

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that research now shows you that happiness is controlled by a body system and we have some new power to control some more of it. Most of the research around changing your happiness levels points to a concept called Hedonic Adaptation. It means when something good or bad happens to you over time you get used to it. Researchers have found that that Hedonic Adaptation happens with a majority of good and bad things that happen in your daily life. It exists in your body to help you maintain balance during stress and return you to neutral to keep your stress down, so it's there for your best interests.

Dave: But they also found in the latest roundup of research is that you control about half your happiness level. The exact level can vary from person to person, but it looks like about half of it might be genetic or our environments, which they like to call the happiness setpoint, which by the way I don't believe in. About 40 to 50% of our happiness is within our power.

Dave: Because so much of what we believe is genetic is actually epigenetic or controlled by the environment around us. That's why I have a hard time when researchers say, "Oh, it's about 40 to 50%." I just don't believe you. It's probably much higher than that, much like the people 20 years ago said, "Cancer is genetic." Now some of the cutting edge cancer researchers that I've interviewed or become friends with will say, "We think 2% of cancer is genetic. The rest of it's environmental." Your happiness is environmental and it's also what is going on inside your head, how much trauma you have, and stuff like that. In my own path from being generally pretty cranky and unhappy much of the time to being pretty darn happy even though I have more on my plate than is sane, well, I feel like maybe it's more hackable than we like to think.

Dave: Because you listen to the show regularly, you know that I'm a master of foreshadowing. There might be the chance that we're gonna talk about happiness today on the show. What do you think? Of course there is. But before we talk about happiness, if you're a long time listener you know today's guest. Her name is Stella Grizont. She has been on twice very, very early on the show to talk about happiness, I think, in archive editions sometime in the first hundred if I remember right, and again in the 200s.

Dave: Today we're going to talk about, well, a bunch of different things that have to do with her experience teaching work life balance and happiness even at companies like Dow Jones. She's one of the first 150 people to earn a master's degree in applied positive psychology, which you could also call the science of happiness, from the University of Pennsylvania, which is apparently a pretty good school because, well, I went to Wharton after all. I'm gonna give you an extra bonus point there, Stella. Welcome to the show.

Stella: Thank you. It's so great to be back.

Dave: You've coached 1,500 leaders in 24 countries including and if you've keynoted about happiness at Google and Johnson & Johnson and things like that. Is this because you

were really an unhappy, sad person and you thought you would go study positive psychology to see if you could undo that problem? Or is there some other dark story behind why you would do this?

Stella: Yes. Actually, that is why. I spent the first 10 years of my career kind of feeling, I'd have highs, but then I kept hitting these real lows and feeling really miserable and having just ... Literally I remember one time I was watching focus groups because I used to be a brand strategist. You sit in this dark room watching people talk about stuff. I was stuffing my face with M&Ms just to stay awake. I just had this moment of like, "Oh, my God. I can't believe this is my life," and I ran to the bathroom.

Stella: I sat there and I clasped my hands and I literally prayed to God and I said, "There's got to be more than this." I found myself in that place one too many times and I really wanted to crack it, like, "What's up with this? How come I keep landing in this place of feeling like there's got to be more?" I keep achieving everything I say I'm going to achieve, but I'm not happy, and so that's why I went to study the science of happiness because they say, "You teach what you want to learn." I'm constantly learning, but yeah, I feel like I've finally cracked the code. Thank God, because that sucked.

Dave: Yeah, achieving thinking it'll make you happy and then not getting happy sucks. I did the same thing in my 20s. But you came across this, I think a lot of people listening are at that point where you're doing what's supposed to make you happy, which is your parents told you you have to go to med school or law school or get a degree in whatever. You're like, "But I don't want to and it's not what makes me happy." We have this inherent internal conflict about it. What's your advice for people who are sitting there saying, "I don't feel like I'm doing what makes me happy, but I kind of like to eat."

Stella: Yeah. I have gone to the bottom of a Nutella jar multiple times in my misery at work. But that aside, I would say that the big mistake I see people making over and over again, myself included, was that you set these goals or you think about ... Whenever things suck and we're just not happy, we just wanna escape that, right? So we wanna do something completely different and the grass is always greener. So we think, "Oh, well if I just change my job or if I just find a new boss or if I just finally go do something that I've been really passionate about, then it will be okay. Then I'll be happy."

Stella: So we have this innate desire to escape when we're feeling really miserable and negative. So what I first tell people is actually, and these aren't my words, but no matter where you go, there you are. I always tell people, "Well no matter where you work, there you are." So unless you do the inner work first, you can go ahead and find a totally different job or a different manager or work in a different department, but it's gonna creep back most likely.

