



# HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

Reed ([00:00](#)):

Welcome back to the event everybody, I'm so happy today. We're going to be talking with Ben or pardon me, Tal Ben-Shahar. And he is the author and lecturer who we're just, again, really, really happy to have here. He taught two of the largest classes in Harvard, university's history, positive psychology, and the psychology of leadership. Now, I guess you can see why we have him on our event, because these are incredibly important things to the health coaching world. So, today Tal consults and lectures around the world to executives in multinational corporations, the general public, and at risk populations. I'm looking forward to delving into what he means by at risk populations. And the topic he lectures on includes leadership, and happiness, education, innovation, ethics, self-esteem, resilience, goal, setting, and mindfulness. Again, I think you see why we're featuring Tal today. And his books have been translated into more than 25 languages and have appeared on best seller lists around the world.

Reed ([01:09](#)):

Tal's also a serial entrepreneur. I've heard that term a lot lately. He's the co founder and chief learning officer of Happiness Studies Academy, Potential Life, Maytiv and Happier.tv. So, he's an avid sportsman, Tal won the U.S intercollegiate and Israeli national squash championships and today for exercise swims, dances, and practices, yoga. He obtained his PhD in organizational behavior and a Bachelor's in philosophy and psychology from Harvard. So, again, I'm just tickled to have Dr. Tal here today. And hello, Dr. Tal, can you tell us a little bit about your background and such?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([01:57](#)):

Hi, Reed. Thank you. It's good to be here. My background is actually in computers or at least that's where I started. I went as an undergraduate, found myself in my second year as a computer science major, doing pretty well academically, doing well in athletics. Doing okay socially and yet being very unhappy.

Reed ([02:22](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([02:23](#)):

Yeah. I remember, I remember waking up one very cold Boston morning, going to my academic advisor and telling her that I'm switching majors. And she said, what to? And I said, well, I'm leaving computer science and moving over to philosophy and psychology. And she said, why? And I said, well, I have two questions and I'm desperate for answers. The first question is, why aren't I happy? Second question. How can I become happier? And it's with these two questions that I then went on to get my undergraduate degree. And then my PhD also focusing on these questions. And then started to teach what I had learned, and I continue to learn. This was, started 30 years ago, still going.



# HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

Reed ([03:11](#)):

Remarkable. Well, you're looking great. I hope you're happy because that's a big goal of health coaches is to help people get healthier, so they can be happy. So, there's, I mean, why would someone want to be healthy? Because you're happier. You know, it's better to have good energy, and sleep well, and not be overweight and all these different things, clear thinking, all that. And in your background too, you have the positive psychology. Personally, I'm glad you switched, because there's enough tech people around I think. And who knows if they're happy.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([03:51](#)):

I know. Yeah. And I'm glad too, but you know, Reed, you talk about the connection between health and happiness and it's only in the West and only over the past, you know, a couple of hundred years that we have created this distinction between mind and body. And there are two sides of the same coin, you know, a healthier mind leads to a healthier body, a healthier body leads to a healthier mind. And we need to look at both. We need to look at physiology as well as psychology.

Reed ([04:24](#)):

Yeah, I totally agree. And most of it, people in our world, it seems like to get people to work on themselves it takes more than just some symptoms. Like, you know, they have headaches or some ache or pain or somewhere and you know what, they kind of learn to live with it. Like they start to think it's normal. So, let's talk a little bit about that. How do you get them from there to realizing you're not happy like that? Like doesn't being happy matter to you? Do you have a comment on that?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([05:00](#)):

Yeah. You know, Henry David Thoreau, close to 200 years ago, said most men live, lead lives of quiet desperation. And, as you said, we sort of get used to it and when we don't think twice about it and until something radical happens. And radical, I mean something physical of force or psychological, you know, depression or extreme anxiety. And the thing is we don't need to wait and we shouldn't wait because the, the real power of coaching in general is in prevention. And if we begin the process early on, we can save ourselves a lot of trouble, a lot of heartache. And by when I say, when I say early on, yeah, of course, when we're adults, but wouldn't it be wonderful if schools could introduce these ideas that we teach adults as part of health coaching, happiness coaching.

