



Dr Bruce Wells
the happiness expert

Want more happiness & fulfillment?

take the
Happiness Challenge

featured in:   Herald Sun   Lifestyle.com.au   smh.com.au

BROADCASTING HAPPINESS

What the Book is about in a Nutshell

Michelle Gielan, a former CBS news anchor, saw how nonstop coverage of the 2009 recession left many viewers feeling paralyzed. She had an idea: a new interview series focused on positive psychology and creating happiness in the face of tragedy. “Happy Week” generated the greatest viewer response of the year. In *Broadcasting Happiness*, Gielan shows us how our words can move people from fear based mindsets, where they see obstacles as insurmountable, to positive mindsets, where they see that change is possible and take action.

The book is made up of 3 parts. In part 1 the reader learns how to develop and leverage an optimistic mindset in yourself and others to fuel success. In part 2 the reader learns how to boost positive engagement in others by facing stress and negativity the right way. Finally, in part 3, the reader discovers how to become a master at creating an environment infused with high levels of support provision from everyone, in which positive habits and behaviours can organically spread.

Introduction

Our choice to continually broadcast stories of unhappiness is why many viewers stop watching TV news. The results of another study show that people who watch local news view their city as significantly more dangerous than it actually is, in terms of anticipated amounts of crime or likelihood of disaster.

One of the major roots of the world’s challenges is the belief that change is not possible. In fact, the majority of negative news on TV and in our lives feeds us the lie that outcomes are not affected by our behavior.

The vision of reality we see and share changes other people and can move them from paralysis to activation. The stories we tell about the world predict whether we believe that happiness is a choice and whether we’ll take action to create happiness— or stay stagnant, inert, and powerless.

Positive, optimistic, solution-focused stories, even if they start in the midst of challenging circumstances, fuel hope and inspire others to believe that change is possible and that our behavior matters.

Our stories are predictive not only of happiness but also of business, educational, and health outcomes, including engagement, intelligence, energy, and profitability. New research from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience shows that small shifts in the way we communicate internally and with others can create big ripple effects on business outcomes, including 31 percent higher productivity, 25 percent greater performance ratings, 37 percent higher sales, and 23 percent lower levels of stress.

We are all broadcasters. We constantly broadcast information to others, even if we don't say a word. And the messages we choose to broadcast shape others' views of the world and how they operate within it.

The three greatest predictors of success at work are work optimism, positive engagement, and support provision. Together these measures from the Success Scale account for as much as 75 percent of job successes.

Research from the field of positive psychology shows that when we are rationally optimistic, we are more successful at work. Work optimism measures if you're focused more on the energizing aspects of work and how strongly you believe good things will happen, which includes not only your own successes but also those of your colleagues and your organization. For instance, doctors who are positive-minded come up with the correct diagnosis 19 percent faster than doctors who are neutral. In a large-scale experiment done at MetLife, optimistic salespeople outsold their pessimistic counterparts by 37 percent. Positive engagement measures your response in the face of stressful situations and whether you perceive and broadcast the idea that stress is a challenge as opposed to a threat. Social support is the greatest predictor of happiness that exists. For many people, having a handful of meaningful relationships is the surest path to happiness. Creating an environment at work that supports a positive, bridge-building culture drives success in a way that is infectious and cumulative.

PART 1: CAPITALIZE ON POSITIVITY

Power Leads: prime the brain for high performance

Beginnings are exceptionally important. And when we start with something negative or stressful, it focuses everyone's attention on that part of our reality, preventing us from using those valuable and finite resources for observing possibilities and celebrating successes. Start a conversation with a power lead (a form of priming) which is a positive, optimistic, and inspiring beginning to a conversation or other communication that sets the tone for the ensuing social script (start a meeting with a power lead of gratitude to someone, mention what a great drive to work you had, describe your son's sport success on the weekend, ask kids at dinner best thing they experienced today, start your own day with good music or gratitudes NOT the world news)

In any given second of the day, the human brain can process 40–50 bits of information per second (limited bandwidth). But while that sounds sophisticated, our brain actually receives 11 million bits of information per second. How are you going to spend those 40 bits? Will you focus on the hassles, complaints, problems, challenges, and ways you feel "less than"? Or will you focus attention on the positive things that are happening, resources at your disposal, strong connections to other people, and ways your life is meaningful?