Dave: So if you're a miserable person, you can work anywhere and still be a miserable person.

Stella: Exactly, exactly. Thank you. So what we want to do first is figure out, "How do I want to be?" Then set goals from that. So just to kind of break it down, often I think when we come up with our goals or what we wanna achieve or what we wanna do next, we're

using what I call backward logic. We're either determining where we wanna go based on the opposite of a negative experience we have, or we choose something that sounds right, that our parents tell us to do, or that society tells us is important. So it's about money or about title. It's about things that sound right, but the thing is, what sounds right doesn't always make us feel right. So what I encourage people to first actually do is to think about, "How do I want to be? How do I want to feel?" Let that be the destination that you see, and then you work backwards and figure out your goals from that.

Stella: The cool thing about that is that when you focus on how you want to be, so let's say it's creative or collaborating with people I'm inspired by or having freedom and flexibility of my schedule, when you focus on those things, what you start to realize is that there are actually infinite ways or more ways than you thought of to achieve that. So what I encourage people, if you're feeling stuck or crappy in your place right now, let's get clear on that stuff first and see what you can do to influence your reality now, because there's actually more options and possibilities for you than you can see right now.

Stella: Also when you're, I'm gonna geek out, when you're in a negative mindset and when things aren't going well, the problem is that our vision literally and figuratively is impacted. We know from research that when you're experiencing negative emotions you literally do not see the big picture. Your eyes do not scan an image all the way. Your eyes tend to focus on one particular part of an image, and the same thing with your reality. If you're in a negative place, there may be solutions right there but you're not seeing them because you're cutting it off. Your emotions are cutting off those opportunities. So, does that answer it?

Dave: Yeah, it does answer it. In fact, it matches some of the advice that's in Game Changers. There's a law, "Never discover who you are."

Stella: Yes.

Dave: It said the people who've gone on to the change the game in their respective fields generally don't just discover it, they decide who they want to be and then they move in that direction. So what's the difference then between someone saying, "I'm not going to be a miserable person." Is that strategy going to work, or is there a better way to do it?

Stella: Well, when you're framing how you want to be, I always encourage people first of all to do it in the positive, so it's not, "I don't want to be miserable," it's, "I want to be content," or, "I want to be peaceful," or, "I want to be inspired," or whatever it is. So then yeah, I think that's totally legit. One thing that's missing when we set our ... One way that we easily slip when we set goals is it's called moral licensing. Let's say we're on our way to doing things that we really want to do, and maybe it's being on The Bulletproof Diet, right? So we're on The Bulletproof Diet, we're doing really well, not having extra sugar, having our coffees, and then someone brings in a piece of chocolate cake that has a lot of white sugar.

Stella: You've been on the diet for five days and you think, "I've been really good so I deserve to be a little bit bad." That's called moral licensing. The way we can kind of hack our own brains and not give into that temptation which we all have is by reminding ourselves of who we are, what kind of person we are. So that's when it's really helpful to say, "Well I'm the kind of person who can stick with my goals." Or, "I'm the kind of person who is vital and strong and super healthy."

Dave: Isn't that perfectionism by another name? "Oh I'm not the kind of person who would have the chocolate cake."

Stella: Yeah, I mean that's a really good catch. This isn't about being perfect. In fact, when I make my mistakes, I'm always ... I have to remind myself of past experiences when I have been that person, because I know that I'm not gonna be that person 100% of the time. I know I'm gonna mess up, but every new second is a new moment to be who you want to be, so just move on and choose again.

Dave: That was one of the disruptive things about The Bulletproof Diet aside from the fact that it's like, "Hey, saturated fat has a role in your body." It's presented as a road map, so you're always in a neighborhood. You're still the same person, and today I'm kind of in a sketchy neighborhood, but you can't really go off the road map because, well, you're gonna be eating something, right? You just realize, "Okay, maybe I can move up in the world and move down in the world," but that it isn't so binary.

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: So then you can say, "I'm gonna become the kind of person who when I have a choice I make the better choice even though it's not the perfect choice." I think it set a lot of people free, and this came from my own experience as a 300 pound angry person going through that saying, "I'm not gonna eat the cookie." Then you just eat half the cookie by the end of the meeting because the meeting was so boring you might as well eat the cookie or whatever the other reason was. Then you're sort of like, "God, what's wrong with me?" Like well, "I made a bad decision, but I didn't eat the whole cookie." So I still made a better decision, it just wasn't the best decision. Just having that framing for me was really helpful, and just realizing there's gonna be times when I "cheat", but I could jump off a cliff cheat or I could just do something that wasn't really as good as it could've been but satisfied that craving for whatever it was. Is there a word for that in happiness research?

