

# What Causes Happiness, and What Happiness Causes

## [Robert Mack]

Hi I'm Susan Drum and welcome to the Enlightened Executive where your personal evolution sparks your leadership evolution Each episode we feature groundbreaking techniques and strategies to help you get the edge in personal and leadership effectiveness This episode is brought to you by Marita Leadership at Mariage We help strengthen leaders and empower teams to achieve high performance Go to mariage leadership dot com to learn more Today We're focusing on the art of happiness with me Today I am excited to introduce Robert Mack Rob is a positive psychology expert executive coach and best selling author of Happiness from the Inside Out In addition he's a TV host and producer for Own and E Networks His work has been endorsed by the likes of Oprah and Vanessa Williams and he's been a guest expert for Access Hollywood the Today Show Good Morning America and many others Rob has a master's from the University of Pennsylvania in Applied Positive Psychology which is a degree held by only a few dozen people in the world So I'm excited to have you here Welcome Rob Thanks so much for having me here I got came here more often just for the intro great ego stroke Well it's very impressive All the things that you've done and I love your the fact that you also do TV hosting That's fantastic Yeah I sort of stumbled into that That wasn't something I had set out doing Um but I had spent some time in between a consulting career and the work that I do now as I'm you know working with a model and as an actor and it later has come in handy particularly with the positive psychology work that I do now Yes Yeah So tell us a bit about that What is your approach to the art of happiness and maybe how it's different than some you know there's a lot of books written on happiness right And positive psychology So I really want to get a sense for what your take is and how it's different Yeah I think it's uh different at least three ways One it's rooted in my personal challenges and experiences um sort of living a very unhappy depressed and suicidal life um to the life that I have now which is um so happy and I feel so deeply grateful and uh just really overwhelmed with joy Uh So there's that so it's rooted in my personal experience Uh Second it's rooted in my professional experience So I've been working as a positive psychology expert for about 20 years now and I've learned a lot through my clients and I've been able to share a lot with my clients And then third I'd say you know it's also rooted and grounded in

science So this field of applied positive psychology is about 20 years old It's the science and the empirical study of what makes life worth living So we have thousands and thousands of time tested face valid research studies that have been conducted on happiness So we know a lot about what causes happiness and what happiness causes So the effects of happiness And so I'd say for those three reasons the work that I do is uh a little bit different than the work other people do that Awesome Well let's get into the science of happiness So for people who don't know about it what it what causes happiness and what impact does happiness have on your life Yeah So um I'm gonna give you the answer that comes from science and then the work that I do kind of goes beyond that Um But I would say you know based on the research that positive psychologists have done um over the last couple of decades there's a happiness formula So the happiness formula is pretty simple It's  $H = S + C + V$  So H equals happiness and that s is genetic set point So we're all born wired a little higher a little lower for happiness And that genetic set point makes up for about 50% of how happy or unhappy we are now Unlike height for instance or eye color we can't we can change our genetic subpoint and wiring for happiness And so in other words it's plastic it's malleable We can make ourselves a lot happier and we can make ourselves a lot less happy Depending on the people We spend time with the thoughts that we think the stories we tell ourselves the foods we eat all of that plays a role So s genetic subpoint is the first variable c is the things those are the things that we think about as successful conditions and circumstances So it stands for conditions and circumstances And so when you think about a perfect life where you have just the right number of kids even if it's zero you know the just the right number of partners even if it's zero or even if it's at 10 you have um infinite money You are infinitely beautiful eternally youth youthful and young when you're just you know healthy just imagine your perfect life If you were to create this perfect life all of that together only accounts for believe it or not 10% of how happy or unhappy you are So all the things that we spend most of our lives chasing and trying to achieve accomplish choir only accounts for 10% of our happiness rating And I would still say that's a pretty liberal number Uh but it's 10% at best Right Yeah I would agree with that particularly given you know I I coach some extremely successful leaders billionaires that you know you look at you think oh they have everything they've achieved the this financial success that they've always wanted And you know they say money doesn't buy happiness and sometimes people don't believe it They're like oh