Reed ([06:04](#)):

Yeah. You know, it just gets more and more interesting as we go along here. I'm wondering, because the type of health coaching that I teach is very much physiology, anatomy, biochemistry, and things. I teach the use of functional laboratory work, saliva, urine, blood stool, and yet, it's the more the interview that you would do, what we would call an onboarding session, where you find out what's your main complaint? But why is it important to you? You know, how does it keep you from being happy? And



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

again, I just get overwhelmed sometimes that people could tell you, well, my main complaint is migraines. Well, how often do those bother you? Oh, three times a week. And, well, how long has that been going on? Oh, about five years. And we ask them, what have you tried so far?

Reed ([07:02](#)):

I say, well, how does this prevent you from being happy? I'm looking for a motivating factor. And you, people, whatever the symptom was, and it's been going on for years and they've had it all the time. And then you say, well, so how does this prevent you from being happy? And they say, oh, I get by. Like it's really hard to get them to connect how that physical ailment is, they just really make, do people not care about being happy? You said that in today's age, it's becoming more prevalent, but why don't people care about being happy here?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([07:35](#)):

You know, I, I think part of it is because, well, there are many reasons for it, but, but part of it is because people don't realize that connection, that exists, you know, so there is fascinating work that was done by the late John Sarno, who was a professor at New York university. And what his work essentially showed is that most, not all, but most backaches are as a result off some psychological disease, rather than something being wrong with the alignment or tissue. Most backaches are results of suppressed, rejected emotion. And so, when he tells people this and they, and they understand the rejected emotion, understand the connection between mind and body, the the back pain sometimes simply disappears, goes away.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([08:30](#)):

So, mind affects the body, body of course, affects mind. You know, one of the top generators of not just unhappiness, of misery it's physical pain. Another is of course fatigue, that's physically unpleasant, also psychologically unpleasant. So, all these things just point to thing, and that is the oneness, the connection of the mind and body. And the question is how do you get people to understand, to get it? And the way to get them to understand is A) by telling them stories and B) and that is more important to get them to experiment. To get them, to try things out and to experience small victories. And these small victories can motivate them to do more. And of course you can build on that in an upward spiral. Unfortunately, too many people are on this downward spiral where they don't feel well psychologically. And then that affects their physiology, which makes them feel worse psychologically and on and on. And then they get to a point where they can no longer take the pain or the discomfort, and then they come to you.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([09:42](#)):

But they should be doing that much, much earlier. And I mean, I follow you completely. And I'm just wondering, you made me think about what came first, you know, cause if someone's unhappy about something, they might put their head down and then they got the rounded shoulders. And then they, of



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

course aren't breathing properly. They're not sitting back getting all the oxygen and things into their body. So, then the next thing you know, they, they're saying, they're going to a chiropractor thinking something's wrong with their back, like you just said. And so, I just wonder if, I mean, you just said that's true that that happens. And then you also get people with pain, maybe you're in a car accident and you actually do have a bad back. And, but the same thing happens in reverse where you have this bad back, you know, just start slumping your shoulder. Now you're not breathing right. Now you're not oxygenating your head and now you sort of get foggy thinking and then you're not doing as much. And now you're depressed. Like, you know, it takes, that what I think health coaching can help people do is sort that out. Don't you think?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([10:48](#)):

Exactly. I couldn't agree more, Reed, what you're describing essentially is that there is a system and in the system, the parts are interconnected, meaning your mind is connected to the body. Your back is connected to your shoulders. Your shoulders are connected to your sympathetic and parasympathetic system. You know, everything is interconnected. Your nutrition of course is effected in effects. And what a health coach does is, help the coachee, understand the system and how everything affects everything else. Now, the important thing in this is taken from the wonderful work of Peter Sangey, who's a professor at MIT on systems thinking, he says the important thing about systems thinking is that it allows us to identify leverage points, leverage points for change. And isn't that the kind of work that you do? I mean, why are you interviewing even before, before your intervention to understand where the leverage point is that can affect the entire, the entire system.

