

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE RESILIENCE SERIES

PART 2 - SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

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Guest: Ron Chapman, MSW, CEO, Leading Public Health

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Dany Zimmel (DZ): Welcome to Ideas for Practice, a podcast of the Region V Public Health Training Center. As one of 10 public health training centers across the country, the RVPHTC seeks to strengthen the skills of the current and future public health workforce in order to improve population health outcomes. We hope this podcast will share insights and spark ideas among those working in public health practice. Thank you for tuning into the second episode in our series on public health workforce resilience. Today, we'll be talking about the science of happiness. And I'm your host, Dany Zimmel. I'm excited to welcome back our guests, Natalie Gallagher and Ron Chapman.

DZ: Natalie is a coach, trainer, and facilitator who works with individuals to strengthen communication skills like public speaking. She also works with organizations, including those in governmental public health, to help them communicate effectively to solve problems and reach common goals. Ron is a facilitator, strategist, trainer, coach, and consultant, specializing in leadership and organizational development. Ron has experience with capacity building in the Public Health sector, and his clients include governmental and non-governmental organizations, non-profits, and private sector organizations. Today, Natalie and Ron are here to talk with us about the science of happiness. Welcome back to our podcast.

Natalie Gallagher (NG): Thank you so much for having us back, Dany.

Ron Chapman (RC): Thanks, Dany.

DZ: So for those of our listeners who weren't able to catch our previous episode on anti-fragility, let's start by learning a little bit more about our guests and their work. Ron, how about we hear from you first?

RC: Sure, well, officially, I'm a social worker. I have a master's in social work, though I've never practiced clinically, but it informs everything I do. And for the past 20 plus years, I've been working in public health at pretty much every level, border coalitions, health equity, states, communities, CDC, NIH, World Health, and I spend almost all my time working on the realization of potential for individuals, for leaders, for teams, for organizations for missions. And so that's pretty much what drives me, is how do we get the very best out of this place I call the heart of public health.

DZ: Thank you. Natalie, what about you?

NG: Yeah, as you mentioned, I'm a public speaking coach, I'm a trainer, I'm a facilitator. My background is education. My master's is in education, I cut my teeth in the classroom. I spent years teaching communications and public speaking at the university level, and all of

that experience essentially guides everything I do, which is anchored by adult learning theory, and making sure that people learn new things that change their trajectory. And that's what I love about learning theories, it's if you teach people the right thing at the right time, it completely changes the track of their life.

DZ: I agree with that 100%. So Natalie, it sounds like your experience in education and communication are going to be really helpful for our conversation today. Now, we only think we know the meaning of the word happiness, contentment, all things positive, those are maybe some terms and phrases that may come to mind, but what exactly is meant by the phrase, "the science of happiness"?

NG: I'm so glad that you asked that because I think there's a lot of misconceptions around what it means to be happy or that we can simply just turn it on and off like a switch. So the main framework I wanna refer to is called The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor, and this comes out of Harvard's famed positive psychology course. And Shawn Achor collected tons of amazing studies. He did a lot of his own work to look at how feeling good impacted things like your cognitive function, the way you solve problems, the way you view the world. And what he found over and over and over again is that when we are feeling good, when we're feeling happy, our brains work better. That's the simplest way to put it, is feeling good leads to better cognitive function. And I tie that back to... There's a wealth of studies, and I can touch on them in a little bit if you would like, but mainly what I do is I connect this idea of how we communicate with mindset, and I think of mindset as how you communicate with yourself. It's that running monologue in your head, and if you can change the things that you're telling yourself, then you change the way that you feel. And when you feel better, you think better.

NG: So I'm connecting these dots, teach my clients how to change the way they communicate with themselves, that improves their cognitive function, that creates better outcomes, and because I work specifically in public health, that creates better public health outcomes.

DZ: That's really interesting to think about how much an impact your mindset and your state of happiness and contentment can have, the impact that that can have on your outcomes and how that can translate into your work.

