



The Heartbeat of Your Why: Exploring Gratitude as a Superpower and Illuminating the Power of Mindfulness

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Seena Haines, Stuart Haines

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast, and I'm your host Tierney King. I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. This week's episode is sponsored by the Wellbeing Elixir, Magna's brand-new wellness course for educators where experts will help guide you through wellbeing and resilience. She's a pharmacy professor who is also a certified yoga teacher and wellness coach. He's a doctor of pharmacy who trains practicing pharmacists using mindfulness principles. Together, they have a decade of experience in the science of happiness and the benefits of practices that lead to less stress and more joy in your work and life. Today, I'm so excited to have Stuart Haines and Seena Haines, who are actually also the main presenters in our new Wellbeing Elixir course. So they're going to cover a few concepts and techniques that teachers can apply to their own lives and to their teaching pertaining to wellness, mindfulness, and mental health. So kind of start us off and just explain, you know how you both became interested in the topic of mindfulness and wellness, and what drew you to this lifestyle.

Seena Haines 01:11

So for me, originally, I'll just share a little bit about myself and what led me to where I am today, I was originally pursuing a career as a dietitian. And so I've always been very interested in lifestyle, lifestyle medicine, and preventative medicine. And then following that I pursued my degree or my doctorate in pharmacy, and after which I did residency training that landed me in ambulatory care practice, which is working with patients who have chronic disease, or an illness that's more lifelong. And I personally struggled with weight in the past. So I really honed in, in particular, working with patients who struggled with obesity, and knowing how that can adversely impact our health. So not just seeing that in the physical health, but also thinking about mental health, self-acceptance, self-compassion. So that's sort of, you know, bringing me into that space of positive psychology and well-being that drove me to pursue to becoming a board certified health and wellness coach, and developing my own meditative practice over time really illuminated the power of mindfulness and meditation in particular, which brought me into credentialing in mindfulness and meditative instruction. So really, I feel like I have come full circle from where my roots began, always focusing on lifestyle medicine and preventative health, and so I'm just excited to bring what I have learned and these experiences to others.

Stuart Haines 02:48

Yeah, like Seena, I am also an ambulatory care pharmacist trained to work with patients with chronic illness. And you might be wondering, like, why would a pharmacist be interested in you know, mindfulness practices and positive psychology? But I always say medicines don't work unless people a) take them and b) believe in them. And you've got to have a belief in it to actually have them work. We understand the power of placebo, so our mind has such a tremendous impact in how we perceive the world. And so, psychology, you know, is just as important as pharmacology when it becomes, you know, in terms of medications. So I don't confine my interest into the physiological benefits of medications, but also the psychological benefits of healthcare delivery in our relationships with patients. So there's a number of factors that really work. I'm responsible in our curriculum for a course called personal and professional development. And I really focus on the personal development part of that because we as people are what come to the table when we're taking care of patients. And so developing ourselves personally, is really critical. And part of that is a lot of the things that we talk about in the Wellbeing Elixir course, which is mindfulness and noticing our automatic negative thoughts and many other things. And then lastly, kind of personally, I've been very interested in ancient wisdom traditions and done a lot of reading in that. And so things like what stoicism and Buddhism are and what these ancient traditions can teach us about leading a fulfilling and satisfying life.

Tierney King 04:18

Very cool. And I mean, you guys cover a whole bunch of, you know, different techniques that you have probably researched and kind of dived into. What's been most surprising about a wellness or mindfulness technique that you didn't expect to be so helpful, but it just happened to be extremely helpful.

