



How to choose happiness habits to increase your daily well being

Laura Lane's interview with Mark Setton, Part Two

Episode #17, Hope, Strength and Courage Podcast – Full Transcript

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Thank you for tuning into the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. Love and support for parents whose kids are fighting for their lives! A weekly podcast created to support parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer, where you will find resources collected to help you face each day with Hope, Strength and Courage. From interviews with the top experts in their fields: doctors, psychologists, chaplains and inspiring frontline workers in paediatric oncology as they share their best advice, as well as day to day advice collected from other cancer moms and leaders in personal growth and development . From individuals who understand how hard it can be, I hope you will feel better prepared to cope with the day-to-day challenges of caring for your child. HI, I am Laura Lane, and I am your host. My own daughter Celeste was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 12. In 2015 I wrote about our experiences in the book “Two Mothers One Prayer: Facing your child’s cancer with Hope Strength and Courage”. Since that time, I have dedicated thousands of hours to share with other parents and caregivers the resources, tools, tips, skills and strategies I learned that helped our family to stay happier, healthier and more hopeful. My goal is to share with you my interviews with experts to support you as you care for a child with cancer.

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Today's episode features part 2 of my interview with Dr Mark Setton, PHD in Philosophy, co-founder and CEO of Pursuit of Happiness, a non-profit organization dedicated to data driven research into the study of happiness and depression prevention.

Last week we spoke with Mark about the importance of cultivating strong relationships and being caring towards others through Acts of Kindness and how caring for others can make a difference in our own happiness.

This week we continue to discuss the next 5 of 7 Habits of Happy People and how to choose happiness habits to increase your daily wellbeing.

I hope you will enjoy this interview as much as I did.

I am pleased to formally introduce you to Dr Mark Setton. Mark has his PHD in Philosophy and has studied and published works on East Asian philosophy for the past 30 years. He earned his B.A. and M.A. at Sungkyunkwan University, the only Confucian university in Asia.



He has taught at the State University of New York at Stonybrook, the University of California at Berkeley, and Oxford University, where he earned his doctorate.

Mark and his team design and teach educational programs on the science and implementation of well-being for secondary schools, universities, and corporations such as Google, Mediamax, the China Accelerator, Dartmouth College, etc. He is especially interested in recent scientific discoveries on well-being, as well as the remarkable resonance between modern science and ancient wisdom.

He is the co-founder of Pursuit-of-Happiness.Org

Laura: So, as you were saying, relationships, caring, and then down the list here ...

Mark Setton: Yes. The next column which is very important, and I would say, especially ... this is especially one of the most promising fields. There's all kinds of new discoveries coming out. Not just regarding exercise but the impact of the body on the mind. And, of course, we always knew that, right? We always, we've known that our mothers have been telling us this for hundreds of years but now we have very clear scientific proof that not only exercise, but also exposure to sunlight, food, all these things that are good for our body, have a very significant impact on our mind. And there seems to be pretty convincing evidence now, that doing aerobic exercise at least three times a day is probably as effective, if not more effective than anti-depressants. I would hesitate to say one is better than the other, it's probably, you know, in some cases, you might have to do both.

Laura: As many of those that you can, then the better, right?

Mark Setton: Right. And then sunlight now is also playing a major – has been discovered to play a major role, especially ... you can take as many Vitamin D pills as you like, we're discovering that Vitamin D also has an impact on our sense of well being. But you can take as many vitamin pills as you like but the problem is our body doesn't absorb Vitamin D easily. It's the sunlight enables us to absorb it. And also, another interesting thing about sunlight is that some people who are deprived of sunlight, get what we call SAD, seasonal affective disorder. And it's one of the most funniest abbreviations, well it's not funny, it's actually quite dramatic but it's very easy to remember. Seasonal Affective Disorder can be abbreviated as SAD and we used to think that, you know, only a very small portion of the population became depressed in winter. But now it seems at least 30% of the population are significantly affected by the weather. And we've also discovered that being exposed to sunlight in the morning or just daylight, going out, getting out of our chair, getting off the computer and just walking in the garden or walking on the street ... especially early in the morning after waking up can have a significant impact on the whole of our day.