Reed ([11:53](#)):

Right. Right. So, these leverage points, I'm putting that in my own framework, of course. Because we use the system it's, it's very, system-based. What I teach was based on the thousands of labs I ran on thousands of people and I had good mentoring, but I also was able to make my own observations about the commonalities, the patterns that existed, I started to recognize certain patterns. And then people would come along and, and I would just realize that here's the pattern I'm seeing. And it developed into a system, at least of investigation into underlying causes and conditions, at least, you know, physiologically.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([12:39](#)):

It's interesting what you're saying, you know, it's interesting what you were saying, Reed, because you know what you were saying. So, you accumulated a lot of information, a lot of data, and then it created a pattern for you. And now you can already see the connections. So, it is almost you've internalized it and it seems like intuition, but it's much more than that. It's based on a lot of tuitions, a lot of learning, and as you say, mentoring, as well as experimentation. And it reminds me of another thing that I think is very important for us as coaches to highlight. And that is yes, look at research and you know, and of course we provide them with evidence based interventions and research in physiology, in psychology. These are all very important elements, no less important is we need to encourage our coachees, in



addition to research, to experiment with me-search. And me-search is about trying things on themselves. So, yeah, you know, here's something you should try. Here's something else you should try it, see what works for you. And that's no less important than the universal research, is the particular me-search.

Reed ([13:55](#)):

How do you get someone to be willing to do me-search? Because people tend to be pretty stuck in their ways. And sometimes we want to go, we want to shake them and go, go look in the mirror. Like you're, you're getting old, you know, this is important, you know. And I always also trained my coaches to not want it more than they want it. We can't want it more than them. And there's a psychology behind that. But, but how, is there some tricks we could convey about getting people to do the me-search? I love that term by the way. That's fantastic.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([14:29](#)):

Yeah. So, obviously I think about this a lot. Let, let me share with you a story, which is always in the back of my mind when I introduce someone to change and especially when I'm struggling to get them to move. So, this is a friend of mine who was invited by an organization. And the problem, the, the pain point in the organization was stress and burnout and physical as well as psychological consequences of the ongoing stress. And so, they invited him in, he talked to them about the importance of taking time out for recovery. And they loved his talk. And at the end of the talk, this was a trading company. At the end of the talk, they said, yeah, doctor, we love what you have to say.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([15:21](#)):

What do you want us to do? And he said, here's what I want you to do. What I want you to do is every two hours to take a 15 minute break. During that 15 minute break, you can go, this was in New York. You can go for a walk around the block. You can have a cup of coffee, whatever it is, but break for 15 minutes. They said to him, you're joking. Right? He said, why? He said, you know, 15 minutes, we're traders, you know, how much, what can happen on world markets in 15 minutes, we have to stay on that screen all the time. You know, we have our lunch in front of that screen. We don't have recovery. So, first of all, he understood the source of the problem, but he also understood that this wasn't going to work.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([16:01](#)):

So, he said, okay, not 15. How about five minutes? They said, no. He said, okay, how about 30 seconds? Do you have that? They said, okay, 30 seconds we'll give you, what have you got, quickly? And he said this, he said, here's what I'd like to do every two hours to take 30 seconds during which I want you to ideally close your eyes and take in three deep breaths. So, five seconds in, all the way to the belly, five seconds out. And he said, but what I want you to do is promise me that you do it consistently throughout the day and not just today and tomorrow, but you do it continuously for the next month or



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

two. And they said, you've got a deal. And they did it. That brought about significant change in the organization, because that was his way in, sort of the foot in the door.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([17:02](#)):

Moreover, as we know, you know, even three deep breaths can shift us from the fight or flight response to the relaxation response, which is what he did. And I think that what I find so fascinating about this story and a real success story is that he introduced small changes consistently. And that is the key. Once you introduce small changes consistently they'll see change. And once they see change, that reinforces their willingness, that opens them up. And there's a lot of work on influenced by psychologist by the name of Cialdini. And he talks about this foot in the door technique, you know, just start. And once you start, that can become a snowball in the positive sense of word, an upward spiral, rather than a downward one.

Reed ([17:53](#)):

That's a great response. I like how you brought in the parasympathetic, getting the rest and digest, relaxation response in there. Because we do tend to be very sympathetic dominant these days, the amount of stress and what we're willing to, to do. It's amazing that we're surviving, all in the name of progress. Right. So, when you're invoking this relaxation response, which I could see how it could change the organization, it changes communities and families. If they just get together and have a good time, play a game, do something that isn't, you know, the doldrums, it can be very, very useful and helpful. Anything else you want to add about that would be great. And I also want to make sure that I asked you about something a little bit deeper.