Being a positive broadcaster starts with refocusing people's attention on the positive before the social script is written. Our natural tendency is to be on the lookout for threats. We are evolutionarily wired this way, and it is thanks to those instincts that we are here today! (when you arrive home the first words out of your mouth to your partner shouldn't be "What a lousy day. I'm exhausted. How was your day?" OR a doctor saying "This is going to hurt") These days, life is substantially more stable; our brains do not need to devote themselves to threats in our environment as much. Start conversations with something positive (with coffee barista, with colleagues, with partner).

The key when communicating with negative people who give stressful updates is to get in before they do and set the social script of the conversation to positive and also to realize that these people are not bad people = they're scanning is just stuck towards negativity. We all know a Debbie Downer. This is someone who cares for you by ruining your day, starting conversations by telling you about the latest sensational news headline (earthquake overseas), a health scare (bed lice), that they need to talk to you in your office now (about the photocopy machine), a personal drama.

When someone asks how you're doing, it's the perfect moment to try out a power lead. Instead of saying, "I'm okay/ tired/ fine/ annoyed at the boss," offer up something good that happened that morning: "I had an easy commute today." "I had breakfast with my son, and he was being really funny." "I'm doing well. My team won this weekend. Super Bowl here we come!" These kinds of statements tell the person you're talking to that you are in a positive space, and it nudges them to look for something positive to share with you.

Studies show that employees who both feel and are expressive of their happiness at work receive better ratings from their supervisor, higher pay, and ultimately more support from their supervisor and coworkers. They are more attractive to other employees, which leads not only to a stronger social support network but also to higher levels of overall success at work.

Flash Memories: leverage past wins to fuel future successes

In order to achieve success, we need to move our brain past its natural focus on what we need to improve to what is already working. We accelerate toward growth when we focus on how far we have come or achieved, not when we focus on how far we still have to go. A flash memory is the first thought you have in response to a particular stimulus in your environment, and changing it from negative or neutral to positive can dramatically increase motivation and achievement. Positive flash memories often don't develop as easily as negative ones. Due to the brain's natural negativity bias— the heightened focus on threats in our environment— we pay more attention to the negative. After a vacation, the memory of the subpar food might stick with us more than the beautiful view we saw from our hotel room. And then later, when we are talking about our holiday with friends, our partner reminds us of the fun times we had.....and we say, " Oh yeah, I had forgotten about that!" So, how can you learn to focus more on the positives? Try spotlighting current successes in a company (and sharing via newsletters, meetings, stairwell boards), spotlighting worker strengths that allowed goals to be met or which helped others, spotlighting positive customer reviews (reminds workers of the meaning and value of their work), keeping a list of happy family moments or individual successes (and sharing via movie nights)

Leading Questions: Spark Positive Thinking

The goal of these questions is to get the information you need to help inform your broadcast, to switch the frequency from negative to positive, and to encourage the people you're speaking with to start asking more questions— the kind that lead to positive results. Useful questions to ask to keep you focused on positive solutions: When are you at your best (identify the habits, patterns)? What is working now in your company that you need more of? What are your 3 greatest strengths (gets you to focus on your meaningful successes)? What was the best part of your day (and what part did you play in making it happen)? Is there anything we have forgotten to discuss that you want to add?

PART 2: OVERCOME STRESS AND NEGATIVITY

Fact Check: move from paralysis to activation

Fact-checking is the practice of ensuring that you have the right facts to accurately portray the present, but also the process of discovering facts that lead to alternative and more beneficial future outcomes.

According to Harvard researcher Steven Pinker, the world is safer than it has ever been. Even though it might not appear this way given news of terrorism, food shortages, and other issues facing our world, according to his research, we are living in the most peaceful times in history. The murder rate, number of war deaths, and the percentage of the population dying of infectious diseases are all lower now than ever before. And life expectancy, quality of life, and percentage of the population with access to education are all increasing.

Our brains are wired to scan for the threats in our environment and all the problems we need to fix – the negativity bias. But in most cases this disposition doesn't serve us well. Instead, training the brain to look for facts that fuel a hopeful and optimistic picture of reality can help motivate us. At a fundraiser, focusing on the money already raised and the outpouring of volunteer support is more fueling than the fundraiser's stretch goal that's been set for the year. Marathon runners who think about their strong muscles or get lost in the music they are listening to have a better experience than the ones who stress about how many miles they still have left. Project managers who are able to see individual team members' strengths or appreciate the available company resources are more successful than those busy worrying about deadlines.