yes it would for me But if you do the research and and you look at people that come into money very winning the lottery and they call it actually sudden wealth syndrome that they're actually not happier and they and sometimes can feel more depressed So the things that we think are gonna make us happy may not now they can be wonderful if we have the right mindset for it But most people don't you nailed it I mean money can make your unhappiness a lot more comfortable that's for sure And it can improve your life satisfaction but it doesn't generally improve your um happiness which is which is you know quite a bit different You're subject to well-being So what was the last one There's one more right Yes So it's HS plus C plus VV is voluntary or volitional activities So that's really where the rubber res sort of hits the road or meets the road Um Those are the things we think about when we talk about optimism you know gratitude uh savoring when we talk about our social support system these are the things that you can control and that accounts for 40% of your overall happiness score rating which means that in the end 90% so 50% is genetic wiring that 50% is perfectly malleable changeable 40% volitional activities that 50% that's genetic is actually changeable by the volitional activities that you either do or do not participate in So that's 90% and only 10% is quote unquote outside your control I'd argue that even that isn't true because the happier you become based on how many volitional activities you participating in the more likely you are to be successful and then change these other external conditions and circumstances in your life So I'm hearing bottom line happiness is within your control and you can build it so you can change it and change the set point change the volitional activities So let's talk about how you do that What is you know which which one of the part of the equation do you recommend to focus on And how do you do it Yeah it sort of depends on where you're at in your journey If you're just starting your journey I would say you want to think about the activities that you consistently engaged in So I would say identify at least two different buckets um Happiness islands and happiness deserts or valleys happiness islands are activities that you love for their own sake They bring you lots of joy you feel inspired you feel energized for having done identify those then identify your happiness deserts Those are activities that you don't love for their own sake You probably only do because you think you should or you get some other extrinsic reward or result from it You wanna try to outsource delegate reduce eliminate automate or regulate all of your deserts Now you're not gonna be able to do that with all of them Um But you can do that with a lot of them

And so the idea is to spend as much time energy and effort on your happiness islands and off of your happiness deserts or valleys as possible So that's step one which is really all about happiness being a kind of activity or action It's about taking action it's the low hanging fruit but there are steps you want to go sort of beyond that The second step is really all about people So we know from the field of positive psychology that other people matter and they matter a great deal especially social support matters And so you want to do essentially the same thing with your people in your life You want to identify those people who are essentially you know helping to support you and feeling happy You might call those sort of happiness or happiness sort of nourishing people and and also like sort of happiness vampires And so you want to spend as much time as you can with the people that love you and generally want to be happy and want you to be happy and off and away from the people that are generally negative The third step and there's only I promise four steps But the third step is really about telling better feeling stories based in truth about everything and everybody in your life starting with yourself So it's not about lying to yourself It's not about pasting smelly stickers on empty gas tanks It's not a it's not a snow job It's literally thinking in the most constructive way humanly possible so that you can facilitate or pre pave the happiest most successful experience of life for yourself as you can right So it is so fascinating too The stories we tell ourselves will determine the level of happiness And there's this powerful exercise Sometimes I'll take uh groups of leaders through where they tell a story where they got screwed over in work at some point right Where you know they've got passed over for that promotion or somebody stole their idea whatever it may be And they tell that story to their partner and the emotions it brings up is like anger and you feel duped and you're un ha you know and then I have them tell the same story from the perspective that they were actually responsible for what happened but not in a blaming way And at first that's challenging but once they do I said just give it a shot right You can have your old story back But once they do that they are transformed from the standpoint of actually I feel more empowered from it And so you wonder why do we tell ourselves these stories whatever it is that make us feel bad It's interesting isn't it I love so poignant when you share it there it's so easy to join sort of this chain of pain storytelling and meaning making experience that makes our lives worse off and not better off And part of that of course is um nature and part of his nurture right So the brain comes wired with dozens of cognitive biases like negativity bias And um you know we've got you