Stella: I call that appreciation, because actually one of the things I encourage my client to do at the end of the day, is once you've gotten clear on how you want to be and we distill that down into values, I ask my clients to check in on how did they actually perform on those values during that day. So let's say if one of your choices is to be healthier, be bulletproof, then you can ask yourself, "In what ways was I bulletproof today?" I would say that eating half the cookie instead of the whole cookie was your way of expressing that value, so it's about appreciating what progress you're making and not judging the progress. That I think really sets a lot of people free like it set you free. It's like, "I'm not gonna judge how much I did." Or, "Maybe I didn't change the whole world today, but I made these huge choices that were in alignment with how I wanted to be."

Dave: Yeah, so you can find something to be grateful for. You know, and I think our listeners have probably heard it but maybe haven't heard recently, this idea that we're heavily biased towards avoiding negative things because the way we're wired negative things might be a tiger that would eat you and then you're dead. So you should really over bias that, but then it's so easy to forget the positive things. So yes you ate the chocolate cake or whatever, but you might've also saved someone from a burning building. But you're probably going to remember the chocolate cake more than the burning building unless you also got burned.

Stella: Yes.

Dave: That just sucks. Is there anything we can do programmatically, or like you're saying, in the evening, that allows people to better remember the good stuff and to maybe devalue the bad stuff? Do you have anything besides what you just mentioned?

Stella: Yes, well that's negativity bias that you're talking about. We have to have the negativity bias, and so the way that ... One of the exercises is to really reflect and appreciate what are those things that you did, and it's like a muscle, when you practice, you will literally start seeing more and more, more ways that you are expressing your values, more ways that you're being who you want to be. I do also, I do a loving-kindness meditation. I actually do it in the morning, not in the evening. When I wake up what I will do, and for those of you guys who don't know what loving-kindness meditation is, it's a Buddhist practice which basically is just you're wishing other people well and you're wishing yourself well.

Stella: I really love it as a go to, especially when I have a hard time just being quiet. It's a form of meditation where I can focus my thoughts but also have them beam goodness, so it kind of does two things at once. I do find when I do this that I have a much better day. I find strangers smiling at me more. I get free things randomly. It's just, if I really plug into my loving-kindness meditation, it really unlocks a lot of stuff. There's a lot more we can get into about it, but-

Dave: Do you teach your clients, like when you're working with a senior executive, do you say, "All right, wake up in the morning and beam loving-kindness at the world?"

Stella: I actually do.

Dave: How do they respond to that?

Stella: We're usually in it and it usually comes up because they're dealing with a toxic work environment, or they're dealing with a very difficult personality, and so they've tried everything. They've tried to have conversations with this person. They've talked to other leaders about this person and this person's making their life miserable. I recommend before you have any additional big conversations or moments with this person, the one thing that I recommend people do is to do a loving-kindness meditation. I know it sounds really woo-woo and whatever.

Dave: On that person specifically? Like send that person-

Stella: Yes, I include them.

Dave: Okay.

Stella: I include them. So the way it works, a loving-kindness meditation, is usually you start thinking about someone who is very easy for you to love. For me I think about my daughter. I envision her, and then what I'll do is I'll may be healthy, may be happy, may be safe, may be free to be herself, whatever. You can come up with your own combo of well wishes.

Dave: Like may be free to be yourself at some other company?

Stella: No, just I want you to-

Dave: Just kidding.

Stella: Feel true to who you are, that's what I mean, because I think that's so important for us. Then I'll shift my attention to my husband or I'll shift it to whoever, and then I'll go person by person, I'll do my team, and then I'll kind of, just because it's gonna take forever, I'll start collectively envisioning people. So I'll do a group, and then what I'll do is anybody who I encounter, so I did this for you Dave. I did this for all the listeners.

Dave: Aw, thank you.