Reed ([18:51](#)):

We talk about brain, body and relaxation response, and getting to a space, and I don't want to go too far out into space, but what I find when I do that moment, cause I try to do that for 15 minutes every morning. And I'm like you, I start early, I work hard, I've been doing it for years. I'm just used to always go, go, go. And then I sort of crap out, you know, but what I found really helps me is doing this at least once a day, at least. I just did it before this call. I have a very busy day. I went outside in bare feet and put my feet on the rocks and I just took a few breaths in. What I find is that some other type of information seems to bubble up that I was ignoring until then. And if I do that, I find, oh, yeah, you know, some little inspiration, something, I think it's coming from my subconscious or something. Like, can you explain that to us a little bit?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([19:51](#)):

Yeah. You know, I think, Reed, there are so many points here that I, that I would like to respond to. The first thing in what you did was you essentially took out or take out time for recovery. And if you think about it, you know, many people have a misperception of stress. So, you know, stress is, you know, public enemy number one when, when it shouldn't be, because if you think about it, stress potentially is



good for us. So, what happens when you go to the gym? Lifting weights, you're stressing your muscles. Now, not necessarily a bad thing because you stress your muscles and, you know, two days after you go back to the gym and you stress them again. And then, you know, after six months, a year, you get bigger, healthier, stronger.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([20:39](#)):

So, stress in and of itself is, is actually good for us, potentially. When do the problems begin? The problems begin when we go to the gym and we lift weights, and a minute later we lift more weights, and then more weights, and then more weights, that's when we get injured. That's when we get weaker rather than stronger. The problem therefore is not the stress. The problem rather is the lack of recovery. When we do not engage the parasympathetic system, when we are constantly in stress, the fight or flight, that's when the problems begin. However, if we fluctuate between sympathetic and parasympathetic, as our nature dictates, that's how we actually potentially get stronger, healthier over time. Now, interestingly, when people attack stress, they pay high price for it. Now there's some wonderful work by Kelly McGonigal.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([21:41](#)):

Who's a, who teaches at Stanford on the upside of stress. Showing that people who have, who negatively evaluate stress in their lives are less healthy. Whereas people who also, not only, but also see the upside of stress, actually turn out to be a healthier fear. And of course happier because two sides of the same coin again. So, the recovery issue is, is so important. And as you say, you know, going outside and, you know, breathing some fresh air if possible, closing your eyes and taking some deep breaths, playing games, having your cup of coffee, whatever it is, that can go a long way in giving us exactly what we need in terms of the recovery. That creates a beneficial cycle with stress. Stress, recovery, stress, recovery, this is the healthy approach.

Reed ([22:40](#)):

Yeah. I really liked that. And it doesn't take that long, I guess it depends on the stress and the level and the damage that's done as to how much recovery you might need. Like sometimes you hear, well, I need a vacation. And you might need a vacation. It might take three or four days to overcome some traumatic experience. I am a guy that just kind of older, sort of macho type, like nothing bothers me, things like that. Some of it's a facade, but, you know, but truly I really think I'm kind of invincible. I've been through a lot of stuff, but the other day I had a fire on my property and I have a big property. It's really beautiful, kind of a paradise I've built, overlooking a Lake, and everyone comes here and, oh my God, it's so beautiful. The other day I woke up and there was a fire in the vally. It's fire season here in Southern California. So, I go outside and there's smoke. And it was coming right up to some of my property. And I wasn't dressed well, I went up there and I, with my fire extinguisher and it just exhausted.

Reed ([23:51](#)):



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

Anyway, I started breathing smoke, and I fell and I twisted my ankle. And like I said, I just barely had even pants on and I just, I kind of panicked. And it's remarkable. The fire department showed up. They were looking for it because I'd been asleep on the sofa, taking a little afternoon nap. And it just, the whole thing just was very, very stressful. And I can handle a lot of stress. I mean, I've had things happen to me. But that took a lot out of me. That took me a few days. I found that that that happened on a Wednesday. And I had to finish the week, the work week, but Saturday and Sunday, I was completely drained. And I didn't know why. I just thought, why am I so tired? I, oh okay, because your house just almost burnt down, and you twisted your ankle, and you inhaled smoke to the point where you're choking in that. Man, you better take that recovery time. And I'm not ashamed to admit that took the window to my sails, man.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([24:55](#)):

Yeah. And I think you're spot on and your body was telling you, I need recovery. And that recovery is critical. And, you know, you describe a very difficult situation that you experienced and your body needed recovery. We also need recovery after very powerful, emotionally powerful, positive experiences. People who, talk about how after a wedding, you know, it's a real high perhaps, but you need time for recovery because it's emotionally taxing. And again, the key is going back to the idea of me-search. We need to listen to the messages. So, if your body mind telling you that you need to sleep, go to sleep. If it tells you that you need time off, take time off because, you know, 30 seconds will not be, is not the panacea. It's not, it's not always enough. You know, JP Morgan, the father of a North American investment banking once said, I can do the work of a year in nine months, but not in 12.