know dozens the halo effect the horn effect But the idea essentially is that the brain is really designed to keep us alive not necessarily designed to make us happy Although if we you know stay alive it's a lot easier to be happy in these bodies right So that's the first piece you know second piece is you know we are surrounded by very well intentioned people who don't necessarily understand that and have made a habit of practicing thoughts and beliefs and stories that don't support them feeling better you know or doing well in their lives And so we've kind of picked that up and we begin practicing it And so we've taken something that sort of was built into the brain and we practice it over and over again until we become extraordinarily good at it and then it almost operates in an unconscious level We know we're doing it So in the beginning it can be a little bit effortful to turn that trainer around But if you don't turn that train around to your point it's easy to blame everybody and everything else for how unhappy and therefore unsuccessful you are And when you do that although it's justified its legitimate it's like you did get sick or you did get laid off or the person was mean you really only disempower yourself to do anything about it because if the other person or condition is responsible for the problem they must also be responsible for the solution So we disempower ourselves when we do that and you make a great point Um That that's really a valuable technique and tool to learn Yeah And and just being conscious more of you know why we're telling us even if it was a bad experience with time Now initially you gotta get those emotions out right You gotta experience them But with time can you reframe the story But I almost think we get locked into telling the same story over and over right It's like that was the story we told when it first happened and we just keep telling it But on with bigger reflection isn't there a different version you could tell And there's always a different version right There's always a better version there's always an improved version a better feeling version a more successful version I mean the truth is this thing happened and the truth is this thing is over too right I mean it's yeah so you know it's like and also it's good to remember I think that it's the bitter that that makes this sweet that much sweeter right So life is often full of contrast we call it duality but it's full of contrast and the contrast is what makes life so beautiful often for for for so many of us Um So you're right there's always an honest truthful but better feeling way to talk about everything And if you can lean into that more consistently you'll get better at it in about 22 to 66 days your brain rewires itself to do it automatically or to do it more effortlessly And then you find that not only you feel better but you start to do better and life starts to go

better Yeah Yeah Great And then there was wait 1/4 1 right OK What is that Yeah So the first one is sort of happy thought It's all happy actions Second one is sort of happy people The third one is sort of happy thoughts and the fourth one is happy no thoughts so happy no thoughts is all about letting all of this go and spending more time in that still silent sort of placeless place or stateless state of presence but you're just swiffer and not thinking you're walking and not thinking you're showering and not thinking you're in your body maybe in the beginning more than you're in your brain So you're in the experience of your body more than the explanations in your brain And you're doing it simply to enjoy yourself right Simply to enjoy this precious present moment And the more you can do that we can sort of just stop thinking or let thinking go or notice thinking but not obsess about it not identify with it just let it let it pass the way you let a cloud in the sky pass You'll find that you become quote unquote better and better at it You enjoy it more and more deeply and then life begins to seemingly cooperate with you in ways that you couldn't have scripted or planned right So things just and people just show up and opportunities to show up and that answer you seem to never or couldn't come up with suddenly surfaces on its own or that lost object suddenly appears out of nowhere And the same thing that happens when you often reframe things The point is that when you feel better again life goes better But the fourth piece is really I'd say the lazy intelligent shortcut the most direct path to accessing that infinite well or pool of happiness and peace and love that exists inside you all the time Um And you do it by not thinking now what about the person that says oh how do I not think Because I used to be this person to some degree and it's still challenging for me Like the brain is always going going going And I used to think I could never meditate And what helped me get through over the hump and start doing it regularly was the belief that you're never gonna not be thinking Just recognize that it's a cycle of either mantra or breath focus and then thought and then mantra mantra mantra thought Um So how do you all the people that say what you're trying to talk about is is really difficult How how do you approach it Tequila just get black out drunk and notice how it works so easy You know it's a question because I for sure like was a poster boy for that for feeling deeply that I would never be able to experience moments of silence or stillness And the truth is if you're paying attention you'll notice there are moments during the day Generally when you're either in great pain or great pleasure your mind is already quiet cool calm collected composed right Still in silent already There are moments They're tiny they're these little tiny mini

we call them little bundles of joy that are tucked into your day already And that's also the value of like coins right When someone says to you here's a just what's the the sound of one hand clapping your mind for a moment a micro mode just goes quiet Or somebody says what's  $3\ 317$  multiplied by  $578$  It's like most of us get jammed up Even trying to think through that It's like your mind goes quiet for So in that moment in that quiet space and that little gap doesn't seem like there's a whole lot of peace and joy and happiness But I promise as you first of all notice the gaps that already exist throughout your day you'll find that they start to deepen and widen Second I would take advantage of both that moment right before you go to bed and the moment right when you're waking up in the morning when your mind is already pretty quiet it's in an alpha beta wave state When you're so tired you can barely move your body and you don't really want to think about the world or anybody else in the world anymore Just try to save and enjoy those moments more And you'll find that they also deepen and sort of widen and uh become more frequent And the third piece is what I call micro meditation and micro meditation is just one breath You know we've all taken meditation classes It can be hard to meditate for 30 minutes or even five minutes but we can all do one breath So the idea is to practice or pretend sincerely that you only have this breath left that you only have one breath left and hopefully that's not true Hopefully we've got 100 years left but we might only have one moment We don't know So we treat this one breath like it's the only breath that we're guaranteed And we try to enjoy this one breath as deeply as humanly possible and we can do that best by letting all our thoughts go breathing into the nose and out of the nose for joy's sake alone We're just trying to milk that one bread for as much joy as we can get out of it You don't have to stop what you're doing If you're vacuuming or folding the laundry if you're on the phone or listening you could just practice that one breath So if you could do it as frequently as you can remember throughout the day you'd be surprised that again in about 22 to 66 days your brain starts to rewire itself to be a lot more present and you'll find how easy and effortless it is to not think and you have to not think forever It's just in this moment right here now can I just enjoy the shower Can I just enjoy the food Can I just enjoy looking and talking at Susan You know to Susan without having to get lost in discursive ruminative thought again Yes Yes absolutely What has been your journey in this happiness You alluded to it when we started and and I'm curious to know what had you get on this path and uh what difference it's made for you Oh that's a question there I um suicide I was severely depressed as a kid I mean I