Stella: I really just, I try to envision really beaming goodness, and the reason why it's so important and I recommend it, first of all there's research on this, that it can actually transform. In six weeks of doing loving-kindness meditation you have greater life satisfaction. You can reverse signs of depression. There's all this great research on it. But also how it's so important is that our emotions are contagious, right? There's something called emotional contagion, so your emotions, just like if you sneeze and you can spread the flu, your mood can be transmitted to others. So if you're having a hard time with someone, I always want my clients to be what I call immune to the toxicity, and the best way for you to do that is, one, to be clear on who you want to be because if you're not clear on that, then it's very easy to get lost in all the stuff. Because if someone's toxic or they have stuff going on, that stuff penetrates you and then you can't tell, "Is this mine or is this theirs?" You start to question yourself.

Dave: I think everyone listening has had at least one circumstance at work, at least if you've had a job, where you have someone toxic. But what does that actually mean? Because I think different people might use that word toxic in different levels. How do you know you're dealing with a toxic person, or is it just someone you really don't like?

Stella: I think it's a toxic situation when you're not able to perform in the way that you want to perform, so you're debilitated in some way because maybe you're feeling emotionally unsafe around this person, you're feeling like whatever's happening between you is

getting in the way of your showing up and being your best. The thing is that we pay so much attention to what we consume, especially your listeners in terms of what we put in our bodies, but are we paying as much attention as to the people we're surrounding ourselves by and the thoughts and emotions we're having as a result of those interactions? So I want people to be really conscious of, there's also, we all have responsibilities.

Stella: Sometimes we're contributing to whatever that situation is, and so I always encourage people to look, "How can I look at this differently? How might I take responsibility for my part?" But I just think it's so important to ... The number one thing I talk about in communication is not what you say, but it's how you're saying it. It's the energy that you're showing up with, and so if you want to break through that passive aggressive madness that you're having or you want to really connect deeply, or just power through regardless of the shit around you, then it's really important for you to be grounded in who do I want to be, how can I show up as that person, and how can I just blast this whole situation with love. That's I think where really miraculous things start to happen and it gets really juicy.

Stella: I've seen my client ... I had a client who would literally schedule time in her day to cry because she was so miserable at work. She is a big executive. She was at the company for 11 years, decided to go onto a different team because she wanted a new challenge. This boss ended up being a super micromanager. Suddenly she went from being this empowered leader to feeling extremely insecure and having no autonomy. I talked to her about, well let's script out a conversation you can have with him. She was really resistant. She was like, "He's not gonna get it. He's not the kind of person who understands. It's just gonna make things worse." So whenever we're dealing with a toxic situation, we're always afraid to speak up for our needs because there's a big risk, and she just assumed he wouldn't get it.

Stella: When we did her, we did the vision generation, which is by the way an exercise I'd love to give to you guys if you need help figuring out how you want to be, you can download this free tool. Visiongenerator.com. So she did that work ... One of her values is being a champion for others. I said, "How are you being a champion for yourself in this moment?" That's the reason why we want to do our values is it's how we can hold ourselves accountable to being who we want to be. We have to be that for ourselves first. So, she realized she had to be brave and she had to be a champion for herself and have this conversation, but she was doing all this work in the meanwhile. She booked, her next one on one she had a conversation with him. It took 20 minutes. She got put onto a new project. She had the autonomy she wanted and she said, "Stella, I'm not coming to work and crying every day." So, things can transform rapidly if we're willing to really do that inner work.

Dave: Okay, so what she did is she sent loving-kindness beams from her heart to her boss who was micromanaging her. She got clear on who she wanted to be using the vision generator tool that you got.

Stella: Yes.

Dave: She did those two things which led her to have a conversation for 20 minutes that got her put on a new project.

Stella: Yes.

Dave: Well that sounds pretty awesome.

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: Okay.

Stella: It's like she spent so much time feeling anxious and having resistance to actually doing what she needed to do, but it was so much simpler than she imagined.

Dave: That sounds pretty easy. She's a big exec, so she probably has enough money that if she loses her job, which is the downside of having that uncomfortable conversation, that she probably could get another job before she ran out of money and lost her house and stuff like that. It seems like there's a lot of people who are living paycheck to paycheck, and I don't mean people who are just starting out in their careers. There are a lot of people my age living paycheck to paycheck now in the US, and even people who are executives sometimes. It's just expensive to live in a big city now. So there's that anxiety like, "Okay I really want to show up, but I'm miserable at my job because I'm afraid that if I show up I'm not gonna have this job." How do you coach people around that?

Stella: Yeah, well I think before you have the conversation, and what Cheryl did was really start to practice being who she was. That meant showing up as the leader that she wanted to be. So what you start to do in the process before you approach any kind of conversation, by going through the work of clarifying who you want to be and then taking action to be that way, you start to become a more valuable player. Often what happens to many of my clients is they actually don't even need to have the conversation because somehow their boss or their coworkers start acting differently towards them without them even actually having the conversation. That's because they're showing up differently.