Stuart Haines 04:52

Well, I think when we talk about mindfulness, we're talking about not only awareness of the here and now but also awareness of our thoughts, awareness of our emotions, having a curiosity about those things, being non-judgmental about those things, having a receptivity to what's happening here now. And part of what makes it very powerful, is once you become more aware of your thoughts and emotions, you can start to reframe them. You can take a pause, like you notice how you're reacting to something. And I think that's a very powerful thing to have and have an awareness of. We often aren't aware of our thoughts, we just have them, we have certain reactions, and learning to recognize those gives us an opportunity to reframe things. And we all have cognitive biases. One of the things that we talked about, and it's in the course, but also if you do reading in this area is the amount of biases that we have of these automatic negative thoughts that we have. So I think that's one really powerful thing. The other is taking micro-moments throughout the day, to just calm our mind, to take a few breaths, to say, "I'm upset by something," I just need to take, you know, a little timeout, and to just let that emotion kind of be with it, and let it you know, move on, rather than trying to push it away, which is what we often try to do. So those would be two things that I think are unexpectedly helpful, that I found.

Seena Haines 06:34

So given what Stuart shared, which I totally agree with, I think a nice complement to the mind is the body. And I found the practice of yoga back in 2016. So not too long ago, and I'll just say yoga is for everyone, I didn't find it until my 40s, and I'm in my 50s now, but I had heard from a colleague that it could really help lower stress levels. But what I didn't realize is how super quickly it does that, it has this

effect around my thoughts and emotions and stories in my head, like Stuart was talking about, was a noticeable difference. So after two years, I took that step to become certified to spread the mind body connection to others, to know that the deep diaphragmatic breath actually affects our vagus system or a vagus nerve, I should say that permeates our entire nervous system kicking in our parasympathetic side, which is very relaxing. So it calms us, it centers us, it helps ground us. So I think that yoga in particular is worth mentioning because of how nicely it complements being more mindful. And then the second element, which is relational, is just again, this idea of being a believer and supporter of moving our bodies every day. And by experimenting, we can discover what can work best and lead to our sustained engagement. So for me, I have learned that I prefer group conditioning activities, so that I'm not a "go it alone" kind of gal. And so the idea of doing CrossFit, and yoga, all of these experiences also bring me another important human need, which is a sense of community. So there are things that we can be doing for our health and wellness, that actually tied very well even back to your own core values.

Tierney King 08:24

That's awesome. I know a lot of people, you know, we have this mindset where we want to do yoga, but it's a little intimidating, because I just envision everyone in class and everyone very good at it. And I'm just like, "No, I won't be that good. I'll be at the back of the classroom." Do you have any, you know, kind of tips on how to kind of jump forward and maybe start it?

Stuart Haines 08:45

Well, can I interject here, though, because I am not a yoga teacher. I'm not one who's as physically active as my wife, but I do go to yoga class, I do go to her class, and it is for everyone. And there's different styles of yoga too. So for those of you who don't understand yoga, there's many different styles of yoga. And you may need to experiment with different styles to see which one that works for you. But I do the really gentle stuff. And I find extremely helpful. So, I'll let Seena respond a little bit more to this, but I just want to reiterate to folks, I'm a guy who's 60 years old, I didn't take this up until I was in my late 50s. And I find it very, you know very beneficial, very centering and not difficult to do.

Seena Haines 09:33

Yeah, so at the cornerstone of yoga, as I mentioned, it's really about breath and movement, anchoring your breath, knowing that that is the key and most critical piece, and the asanas or poses are secondary. And so I think feeling safety where you're practicing and knowing that you're in the hands of someone whose credential to teach because part of teaching involves cueing for all levels. So knowing that you have options, ways to take a pose here or there, and I think languaging to students to say, all of our bodies are different, and nobody looks the same in a pose, there's no one way to do a pose. So creating that freedom so that you can have play and discovery on your mat makes for a much more rich experience and knowing that it's more about community, and not social comparison.

Tierney King 10:26

That's super helpful, because you know, I'm sure there's a lot of people out there that are just, they want to do it, but they're just a little intimidated about it. And then kind of jumping into, you know, you use all these different techniques, and what do you use most in your daily life? And both in your daily life and then what do you use most in the classroom?

