

Happy Lawyer Happy Life

The Course Week Four



The second Habit of a Happy Lawyer-Attitude

Last week we looked at the first Habit of a Happy Lawyer- Health and this week we are moving onto 'Attitude' as the second habit we need to cultivate to improve our Happiness.

When I say 'Attitude' I am talking about your mindset- your 'default' thought process when it comes to how you think about the world around you.

We have already touched a lot on the need to have a positive mindset. If you think back to the neuroscience from week 2, we learned that no matter our age or stage of life we can change how our brain functions, particularly by mindfully changing our thoughts. It is the neuroplasticity of our brains, our capacity to 'rewire' them that we will be tapping into this week.

Attitude encompasses a few things:

1. How you think.
2. What you do.
3. How you feel.

It is much easier to change how you think or what you do than it is to change how you feel. But where so many of us get stuck is that we focus on trying to change how we feel without making any shift in how we think or in what we are doing.

A is for Attitude

This week I am going to encourage you to focus on changing how you think to change how you feel (the idea being to feel 'happier'!)

Before going any further, you should read pages 97 to 112 of my book, Happy Lawyer Happy Life. You will see I talk a lot about Mindfulness and I have a few more resources to give you on that one!

Those lawyers whom I consider 'happy' have a particular attitude towards their life. They have a positive mindset. They actively practise kindness, gratitude and empathy and, when faced with a challenge, they are able to take a deep breath and tackle it head on. These happy lawyers are quick to take responsibility when they haven't lived up to their own expectations, but they rarely judge the decisions or actions of others. They are compassionate, well-meaning and very mindful.



Your Happy Lawyer Attitude

We have already done a bit of work on your attitude (think 'Smartie Challenge') so let's hope it has paid off a little already. When it comes to your 'attitude', let's start by rating your current 'mindset' on a scale-

1 2 3 4 5

A score of '1' would mean this is an area you want to work on- you struggle to find much 'good' in each day- you would probably feel 'worried' a lot of the time.

A score of '5' means you are all over this- you probably have some techniques in place to pull yourself up when things are down. Chances are you practise some form of mindfulness or meditation activity.

And if you are somewhere in the middle, there is probably room for some improvement!

How to Cultivate a Happy Lawyer Attitude

When it comes to a Happy Lawyer Attitude, the good news is that you can create it. We all control our own Attitude. It comes from how you decide to interpret what happens to you. Whatever the world throws at you- you have a choice about how you let those circumstances, events, people or things affect your thoughts and your day. Sometimes this is easy (think of the annoying email from a telemarketer that you just delete!) and sometimes this can be really hard to do (think of the moment you realise a formal complaint might be coming from a dissatisfied customer!)

When you decide how you interpret an event you are able to control how you feel about it.

Let's try an example.

Thinking about the last few days, write down an example of something at work that has really annoyed you- it might have been the actions of a client, colleague, friend or co-worker. It may have even been something you did that made you dissappointed in yourself-

Thinking about this example, what was going through your mind immediately after it occured?

Now I want you to imagine that you have the chance to live that moment again and knowing that how you interpret an event will enable you to control how you feel about it- what might be an alternate interpretation for the example you chose?

This exercise is not an easy one and will require some thought and you might want to try a few different examples to really get the hang of it.

But the point is this- you choose how you interpret whatever is thrown at you- you can see all the problems, the challenges and the difficulties or you can see the opportunities, the beauty and the silver linings.

Slowing Down

You would have read in my book that a key to the change in attitude for me was what I call 'slowing down'. In 2015 I set myself only 1 New Year's Resolution (I usually have about 10 so this was a big thing for me!)

'Slowing Down' meant that I would spend a whole year focusing on being in the moment and enjoying my life for what it was that day, not always thinking about what would be happening tomorrow or the next day. I found myself forever worrying about the past or the future- what I had forgotten to do that day or what the rest of the week had in store for me.

I also applied those 2 words to my decision making- rather than just doing 'everything', I started to ask myself- 'Is this thing, this opportunity, request, event, email, lunch, dinner- whatever it was, is this thing that I am about to spend my time on really something that fits with what makes me happy and if not, why am I doing it?'

There are things we all have to do from time to time that we can't get out of that don't necessarily make us happy, but when I stopped and started to really pay attention to my decision making, I realised that a whole lot of my time was being spent doing 'stuff' that I did not really need to be doing that was not making me any happier. So I stopped doing it! And you will be shocked to learn that I started to feel happier!



The Magic in Mindfulness

What I called 'slowing down' I later learned is really the notion of Mindfulness- defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn as 'Paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally'.

So much of our negative mindset comes from worrying about things that may never happen. Rather than thinking about what we are doing now, we worry about the past or the future- those long to-do lists, the chores at home, the inbox that is never empty. So much of our personal stress comes from 'worry' but that worry can be contained if we just focus on the here and now.