NG: Absolutely, I wanna reference one study that's pretty remarkable. And this is straight out of The Happiness Advantage, this is worked on by Harvard. They found that doctors who are put in a positive mood before making a diagnosis show three times more intelligence and creativity than those in a neutral state, and they make accurate diagnoses 19% faster. Now, what's remarkable about this is doctors are trained to look for things that are not great, right, things that are going wrong, and so they frequently get into a negative

state of mind. But if we can find ways to teach them how to get into that positive state of mind, then their performance improves. And it's not just doctors, this is across public health, this is... We've seen this with kids in school. When they're happy, they do far better in math, they do far better in Language Arts. This is across the board. So my goal, my work is about teaching people how to change the way they think to get those results.

DZ: Thank you for those examples.

DZ: So Ron, I'd like to ask you why is it important to take the time to learn about the science behind happiness? Natalie gave some great examples, but with everything going on in the world today, people are overwhelmed and overworked, especially those of our practitioners that are involved in frontline response. Taking the time to do this type of work, it may seem like something that's not top priority.

RC: I completely understand why people would say, "I don't have time for this happiness stuff, Dany." But let's be real about public health. What drives the people in public health is meaningfulness, which may not even be a word, but it captures itself. The source of morale and the well-being in public health comes out of feeling like the work we're doing matters. We certainly didn't come to public health to get rich, right? That's not why people do public health work. They care a great deal. So the parallel with what Natalie is talking about, about the mindset of how we're oriented to that, is extraordinarily important. I'm gonna do a little bit of a throwback here for a moment. I recently had a chance to read Viktor Frankl's original first book, a collection of lectures called *Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything*.

RC: Now, for those of you who don't know, Viktor Frankl, the book was *The Man's Search for Meaning*, he was in a Nazi concentration camp. So these are his expositions as a psychologist on the source of meaning. And what he concludes is that meaning has nothing to do with external circumstance. So let me put that in public health, whether we have a COVID or some other pandemic, whether we have difficulties with social determinants of health and health equity, race in America, the determinants of public health well-being, and therefore their happiness is not external. The source of meaning is completely sourced from inside us. So what that tells us is if meaning is inside us, and if mindset and attitude and all those things are part of that bound together source of meaning and purpose, then we should be looking inside to all these psychological brain chemistry matters, that'll help us find well-being, which I really think is probably a better word than happiness, a sense of well-being.

RC: And then just to call back to something in our previous anti-fragility session, the amount of data people have about their own lives, about how well they have come out of difficult circumstances. It's like the coolest thing in the world is that, as I said, in the first session, it's that coach who was so hard on you, but my god, how much you grew. So it

turns out that that source of real value doesn't have anything to do with what's outside of us. So if I'm a leader in public health and I've already got a workforce that is pre-conditioned to want to have meaningful work, I gotta start thinking about every way that I can to support the ecological model, create an ecology, in which these people with those motivations can thrive regardless of external circumstances. And then the next thing, you know, all those indicators about people's well-being in the workplace go up, and then Natalie inferred this, then all of a sudden, all those things in your personal life improve because things have improved inside your work life. And suddenly you've got this upward spiral effect that, from a potential point of view is just too good to miss.

DZ: Yeah, it's all connected. It sounds like, you know, striving to look internally and to foster that sense of well-being can help you discover what your strengths are, and really put them to use for positive impact.

RC: Yeah. You know what? It occurred to me and Natalie may actually know the science on this, I don't know if you do or not, but just as you were saying that, Dany, I have a funny feeling that if you look at people's creativity, productivity, innovation, etcetera, that if we get into this better sense of well-being that the innovation and creativity don't create the sense of well-being. I have a funny feeling that, hopefully Natalie can confirm this, that that the well-being produces the innovation, the creativity, the magic, that we become so pleased and find so much meaning in. So I don't know if I just set you up for the fall, Natalie, but I bet you can respond to that.

NG: *[chuckle]* No, I think that's spot on. Not I think, I know it's spot on, 'cause I spend a lot of time looking at the research looking at the evidence. The lovely thing about working with public health professionals is you have to show up with the data, you can't just say, "This is how it is or this is what I think. It's, "This is what the research shows and I can point to a wealth of studies." Like I said earlier, Shawn Achor compiled quite a bit of them in *The Happiness Advantage*. If you look at work from Brené Brown, if you look at work from Adam Grant, he's another one of my favorites. They spend a lot of time studying how people think, and over and over and over again, they found that if you can achieve that sense of well-being, that sense of happiness and peace, that has a direct impact on the way you think. Now, the pushback is, I can't just, "be happy", so how do we get people from feeling despondent, feeling angry, sad, powerless, into this place where they feel empowered, they feel happy, they feel good, so they can tap into those cognitive benefits?