remember at six or seven years of age being so deeply depressed and so stressed out and anxious and self loathing I mean I hated myself and I just always hoped and thought I would grow out of it I said I'll grow out of that one day You know that did not happen right away You know I just always assumed that I want to be a professional basketball player It's like well I'm gonna work hard on the professional basketball thing I'll get good grades I'll make money eventually Maybe I'll even have some friends who knows maybe even a girlfriend you know all these So I worked hard at all those things and a lot of those things came to fruition with the basketball of course And despite achieving those things I just continued to feel worse and worse And I got to a place where I was so depressed and experiencing suicidal ideation so often all day every day that I decided I was going to do something about it So I did a little research I decided I was going to slash my wrist So I went kitchen I got a kitchen knife and state knife and I dug it into my wrist and um you know I just wanted to end the pain You know I just wanted to be done and I had the most unexpected and uh inexplicable it was really ineffable experience that I've ever had Which is that And I had a good knife at the time I had a good knife So I dug this knife into my wrist I just felt the kind of peace and joy and love that you imagine you'll never experience I experienced it in that moment that was actively digging this knife into my wrist And I couldn't explain it I was like wait what like why am I feeling all this and what I would deemed the most depressed and lowest moment of my life So at the time I just postponed the suicide for I think it was like 10 minutes I don't even know I wasn't committed to a full 10 minutes It's laughable now It's like it's like 10 minutes raw but it's like that's where I was at It felt very ambitious for me to post on it for 10 minutes But I said I can always do it later And in that 10 minutes I started doing a different kind of research I looked up what depression is what happiness is And I found first and foremost I wasn't alone There are a lot of other people in the world In fact the vast majority of the world experienced stress anxiety self loathing depression And um I also discovered there were some folks out there in the world that were a lot smarter than me and a lot happier than me that I can learn from So that became my journey really with happiness And only later after I became a lot more happy myself did people start to ask me about it Like I was obsessed with talking about it like not my journey necessarily but the happiness And so I basically decided it was like well I'd like to offer it to people And at first I just thought I'll do it for free And then I realized that I couldn't possibly keep up with the demand that much I got to



charge for it And um you know it became my life Yeah Yeah Well that's an amazing story and certainly proof that the brain is plastic and that you can transform your set point of level of happiness And what that would be share some new tips for people besides this micro breath which I think is a great one What other things can people start doing tomorrow to increase their level of happiness I this is so important just there's there people are in a lot of pain right now There's a lot of divisiveness and um I think having some solid easy techniques will really help Um Great question Uh Number one prioritize happiness above everything and everybody else I know that sounds harsh But I actually mean it the way I said it precisely the way I said it if anything or anybody is more important to you than your own happiness First of all you have nothing to offer those people Second of all you're gonna make it a lot more difficult to achieve or accomplish whatever else you want to achieve or accomplish So if you can be single minded in your pursuit of happiness which does in the beginning require you to be extraordinarily and authentically selfish I promise that in the end you'll be become extraordinarily and authentically unselfish in a real way you'll be able to give without an expectation of reciprocity and you'll do it for joy's sake Not because you're trying to be a good person So let's say number one is to prioritize happiness above all else So we have a lot of folks out there who are very well intentioned and I love them uh that are do gooders and unfortunately coming from a deficit based place And so the help they offer often comes with strings attached and the expectation of reciprocity that pollutes the entire effort That's that's number one OK So if you prioritize did not agree more with that yes Yeah It's um so that's number one If you prioritize happiness above all else I promise you that practically any and every path will take you there Um Number two I would do everything I could to put myself in places spaces and with people that helped to encourage encourage that that supported that And there were models of that or for that uh three I would really work on my mind Right I would really work to see and focus on and talk about to myself and other people only the best parts and aspects of everything and everybody And I would do it for selfish reasons because I like to feel good and I'm not willing to postpone or procrastinate or hesitate on this thing called happiness anymore I think Buddha is absolutely right When Buddha said your only problem is you think there is time there is no time Do not postpone or wait or hesitate to procrastinate on your happiness hoping that one day in the future somebody or something will bring it to you It will not I promise you and if it does it

