

**BOOSTING
RESILIENCE TO
REALIZE YOUR
POTENTIAL**

EPISODE THREE

THE WELLBEING LAB PODCAST SERIES FOR XERO



THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

1. STEP ON THE MOOD SCALE

Think about your experiences and feelings at work over the last month and note down what percentage of the time you've been experiencing the following emotions.

POSITIVE EMOTIONS	
Joy	Interest
Pride	Awe
Serenity	Gratitude
Love	Hope
Inspiration	Amusement

% Recently _____

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	
Stress	Anxiety
Fear	Anger
Guilt	Shame
Sadness	Distrust
Hate	Overwhelm

% Recently _____

2. APPLY YOUR PERMAH 3 POINT CHECK

Looking at your scores, answer the following questions:

- How** do I feel about my results (the comfortable and any uncomfortable scores)?
- Why** am I feeling this way?
- Who** do I want to be as I step forward at work with this new insight? What does this suggest for how I might boost my resilience and help me realize my potential?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Professor Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina has found that people who are consistently thriving at work are experiencing both heartfelt positive emotions and some heart straining negative emotions in there as well. She suggests these emotions work like the balance between levity and gravity. Too many heartfelt positive emotions, just like too much levity and we risk floating away and being disconnected from reality. But too many heart-straining negative emotions, just like too much gravity, can leave us flat on the floor and unable to get up.
- While the ideal number of each seems to vary among different people – and the older we get, the more heartfelt positivity we seem to need – what Barb’s research and others’ have consistently found is that we need more heartfelt positivity than heart straining negativity if we’re going to thrive.
- Why? A growing number of studies have found that the presence of heartfelt positive emotions like joy, interest, pride, inspiration, hope, gratitude, even amusement, helps to improve our performance on nearly every level. In fact, it seems that we’re more engaged, we’re more creative, motivated, productive and much better at collaborating and building good relationships when our mindsets and our moods are positive.
- How? Barb suggests that when you experience heartfelt positive emotions, it seems to broaden your brain and build your psychological, intellectual, social and physical resources. For example, you can see more of what’s happening around you because your field of peripheral vision actually expands to take in about 75% of what’s going on, compared to only 15% when you’re in a neutral or negative mood. You are often able to think quickly and creatively because your brain is flooded with the feel-good neurotransmitters of dopamine and serotonin. Because your brain feels safe, you’re more likely to think about “we” and a little less just about “me.” And as your experiences of positive emotions accrue over time – a bit like money in the bank for the rainy day – they create an upward spiral of learning, growth, connection, and resilience that helps you to thrive even in challenging times.
- Often the biggest a-ha moment for people around this research is not that heartfelt positivity matters or even what they can do practically, but that we need to prioritize opportunities for these jolts of joy regularly every day. Much like brushing our teeth or going to the bathroom, these cannot be “nice to have” moments. If we want to boost our resilience, we need to be prioritizing moments of heartfelt positivity every day.
- To be clear, however, researchers are not suggesting that you want to get rid of all heart-straining negativity and be positive all of the time. While it can be tempting to try and ignore, suppress, or distract ourselves from negative feelings, often these emotions also offer important learning and growth opportunities for us. For example, guilt can alert you to the hurt you have caused someone and motivate you to be more socially sensitive and caring, anger can give you the energy to take action and do what counts, and sadness is a natural response to pain – in ourselves or others.