NG: And that's really where Ron and I come in with our work, which is, let's coach people through this because we know that it's not enough to just... I was joking around about this in the last episode, it's not enough just to look at a Pinterest board full of empty quotes and platitudes, you actually have to have skills and you have to have strategies to get yourself there.

DZ: Exactly. And Natalie, you set me up perfectly for my next question here. So I've bought in, I understand the importance of The Happiness Advantage and its value, but what does implementation look like?

NG: Yes, implementation is essentially, I want to say rewiring your brain, running a new program, if you will, and you can start small. One of the things that I do with my clients is we teach a shift in perspective. And the overarching theme of this is I'm gonna teach you how to have a problem solving mindset. Now, if I come in and say, "I'm gonna teach how to be happy," there's all sorts of problems with that, right? People push back, they shut down, they get angry about it, "You can't just make me be happy, gosh, darn it," and they're right. But I can teach you how to solve problems. I can teach you how to tap into the creative parts of your brain to work through your challenges, and that in turn, makes you feel good. And then you become better at solving problems, and then you feel even better, and then you have a really beautiful cycle. So the first thing I do is is a shift in perspective.

NG: When I was in the classroom, my most successful students were not the most talented, they were not the smartest, they were not the hardest working; they were the ones with the problem-solving mindset, which means even when I'm not feeling great, I am committed to finding a solution. In Good to Great, Jim Collins refers to this as the Stockdale paradox, which is you acknowledge that there's a problem. This is not toxic positivity, you must recognize that there's a problem, but you must also have deep faith and commitment to solving that problem, and you must tap into your creativity in order to do so. And so I teach them how to ask the right questions how to master their stories, which is if you're letting a story about the situation shut you down, a story could be, "There's no way out, there's no solution. I just can't do it. Everything and everyone is against me." Well, those are stories. How do we master those? And you keep taking steps towards this idea of this problem-solving mindset that gets you feeling better. When you feel better, cognition improves. By the way I repeat things a lot because we also have a lot of evidence that repetition is essentially what gets people to retain it. *[chuckle]*

DZ: I know that helps me. *[chuckle]*

NG: Yeah. So I joke around I'm like, "I'm gonna sound like a parrot, that's on purpose. You're gonna remember this though, when I'm done, which is the point." So problem-solving mindset, I teach people strategies, how to tap into that, and then we go from there.

DZ: Yeah. And I really like the point you made about knowing to ask questions and trying to decipher what questions to ask yourself as you're kind of reflecting on these challenges that you may have been struggling through.

NG: It's a lot to ask someone who is struggling to just feel good. It's a lot to say, "Hey, if you just feel happy, you'll solve your problem." Well, that makes them feel worse. But if we can start with questions that are just about curiosity, like "I'm curious about this problem. I'm curious about the possibility of there being solutions. I'm curious about who I could talk to about this." It's easy to tap into curiosity, and then curiosity opens all these doors, and then we start to move forward. We get people out of feeling despair, we get them out of being stuck, we get them out of this false narrative that they can't get through this. And then they start to feel a little bit better. And now, we're doing what Ron's referring to is, spiraling up. It's all about taking these very specific steps, asking specific questions and getting to this place where they feel good enough that they're tapping into those cognitive benefits.

DZ: That's really interesting how powerful curiosity can be. I think it's something that I don't tend to think of on a day-to-day basis. But I think that that's a really important thing to keep in mind as we're having this conversation.