Laura: Oh, terrific.

Mark Setton: There's food as well but if I talked about food, I'd go on forever.

Laura: So, what can you tell us about flow?



Mark Setton: So, flow is all about finding an activity that is creative, that you're skilled at, that you love being involved with and is challenging. So, I mean, just choose an example ... do you have a flow activity?

Laura: So, for myself, that would be painting.

Mark Setton: Oh, that's a great example. They've discovered this Hungarian American psychologist; he's got a very long Polish name. His name is Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. In the 1980's he discovered flow through experimenting, experimenting with his students. And he found out that the happiest students are the ones who had a flow activity. It could be painting, it could be music, but anyway, it had to be some sort of activity, some activity that sort of enabled you to polish your skills to a higher and higher level, and if you did find an activity like that it could really boost your well being. And also, it takes our mind. If we've got worries or problems, flow activities are great for taking our mind away from those concerns.

Laura: So, for me, I love to paint, and I do abstract acrylic painting, but I love to put music on while I'm painting and so it feels like my hands are dancing on the canvas. That's just the texture of the different paints and I actually use my hands I don't use brushes. I use different tools and implements to move it around, and I throw the paint, and just get my hands in there - get all dirty and, and put some just incredible music on, and it's like this partnership that I'm having with the paint and the canvas and it's an incredibly expressive ... fun, for me, that really does flow – flow really does describe it.

Mark Setton: My flow is talking about happiness and teaching about happiness. I just forget about the time. How long have we been speaking? The whole audience is probably falling asleep by now.

Laura: So, all of this has been terrific, the next question ... maybe we'll quickly cover those other two topics – spiritual engagement and meaning.

Mark Setton: So, spiritual engagement means more than simply being involved in a particular religious activity. Spiritual is, in the broad sense, can be interpreted as feeling a connection between something bigger than ourselves. So, we found out that anyone who regularly participates in a group activity that has a spiritual dimension, and, you know, it could be a religious activity. It could be the society of tree huggers, or it could be yoga, but we found out that there is a very significant difference in the level of well being between people that are involved in that kind of activity, as opposed to people who are just involved in a bowling association or a chess club, or something like that. Although that will do you a lot of good, too. Meaning is very important, finding meaning. It's when you lose meaning that's when - that's a sign of depression is when we feel that our lives are meaningless. So, finding meaning is extremely important. A great book that, of course, a lot of people know about, and you've just read, you told me so a while ago is "Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl who talks about finding meaning in the most meaningless kind of situation which is a Nazi prison camp.



Laura: Right, yeah.

Mark Setton: So, strengths is the next – we say correlative habit, so the next habit of happy people is, also extremely important, the ability to find our strengths. And that might take a long time, you know. Many teenagers still haven't discovered what their strengths are, but when we discover our unique strengths, so for example, let's say you've discovered your patience, let's say you've discovered you're very patient. And then you discover that you're a caring person, maybe being a teacher would be a great way to express those strengths. And we've discovered that people who discover their strengths are happy but they're even more happy if they use their strengths in a career or in, you know, a pastime like painting, for example. And then an even greater boost is achieved when we use our strengths for a cause that is greater than ourselves. So, I imagine that you are using your strengths for, you know for the Hope and Happiness Summit. You're connecting, you know, particular strengths that you have. You have people skills. I know that you have people skills. And you're connecting that with a much greater purpose. And I'm sure that makes you tremendously happy.

Laura: Oh, it does. To be able to give back to the community that supported myself and our family. And being able to use my ability to reach out and connect with others. To bring to garner information; I love to research, and I love to read. I have a library like you have behind you. I've got a huge library of books I love to be able to share. Yeah, so for me being able to use my strengths to help other people is a real blessing.