Stuart Haines 10:46

Yeah, so there's a number of different things, but things that really I've found to be helpful and I do them most frequently would be journaling and writing and actually writing for our Wellbeing Elixir blog as part of that writing. Like, I find it both therapeutic, and I learned a lot from it. And it helps to solidify and consolidate thoughts that I have. And expressing them in writing is really very helpful. Of course, journaling is very helpful to process things like grief and emotions and troubling things in our lives. So for people who like to write, that's just a really great way to do that. And that's probably one of the most common things that I do. Another thing that we do is gratitude, which we talk about in the well being lecture program. It's a, I call it a therapeutic superpower, because it's hard to, you know, express gratitude and think in grateful ways and be unhappy. It's just an ingredient for happiness. And so, short little gratitude practices. Again, journaling is a way to do it. But for us, we say a little prayer before dinner. So you know, giving thanks for the things that we have is really important. And so taking that short little pause is another way of expressing gratitude each day to remember that there are things that you should be grateful for that I am grateful for, not that I should but I am. And lastly is taking some pauses and breaks on a regular interval. So Seena and I, we got some hammocks last year, and we go out and we take a break. And on Sunday afternoon, we put up the hammocks in the park, and we just relax and do nothing, maybe read a little bit, take a little nap. But it's just a time to reset. And I think we all need those. In the years past, we all had a Sabbath, you know, we used to take Sundays off. And for many people who still have religious practices Sunday or a Sabbath is really critical to their their lifestyle. But so many of us have gotten away from that. And I think it's really important to have a brief respite from life every week. Oh, and you asked about in class. So I do a brief mindfulness activity at the beginning of class just to recenter us bring us to the present moment, pay attention to what's happening here. Now, I think many students really like it. Some are a little curious about it, like what the heck is this all about? But it gets them more interested in and we do talk about the benefits of mindfulness or meditative practices to bring more mindfulness into our lives.

Seena Haines 13:24

For me, and Stuart's mentioned some great examples, so to add to that, I would say the types of exercise I mentioned for me provides a little bit of what I think we're missing in our society as adults, which is play. I would like to have more in my life. I think I can always do better in that regard. But I do see some of what I decided to do - my choice, my selection - brings me some play. I would add that words have power. They affect our emotions, our thoughts and the stories that we tell ourselves. So I use music to help me in that regard because it can uplift me. It helps me release frustrations. I may laugh, I may cry. It's sort of that full spectrum of emotions. And so I utilize that as a tool for myself and for students. And Stuart mentioned the gratitude aspect. I would add, for me, one particular area I'm working on, in case it's helpful to others, is this idea of being grateful for setbacks, being grateful for failure, being grateful for the difficulties because for me, I'll just say it has definitely been a challenge and if I can put my mindset towards that, to know that there's value and lessons to be learned than taking my mindset in a different direction about those setbacks. For students, I would add a couple other quick examples: bringing yoga and meditation as Stuart mentioned to them, but having bookclubs ,a newsletter. I work with students to put out called The Remedy for their peers, bringing in speakers, offering peer support and mental health training are definitely some critical and valuable experiences for them.

Tierney King 15:12

And you kind of talked about, you know, these setbacks. And so you know, it's the new year for 2022, and we're all making our goals and our resolutions. And I think the hardest part is, you know, you encounter these setbacks. And then you have to keep holding yourself accountable. So what tips do you have for individuals for holding yourself accountable, and consistently practicing these techniques despite these setbacks? And then, you know, consistently practicing them throughout the year, and then years forward.