NG: If you're dealing with challenging relationships, if you come into any of those conflicts with a sense of curiosity, and then you ask someone openly without sarcasm, "Hey, I'm curious about your experience," and then watch what they say and how they shift, that is the power of curiosity question. That completely changed my career as a teacher, 'cause I went from being like, "You didn't do your homework, you must be lazy, whatever," 'cause teachers label, we all do, we're human, into, "Hey, I'm curious about your experience with this." And all of a sudden, I find out all of these things that they were stuck on or they weren't sure about, or these other things that were happening. And now I know where I can target my teaching. Now I know how to approach this issue. Now I know how to resolve this conflict, because curiosity opens these doors.

DZ: Those are really great examples.

NG: Thank you.

DZ: So we talked a little bit earlier about how this work can help foster creativity. And I wanna come back to Ron now, can you talk a little bit about the role of creativity in this? And specifically in the workplace context, what happens to individuals and teams when working on happiness just isn't happening?

RC: I like where Natalie was was going with this, where can we start? Where do we get the upward spiral started, since we can't just talk ourselves into feeling happy when we're not feeling happy? And I come out of the recovering community. I'm a longtime recovering alcoholic. And one of the things we've learned in that community, some psychologists studied, and they said, it's one of the most positive take one step at a time models they'd ever seen. So if we wanna tap creativity and use what Natalie is talking about, and learn

what we've learned about this ability to take one step and suddenly begin to create a different trajectory, what we do is we use the questioning techniques Natalie is talking about. We ask a question, which immediately there's this funny thing about the brain, it's like the raw machine of the brain, if you give it three questions, literally, the research shows this, it can't not begin to wonder. They have to be credible questions... What happens is the raw machine of the brain, the part that just runs on sheer logic goes, "Oh, I don't know." And suddenly, a space begins to open up. And if you continue to prod that, here's that one little step at a time thing.

RC: If you continue to prod that slowly but surely, and people talk about this all the time, when you talk to people about perhaps have depression challenges or real difficult circumstances, if you talk very long with 'em, Dany, what you begin to see is that they have these strategies like, well, yeah, I woke up with 87 things on my to-do list and I almost went back to bed, but then I said, I'll do one. And they did one and one led to two, led to three, which is, again, part of what we see in the recovering community of people putting their lives back together, really interesting crossover into behavioral health.

RC: So, if you wanna open up creative space, what we do is we take advantage of this tendency towards curiosity, such a great word, and we just keep nudging and prodding in that direction. Now, Natalie alluded to something that I find often with leaders, and so this is directed towards leaders. One of your greatest traits as a leader is being patient with your people while they get there, they didn't wake up deliberately on the wrong side of the bed, planning to be a thorn in your side, so how do I as a leader help coax my team, coax my people to find ways into creativity, into innovation.

RC: And here's what's really interesting about what the research also shows us. The research shows that the highest performing teams have seven positive interactions for every one that is so-called negative. Now, they don't say it's causative, so you can't do seven and naturally produce high-performing team, but all high-performing teams. So if we can create this sort of positive, inquisitive, expansive, open, patient way of opening it up, what the research shows is it increases the number of positive interactions, the number of positive interactions increases cohesion, increases the glue of relationships, furthers what it is we're here to do, builds on the meaning that I talked about earlier, and pretty soon, what you've got is you've got an engine of momentum on your side. And so the leaders, even though if they're informal, have to be mindful of how we get that engine of happiness working on our side, rather than working against us or us working against it.

DZ: And as you were giving that explanation, Ron, it made me think of how these leaders can really help foster this creativity and how it can lead towards that upward spiral of, "Okay, so you have the sense of creativity that's been fostered among the members of the team, and this can contribute to their potential and capacity to solve problems, and this can

help build trust among the members of the team, and then how that can then reinforce their capability even further to continue to solve really challenging problems that they may be facing. So...

RC: I have a team I've been working with for more than a decade at the CDC, and they have been doing exactly what we're talking about. And what comes back with this group every single year is they are consistently one of the highest performing groups benchmarked against their peer cohorts, and twice or four times a year, they come back and they keep working... It's like a flywheel, you just do it over and over and over and over again. And it builds this incredible culture, this incredible ecology for people's well-being and for their ability to perform 'cause they're all absolutely interlinked.

DZ: So, Ron and Natalie, this may seem like a question not worth asking, but what effects could we see when we have happier individuals and teams that are able to work in more of a positive environment?

