

# Let go of the Banana!

Sandra Eugster, Ph.D.  
Westside Psychotherapy, LLC

# I Will Be Happy When . . .

- In our culture, we are always **getting ready to live**. “Can’t wait” to: grow up, learn to drive, leave home, graduate from college, get a job, get married, get a house, get a dog, have children, get a promotion, go on vacation, retire . . . ?
- I will be happy when . . .
- Looking outside ourselves for fulfillment. Expecting our partners, jobs, possessions to meet our needs inevitably leads to disappointment. Explanations for what ails external: If-only’s and regrets.
- Happiness is an inside job. And it can only happen *now*.

# Which of the below do you want?

- Wealth
- Weight loss
- Promotion
- Attractiveness
- Cool Stuff
- Children
- Aging

# Pop quiz!

Which of them correlate with happiness?

- Wealth
- Weight loss
- Promotions
- Attractiveness
- Cool Stuff
- Having children
- Aging

We are very bad at  
predicting what will make  
us happy.

# Things that do correlate with happiness

- Good relationships/community
- Paying attention to what you're doing
- Doing things for other people
- Religious/Spiritual affiliation
- Feeling gratitude
- Meditating

# Happiness vs subjective well being

- Happiness is a temporary feeling state
- Stability of “happiness” associated with continuity of subjective well being. (Aging makes us better at this.)
- Not a moment, but a foundation or base-line. Build it from the bottom up. This is a grubby process. We don't find happiness, we make it.

# Factors of Well-being

## Seligman - Positive Psychology

- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Quality Relationships
- Meaning and purpose
- Accomplishment



# Richard Davidson

## UW Madison

- Neuro scientist studying the brain. Via rigorous imaging and study, identified four constituents of well being.
- The circuitry of the brain that underlies these qualities is plastic. What we do changes our brains. Basic truth for good or ill.

# Facts and Traits

Richard Davidson, UW Madison

## **Resilience:**

Ability to recover from adversity. Measuring the speed of recovery associated with SWB

## **Outlook:**

Optimism — The ability to see the positive in others — view of other humans as innately good, able to savor positive experiences

## **Attention:**

**a wandering mind is an unhappy mind.**

Study using cell phones, 3 questions

strong correlation between reported happiness and focused attention

Large sample of adults 47% of their time not paying attention to what they are doing.

## **Generosity:**

Engaging in altruism and generous behavior activates circuits implicated in feelings of well-being in an enduring manner. Practices of loving kindness

Well-being is a skill, no different from learning an instrument or a language. Constituents of well being lie in the neural circuitry.

Plasticity of the brain suggests we can take more responsibility for how we experience things. Some more accessible than others — (resilience vs outlook).

All responsive. Brain changes regardless. Either by intention or lack thereof. Patterns becoming more entrenched.

Meditation/Mindfulness/Loving Kindness

# Rates of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues among Lawyers Significantly higher than Average Population (2016)

- Problematic drinking 21% (11% comparable) starting in law school, diminishing over time (<30 = 33%)
- Symptoms of clinical depression 28% (3-9%)
- Symptoms of anxiety 19% (18%)
- Treatment: 7% (Stigma/Confidentiality)
- 54% more likely to commit suicide than other professions

## **Resilience:**

Lawyers found to be low in resilience — thin skinned, under adversity and challenge, tend to turn to negative coping such as substance use

## **Outlook: Pessimistic**

Lawyers are *trained* to anticipate the worst case scenario, *taught* to expect the very worst motives and behavior from others, and often are validated in that view.

## **Attention:**

Lawyers constant multi-tasking, distraction, push notifications

## **Generosity**

Survey of 6400 lawyers “success” defined by high income and most prestigious job, highly competitive, no room for altruism. Dog eat dog.

# Portrait of Lawyers

- Substance abusing
- Depressed and anxious
- 54% likelier than average to feel suicidal
- Thin skinned/not resilient
- Pessimistic and cynical
- Highly competitive
- Striving for things that do not correlate with happiness

Please get help



# Ruthless Curation!

35,000 choices/day

- what to say
- how to say it
- how to spend my time
- who to spend it with
- what to pay attention to
- how to respond
- how to relate to others

- what to eat
- what to watch
- what to read
- what to think about
- what to wear
- what to buy
- what to believe
- where to go
- when to go
- what to do right this minute

# Be a Scholar of your own experience

- Everything Matters (but not too much)
- Choose not for pleasure, but for what is more “life affirming”
- Mindfulness is the point
- incremental accumulation of better choices over time

# Think Small

- Care for the body (sleep, food, exercise)
- Manage your devices
- Moments of Meditation
- Focus your attention
- Practice gratitude
- Nurture your relationships

Let go of the banana

Thank you!