Stella: Because emotions are contagious, if I am constantly in the office feeling like a victim of my circumstances like, "Oh, they're taking advantage of me and they're giving me too much work. Oh, they're not respecting me, or they're not giving me what I deserve. I'm angry and I'm pissed off," whatever it is, if we're feeling all that and that's what we're obsessing about, that gets transmitted. No one really good ... And this is all happening on a very subconscious level. We're receiving that information. We're transmitting that. Other people are receiving it, and no one really wants to be in your corner when you're full of resentment or pity or you're not coming from your most empowered place.

Stella: But when you start acting like the badass that you are, then people want to align behind you and support you and open the door for you to be successful. So by the time you actually have that conversation, you're a different human being and people will respond differently to you, especially if you're doing loving-kindness. You're not coming in there

from the perspective of, "I'm gonna have a confrontation." You're coming in there from the perspective of, "Let's have a conversation." I talk to people about how to master difficult conversations and what to say and all that, but it really starts with your energy.

Dave: What's the first thing that someone should do when they come from home work and there's a new employee, new boss, new coworker and you're like, "Oh my God, I think this person's a psycho," or whatever, "They're a micromanager. They're a bad human being who's spreading darkness," whatever your inner dialogue is. The second you have that inkling, what's the first thing that you as a happiness coach tell people to do?

Stella: Well you don't, I always say, well one I'm always like, "How can you look at this differently?" I'm always asking people to leave space for the unknown because we never really know. We don't really know what's going on with anyone. We don't know ... One of my clients thought her boss was being a super, just he was being really mean to put it lightly. She's a doctor, and she was complaining about him to me. I said, "Well you never know what's going on." Then it turned out two weeks later she discovered that his wife was suffering from breast cancer.

Stella: People are bigger than their behaviors, and so I always encourage you to really try to understand where this person is coming from, really get to know them. We all have flash judgments. We're always judging, that's just the way our brain works, but to know that that isn't our truth and that is not the truth. So just to notice those thoughts, and I know you encourage meditation, meditation is a really great way to create space in between those instinctual judgy thoughts and to really create space for another possibility, another way of looking at this. So I really just try to encourage people, you know, go out for lunch, ask them questions like, "What gets you energized? What are you excited about doing? Tell me about where you came from and how you got here."

Dave: That seems a little bit Polly Anna. Okay, someone comes into your company and you're like, "Actually I'm pretty sure that this new coworker is after my job," or whatever it is. You're saying, "Okay, maybe I'm wrong." So you go through that and you're like, "Actually I'm not wrong."

Stella: Yeah, well if you're not wrong, hey it's legit. [crosstalk 00:30:30] So if you're not wrong-

Dave: How do you handle the misery then? Because I mean you've stated on your social media and all that stuff that huge numbers of people are miserable in their current jobs. In fact, what percentage would you say? You probably have the research.

Stella: Well we know that it's about 80% worldwide. In the United States it's about 70%.

Dave: Of people who are miserable in their jobs.

Stella: They're unengaged, which means they're checked out, so it's a range of just bored to straight up miserable.

Dave: Okay, got it, a range somewhere in there. So this is happening a lot. You're like, "All right, maybe it's me," which is part of it. Maybe it's the way I'm framing the situation and maybe the other person has something going on and you can engage, which is a very healthy behavior. But I think some of the time other people just have, they have their stuff, and I've seen this multiple times in my career where you get the wrong person in at the wrong level and just things go sideways, right? It's like a chaos generator. So that can also drive misery [crosstalk 00:31:29]

Stella: Oh totally.

Dave: What do you recommend people do in that situation?

Stella: One, I would recommend that you're always documenting everything. If you start to feel like someone is really sabotaging your growth and is really threatening to your success at an organization, you want to start documenting everything from comments they made at a meeting, keeping emails if they're really abusive. You want to have a paper trail, and if it gets really bad you should, or even before it gets bad, I always ... The first thing I always try to do is to have an authentic exchange with this person and have them really understand their impact on you if you feel safe enough and if you ... I would recommend maybe you get some support and coaching on maybe how to have that constructive conversation, but I always try to talk directly first with the person and see if them ... Because sometimes people don't know how they're affecting others. They just really have no clue.