will not last for very long Um So work on that Now one of the best ways to work on that is by listening to or reading the thoughts of other brilliant positive encouraging happy people Like I was addicted to Abraham Hicks I was addicted to Yes Loves loves Yeah Just drown yourself in that kind of information and do it all day every day Even if you're not listening even when you're sleeping I used to play it when I was sleeping because I was like I can't be trusted with my own mind I tell Yeah I use it If ever I have like a down moment or I'm feeling anxious about something I'll turn it on and it will instantly raise my vibration So absolutely you nailed it you nailed it And then the the the the final thing I'll say is and for me exercise is huge too But the final thing I'll say is um it's extraordinarily difficult to be happy If you don't trust that happiness will also help you be successful and will also help you be healthy and will also help you find love There's a faith and a confidence in happiness itself that is almost required in order to totally relax and rest in happiness in the present moment you have to really trust that And if you need help with that look into the science there's lots of science Look into spirituality If you go deep enough into any religion it's there it's hidden everywhere but you have to go deep enough into any of these disciplines to find it But they all say essentially the same thing like seek the kingdom of heaven within and the rest will be added You know it's like the same idea just repeated over and over again Yes Yes absolutely And I'm wondering the last question I have is I'm sure some people say well you know surround yourself with happy people What about the people that you don't have any choice They're in your life they're you're related What do you do Let's say it's your mother-in-law Let's say you know it's someone that is a thorn in your side How do you approach that and maintain a happiness mindset Yeah those folks are personal trainers for your soul They're personal trainers for what you most want to learn or remember which is how to be unconditionally happy unconditionally self loving and unconditionally peaceful And so those folks in lots of ways are giving what you what you most want and most need But don't realize you know often we think it's the people who please us the people that you know are super loving and kind that are doing us the greatest service But the truth is sometimes those people do us the greatest disservice because they literally train us and lead us away from the source of peace and love and happiness and contentment that exists within us And so these people first and foremost remember and reframe it as personal trainers for unconditional peace love and happiness Second of all make your interactions as short and sweet as humanly possible Even if you have to do it more

frequently it's fine you know and uh third you don't need to hear everything they're saying You know part of the thing the value and the opportunity that coaching has presented for me is that I've learned to just spend and place part of my attention always inside myself in that and rested in that place that I might call God You might call it the divine you might call it just life itself but there's a place inside of all of us and I would say it is all of us that is perfectly peaceful all the time And if you can practice coming with that is often extremely possible You'll be surprised at not only how much better you hear everyone but how much better you respond and almost also how much less affected you are by everyone's bad behavior or negativity or toxicity Yes Yes Sometimes when I feel myself getting frustrated in those circumstances I I say ok what's one thing I can appreciate about this person right now Like internally to myself whether it's you know that's a great sweater they're wearing or we have actually a beautiful smile or just find something It'll help me from going down the uh dark path or eight lane highway to hell Oh you know I love it I love it That's so good I love that so much I could agree more And yes it's great practice for focusing on the best within everybody and everything And if you could do it with them it's like if I can make it in New York you can make it anywhere Same idea Yeah exactly Yeah So the in law you can make it anywhere Awesome Well how can people find out more about your work Yeah So you can find me at my website at Coach Rob Mac dot com You can find me on most all social media platforms probably most consistently Instagram at Rob Mac M A C K official You can find both published books happiness from the inside out and love from the inside out everywhere Great books are sold including Amazon Barnes and Noble Target Costco all places Fantastic Well thanks for joining today and this was such an important topic So I love it I appreciate you so much Let's lead the way Hope you enjoyed today's episode and I'd like to point you to the next important step Hit the subscribe button and the bell to get notified when we release new content I'll see you on the next episode of the enlightened executive