

## Happiness and Empathy

Following up on the Keynote presentation on Happiness by speaker Kim Strobel, I found myself wanting to take a deeper dive into happiness, and how it influences how we interact with others. We have all struggled in some way with the pressures brought to bear by current events. At a time when we need each other more than ever, perhaps the opportunity to cultivate our own happiness is a way to be there for ourselves and others, increasing our collective wellbeing.

Kim shared with us the factors impacting, positively and negatively, our own happiness: genetics, our own internal landscape and belief systems, as well as external factors. Not surprising, research has identified that people have a variety of beliefs about the nature of happiness. Some believe it to be the product of internal beliefs; some think it is heavily influenced by uncontrollable (external) factors. Some think we have a happiness set point, that may vary up or down, but always gets back to level; some think happiness can change significantly over time. All theories are undoubtedly true for the believer. If you are someone that is finding happiness elusive, however, it may be helpful to remind yourself that our thoughts and belief systems are as flexible as we want them to be, and therefore we are capable of choosing something different. Happiness can be practiced, and like other abilities, increased with repetition.

No matter where you fall on the spectrum of happiness beliefs, you may be surprised to find out that our beliefs around happiness influence how we interact with others, specifically around the expression of empathy. Empathy is described as the ability to sense other people's emotions. Those that believe happiness is flexible, controllable, and stems from your internal beliefs are more likely to demonstrate an empathic response to another.

If you are open to the possibility that how you feel about happiness influences how you show up with others, would you consider undertaking activities that increase your happiness? If so, consider taking Kim up on her advice. Start a gratitude journal. Write three things in it that you are thankful for each day. Make it easy and use Kim's [gratitude tracker](#). Even easier and tied directly to supporting others – a two-fer of sorts - increase your own happiness by praising another. A small note, email, or text to share a positive affirmation or thanks, boost your own joy and theirs too. Another two-fer is connecting with others. Happiness it turns out, is quite contagious. You can also boost your happiness and that of others by engaging in random acts of kindness.

What are some of your ideas on increasing happiness and our ability to show up with empathy for others?