Reed ([26:08](#)):

Yeah. That's funny.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([26:09](#)):

Could do the work of a year in nine months, but not in 12. You know, now most of us can't afford perhaps three months off, but the message is clear. You know, if you want to be at your best, and if you want to perform at high, high levels, you must, must have periods of recovery. And that could be, you know, the 30 seconds, the 15 minutes, the, the good night's sleep, the day off, or two days off a week, as well as the vacations. And, you know, you were talking earlier, Reed, you were talking earlier about how it's difficult to get people, to follow prescriptions from, you know, a health coach or a happiness coach. And here I find it very challenging when it comes to taking time off, especially with type A's. Because, as you say, I can do anything and I don't need the break. And when I take a break, other people are taking over. And the example, the analogy I always give is of a racing car. So, imagine a race car going around the track over and over again. And the, you know, 30 laps, and the driver says, I'm not going to take a pit stop because when I take a pit stop, it means others are continuing. So, you don't take it pit stop. What happens? Either your tire will blow out, will blow up, or you'll run out of fuel. Which is exactly



metaphorically what burnout is, we run out of fuel. Our tire is burnout. We must have those pit stops. If we want to perform at our best, not to mention be at our happiest and healthiest.

Reed ([27:47](#)):

It's a really good point. One of the people that helped me early on was Stephen Covey. And he talked about sharpening the saw. That you can't just keep, your sawing away and your sawing away. And man, you're really productive and you're cutting down a lot of trees. You get a lot done. Pretty soon your work starts going downhill, and you're not sharpening your saw, man. I'll tell you real quick, funny story. You might have a reflection on it. So, I have this picture that I use in some of my lectures. It's just full on. It's my son, he's about 30. He's flying through the air. He's, he's on a free fall on a skydive. He's skydiving, and he's not tandem, he's by himself. And he's just falling. The photographer took it right there. He's so high up, you could see the curvature of the earth behind him and down below is the desert and just this beautiful, beautiful sky.

Reed ([28:41](#)):

The sky is perfectly blue. Like he's on top of the world, literally. And he's falling probably a hundred miles an hour or more. And I said to the, I say to the crowd is this eustress? Or is this distress? And the guys all go, that's eustress, you know, and then the mothers in the crowd go that's distress. And it's really funny how you see these different reactions. So, what I'm getting at is that perception can also be a big part of the problem, right. So, let's talk a bit about perceived stress, you know, how come I can, I thought I got over that fire pretty quick. Because that was Wednesday. Thursday, Friday. I was fine. But the weekend... So, anyway, let's talk about perceived stress.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([29:32](#)):

Yeah. So, perception obviously matters a great deal. I'll share with you a research by an ex student of mine, who today is a professor at Stanford, Aliyah Crumb. And what she did is she went to, again, workplace organization, during a stressful period. There was a downturn in the economy. So, she went to them and she randomly divided them into two groups. One group, business as usual, was the control group. She didn't tell them anything. And their perception is what most people's perception of stress. And that is stress is bad. Stress is negative. You know, it's been called the silent killer. It's something we need to get rid of. That is the common conventional wisdom. So, that's one group. Second group, she actually lectured to them and she said to them, you know, stress potentially can be good for you.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([30:30](#)):

You know, just like in the gym, you know what I spoke about earlier, stress can actually make you stronger. You need recovery, of course, but change the perception of stress. She spoke to them for a little bit over 15 minutes. Wasn't a very heavy intervention. As a result of that brief intervention on