NG: There's so much evidence that when people are feeling good, especially feeling good about the work that they're doing, they show up with their whole selves, and what I mean by that is they show up ready to tackle these challenges, they show up ready to solve problems, they show up ready to be part of the team, ready to connect. When they're not happy, when they're not feeling fulfilled in their work, when they don't feel like they're being valued, when they're not being heard, that's a big thing that we work through. They shutdown.

NG: And so, when you have someone on your team that you may have labeled "problem person," So-and-so is not carrying their load, whatever, this is where the curiosity comes in, because there's something there that is creating a disconnect that's shutting down how they feel about their work, and thus how they're doing their work.

DZ: So, talking about how perspective and impact are connected, I'd like to ask both of you to provide any information or maybe even some helpful tools that our public health practitioners can use when they're working to foster happiness in themselves.

NG: We'll definitely provide some resources that you can share with your listeners. I have referenced the book, 'The Happiness Advantage' before. I absolutely continue to recommend it. Adam Grant has a really wonderful podcast about work life. And then the last thing that I wanna include is there are a lot of little things that you may not think have a big impact or maybe they're a waste of time, but they're really important. So, for example, I've done a number of trainings where the first thing that we do is I just have people drop into chat, "Hey, what's a great thing that happened to you in the last 24 hours?" Maybe you

got a good night sleep, maybe you had a great dinner, maybe the cup of coffee you're drinking right now is on point, that's the beauty of working from home, right? Better coffee.

DZ: Mmm hmm. *[chuckle]*

NG: And sometimes I'll have people share things, like share a picture of something that you love, and people share pictures of their adorable cats or their kids, or their garden or their yoga practice, and they get really excited talking about that, and now they're connecting with their colleagues on a human level, and we know that when you have humanized your colleagues, you have a lot more compassion and grace and patience, and that opens a lot of doors to what I keep referring to is the problem solving mindset. You're much more willing and able to work with them on the toughest challenges that you're facing, so, I would tell all public health professionals, find the time to be human, to share pictures of kittens, to talk about your gardens, to share the banana bread, to find out about each other's families and hobbies, because that humanous, that humanizing element, that is what is going to dramatically improve your cohesion as a team, your happiness, and your work.

DZ: I 100% agree with that. I think one, it's important and helpful to take the time to appreciate the little things, but two, to be able to share that with those that you're working with to help build those relationships and build that trust and be able to work as a more cohesive unit moving forward.

NG: Yeah, I'll share one quick story of before you turn it over to Ron. I was working with a team in Gaston County, North Carolina, and I could tell they're feeling low, it's after lunch, they're really stressed out, they're now working in their vaccination clinic, which is great, but also stressful. And when we came back from the break, I put up a picture of my cat Poppy. And Poppy is a ridiculous looking kitty, she looks like... My husband calls her deranged muppet, 'cause she has like this weird tufty fur, and she has a stripe down her nose and these big round eyes, and all of a sudden I'm getting all these messages like, "Oh my God, I would die for Poppy, that is the cutest cat I've ever seen," and all of a sudden they're engaging, they're laughing and they're talking, and they're engaging with the exercises.

NG: So, what we think is a little thing is actually a big thing. And that's what I want people to remember. Developing a happiness practice, a gratitude practice, it might feel big and overwhelming, but it's all those little things that have the biggest impact.

DZ: I agree. Ron, I wanted to ask if you have any tips or tricks that you'd like to share with us here. I know in previous conversations we've talked about the importance of reflecting

back to what are things that you did pre-COVID and how those may be able to play a role, as you're working through adversity.

RC: Yeah. I wanna add to something Natalie said. I've talked multiple times now about the heart of public health, that people come to public health 'cause they really care and really want their work to matter, but the other thing about public health that Natalie was sort of pointing towards is, public health is a very relational culture. Not just good will, although that's there, but they are people who like people, they like interacting with people quite often. And so, what we're playing to is again, a tendency that's in the public health culture, the relationality, the glue, I think I called it earlier, that makes all the difference in the world. So, how do we nurture, whether it's Poppy on the screen or all the other things we can do.

