



Module 2:
What Makes Us Happy(er)?
Syllabus

About

This module begins by defining happiness as the overall experience of meaning, strengths, and pleasure, in the context of a larger systems dynamic. Students are then introduced to the theory and practice of a growth vs. a fixed mindset, and the related concept of a growth heartset. Topics covered include systems thinking, full-body engagement, finding flow, detecting meaning (even in the mundane), wholebeing, and appreciative inquiry.

The lesson schedule is as follows:

Week 1

Happiness as an Emotion
Happiness as Life Satisfaction

Week 2

Happiness as Meaning
Integrating Happiness

Week 3

The System of Wholebeing Happiness
The Relational Network of Happiness

Week 4

The Happiness Biofeedback System
Inspiring Flow

Objectives and Outcomes

- Understand the three ways of defining and understanding happiness
- Utilize the “genius of the AND” as a strategy to hold the paradox between pleasure and meaning
- Create a relational network map, harnessing the ecosystem to leverage well-being
- Use an evidence-based approach to detect meaning in everyday life
- Practice using physical sensations as biofeedback to understand and cultivate positive emotions
- Explore the concept of flow in daily life, a deep engagement with activities

Who Should Take This Course

This program is designed for both personal and professional growth. Attendees have included social workers, psychologists, coaches, allied health professionals, yoga teachers, schoolteachers, business leaders, managers, and those looking to increase well-being.

Lesson Overview

Lesson 1: Happiness as an Emotion begins by defining the big picture of happiness as the overall experience of meaning, life satisfaction, and pleasure. Then we explore the concept of pleasure more deeply through “emotional granularity,” a model of understanding emotions on two dimensions—as pleasant or unpleasant and high or low energy. Lastly, we make the connection between a larger vocabulary for emotions and our subsequent actions.

Lesson 2: Happiness as Life Satisfaction makes the case for identifying and using strengths as a key lever for life satisfaction. We discuss the difference between character strengths and skills or talents, and practice the Reflected Best Self exercise, expanding our view of strengths by seeing them through the eyes of another.

In **Lesson 3: Happiness as Meaning**, students learn about happiness in the most enduring way—as meaning in life. The definition of meaning is laid out, as well as the latest evidence on meaning as more commonplace and accessible, differentiating the BIG meaning in life with everyday meaning. We explore personal meaning through an image-based exercise developed by one of the leading researchers on meaning in life.

Lesson 4: Integrating Happiness pulls all three aspects of happiness together into one integrated model. Seeing the overlap of all three, students get a multi-dimensional view of happiness, so they can concentrate efforts at the intersection of pleasure, strengths, and meaning.

Lesson 5: The System of Wholebeing Happiness explores the possibility of dissension between pleasure and meaning, and the paradox of holding the whole of it from a systems-thinking view. We discuss the concept of a growth mindset, and how we can use the “genius of the AND” to acknowledge the challenges of aspirational meaning and being mindful of present pleasure. The lesson closes with an invitation to hold a “growth heartset.”

Lesson 6: The Relational Network of Happiness dives into the impact of social connections in our well-being. We review the work of Christakis and Fowler, pointing to how connections spread constructive and destructive norms. Students are introduced to emergent properties—the characteristics an entity gains when it becomes part of a bigger system. The lesson ends with a mapping process of connections, looking for the ecosystem that supports well-being.

Lesson 7: The Happiness Biofeedback System examines the dynamic interplay between body and mind. Emotions are not all physical (just in your body), nor all cognitive (just in your head). It’s a complete mind/body experience. Students practice using physical sensations as a biofeedback tool for emotional regulation, self-understanding, and deliberately cultivating positive emotions.

Lesson 8: Inspiring Flow ties SPIRE together with the definition of happiness as pleasure, strengths, and meaning. We review the concept of flow, along with the six factors that define the state. Students examine when flow arises in their own life, and the circumstances that help facilitate it.

Recommended Reading

Module 2 reading consists of books and academic articles that directly support the video lectures. They are recommended (not required) for developing an in-depth understanding of thriving.

Lesson 1

Kashdan, Todd B., et al. "Unpacking Emotion Differentiation." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2015, pp. 10–16. doi:10.1177/0963721414550708.

Posner, Jonathan, James A. Russell, and Bradley S. Peterson. "The Circumplex Model of Affect: An Integrative Approach to Affective Neuroscience, Cognitive Development, and Psychopathology." *Development and psychopathology* 17.3 (2005): 715–734.

OECD (2013), OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Lesson 2

Morgan Roberts, Laura, et al. "How to Play to Your Strengths." *Harvard Business Review*, 31 July 2014, hbr.org/2005/01/how-to-play-to-your-strengths.

Niemiec, Ryan M. "VIA Survey or StrengthsFinder?" *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 17 Dec. 2013.

Niemiec, Ryan M. "You Have Many Different Kinds of Strength." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 22 Nov. 2013.

Rath, Tom, and Marcus Buckingham. *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. Gallup Press, 2007.

Lesson 3

Amabile, Teresa, and Steven Kramer. *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2011.

Steger, Michael F., et al. "The Mind's Eye: A Photographic Method for Understanding Meaning in People's Lives." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2013, pp. 530–542., doi:10.1080/17439760.2013.830760.

Lesson 4

Ben-Shahar, Tal. *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*. McGraw-Hill, 2007.

Lesson 5

Buchanan, A. & Kern, M. L. (2017). The benefit mindset: The psychology of contribution and everyday leadership. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 7(1), 1-11. doi:10.5502/ijw.v7i1.538

Baumeister, Roy F., et al. "Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2013, pp. 505–516.

Machell, Kyla A., et al. "Relationships Between Meaning in Life, Social and Achievement Events, and Positive and Negative Affect in Daily Life." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 83, no. 3, Mar. 2014, pp. 287–298., doi:10.1111/jopy.12103.

Lesson 6

Christakis, Nicholas. "The Hidden Influence of Social Networks." *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*.

Lesson 7

Gross, M. Melissa, et al. "Effort-Shape and Kinematic Assessment of Bodily Expression of Emotion during Gait." *Human Movement Science*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2012, pp. 202–221., doi:10.1016/j.humov.2011.05.001.

Lesson 8

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper Row, 2009.

TECHNOLOGY

Your course material is housed in the virtual classroom, a password-protected area where students watch the videos, use the worksheets for exercises and reflections, and get information on all course-related material. Wholebeing Institute hosts live events on Facebook to connect our community.

Faculty

Megan McDonough is the CEO and co-founder of Wholebeing Institute. She is lead faculty for the course, responsible for your video lessons.

Guest Lecturers

Along with the video lessons, you'll watch video interviews with positive psychology researchers so you can hear about the science directly from the people doing the work.

Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, is among the most highly cited scholars in psychology. She's director of the PEP lab at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, focusing on the study of positive emotions.

Kristen Lindquist, PhD, studies the nature of emotion—what emotions are, how they are created, and how we experience and perceive them in daily life. She's an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and director of the Carolina Affective Science Lab.

Tal Ben-Shahar, PhD, is co-founder of Wholebeing Institute. He holds a doctorate in organizational behavior and a bachelor's degree in philosophy and psychology from Harvard.