

# Happy Brain Science

Fostering productivity, creativity & happiness through  
the application of cutting-edge brain science.



## WHAT IS THE REAL VALUE OF HAPPINESS IN THE WORKPLACE?

### TRANSCRIPT

#### Working Happiness

Thrive From Nine to Five: The Science of Happiness at Work

Science tell us it is possible to choose more happiness at work and in our lives and if we do, we not only feel better, we perform better.

Now, if your skeptical at all, and I would be concerned if I didn't have a few skeptics in a company that includes engineering among other disciplines--skeptics are looking at the covers of these books and thinking science "ha, looks like pop psychology self-help bologna to me."

Let me assure the skeptics that unlike other books near these in the bookstore, these books are written by or the very least about PhDs doing peer-reviewed research at places like Harvard, University of Oregon, University of California, and many other universities. The science that fills these books and journal articles and more that I cite throughout my presentation. This is the real deal science with random assignment, placebo control, peer review, duplication of results, and all the things that make solid science, solid science.

Now, we are talking about the science of the most complex highly organized object we have found so far in the universe, your brain: 85 billion neurons give or take--depending on how much fun you had in high school and college--averaging several thousand connections each to other neurons in your brain. That is immense complexity and it means that every brain here is different. Every brain in the world is different and, therefore, you cannot take averages from large groups of people, which is what science gives us, and say "ah it's going to work this way for all of you," it's not. What science can tell us is what will work for most people most of the time.

You are not most people most of the time. You are yourself. If you're willing, and to be crystal clear, I work for you today, not the other way around, but if you're willing I'm asking you to play an active role today, which is not to try to remember and act on everything I'm going to tell you, that's essentially impossible. What I'm asking you to do is play and active role by finding the few things that you think will work best for you or people that you work with. Speaking of which, I think happiness is very much like oxygen masks on airplanes. If you really want to be helpful to other people try helping yourself first, you'll be in a much better position to help other people be happier.

Solid science suggests we can make choices to boost our happiness and that by doing so we will boost our performance in a number of different ways. Again, multiple studies behind all these words. Multiple studies show that happier people are more productive, energetic, cooperative, sociable, they work better together. People work better with each other when they're feeling good. They're more creative, intuitive, resilient. We just heard about some of the stress and hard times at least some of you are going through. Happiness helps you bounce back more quickly and more effectively from tough times.

Happier people are more successful and they are more engaged. In part, because happiness broadens your scope of attention. You will notice somebody's getting uncomfortable in that sales meeting sooner in a good mood than a bad mood. You'll catch a typo on a brochure faster in a good mood than a bad mood. You notice more. You take in more information. You also find more solutions to problems. As scientists put it, you increase your behavioral repertoire, which to you and me means you have more virtual tools in your tool belt to solve those challenges.

Happier people are also healthier and they live longer. They show up in the emergency room less often, show up at work more often. I wanted to be all of that, which is why I dove deep into the science of happiness when I discovered it over a decade ago. I want all of you to be a bit more like that more often if possible if you choose to be, which is why I'm here today. I want the working world to be more like that, which is why I resigned my career leading video game development and specifically quit Intel about three and a half years ago to do work like this full time.

How do we get all these awesome benefits? Science tells us that happiness is largely a choice and there are lots of things you can do to choose more happiness at work and in your life. I'm organizing those things this morning around four themes. One sooth stress, two practice positivity, three flow to goals, and four prioritize people. I will explain what I mean by those as we go through them in depth.

I started at Intel in 2005 and was very happy managing my team of software engineers doing outreach to the video game industry that I come from. I was very happy and then I heard a word that at least some of us at Intel learned to dread, reorg. Re-org? What does that mean? That means I'm getting some new peers, some fellow leaders, with strong personalities. Intel is a wonderful, wonderful place to work. It is also a very competitive place to work, so my peers and I were competing for my bosses praises and raises and that competition turned to conflict and that conflict turned ugly at least for me. It doesn't take much for conflict to feel ugly to me. I am not a person who thrives on conflict. As the issues between my new peers and I built up and the conflict went up, my stress level went up and stayed up, and my happiness started going down and stayed down.