RC: I wanna acknowledge that it was far easier when we weren't working virtually because we had all those drop-by moments, which we have to be much more mindful of now. But a couple of the things, the tools that we use, we... Natalie and I do a lot of training in strength-based approaches. There's a tool called StrengthsFinder 2.0, Strengths-Based Leadership, CliftonStrengths. What all of them are, is they're oriented towards your sweet spot, towards what makes you uniquely, beautifully talentedly you, and it's a real different mindset when we start building cultures and teams around strengths and our positives rather than the feedback on our negatives and our weaknesses. Whole cool body of research behind that, that spawned a whole new set of psychological assessments.

RC: Another thing that I wanna shout out, and some of your people already know this is appreciative inquiry is a very specific tool used in any number of places in local public health and state public health, that is a different way of thinking about how we interview and how we talk to people about things, so, you can Google appreciative inquiry and you will find lots on that. So, my number one tip is one I referred to earlier, which is, you don't suddenly find your way into this positive mindset, many of us have to start with that one little step that moves us in that direction, and then all the steps that follow.

RC: So, if you too wake up with anxiety, I'm speaking about myself now, anxiety or wondering how you're gonna tackle all that long stuff to do in a difficult time, and your kids are being homeschooled right now, 'cause it's virtual and your spouse is in the other room and you don't think you like them very much anymore, that whole spiel, right? Okay, yeah, and let's do one thing to start moving in the right direction, and then what Natalie's identifying is then you get your brain on your side, then your brain becomes your ally and isn't working against you and the momentum it can create is pretty cool.

DZ: I think it's important to just think about taking that first step and to also remember, you're not starting from scratch. There are many instances where people have had to

overcome challenges in their personal life, and the way that you deal with that can translate to your professional life as well.

NG: Absolutely. We talk with a lot of people who are experiencing an array of issues in their personal life because we're all human, and sometimes Ron and I get very vulnerable and share things like... I have an autoimmune disease, so it's been a really weird time during this pandemic, like I know I need to be very cautious, but at what point does caution turn into paranoia, which shuts you down? So, it's been a really interesting year getting to put all of this work into practice and to see... And I think this is very heartening in the public health sphere, there's a huge demand for it, which means there's recognition that mindset and how we communicate and how we lead are incredibly important, incredibly important, has a massive impact and effect on our work.

DZ: Thank you for sharing that with us, Natalie. I think that's a really helpful example to kind of contextualize what we've been talking about.

NG: Especially because I don't want anyone to have the impression that you can only put this into practice if everything in your life is going smoothly. It's the opposite, this is, we're meeting you where you're at, we get that it's a storm, we're all in different boats, but let's talk about what we can do to get through the storm, how can we equip each other to be successful? How can we get through this? And a big part of that is being vulnerable, being open, being honest, and communicating with compassion.

DZ: Yeah, there's no such thing as waiting for the perfect moment to start. Every moment is the perfect moment.

NG: Yeah, right now, today.

DZ: So, you mentioned a couple of things, but I just wanna follow-up briefly, are there any specific dos and don'ts that our listeners should follow when they're trying to implement these happiness practices?

NG: Don't ignore the problems. Don't think that positive psychology or The Happiness Advantage is about ignoring problems, and I touched on this in the previous episode about anti-fragility, but this is all specifically so you can tackle those problems, this is so that you can look those problems in the eye say, I know that there's a solution here, and I'm well equipped to manage that solution, and I would say do stay present.

NG: I just got done watching The Last Dance, the Michael Jordan documentary. I don't even like basketball and I loved it. And what really resonated with me, this is makes Michael Jordan great. He was laser-focused on the task at hand at that moment, 100% present. Every time they'd ask about the future or the past, he was always keeping them focused on

the present. I am dealing with this thing right now, and I'm going to tackle it and resolve it and be the best at this one thing.

NG: So, that was a very rambly, weird response to just say, stay present, you know, take a deep breath, don't worry about what happened behind you, don't worry too much about what's going on tomorrow or the day after, 'cause you don't know what's gonna happen, instead stay focused on what you're dealing with right now.

DZ: And that was not a weird response at all. I think that's really helpful to hear.

NG: Okay, good. I was like, was that too circuitous?