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

stress. That group not just became happier, job satisfaction went up. They actually became more effective, productive at work, and they became healthier, just as a result of change of perception. Now, does that mean that everything is perception? No. You know, let me give you another example of how important perception is. This is research reported by Herbert Benson. He's the relaxation response guy. So, he's done a lot of research during his time at Harvard medical school on the placebo effect. And what he showed, for example, one of his, that's one of my all time favorite studies is, they brought in women who experienced nausea. Who were throwing up. And what he did, he gave them Ipecac. Now, Ipecaca is something that you take, if you want to throw up, if you want to, you know, clean out your insides. And he gave them, but he told them this is an anti nausea, anti vomiting drug. And they took it and it actually reversed the effect of the drug. And they stopped feeling nausea and they stopped vomiting just because perception, they thought this was an anti nausea drug. So, perception has a lot of power. Having said that, if you give someone, and I don't recommend this, but if you give someone poison and you tell them, this is actually vitamin C, it will make you feel better. They'll die, if it's a strong poison. No matter what their perception is.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([32:39](#)):

So, the point I'm making, the point this research is making is that yes, it's perception and it's about the external reality. Just like, backache can be about your mind. It can also just be because, you know, you had an accident and two of your vertebrae are misaligned, so it's both. And the system, and this is where systems thinking is so important, needs to take into consideration the mind and the body, the perception, as well as the physical reality.

Reed ([33:15](#)):

Yeah. I love it. And gosh, there's so much, I hope you have time for a few more questions. And because, you know, this idea of perception and the placebo effect is really important. And one of the, you know, again, what I teach is laboratory work, and on the perceived stress, when we do what we call a cortisol awakening response, we actually can't find any physiological reason why someone's cortisol would go up high and stay there.

Reed ([33:48](#)):

You know, it's supposed to come back down. So, you're waking cortisol is you're waking cortisol. It's rising. You take it, you take a saliva sample, when you first wake up, you have cortisol level, which is a stress indicator of sorts. Now you take it again a half an hour later. It should be kind of peaking out at 30 to 40 minutes, as per research. And that's your peak. Now, when you, another half hour later, though, it should come down to within, you know, closer to when you first woke up. Why? Well, because it's a physiological response, it's part of your circadian rhythm, and it's just supposed to elevate your blood sugar. Cortisol, elevates blood sugar. Which you need to get up and get your feet on the ground and get going, you know, brush your teeth, make your bed, get the kids out, whatever it might be.

Reed ([34:37](#)):



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

Now, most people, what we would call the normal cortisol awakening response, it comes down to within about 15% of where it started. So, we have our waking, plus 30 minutes, plus 30 more minutes. And from waking to plus 60 should be pretty close to each other, some peoples isn't, it just stays up there. And it's actually a coaching point or leverage if you will, for what's going on with you in the morning? You can actually see it on paper. I find that very interesting. Another thing. So, I don't know if you have any, I'm interviewing you, but that would be interesting to do some kind of research with this procedure, just because we also know that there's a nocebo effect. And it's why I don't particularly like genetic testing very much. I mean, it's good for me to know, but when you convey to clients, oh, you got the gene for this and the gene for that, the next thing you know, they've got that, whatever it is, you know, because you put the thought in their head. Oh, you've got the gene for colon cancer. And they say, yeah, my dad had it and my grandfather had it. I'm getting it too. And they can actually get it.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([35:52](#)):

It becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Yeah. Reed, it's fascinating what you say. So, I didn't, I didn't know about the cortisol rise and then, and then drop, though it makes obviously perfect sense. I think one of the reasons why many people, would struggle with the recovery from that cortisol high, one of the reasons I would suspect is because they are, they expose themselves to news as soon as they wake up in the morning. And usually news is not good news. Right. Usually news is bad news. And there's research by Michelle Gielan, she was a television anchor turned a psychologist showing that even if we consume, you know, three minutes of bad news in the morning, it actually affects our entire day.

Reed ([36:50](#)):

Yeah.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([36:51](#)):

It affects our wellbeing for the entire day. So, I think starting the day with something like meditation, with something like reading that you enjoy, or music, or hanging out with loved ones. I think it's much healthier than, you know, starting by picking up that phone and looking okay, what's, how's the world's getting worse this morning?

Reed ([37:16](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I try to start off with a little, a little gratitude and, you know, before we go, doctor, I really want to ask you too about happiness coaching, because it's fascinating. I know everyone's going to want to hear more about that. And we certainly have established that we know a little bit about stress and perceived stress, and by the way, if you ever want to run that test on some folks, I can help you out with that. It's what we do.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([37:47](#)):

I would like to do it on myself. Yeah.