Mindfulness practice offers so many benefits. If you can train your mind to stop running away from you, to focus on one task at a time and to enjoy that task – whatever it may be – I promise you will feel calmer, more connected and happier.

What are your Mindfulness Practices?

It is easy to incorporate mindfulness practices in your daily life (you don't even have to meditate if you don't want to!) Chances are you have a few already but just in case here are a few ideas-

Breathing Breaks- purposefully breathing in and out while you focus on your breath is a great way to settle your mind. Stand if you can, close your eyes and take at least 3 very slow and very deep breaths and focus your thoughts on the movement and feeling in your body or on counting your breaths as you do. This is a great exercise to calm a busy mind quickly.

Mindful Touchpoints- Choose something (or a few things!) that you are likely to see every day that you know will bring a smile to your face. I have a funny little 'Troll' doll on my computer at the moment for this reason!

You might already have a few Mindfulness practices in your day but take a few moments to think about what else you could do to calm that busy mind and help cultivate a positive attitude?

A Positive Attitude is the Key

Some of us are naturally more 'glass half full' than others, but optimism is something you can create. Remember, you are in charge of your own thoughts and you can change them.

By purposefully changing what you are doing- I don't mean in the career sense; I mean in the day-to-day, living your life, caught up in the hustle and bustle sense- you will be able to change your thoughts.

If you can focus your mind to be present, and change your actions to be consistent with that, you will be well on your way to achieving an optimistic outlook- the famous 'Happy Lawyer Attitude'.

When we feel rushed or disorganised, it is much harder to maintain optimism. By focusing on the 'right now' - slowing down and being mindful - you give yourself the best chance to find the good in the challenge.



When it comes to being a happy lawyer, a positive, optimistic approach is key. Optimistic people handle stress better, get sick less and even live longer. Now, why wouldn't we want that?

Here are a few things that will help you kickstart that positive attitude-

Let's Kickstart that Positive Attitude

1. Choose your words

I recently read a great example of this where the author encouraged replacing 'have to' with 'get to'. For example-

'I have to go to work' instead should be 'I get to go to work' or

'I have to go grocery shopping' instead should be 'I get to go grocery shopping'.

It may sound trite, but try it this week and I bet you will be surprised just how often you say 'have to' (I was!)

2. Make Gratitude Practice part of your day

Each day, I take a moment to count my blessings, to pause and reflect on those things for which I am grateful. You can do this informally as I do or perhaps try using a Gratitude Jar or Journal to record those thoughts- it will come in handy when things are not going so well.

Positive psychology research consistently associates gratitude with greater happiness. Gratitude helps us feel more positive emotions, see the good in any experience, manage adversity and, importantly, build strong relationships. So why not give it a go?

3. Be Kind

Research has shown a link between kindness and happiness. Happier people are kinder and kinder people are happier! By engaging in random acts of kindness, you can improve your own happiness levels. So go on, get out there and be kind to everyone around you!

4. Find opportunity in difficulty

We lawyers are not great when it comes to making mistakes. In fact, I have worked with many a lawyer who will swear to you they have never made a mistake in their life. Now, for one, that is just not possible, and for another, mistakes aren't a bad thing - they are the breeding ground of great opportunities.

Look for the silver linings. You will make mistakes and you will face periods of challenge in your life, but if you can train your brain to look for the learnings and the opportunities, you will start to deal with these moments differently.

A few other things to remember

There are many things that will affect your ability to maintain a good Attitude- some you can control and others you can't. Here are a few other things I have found can be a 'drainer' on that optimistic attitude if you are not careful-

- Other people- if you spend your days surrounded by pessimistic, negative people who are only too happy to tell you what is wrong with you and the world around you it will be near impossible to maintain a positive outlook. Be aware of the impact of those around you and instead surround yourself with people who are positive, supportive, gracious and kind.
- Your own expectations- 'Law Land' as I like to call it is full of high achieving, intelligent, competitive people. You can spend your days comparing yourself with them if you like or you can instead focus on running your own race. To maintain a positive Attitude I encourage you to leave the others to their races and get to running your own.

This list could go on. Take a few moments to think about your 'Ah Ha' moments when it comes to your attitude- what might you need to change when it comes to how you are spending your time or how you think if you really want to feel Happier?

And my big Ah Ha moment was....

Week 4 Summary



To cultivate a positive Attitude I will...

This week take the time each day to really think about your attitude- how are your thoughts affecting how you feel? Are your thoughts mostly positive even when you are faced with challenge?

How are you spending your time?

You won't get happier by just doing the same thing as before. This week take the time to really consider how you are spending your time- what changes could you make/ have you already made that are helping you to feel happier? (pull out those Happiness themes from Week 1 again if you need a clue!)

Happiness is...