- Rather than fearing negative emotions because they are uncomfortable, Dr. Robert Biswas-Diener and his colleagues suggest that we think about emotions like fear, anger, or anxiety as our body's internal telephone system that rings whenever there is something important we need to know to keep us safe or help us to learn and grow.
- For every study that finds stress undermines our resilience, performance, and wellbeing, researchers can now also point to a study that shows the exact opposite and suggests that experiencing stress can actually be good for us. How can this be? Like all of our emotions, stress itself appears to be neither good nor bad for us but what Doctor Alia Crum at Stanford University and her colleagues have found is that your body actually has multiple stress responses and which one you reach for and whether it boosts or drains your resilience, is largely determined by your beliefs about stress.
- For example, your body's flight-or-fight stress response gets triggered when you believe stress signals something harmful is about to happen to you and creates a surge of cortisol and fearful energy and motivation that primes you for self-defence and makes you vigilant for signs that things are going poorly. And while this can be great in short bursts, it can also create a vicious cycle where your heightened attention to what's going wrong starts to fill you with self-doubt and leaves you with more cortisol, which can be associated with impaired immune function and depression.
- But you also have a challenge stress response, which gets triggered when you've been pushed outside your comfort zone and as a result even though you might be struggling you also have that sense that you're learning and gaining new skills that are important to you. When you believe that stress is an opportunity for learning and growth, it creates a powerful mix of endorphins, adrenaline, testosterone, and dopamine and leaves you with higher levels of (DHEA) - a neurosteroid which helps you recover and learn from stress.
- And your tend-and-befriend stress response gets triggered when you care for others in moments of stress –like when a community rallies around each other to help in times of disaster – and in these moments your levels of oxytocin are increased to inhibit the fear centres of your brain and improve your feelings of empathy, trust, and connection; dopamine is released to help you feel more motivated and optimistic about your ability to do something meaningful; and the neurotransmitter serotonin is activated to enhance your perception, intuition, and self-control to ensure your actions have the biggest positive impact. And all of this helps you to transform fear into bravery, and powerlessness into optimism.
- Now let's be clear again, researchers are not suggesting that all stress is good so it should just be piled on! Rather, it's helpful to understand when your internal phone rings with a message that you're feeling stressed it is simply your body's way of telling you that something important to you is at stake in this moment and based on the situation you're in and what will serve you best, you can choose to interpret that message as needing a fight-or-flight, a challenge or a tend-and-befriend response and this will set in motion different neurological, physiological, psychological and social responses.

WHAT CAN I TRY?

- **HEADING BACK TO NATURE** – Get out regularly into nature and spend time enjoying the eternal beauty and presence of the world around you. It might be sitting under a tree as you have your lunch, walking through a park or along a river on your way to work, or stopping on the way home to take in a sunset or the sky.
- **GET GRATEFUL** – Each day, try to take a few minutes to be really present to the good things you have around you. For example, it might be savoring your morning coffee, or showing heartfelt gratitude to someone, playing back some of your favorite conversations on the way home, or keeping a daily gratitude journal.
- **PERFORM A 5 MINUTE FAVOR** – Spend five minutes each day helping someone else in your network. You could share information, connect contacts, offer feedback, or make a recommendation. If people offer to repay you in some way, ask them to pay it forward instead, by helping or supporting someone else.
- **REFLECT, DON'T RUMINATE** – Instead of going over and over something that didn't play out the way you'd planned and recycling negativity unnecessarily, try distracting yourself in healthy ways. Go for a walk, call a friend, listen to your favorite song, or find a YouTube video that makes you laugh so that you can plug your energy leaks.
- **DON'T JUDGE, GET CURIOUS** – Generally the moment we step into judgment, it's not positive for ourselves or others. Instead get curious and start asking questions to figure out what might be happening in that moment for yourself, what might be happening for the other person, and be open to how you might find new ways forward together.
- **STAY IN YOUR OWN LANE** – Try to avoid social comparisons with others and focus on your goals and what's working well when it comes to things that matter most to you. If you're struggling to be mindful of how time on social media or with certain people may trigger your social comparisons and re-prioritize the time you spend on them.