Transformative Journalism tells inspiring stories that showcase positive action people have taken in the face of challenges, while leveraging emerging technologies to not only inform the public but also to engage with them through discussion and calls to action. This style does not ignore serious events and issues facing our world; it covers them in a way that fosters optimism and forward progress. Transformative stories give the public hope that they too can make this world a better place.

If others or you are struggling to see the other side of the news— all the positive stories that live around us— I suggest you simply head to your nearest airport and spend some time in the arrivals hall. In the movie, *Love Actually*, Hugh Grant's character, David, narrates as follows: Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. General opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often it's not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it's always there— fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge— they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love, actually, is all around.

Optimistic thinkers believe that negative events are temporary and local (only affecting one domain of life, such as work or a relationship), and, most importantly, they believe that their behavior matters in the face of a challenge. Pessimists believe that negative events are permanent and pervasive and that behavior does not matter in creating a positive outcome. We are happier, healthier, and more successful when we are optimistic. We do better at our jobs, are more resilient, save more money, and are more likely to remarry after a divorce. How to fact-check: One, identify the thought that is stressing you out. The key is to identify the simplest thought that is causing problems. Two, find facts from your environment that support the worrisome thought. Three, scan your environment for fueling facts that support a completely different story. The key is to find facts that are equally true to the facts from the other list, for example, the things that you have not thought about previously.

Strategic Retreats: deal with negative people

“How do I deal with a negative person in my life?” If we don’t figure out how to deal with negative people, it harms our mental well-being and causes undue stress. So, strategic retreats are also about protecting our own ability to choose happiness. Yes, happiness is an individual choice, but almost every choice is influenced by the people around us. To make things worse, negative emotions emitted by others are highly contagious. When a negative person like that spreads toxicity to others at work, it lowers the productivity of nearly everyone around him.

Best times to retreat: One, if you are H, A, L, or T (hungry, angry, alone, tired) and you do engage, it is much easier for the conversation to spiral downward. Sometimes it is best to hold off or retreat in these moments. Two, just like you learned as a child not to ask your mom for candy when she was mad, you shouldn’t try having an important conversation with someone in a fired-up negative state. Three, just like you don’t want to be talking about your spring-break trip at a funeral, you need to choose the right moments to engage with negative people – when you are outnumbered or surrounded.

Regroup: Easy positive daily habits to help shift the lens through which you see the world (21 days) = a neg bias to a pos bias and to buffer against the negativity of others.

Send a positive email of thanks to someone you know.

Write down 3 things you are grateful for each day.

Take at least one picture of a meaningful moment or thing in your life— a sunset, your child sleeping, a project at work you successfully finished, or perhaps the meal your spouse cooked that night. Make sure to capture a moment in which you felt positive emotions, such as happiness, gratitude, joy, peace, serenity, or love. At the end of each week, scroll through the pictures you took to remind yourself and relive the emotional highlights of the week.

Re-enter: When re-entering the conversation with the negative person try to capture the high ground. Make sure you find a time when that person is likely to be less busy and less stressed and in a (relatively) good mood. And bring reinforcements who will be other positive people who can help disarm the negative person.

2-minute drill: When I reengage with a negative person, I always have my two-minute drill. I know the three topics that are going to be safe and help me gain ground, and that I can do quickly to get to the goal I want. One, start with a power lead. I will knock on the door of his office with a smile. When he acknowledges me, I’ll step in but not sit down. I’ll say, “Congrats on the finished project.” Two, I plan to ask him the question I need an answer to, making sure to keep it simple. Three, I will thank and compliment him: “Thank you for this information. That was really helpful. I plan to walk out of his office right away.”

The Four Cs: deliver bad news better

Police Officer Simmons is a master at delivering bad news better. He uses the 4 Cs:

1. Creates social capital by looking the person in the eye with a friendly, warm expression on his face, and speaks in a soft tone of voice, using plain English instead of cop-speak.
2. Gives context to the situation. Instead of merely explaining the violation and the fine, he talks to people about how, together, they can keep the community safe and how road safety is better for the families that live there.
3. Expresses compassion for the fact that a driver made a bad choice with its resulting negative consequences. His words and tone of voice communicate sincerity, and people seem to realize he is not nasty, trying to make his monthly ticket quota, but rather he is giving them the benefit of the doubt.

4. Stays committed by giving drivers not only his advice about what to do to remedy a certain situation, but also his contact information at work in case they have any additional questions.