Stella: So just to share, "Hey when we were in that meeting last week and I was speaking and then you started talking about a different topic, that made me feel like my voice didn't matter. For the rest of the day I found myself feeling very distracted as a result of it and questioning whether or not we're on the same page. So what would be really great is if when I'm speaking this theme next week, could you hold off your thoughts until I'm done? That would make me feel a lot more supported." So, first start with them. If that doesn't work, talk to your boss. Then keep escalating it. Hopefully you're not in a situation where you're in harms way, because if you are that really needs to be escalated to another resource, whether if it's not HR, to a lawyer, to the police department if things are really serious. But don't stay, I would always recommend to not stay quiet and just power through, because if you're in a really bad situation, it's going to end up getting to you and affecting your performance.

Dave: I think that's powerful advice. It's probably more than your performance, because as a lot of people know, I've been pretty public in a few of the big magazines now, I'm planning to live until at least 180 years old. I'm also planning to be highly functioning when I'm 180, not putting my car keys in the refrigerator. That's not my goal. So I know that happiness is intimately tied to performance because Game Changers, those were the big three things that came out of it, the people who kick the most ass found a way to be happy which helped them kick ass, not the other way around. But I also know from my longevity research that happiness, including happiness at work, but happiness everywhere else, is a part of longevity. Do you have any data? Do you do any work around that with your clients around their health or longevity as a result of increasing the happiness at work?

Stella: Well, we do know that if you are a more positive happy person you're twice as likely to be alive after the age of 60 than your negative counterparts, so that's amazing and huge.

Dave: Is it the same for men and women?

Stella: I believe so, because there was one study that was done on men and then there was another study that was done on women, on nuns. It's called The Nun Study. So what they did is they found these nuns who were writing essays before they became nuns, and they actually coded their letters with the more positive words versus negative words. Then they looked around and they saw who was still alive, and those who happened to have more positive letters at the onset or more positive words describing their life at the onset were twice as likely to be alive. Then they did this also with a group of men, I believe they were Mexican men. I don't remember the name of that study, but yes. So you are much more likely to be alive if you're more positive and happy.

Dave: You've seen the movie Grumpy Old Men, right?

Stella: Yes.

Dave: It's kind of a stereotype of grumpy old men. It's also a perfect description of testosterone deficiency syndrome in men. One of the things that drives grumpiness and lack of longevity, at least in males as we age, is that our testosterone goes through the ground and then we become cranky and you become less happy. There's an interesting thing. Is it the lack of testosterone like a young person would have that's killing you that's also driving your lack of happiness, or is it the testosterone drove a lack of happiness that increased stress that killed you? No one's ever done that research that I've seen, but I think they're intimately linked. Certainly we know things like oxytocin, which makes you live longer, that comes from happiness and culture and things like that. So I think it's a twisted mass of things, but I'd be shocked if the numbers were exactly the same for men and women just because of the way our emotional and hormonal systems work as we age.

Stella: Oh my God, I mean I have been doing a lot of research on hormones because I know my mood and my cycle are so synced, and it's crazy how every month I will forget, "Why am I so cranky right now? Why do I feel like the world sucks?" Then I'm like, "Oh." I look at my cycle and I'm like, "Yes, this is happening on schedule." I'm doing a lot of hacking to improve it, and I think it's helping, but-

Dave: Check out Jolene Brighten. She was on awhile back talking about cycle syncing. I just read a blog post on that. The idea is that there are certain activities for women that you'll just be more successful at them at certain times of your cycle because your hormones are in alignment with cognitive function, and when you do heavy exercise and all sorts of stuff. She's done some really cool stuff. There's a few others in the field.

Stella: Yeah, Alisa Vitti I think was also on your show.

Dave: Yes, she was indeed, Alissa and Jolene are two that I would go to.

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: Just for everyone listening, this is meaningful stuff. If you're saying, "Well this doesn't apply to me because I'm a guy," there's a pretty good chance that you have women in your life who are close to you and that's affecting you. So I appreciate that we can have just adult conversations about that, and certainly, I mean I'm married. There are times like, "Wow, today's just kind of a shitty day." It can have something to do with the calendar. It's just something that you can acknowledge. It also makes it easier to feel loving-kindness and forgiveness and all that towards someone. You're like, "Oh, that's what's going on, okay."

Stella: Also to yourself as a woman to be like, "Oh, maybe it's not me. Maybe it's not my life, it's just what's happening for me." Alisa, she's a friend of mine, she actually has a really great app that I use, and you can actually share it with your partner so he knows where I am on my cycle as well, which I love.

Dave: Yep.

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: I haven't done the app version of that, but my wife and I read her fertility book, so we're pretty down on that stuff.