DZ: I think that was great. So, I know that both of you have been providing some evidence behind the different aspects of The Happiness Advantage that we've been talking about today, and in public health, we like our evidence-based strategies. We like to have data to drive the strategies and approaches that we're trying to implement. So, Natalie, I'd like to hear a little bit more from you, if you could provide some of this evidence to kind of support what we've been talking about so far.

NG: That is a great question, Dany, and it's a big question, so I'm not gonna weigh it down with too many statistics, but I will say, if you go and you do your research on "positive psychology," Google gives you the option to look specifically at scientific journals, these are scientific studies that have been peer-reviewed, go to the white papers and take a look at their staggering statistics, because what we have found is, Let's take students, for example, let's look at Carol Dweck's work with fixed versus growth mindset.

NG: If you simply teach a student that they have the ability to get better and you instill in them the belief that they can grow and improve, that opens up all of these different doors to their abilities, all of a sudden they wanna practice, they wanna study, they're up for challenges, whereas if you have a student with a fixed mindset, which is they believe that their intelligence is static, their talents and abilities are static, they tend to shutdown, and so regardless of what their IQ is, their performance drops, so that alone... That framing of the mindset from growth to fixed shows us that there is a wealth of information, pointing to the fact that feeling good, feeling like you have the ability to solve problems, feeling like you have the ability to get better, which touches back to our anti-fragile discussion, that has a huge bearing on how successful you are going to be going forward.

DZ: Thanks for those examples, Natalie, and Ron, do you have anything else you'd like to add?

RC: Yeah, I'm really struck by something that is emergent in the research space these days, I'm sure a number of your listeners have heard of Adverse Childhood Experiences, ACEs,

big public health space, very predictive of life outcomes. The summary statement for those of you don't know it, is, people who score for a high number of traumatic experiences as a child have dramatically decreased likelihood of relational success, economic success, educational success, life success, etcetera. So anyway, that's just a quick background.

RC: The part that I am really, really jazzed about is the people who are studying post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth. It turns out, here's the research point, and it's very encouraging, the same stuff that can run people off the rails can really deeply devastate their lives, can actually be the transformative material to change them much for the better. Now, we don't quite know the difference, we think it has to do with nurturance and support and those sorts of things, but we don't quite have the answers yet, but what the research is showing is the same stuff that we in public health are so disturbed by because it's so devastating, proves to be the same space that can transform people's lives.

RC: That is really provocative and very consistent with this idea of the happiness orientation or advantage, which is, so, how do you take these devastating things, what's the magic elixir that we in public health can bring to that, that allows more and more people over time to come from these difficult stories and circumstances and find their way to a transformed and/or much more positive set of outcomes. That is just exciting as it can be because of what the research is beginning to show. And I guess as the chronic optimist perhaps, is like, well, I wonder, I wonder where we can take that too, that's really exciting if you care about public health and health equity.

DZ: Yeah, that really is interesting and exciting information to hear that there's evidence to support multiple aspects of this framework that we've been talking about today. So Ron, I'd like to follow-up with you. For some of our public health practitioners out there, if they maybe need a little bit of guidance, want to follow-up with some resources, where can they find this information in order to try to implement this happiness advantage framework?

RC: Sure, well, we've mentioned the number of resources along the way, and there's podcast notes where that and other things will be referenced. So, take advantage of that. Natalie mentioned that a nice little Google search may glean you a whole lot of things. Here's what has happened for me, I'm just gonna speak from my own experience. As soon as I started looking at just what I mentioned, post-traumatic growth, I didn't even know there was such a thing until I stumbled across it, is as we begin to poke and look at this, all of a sudden, all of these things that are going on in this brain research space begin to open up. And we start finding there's so much cause for optimism, so, I would encourage you all to do what we've been talking about, be curious, go out there and see what finds its way to you, and then by all means, send us your thoughts because we'd still like to keep building our own practices around this.

DZ: Definitely. There's no ceiling to the growth and the amount of curiosity that we all have and can acquire.