As I realized over time, I wasn't just feeling bad, my performance was dropping as well. I realized this was effecting the quality and the quantity of the work I was doing and I really needed to do something about it, so I went to my boss and I said, "Hey boss, bet you've noticed some of the tension on the team lately" and he said, "Oh, yeah, what do you want to do about it?". We talked about team building and together we arrived at what is called a Pecha Kucha presentation. Anyone ever seen a Pecha Kucha presentation before by chance? Let me explain to everybody: The funny name is Japanese. Pecha Kuchas come out of the Japanese architecture and design community. Pecha Kucha loosely translates to chit chat and essentially it's just a presentation format, only

pictures on slides and the slides are on auto advance. Started off as 20 pictures on 20 slides, 20 seconds each. In typical nerdy Intel performance-enhancing fashion, we cut the number of slides and duration per slide in half: 10 slides, 10 seconds each. We also made a rule for our team building that you could not show anything about your career. Your slideshow had to be about you outside of work, so my peers and my boss and I created these and presented these to each other.

Mine went very roughly like this:

- I was born and raised in Massachusetts. The Red Sox infection comes in the hospital in Massachusetts in case any of you are baseball fans or fellow Red Sox fans, remember as bad as things are this year, we've had multiple very good years recently.
- I was raised on the campus of this fancy pants boarding school north of Boston where my father, a PhD, taught math for 30 years. I grew up on campus, I went to the high school for four years, I learned countless things. One of which was some people seem to have a lot more money than we do.
- I went from there to Vassar College where I got a degree in cognitive science and really became enthralled with brains and what makes them tick and not tick so well. In case any of you are wondering, Vassar turned coed in 1969.
- I moved from upstate New York to our beloved Oregon. This is my beloved wife and I walking along in Ocean Side.
- Here's my father holding my first daughter, Althea, shortly after she was born about six and a half years ago. My wife likes to crack the joke that new babies and old men look alike, so we've always found that picture amusing in that way.
- Here's the rest of some of my family I grew up with. From left to right that goes sister, brother, mother, niece, nephew, brother, daughter, sister-in-law, and wife.
- I love making music. Any musicians in the house? Really, only one, come on. If you've ever played a musical instrument, hands up. You're all musicians. Excellent. I play multiple instruments. I've been in multiple bands, made multiple CDs, got a royalty check from BMI in the mail in the past year, super exciting, lifetime goal achieved! Even though with that royalty check I could buy any two of you a cup of coffee. Still, it was exciting for me.
- Like perhaps many of you, I love nature and backpacking. I wasn't paying any attention when people kept telling me Jefferson Park is really beautiful because I thought sure, every place in Oregon and the Pacific northwest is beautiful and they are. Then I finally went to Jefferson Park and I was like "Wow! This is stunning". Backpacking trip there was one of the highlights of my life. Go to Jefferson Park if you like nature and backpacking.
- We get really terrible family shots, even hiring a professional photographer. I'm like a multiple chin display. Althea grown up here is like I'm smiling as hard as I can, is it coming out right, and my youngest daughter, Zinnia, looks a little bit like please don't squeeze me to death daddy.

We created and presented these to each other and the difference was immediate and significant. I don't want to exaggerate, we still had issues to work through, but we did it better. We treated each other more like whole human beings, more like collaborators and less like competitors. As our cooperation improved, stress level went down. Happiness came up and stayed up, and as my happiness came up my results and productivity came back up as well.

I tell you that story for three reasons. Perhaps least important it helps me introduce myself to you. I think if you're going to spend all day with somebody you should know something about them as a human being. Much more important to me is that this introduces to many of you the best trust and teamwork building tool I have ever seen in my multiple decades of career. If you have a group of people that could stand to get to know each other better, trust each other more, work better as a team, I highly recommend creating and presenting Pecha Kucha presentations to each other. I have a power point template that makes it easy to drag and drop pictures, if you like it, get in touch with us, contact information on your handouts or we can get them to you through your awesome HR department. Pecha Kucha presentations fantastic way of building trust and teamwork. Finally, I tell you the story because it's indicative of where we're heading today.

Again, science tell us that success and happiness are causally connected, but not the way that most of us initially assume. Too many of us turn out the way an executive coaching client of mine did. I have an executive coaching client who is an independent game developer and by Indy game developer standards is wildly successful, wealthy, et cetera. He came to me and said, "I have success beyond what I ever dreamed of and I am not happy, can you help me be happier at work?". "Absolutely" I said. "I've got science that will help you". But that's what science tells us: many of us think "I'm going to work really hard and become successful, so that I can be happy." Science says it works much better for most of us most of the time, the other way around.

If you want to be successful, work on being happy because happiness brings prime brain real estate online, so that you do better work, produce better results, make more money, and end up successful because you were happy.

Money and success do not contribute to happiness very much. Once your basic needs are met, a whole lot of money makes a very small difference in your happiness. Happier people make more money because happiness results in their brains working better, so they make more money, much more than the money makes them happy.