Stella: Yeah, I read it. I read it before we had, or as I was pregnant.

Dave: What a funny thing then, now you have a four year old. Who would've thought?

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: Well, have you seen that being a parent has changed any of your happiness awareness research, the way you work with clients, and just what you tell people?

Stella: You know, what's the saying, you wear your heart on your sleeve now? Or no, your heart is outside of your body and walking around. I remember shortly after having my daughter, I was watching commercials about animals and I suddenly was just crying. I don't think it was just the hormones. I think any time now, I've become a greater activist. I've become a greater advocate for anyone who doesn't have a voice. I just feel like my heart has grown exponentially since becoming a parent. I feel a mothering towards the world, and I feel that's such a privilege that other moms, I just feel like once you become a parent you just care on a different level, at least that's been my experience.

Stella: It's given me so much more empathy and so much more empathy for my clients who are parents and trying to juggle it all, but I feel like it's just blown my heart wide open, and that's been an amazing-

Dave: It's helped your happiness in general.

Stella: I mean yeah. The first year I was miserable, like I was miserable. I was-

Dave: Tell it like it is. The first year sucks.

Stella: I was banging my head against the wall. I literally hurt my head because I was so sleep deprived and I thought, "This can't be it. I'm doing something wrong. This sucks." I was in the lowest of lows and also the highest of highs. I think sleep deprivation has a lot to do with it. But in terms of what it's helped me do is I think I used to always worry about success and being ... In my 20s it was all about doing amazing things, and again, setting these goals that sounded right, but being a parent has just grounded me in such a way of like people are what matter most. We know from the research that the number one predictor of our happiness are our relationships. I know you wrote about that in your Game Changers book, about community and really valuing those around us. Having Leanor has just driven that home and grounded me so much more. It's so much easier to let go of the bullshit because you know what really matters most is the people. That's my driving force.

Dave: So it definitely made a difference for your coaching practice then?

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: What advice would you have for people, and essentially we have more people having children later in life and we have more people just not having children than really in all of history as a percentage, partly because of fertility problems because of what we've done to our environment, and just partly that people are choosing it for careers or just saying, "It's crowded enough. I think I want to go party instead of have a year of sleep deprivation," all of which are valid. But what advice would you have for people at work on how to maintain their own happiness and how to have a healthier environment around them when their coworkers or their friends go out and start families? Because I hear this from people. Work life for the parents shift, but work life for the coworkers shift. It can be a destabilizing thing in companies, but it's also just a healthy normal part of life. Now you've been on both sides of that and you coach CEOs and these big executives, so what advice do you have from both sides of that?

Stella: I will say when I became a mom, or even when I just got pregnant, I was mortified at how bad American organizations are at supporting families. I really felt it. I didn't get it before, but just having morning sickness, and I didn't have to hide it because I owned my own company, but I thought about all the women who felt the way I felt and had to show up in an office and pretend like nothing was happening. I was like, "I can't believe that's what so many women do, also because they're fearing job security." So one, I just, I mean I know this isn't exactly what you asked, but I just feel like we could all do so much more in terms of having compassion for families. In terms of, I think it's a value shift. In America, we're just all about the productivity, which is super important, but I think that's also a big reason why we're so unhappy in America and why our happiness

as a country is not growing. In fact, it's kind of flat. We're not even in the top 10 when it comes to most happy countries in the world.

Stella: I think it's because we're not valuing relationships, and families are one of the biggest frameworks of relationships in our country. So like you said, there's people who are living paycheck to paycheck. They have to make ends meet, and that means not giving your family all that you want to give, so that sucks and that creates pressure for everyone. So I think it's about leadership at organizations really creating the space and the language to say, "This is happening. How do we celebrate and support these people? How do we create infrastructure to support these folks rather than put pressure on moms to come back to work in three weeks and pretend like everything is fine while they're still recovering and their bodies are still healing?" So I think it's on the leadership to create more space for recognizing like, "Oh people have families. We're humans," and that.

Dave: I had a conversation with my executive team actually last week, and just to reset priorities. People always say the customer comes first and we value that very highly at Bulletproof, but that's actually not correct. Here's what comes first, your personal health as a human being.

Stella: Yes.

Dave: Because you're not gonna show up for our customers or anyone else, so the order of priority in my companies is your health, because you don't throw that away, number one. Number two is your family, because if you have a true family emergency, if someone is dying, if someone is giving birth, you don't get a second do over on that. You drop everything and you take care of your family. Work is a close third, right?