Mark Setton: And I think that enables us to digest suffering, you know. It enables us - not to put suffering under the carpet, you know what I mean? And you, especially, you're using, you know, just an unbelievable experience, and you're turning it into something productive. You're turning something meaningless, seemingly meaningless into something extremely meaningful. And that makes a huge difference.

Laura: The other day I was crossing ... going through customs to take books into the United States to mail them off, and the customs officer asked what it was that I had, and I explained I'm an author and I have a book, and I told him about my book, and then he asked about my daughter, and I said "Well, she passed away in 2013". And he said he was sorry. But this now gives me an opportunity to talk about my daughter. To my heart's delight. I can tell the world about her. I can brag about her through my book which gives me a great deal of happiness, to be able to talk about her and to give meaning behind what has happened to her. That if we can bless other people's lives through her story, then that gives meaning to what we went through.

Mark Setton: Right. I mean, I can't say that I've been through ... I can't imagine, you know, what it was like. I know the 15 years of depression I went through were meaningless to me. I would ask the question why, why am I going through this? What's the meaning of all this? And then, you know, when I discovered, oh yes, if I had done this, I would have been happier. If I wasn't doing this ... you know. And so basically, I guess my motive is I don't want anyone to go through the same suffering I did.



Laura: And that gives meaning now to what you went through, you can see a purpose behind it that all of that experience allows you to relate to an incredible amount of people who need your insight.

Mark Setton: Yes, and I learn in the process under this conversation too. So finally, I should proceed to the final habit of happy people which is a big one; which is about positive emotions, and also mindfulness. Talking about positive emotions, you know, it's a tricky thing because, you know, happiness is kind of like a **????**. Depending on your personality, depending on the situation you're in, you know, one of these habits that I've been talking about can be more effective than others. But so for some people, you know, being able to switch from negative feelings to positive feelings is an easy task. For some people it's very difficult, especially if you've been through a life changing tragedy, you know. And someone tells you "Don't be sad, be happy". You feel like slapping them in the face. So it depends on your situation. Using these positive emotions that are for example, they're the three major sort of sense of positive emotion. One is towards the past, one is about the present, and one is about future. And so, the most effective emotions, according to the research of feeling gratitude, about the past, things that we are grateful for on a daily basis. Appreciating what is happening in the present, being involved in the present is very important, too, and then feeling hope for the future – finding something about the future, you know, that we can feel hope for. So, you know, my mother has Alzheimer's. So, what I think about is, oh, you know, science is rapidly developing, maybe, you know, we'll discover something that will bring more comfort to Alzheimer's patients. So, you know, trying to turn negative thoughts into positive thoughts is very important. I would say that, for people who were going through a traumatic experience, mindfulness is, can be very effective. Mindfulness is - it began with Buddhism, but now mindfulness is way bigger than Buddhism. It actually didn't. It began with Hinduism, I think. The Buddhists learned from the Hindus, but it's the whole idea about being able to focus on the present moment. And breathing is very important, control of breathing. And if we teach ourselves to control our breathing, and bring peace to our mind, and through cultivating this meditative state, and it can actually have a knock-on effect on the whole of our days. So even 5 or 10 minutes of, let's say, - what modern psychologists call it is mindfulness-based stress reduction. It doesn't have to be linked to a particular religion. You can practice it while you're walking. Actually, I have ADD. I can't sit down, you know, and meditate. I actually walk by the beach or ... I commute by boat, believe it or not, so I basically pace at the back of the boat, backwards and forwards, looking at the ocean. Of course, the crew think I'm crazy, but I don't care.

Laura: Well, I've seen some hospitals that are now building a labyrinth, it's walking meditation labyrinth. It's for the patients to be able to walk through if they're able to go outside or obviously, the staff or for anyone on the grounds, that are extremely helpful.

Mark Setton: I didn't know about that.