Reed ([37:48](#)):

Okay. Well, you have a test kit coming and I'm serious. Yeah. We'll do that. So, with your course, tell us about happiness coaching.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([38:03](#)):

Yeah. You know, so, for 20, some years I've been involved in positive psychology, which is the science of happiness. And so, I would introduce evidence based interventions to help us become happier. And then I had a, sort of a mini epiphany five years ago. So, I was on a flight, one of those very long transatlantic flights. And the question suddenly came to me and the question was, how is it that there is a field of study for psychology, my field. And there is a field of study for philosophy, and physiology, and business, and history and geography, you name it. And yet, there is no field of study for happiness. And, you know, happiness is important for most people. And yes too, there is positive psychology, but that's just the psychology of happiness. What about what a philosopher has had to say about happiness, and theologians, and physiologists, and biologists and neuroscientists?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([39:10](#)):

And what about what film has to teach us about happiness? And I resolved then to help create a field or rather an interdisciplinary field of study that brings together all of these areas. Again, whether it's physiology, psychology, history, economics, neuroscience, bring them all together and create a new field of study. And a couple of years after that question, I created the Happiness Studies Academy and our first product is our flagship product is a certificate program in happiness studies. Where students, participants are exposed to a lot of knowledge from psychology, and neuroscience, and philosophy. But even more importantly, they gain evidence based interventions so that they can become happier, and so that they can help others become happier,

Reed ([40:17](#)):

You know, so important to walk the talk, isn't it? I mean, you can't be a grumpy guy and be a happiness coach, you know, I guess. Just like, I have two prerequisites for our course, it's that you want to help others and that you're willing to walk the talk. So, everyone runs the labs on yourself, and then you follow the, you eat right. And you go to bed on time and you exercise. If you're going to help others, you probably want to walk the talk a bit. So, you said that the people taking your certification course kind of have to get happy first. Is that what you said?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([40:55](#)):

It's like when people ask me, so how did you grade your Harvard students in the course on happiness? And I said, well, if they were not happy at the end of the semester, they fail. No.



Reed ([41:07](#)):

Yeah. How happy are you? So, they come in the last day and they're all, gosh, thank you so much. I'm so happy. I just can't believe how great this course is, right.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([41:19](#)):

Yeah. And if you're not happy, fake it. Right. No. So, you know, the important thing is not to be happy. The important thing is to work on your happiness and become happier. You know, many people ask me, you know, so they, when they hear that I got into this field because of my unhappiness, they say, so Tal, so today are you happy? You know, 30 years down the line. And my answer is that I don't know how to answer this question. Why? Because I don't think there is a point before which one is unhappy after which one is happy. Meaning it's not a binary, zero one. Instead, it's a continuum. So, yes, today I'm certainly happier than I was 30 years ago. At the same time. I also hope that five years from now, I'll be happier than I am today. In other words, it's a journey and it's a lifelong journey that ends when life ends. And what we see very clearly, and we have research on that students who come into our program. Yeah. Overall, they become happier, but our hope is, and we tell them this time and time again, you know, this is not a one year journey, you know. Okay. I graduated, I'm happy. This is a lifelong journey. That you were starting with us and we hope you continue and help others along the same journey.

Reed ([42:42](#)):

Yeah. Amen to that. You know, there's a real parallel there, doc, between what you said and what I tell people. Because some people coming into the health coaching field, feel like I'm not healthy enough. You know, I'm not, I'm not able to, I'll be a false prophet. I'll be an imposter. They there's this thing called imposter syndrome. And I try to help them get over that, by saying, look, it's a stairway to health. I don't know anyone at the top. I mean, people who've been doing health coaching, I've been doing it 20 years, other people for 40 years. They still have something to work on. So, we are just, you know, and there's people with more steps to take than you do, you know, they're just way kind of down there and they've got a lot of steps. We can get, actually earn a really good living as professional health coaches by, helping them take their steps and have, and again, I don't know anyone at the top. Well, who's at the top in the happiness field? Are there guru's out there who are just the man on the hill and they're just smiling all day long or what?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([43:53](#)):

Yeah. You know, it's funny because they actually have research on it and what they found so far, again, this, you know, they may find something else in the future. But so far the happiest people that they recorded, and that's all through brain scans, especially, are the professional meditators.



# HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

Reed ([44:15](#)):

Oh, no kidding.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([44:16](#)):

So, those who, yeah. So, the Dalai Lama's right-hand men, you know, who are meditating three to eight hours a day. They have the happiest brains.