- **DECODE STRESS MESSAGES** – When you feel stress know that this is your body’s way of letting you know that something that matters to you is on the line. Use your PERMAH 3 Point Check to tune into: How am I feeling? Why am I feeling this way? Who do I want to be as I step forward now? Try to make use of the energy stress gives you, by intentionally triggering the stress response – flight-or-fight, challenge, or tend-and-befriend – that will serve you best.
- **SET STRETCH GOALS** – Eleanor Roosevelt suggested doing one thing every day that scares you. Researchers agree that setting stretch goals that are difficult and meaningful can give you plenty of practice at fine-tuning your stress responses. As you take on these goals, commit to having kind conversations with yourself about how you’re managing your stress, what you’re learning from your mistakes, and how you can show up in similar experiences in the future so you can access your brain’s neurological wiring for hope.
- **NAVIGATE NEGATIVE PEOPLE** – If you’re struggling with a negative colleague manage your own resilience by trying to minimize the amount of time you spend with this person if you can; inoculate yourself with a little jolt of joy prior to seeing them, so your brain is in a better neurological space; and be sure to restore some heartfelt positive emotion after spending time with these people, so they don’t drain your resilience and energy.
- **HOLD MORE POSITIVE MEETINGS** – Researchers estimate we spend 37% of our time in meetings at work and that 50% of this time is completely wasted. Aside from practicing basic meeting etiquette try starting with sizzle and inject some positivity by asking people to share: “What’s working well?” Every action we take is preceded by a question so try to plan the rest of your agenda not around the tasks that have to be done but by the conversations people need to have. And remember that your memories of events are shaped by endings, so ensure you leave enough time to finish on a positive note.

YOUR INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE




1. BOOST YOUR HEARTFELT POSITIVITY

Think back to your results and PERMAH 3 point check when you stepped on the mood scale.

Review the suggested evidence-based actions you can try and choose one want-to action you'd like to take to improve your mood this week and move closer toward realizing your potential (if there is nothing on this list that appeals create your own!).

2. COMPLETE YOUR SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen action, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below:

 <p>What's your WANT-TO CHOICE?</p>	 <p>How will you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?</p>	 <p>Who will you BUDDY UP WITH?</p>
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For example, if you've chosen to create a jolt of joy by heading back to nature, you might create a WANT-TO CHOICE about eating lunch under a tree each day at work. Find a way to TRACK YOUR PROGRESS, for example, scoring your mood out of 10 as you head off to lunch and then re-evaluating when you're done so you can what impact this having for you. And BUDDY UP by asking a colleague to join you.




YOUR TEAM CHALLENGE

1. IMPROVE THE MOOD OF TEAM MEETINGS

To help improve psychological safety in your team, experiment with running more positive teams meetings to improve your collective mood. Agree on the standing meeting agenda items or questions you might like to try. Feel free to mix it up as needed but don't just run through a list of tasks – remember every action we take is actually preceded by a question so how can you use your team meetings to help you each realize your potential?

2. COMPLETE YOUR TEAM SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen agenda, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below for each of the priorities you've chosen:

 <p>What's your WANT-TO CHOICE?</p>	 <p>How will you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?</p>	 <p>Who will you BUDDY UP WITH?</p>
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For example, if you've made a WANT-TO CHOICE about starting your meeting with the question "What's Working Well?", you may want to follow this with "Where Are We Struggling?", "How Are We Drawing On Our Strengths?", and "Who Should We Thank?" as a possible meeting agenda. Agree how you TRACK YOUR PROGRESS, for example, using your fingers to score out of 5 how you're each feeling at the start of the meeting and how you're feeling at the end. And make sure whoever is leading your meetings has BUDDIED UP with someone to help support them in making these changes.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- **Listen to this interview** with Professor Barb Fredrickson on how to prioritize positivity.
- **Listen to this podcast** with Dr. Robert Biswas-Diener.
- **Read Your Wellbeing Blueprint** by Michelle McQuaid and Peggy Kern for a practical guide on how you can improve your wellbeing and resilience.
- **Grab these Wellbeing Cards** for small, practical ways you can improve each of the PERMAH pillars.
- **Put a Wellbeing Poster** on your wall as a reminder of the small actions you can take in each PERMAH pillar.