Laura: I've seen it. At least one hospital that is local to me, and I'm hoping they will begin to build more and more. If I had more room in my own garden, I would put one in. They're beautiful.

Mark Setton: Oh mine's, a labyrinth anyway. It's so messy. Messy with a lot of different parts.

Laura: Oh, nice, very nice. So, which of these habits do you feel would be the most beneficial to children diagnosed with cancer and their parents to help them lead happier lives despite their diagnosis?

Mark Setton: I would say some are more difficult to practice and others in that situation. And you know, I haven't been through that situation. So, all I can, all I can do is to suggest ideas. I think, again, relationships are extremely important. The ability to encourage those children to be able to talk about how they feel. Give them the time to talk about, as much as possible, about how they feel. Some children are probably less prone to talking than others. Some of us can be introverts, in which case, flow activity. For example, physical exercises, as much exercises as they can do in their particular situation. Take them out into the sun, you know. I think those are very important things that you can do. Give them a flow activity. Probably, I would say all these habits that we've spoken about are important, but depending on the personality, and I think that's where parents can use their intuition. Depending on the personality of their child, which habit would be more easy, easier to practice.

Laura: They're great reminders for parents themselves, to our spending weeks months, sometimes even years on end at the hospital with their children, to take those time out. Go for a walk outside, if you can. Get someone to relieve you for a little bit. I know for myself, when my daughter was at SickKids hospital, I stayed at Ronald McDonald House for three months. And on the nights that I was able to go back to the house to rest, I would go to their craft room at 10:00, 11:00 at night. I had some canvases and some paints that I would take down with me, and I would paint in the middle of the night in order to relieve some of the stress and have a bit of that flow for myself. So, finding creative options. Today, it's so popular for the coloring books. The adult coloring books are something that we can take in the hospital rooms with us, and there's so many more, I think, options than before. We just need to be creative and think of the fact that we have to take care of our own well being if we want to be able to take care of our children. We're no good to our children if we're sick as well, right?

Mark Setton: Well, exactly. And the only way you can really teach something is to practice it yourself. So, I don't think, you know, it would be possible to teach a child about flow unless you've actually experienced the flow activity.

Laura: To sum up everything that we've gone over, is there anything from your website you would like to direct people to? And is there a particular spot online? We'll obviously send them to the Pursuit of Happiness.org?



Mark Setton: Well, you know what we're talking about ... I think we're talking about going through, probably a pretty intense period of suffering, of difficulty in people's lives. And you know, the question of how do you turn that suffering into something meaningful? And how to take the edge off that suffering? You know. I haven't been through that kind of suffering, but I've been through a pretty challenging period. And I would say that, yes, you can't promise someone that you're going to give them ultimate happiness in a situation like that. But I certainly think that the science is telling us and also the philosophy is telling us. That, actually, suffering leads to a deeper form of happiness. And I would point you to maybe two or three things on the website to read more about when you discover, to show us that happiness and suffering are actually friends, they're not enemies. And I think the Dalai Lama once said, the more we go through suffering, the bigger our hearts become, the more compassionate.

Laura: I know with my own daughter, I watched her just have a greater appreciation for life because of what she had been through. And then when she returned to school, and people were making a fuss about small little things, she's like, Mommy, those things aren't important. That's a larger perspective on life. She was much older than her years. It was incredible to see that growth within her.

Mark Setton: What you thought was important becomes much less important. What you didn't even think about takes on great importance. But I would say ... probably, if you like videos, one of the most interesting videos on the website it's connected to the idea of transforming suffering into happiness or meeting a particular challenge. You know, turning lemons into lemonade. It's the story of Ma Li and Zhai Xiao-Wei. You can see this here. If you go to the Resources section on the menu, on the website menu. It's a drop down. And you go to Teaching Resources. It's more than Teaching Resources, you can use this personally. You'll see on that page this video. It's a video of a Chinese couple, a Chinese dancing couple, and they won a prize ... it's almost like "America's Got Talent" for China. And the extraordinary thing about them is that she has no arm, and he's missing a leg. And especially, you know, in those days, it's a few years back in China, missing an arm, missing a leg, could have devastating impact on your life in many ways. Not just in terms of what you can do, but how you're regarded, how you're treated. And you'll see that they turn it into something absolutely mind boggling. But I don't understand why they won the second prize. I think, you know, I think they should have got the first prize, but that video is astonishing.