Reed ([44:29](#)):

Yeah. They talk a lot about joy, and expressing joy, and being joyful. And these things. But I listen to meditation almost every day and especially at night time, it's just such a good wind down. And Again, the news all sucks. The only good news is on the sports page when your team is winning, the rest of it's all bad. Maybe financial news once in a while. But yeah, I really appreciate what you said. So, a little bit more about your course, is it all online? Is this you, have to come to the university or what do you have to do there?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([45:17](#)):

No. So, the course is a 100% online. Having said that, all our students then become obviously part of the Happiness Studies Academy alumni group. And what we do is we regularly have retreats, you know, I'm a big believer in face to face. So, we have retreats around the world and they are free. They're accessible to all our graduates and that's where we meet. That's when we get together. And that's when, you know, beyond having a lot of fun, we also, you know, learn new things and interact. But these are optional, you know, in order to get your certification a hundred percent online. Beyond that too, we also, we also really feel that face to face interactions are important. So, there is this option and we have, as I said, retreats in Asia, in the U.S, in Latin America, Europe,

Reed ([46:14](#)):

That's beautiful.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([46:16](#)):

Yeah. They're so, so much fun.

Reed ([46:20](#)):

Well, they better be.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([46:24](#)):

We're happy there.



# HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

Reed ([46:24](#)):

So, yeah, so much fun talking to you. I don't want to end it, but I do want to make sure you know, we're going to put your information for people to reach out to you and your program in the show notes. And they could just go and explore, but who would be best suited to take your course? Is it just for all health coaches? Do you have to be anybody in particular?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([46:53](#)):

Yeah. You know, it's a good question. And over the years we've actually researched the, our student body to see who benefits most from it. And, you know, some people said, well, is it people who come in unhappy or very happy. And we found that, people take, there's enough there so that people in the entire range, they're very happy. They're very unhappy. The coaches, the therapists, the doctors and the business people, and teachers get something out of it. And then we also create groups within, or rather the students create these groups so that they can have conversations with other coaches, health coaches, for example, or executive coaches, or sometimes they, you know, they meet and there is cross-fertilization, which is also a very, very important. So, it's for people who want to increase their own levels of happiness and who want to help others become happier and healthier, giving the connection.

Reed ([47:52](#)):

Yeah. Fantastic. Any final thoughts for us doc, on being a professional, how to add it into your, your profession? My whole purpose for doing this event and bringing people together who are all pretty much leaders in their field is to elevate the whole profession of health. You know, it's not a hobby for me. My hobbies cost me money. My profession makes me money. You know, that's kind of the delineating factor there. How do you view that? What could we be doing to help people be more professional or along those lines?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([48:27](#)):

Yeah. That's a very important question that, you know, we obviously think about a lot. And I will, I will share another line of research. This one also from a, from a student of mine, Adam Grant, who today is a professor at Wharton. And he, he researched givers, people who give, and what he found was that while givers are nice guys. You know, we like them. There are givers who are very successful and givers who are not so successful. Givers who are very happy and givers were not so happy. And what he was interested in his research is what distinguishes the two groups?

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([49:08](#)):

Why are nice guys, nice people sometimes at the top, and sometimes at the bottom, what's the difference? And the one main difference is that givers at the top, meaning the successful, the happy givers also give themselves. Meaning they don't neglect their needs. They don't sacrifice themselves. They remember in other words to recover, also, they remember to learn themselves, not just to teach.



## HEALTH COACH CERTIFICATION SUMMIT

They learn to cultivate their own happiness and be concerned about their own health so that they can better serve others. So, this would be my advice, don't forget yourself, you know, be a coach, a good coach, a generous coach to yourself as well.

Reed ([50:01](#)):

I can't think of a better answer. I mean, it's a, that's one of the best answers I've had and I've already interviewed 20 people. That was, that was truly inspirational. And I appreciate it very much, doc. Well, we're going to, everybody's watching has an opportunity to, of course, to buy all of these recordings. They want to go out to the show notes where the information on you is available to them. And then they can, they can get their VIP pass to all the recordings and things while they're doing that. I just have to throw that little plug in there, doc. But thank you so much, it's been a real pleasure to get to know you a bit. And I hope that we can do some business and I'm gonna have my staff reach out and get you that kit, and we'll have another talk, okay.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar ([50:45](#)):

Wonderful. Thank you very much.

Reed ([50:46](#)):

Okay, Dr. Tal, thank you so much.