RC: And I guess just to be honest, and I realize too, that some of us... Just to ground it, I know there are horrific circumstances and difficult circumstances many people face, so I don't mean to negate or suggest that's not true, but if a big piece of what Natalie was talking about is true, then it's not so much a question of what has happened to us as what we do with what has happened to us, that seems to be positive public health space, to me.

NG: Eckhart Tolle would say "Accept, then act." Accept, then act. Accept whatever is. That's the first big piece. And now that you've accepted it, now you can start to move forward and act based on what you have learned today, what you've learned in your gratitude practice, your public health practice, your positive psychology practice, whatever it is, except then act.

DZ: Really like that, and I think that's a good phrase to kind of round out all of the different things that we've been talking about today. So thank you for sharing that, Natalie.

NG: Absolutely.

DZ: So, as we're wrapping up, I would like to take a moment to ask both of you to share something with us, maybe something that's bringing a smile to you these days. Is it a song, a snack? I'm very food-motivated, so I had to add something about snacks in there, or really anything, anything that's bringing a smile to you these days.

NG: Besides my weird, muppet kitty Poppy. Oh gosh, I'll give you guys one more really cool resource, it's a book called 'Big Magic' by Elizabeth Gilbert, and it's about being creative for the sake of being creative. When you live in a culture that tends to commodify everything, we think, "Oh, if I paint, I've to find a way to sell it." "If I knit, I have to put it up on Etsy." So I've been painting, but just to paint, not to sell it, not to be in a gallery, but just to express creativity, and I find that when I'm painting, I feel like I'm most myself, I'm present, I'm happy, I feel relaxed. And so I would say tap into something creative, not to sell it, not to build a name for yourself, but just to be creative, just to make something because you're human and we're wired to create.

DZ: Just for the sake of creating, I really like that. What about you Ron?

RC: Well, the COVID time has allowed me to bring sculpting clay back out, which I've not been able to do in sometime. So, that's been a real pleasure. But the big one has been gardens. Spring is springing, although I've been going to gardens all winter long, all of the past year, it's the destination for me, something about gardens fills me up, and so as I'm looking out at the azaleas right at this very moment that are blossoming in my backyard,

I'm reminded of all the beauty in the world. And that's a place I go to over and over again, because it fills me up. So, in the COVID time I've been to more gardens than I knew there were gardens to visit, so it's a strange and unexpected outcome from the COVID time.

DZ: That sounds lovely. Well, that's one thing that both of you can take advantage of the pretty nice weather year-round down in Atlanta. We're up here in Ann Arbor, Michigan, so we're just now starting to see those flowers blooming up out of the ground, and I know that's something that's been bringing a smile to me in the past couple of days and weeks.

NG: Yes, although I will say with all those flowers comes an insane amount of pollen, we call it the pollenin, and a friend of mine who works with the weather channel said a high pollen count is 100. Right now in Atlanta our pollen count is like 2000.

DZ: Oh my goodness.

NG: To give you an example of what we're dealing with right now. But it yields flowers, and I think that's a great way to frame a conversation, like, get through the pollen, get through the winter, on the other end, you've got a beautiful garden.

DZ: I like that. Get through the pollen, at the end of it you have a beautiful garden. That's really lovely. Alrighty, well, thank you both so much for joining us today. Natalie and Ron, I appreciate the examples that you shared with us, both professional and personal, and I think that our listeners will appreciate the insight on this topic. I think this coupled with our previous episode on anti-fragility really provide some strategies and some resources to help our public health practitioners continue to get through the ongoing pandemic.

NG: Thank you so much for having us, Dany, we're so happy to chat about this work that we do, and we're thrilled that we're moving into a new phase, COVID-ly speaking.

RC: And who knew... And Dany, I'm just sort of remarking, I've been keeping notes here, who knew we had so much to talk about, so thanks for bringing so much out of us and for letting us do this. This was a great fun.

DZ: Thank you, thank you both.

[music]

DZ: And to our listeners, we hope that you've learned some helpful information on resilience through both this episode and also from part one on anti-fragility. We encourage you to check out some of the resources we mentioned in the podcast notes, as well as an evaluation and transcript. Funding for this podcast is provided by the Health Resources and

Services Administration. With that we'll end here for today, stay safe and stay curious everyone.

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