If you're interested in reading more about suffering and happiness, if you go to the History of Happiness section on the website ... scroll up the screen a tiny bit and you click the History of Happiness. Right exactly. That's a drop-down menu with the names of all the great thinkers and psychologists who contributed to our understanding happiness. The particular names you want to look for are Viktor Frankl and William James. Viktor Frankl we've just spoken about, his work "Man's Search for Meaning" is described there. Actually, the blog that is written around the dance video that we just saw is all about Viktor Frankl. Yeah. So, I recommend reading that. It's on that blog. The other thing to read about is William James,



who was probably the most famous psychologist in American history. He was also a philosopher. He's a man after my own heart. He combined philosophy and psychology. William James went through a very serious depression. But he talks about those experiences giving him a much sort of deeper sense, a deeper insight into life. Of giving him wisdom and a purpose that he would not possibly have thought about before. So, he's a very interesting man.

Laura: Terrific. I'll have to read that afterwards. Thank you so much, Mark. This has been a fabulous, almost an hour, I think, we've been able to speak together. I just - thank you again. Thank you very much for all your sharing. Hopefully these ideas will have an impact on other parents, ideas that they can use with their children to bring moments of happiness to each day and help them find meaning and flow in their lives and build their relationships are all terrific. Thank you very much.

Mark Setton: Thank you very much for giving me ... and it's a privilege for me. And I would say that, you know, there's something very hopeful going on. There's something really hopeful going on. And we're discovering more and more about how we can be even a tinier bit happier than we are. That's today rather than yesterday.

Laura: I hope you have a wonderfully happy day and week and thank you again for all of the knowledge that you are sharing with the world and with our audience. I hope you have a terrific day.

Mark Setton: Thanks a lot, you too. Bye bye.

What fascinated me most about the final 5 habits Dr Setton shares, in the conclusion of our interview, is that as he discussed relationships, caring, exercise, flow, spiritual engagement and meaning, strengths and virtues, and positive mindset, most of these are available to all of us and we can work on them everyday. We can find meaning in our struggles and turn around our thoughts by using the many tools and habit available to us.

To learn more about Mark and The Pursuit of Happiness Organization please visit his website at <https://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org>

Please join me next week for my interview with Fiz Anthony as we discuss the healing nature of music and how to bring more music into your child's life.

Before we end our show today, we have one last segment. Over the last few years, I have asked other cancer moms what advice they wish they had known when their child was first diagnosed. I have compiled that information and will be sharing their advice each week. You can download the top 101 pieces of advice that I put together as a mini E-book at www.twomothersoneprayer.com

Today's advice comes from Deanne:



1. Don't underestimate the impact of the diagnosis on your other children. Even if they seem (or say) they are fine. They, the whole family really, will need support throughout.
2. Keep a journal and take more photos, even on bad days. This is my biggest regret.

Thanks Deanne for sharing that.

[Music begins lightly in the back ground]

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule today to listen to the Hope, Strength & Courage podcast. I look forward to sharing more experts and advice with you again next Wednesday. Please remember to take a minute to subscribe to the show. Thanks also need to go out to our Hope, Strength & Courage production team which consists of my wonderful assistant Tracey Ogilvie-McDonald, Andrew Braun at Braun Audio and Audio Geek, music by Fiz Anthony, social media support by Marife Constantino, and graphic design by Amy Hosmer. To learn more about myself, Laura Lane, and to order my book, please visit ww.lauralane.ca.