Seena Haines 15:45

So I think some tips for 2022 can be things like setting a daily intention. For some it might be reading and looking at a mantra. I feel that this ties again, back to our core values, which I consider to be the heartbeat of our why, which is just so empowering. I think exploring our belief system, this idea of whether or not you believe change is possible, because mindset matters. I think if you're like me, you might like to get engaged, where you have an accountability partner opportunity for group conditioning, adding more play so that it doesn't seem like labor, or something like I really don't want to do it, but I know I have to do it. It's fun, right? We bring fun into our lives. And I would say one more element is how much the environment matters. So be on the lookout for things that might cause us to step back instead of stepping forward. This aspect around social contagion, that we tend to pick up the behaviors of others, and that can be, again, more to our detriment than helping us move towards things that sustain our happiness. So look for role models, who can inspire you to show you what's possible? When you show up and do the work that 1% gain is so incremental over time. And feeding your mind with the wisdom that can be shared by others, through courses like this, being able to visit with us, spending time reading books and podcasts. There's just a wealth of resources and data that can really help guide us and set our course in the right direction.

Stuart Haines 17:25

Yeah, so there's a few things that I think can help people kind of keep on track. And one is to track things, right? There's a little dopamine hit we get when we are able to click off that we did something and then we're staying on track, like, for my journal. My day one journal, they have a little tracker, like, how many days in a row have you actually made that journal entry? Same thing could be the how many days in a row did you go do the CrossFit, or tracking your exercises and what you actually did. So tracking can be helpful for many. Now some people can get really tied up into it, and then the tracking becomes the goal. You don't want that to happen. But just the the idea that you take a notebook or a digital app of some sort and give yourself feedback about your progress and you stay on track can be helpful. I think one thing that happens is that when you slip off, and you don't do it one day, is then you kind of get, you can because your automatic negative thoughts, say to yourself, "Oh, well, I messed up, and therefore I'm going to give up." And I think that's where some self-compassion comes in is like, yeah, you're gonna slip up, there are going to be times that you just didn't get to it or you didn't feel like it. Give yourself some grace, let yourself off the hook. And tomorrow's another day. So I think getting kind of back into the swing, again, remind yourself, this is where your mantra or your intention comes in, reminding yourself of why you want to do it. And also recognizing that it's going to happen. And then lastly, I think along the lines of having role models, and other people who can kind of guide you is potentially hiring a coach, like, so there's some accountability there and coaches know exactly, they

have a good set of tools to help guide you and keep you on track and remind you of things. And sometimes they can point out blind spots that you didn't recognize in your own self. So health and wellness coach, like my wife, would be great. But there are plenty other kinds of coaches that you could consider hiring and it's really in vogue now to hire a coach.

Tierney King 19:38

So yeah, I think that's a great idea. I mean, sometimes we put too much pressure on ourselves and think that, you know, we have to have all these empowering thoughts all the time and have the right tools and be able to do this ourselves. And sometimes, you know, you just need that assistance. We don't have all the tools all the time. And then kind of lastly, you guys have worked really hard on this Wellbeing Elixir course. What are you most excited about? What do you hope that people, you know, viewing it and taking this course gain most from it?

Stuart Haines 20:08

Well, I hope it's time for self-exploration and self-reflection for people that they can set aside some time for contemplation. In the course we talk about different life domains. And most of us don't spend enough time just taking some time out, and contemplating some things or thinking about our life values. And that's really important, because that gives, that's part of our motivation. Our drive to do certain things that we really want to do is being clear about those things and reaffirming ourselves in those areas. So I would say, yeah, I would, I hope that people use this as an opportunity for self-reflection, and being clear about what's most important for them in their life, and then taking deliberate action towards those things.

Seena Haines 20:53

So I would say, first and foremost, getting to collaborate with Stuart, because of the importance of having this level of intimacy with him and this shared passion, which is a value of mine. So this definitely meets that. And I would say being with fellow academicians across disciplines and institutions, which is another aspect of connection. And this community of shared learning, so sharing resources and the evidence that supports it, discussing principles like mindset, emotional agility, the power of connection, designing these activities to help them apply concepts shared and encouraging experimentation, that "TSN" can you Try Something New, and then sharing just valuable life lessons with one another is a peer element of a lived experience, a shared lived experience through peer-to-peer discussions and the online discussion board and the monthly live webinars. I'm just jazzed and excited and energized to have that experience with others.

Tierney King 21:56

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