in, in, in the US, in Latin America, Europe there's a few is better and yeah, there's so, so much fun.

With a better be. Yeah. So we're happy there. Yeah. So, yeah. It's so much fun talking to you. I don't want to end it, but I do want to make sure, you know, we're going to put you information to for people that reach out to you and your program in the show notes.

You know, they can just go and explore. But who would be best suited to take your course? Is it just for all health coaches you do you have to be, anybody in particular?

Yeah. You know, it's it's a good question. And over the years, we've actually researched the, our student body to see who benefits most from that. And, you know, some people say, well, is it people who come in unhappy or very happy?

And we found that, people take, there's enough there so that people, you know, the entire range, the very happy, the very unhappy, the, the coaches, the, the therapists, the, the doctors and the business, people and teachers, get something out of it.

And then we also create, groups within or rather, the students create these groups so that they can, have conversations with other coaches, health coaches, for example, or, executive coaches, or sometimes they, you know, they meet and there is cross-fertilization, which is also, very important.

So it's for people who want to increase their own levels of happiness and who want to help others, become happier and healthier. Giving the connection.

Yeah. Fantastic. Any final thoughts for us? Stuck on, you know, being a professional, how to add it into your, your profession. Like, you know, my, my whole purpose for doing this event and bringing people together were pretty much leaders in their field is to, elevate the whole profession of health.

You know, it's not a hobby for me. My hobbies cost me money. My profession makes me money. You know, that's kind of the delineating factor there. How do you view that?

What what can we be doing to help people to be more professional or along those. Yeah. So yeah, that's a very important question that, you know, we obviously think about a lot.

And I will I will share another, line of research, this one also from, from a student of mine, Adam Grant, who today is a professor at Wharton and, he, he research givers, people who give.

And what he found was that, while, you know, givers are nice guys, you know, we we like them. They're givers who are very successful and givers who are not so successful, giver givers who are very happy and givers who are not so happy and what he was interested in is research is what distinguishes the two groups.

Why are, you know, nice guys, nice people sometimes at the top and sometimes, at the bottom. What's the difference? And the one main difference is that givers at the top, meaning the successful, the happy givers also give themselves, meaning they don't neglect their needs.

They, they don't, sacrifice themselves. They remember, in other words, to recover. Also, they remember to learn themselves not just to teach. They, learn to cultivate their own happiness and and, be concerned about their own health so that they can better serve others.

So this would be my, my advice. Don't forget yourself. You know, be a coach, a good coach, a generous coach to yourself as well.

Professional Growth and Self-Care for Coaches

I can think of a, a better answer, you know? I mean, it's, that's one of the best answers I've had, and I've. I've already interviewed 20 people. That was that was truly, inspirational.

And I appreciate it very much. Well, we're going to, everybody's watching. Has an opportunity, of course, to, to buy all of these recordings. They want to go out to the show notes where the information is available to them.

And then, you know, they can they can, get their VIP pass, all the recordings, things while they're doing that. I just have to throw that little plug in there, doc.

But, thank you so much. Been a real pleasure to get to know you a bit, and I, I hope that we can do some business.

And I'm gonna have my staff reach out and get you that kit, and we'll have another 200. Okay. Thank you very much.

Okay, doctor. Thank you so much.