How to create social capital: We build social capital by calling friends to check up on them, sending holiday cards to extended family, and greeting store clerks with a friendly smile. The longer or deeper the positive track record we have with someone, the stronger the ties our brain builds between the image of this person and attributes such as “trustworthy,” “kind,” and “helpful.” Positive experiences with others add to our storehouse of social capital.

Shared social activities include volunteering, playing sports, going to a movie, or going on a trip together. Be the person at the office known for noticing positive contributions. Every day actively aim to have a five-minute conversation with someone in your network whom you don’t know very well. Find a person’s strengths and specific examples to cite and build the social capital that exists between the two of you.

How to create context: In order to successfully give context, and thus deliver bad news better, be on the lookout for many of the keys I highlighted in the section above. Provide details that indicate understanding of a situation from the perspective of the recipient of the bad news. Provide a full rationale for how the negative news came about and why it is occurring. Clearly provide proof through specifics that you understand the ramifications of the negative news. And, finally, set up a context in which the current status quo context can be recast more positively. This last one requires better “framing” on our parts.

How to express compassion: Whether you are delivering bad news or responding to a negative situation, compassion is your best friend. It puts you on the level with the people you are talking to.

How to stay committed: Make sure you leave people with not only the negative news but also an action plan (TELSTRA did this and then rang me afterwards to check on progress). Your aim is to show that you are committed to his or her well-being and growth, and that you believe it is possible for this person to achieve it.

PART 3: CREATE A POSITIVE RIPPLE EFFECT

Go Viral: generate contagious optimism

The most important step in building an army of positive broadcasters is finding out who is in your personal “31” and activating them. You can do it a number of ways, from formal surveys to informal conversations. Thirty-one percent of respondents said they were positive but not expressive of it at work. I call these people “hidden broadcasters.” These people are one step short of being positive broadcasters; they are already positive, but you need to turn on their broadcasting tower. Provide your network with smart, unique stories that help raise their status as being people “in the know.” It makes them experts— with high social capital— as they share information with their networks. A study reveals that the more positive the content, the more likely it is to go viral, and that the most shared stories are both positive and emotionally arousing ones. When researchers from UPenn changed the framing of a story from negative (a person is hurt) to positive (an injured person is working toward recovery), they found that the positively framed stories were much more popular. Stories are more likely to be shared if they are solutions-focused and create a change in your behavior.

The most helpful, practical stories are often not “broadcasted” but “narrowcasted.” Sharers often decide naturally to whom information is most useful. By microtargeting key audiences

within our networks, we actually spend our time and resources getting the right stories to the right people— those who can actually make practical use of the information.

The key is to package positive stories in a way that can be easily shared. Give people a headline that draws interest and put your stories in a format that makes them easy for people to discuss or forward on to other people – such as infographics.

At a conference attendees were encouraged to use the app to take part in a “happiness game.” They would win points by engaging in a variety of activities, including posting a picture of their “happy place” at the resort, posting a note with three things they were grateful for, tweeting about a fun vacation activity, and sending a complimentary message to another attendee or sponsor.

Ideas to use at your office: make a “gratitude board” at the office for other people to post things on it they are grateful for works well. Ask people to post their gratitudes on the board. Ask people to post their gratitudes on the board. Have a volunteer from the design team create an infographic, with the organization’s logo, that focuses on the scientific value of practicing gratitude to share with the company. Tweet out one gratitude from the wall each day to the wider network. Feature the story of the gratitude board in the company newsletter. Start each month with a fresh board and a new theme, such as “my coworkers” or “the difference we make together.” A comprehensive approach like this takes the gratitude board from a fun activity to a culture-shifting idea. People at all levels of organizations have put similar gratitude boards up at schools, conferences, churches, and even parties to get people engaged in positive behavior.

10/5 Way: A hospital wanted to change the idea of their hospital being all about disease and death to caring attention. So they developed this technique. Within ten feet of seeing someone in the hallway, make eye contact and smile. Within five feet, smile and say hello.



Dr Bruce Wells is a happiness expert and professional speaker with a PhD in psychology and degrees in health promotion and physical education.

He has over 20 years’ experience in the health and wellness industry in Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. He is a former school teacher, university professor, international tour guide, personal fitness trainer, and is the author of *Happiness Anywhere Anytime*.

Bruce regularly appears on Channel 9’s Today show, various radio programs and regularly contributes articles to syndicated papers across the country. He is also a professional speaker delivering presentations to corporate and community health groups. For further details of his programs go to www.brucewells.com.au