Stella: Yes.

Dave: That is what best serves the customer. That's what best serves you. That's what best serves the world around you. But I think a lot of companies have those just in the wrong order where they're willing to burn themselves out or do things that are frankly unnatural in order to meet those goals.

Stella: Unnatural.

Dave: Yeah.

Stella: Yeah, unnatural. It's not sustainable. It's not good for business. I think it's one out of eight visits to the doctor's office is due to stress at work.

Dave: Wow.

Stella: So it's not a win-win for anyone when we don't recognize our own humanity and create systems that support that. When it comes to the toxic work culture that we were talking about before, I think it's because there's these conflicting values. It's great that your

organization's values are super clear and ranked, which I think is missing from a lot of teams and organizations, but there's this, "We have to achieve no matter what," and meanwhile people might be struggling with what's going on at home, so yeah.

Dave: There you go.

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: Well I've got one sort of summary question for you. I really want people to have the CliffsNotes for how do you stay bulletproof in a toxic work environment. So give me the three to five steps that a listener could follow [inaudible 00:48:19] toxic work environment, whatever that means to them. Walk me through, five things or three things, whatever it is.

Stella: Okay, I love it. All right, so the first thing I would do is you have to get clear on what is your own unique definition of success in terms of what does it look like when you're thriving, what does it look like when you're your most alive. So that's why I have people do the vision generator. You guys can just go there. It's a quick-ish exercise to do. It's a fill in the blank, but it will help you define how do you wanna be and exist in this world, because everything starts from there because you need to be who you want to be no matter what happens. You actually have control over that, so that's first. The second thing I would do is to develop a gratitude practice if you don't already have one, and I would before you go to bed at night, just think about three to five things you're grateful for in your life at work, because we know that helps you be more resilient. It helps you see beyond your negativity bias. You have to develop that muscle.

Stella: The other thing that I would do is to start acting in alignment with how you wanna be. That means really being clear on your choices, micro choice by micro choice. If you want to be in a work environment that is more positive, how can you be a more positive force? Maybe you decide to kick off your meetings and ask everyone what they're grateful for. Maybe you bring in lunch or you bring in coffee for folks. Maybe you write a thank you note to someone. How can you be a positive force despite what is happening so you start acting in alignment with how you want to be? Then I would say once you're being who you want to be, really think about your options in terms of what conversations you want to have and with who, and what are the needs that you really need met. I think that only becomes clear to you once you start practicing how you want to be.

Stella: I just like to always, meditation I think is always good to throw in there because that helps you also have more awareness of the choices in front of you and not take things personally, because when there's a toxic work environment, that negative energy can really penetrate. Having a meditation practice or any kind of mindfulness practice just makes you aware that, "Oh that's not my crap," and you can choose not to let that totally invade.

Dave: That's beautiful advice, and it's funny, that's the same advice that helps people be more bulletproof or more resilient the rest of the time, even if they're not in a toxic work

environment. So those are best practices, and those are reflected in Game Changers. One of the reasons I wrote the book the way I did is it's easy to say, "Oh, I heard Stella say it, so it must be true." But if you're listening to this and you're like, "Well I'm 25 years older than Stella. I'm a man and I have a completely different background," you could say, "What works for Stella probably isn't going to work for me." Or maybe it will, but you just don't know. But when you realize that a bunch of people who have achieved that certain level of changing their game, they generally all agree on these things, or they all put these into practice, or a majority of them do, you can just have more safety and more trust that when you decide to do this list of things you have a greater likelihood of success if more than one person says that they're useful.

Dave: This is a way of lowering risk, because the risk, anyone listening who's consciously thinking about it is, well it's gonna take some amount of energy and time and trust and whatever else in order to follow this advice, and if it doesn't work or it moves me backwards, I don't get that time and energy back. Maybe we can de-risk it for you a little bit, and it's that mindset. But I gotta say you nailed it, and you've looked at, because you're a positive psychology person, I mean you've looked at hundreds and hundreds of studies, so you're standing on the backs of giants plus coaching 1500 CEO types and all this. It passes the sniff test on every level whether you want to talk about it from a scientific perspective or a spiritual perspective, it doesn't really matter. We have data and we have practice and we have anecdotal evidence and we have statistics, so I'm pretty confident that your list is valid and worthy of consideration. Well otherwise I wouldn't have had you on the show.

Stella: Well thank you. The thing is, I think it's not like this is shocking stuff, right? Everyone who's listening knows that it's important to count your blessings or to be grateful or to meditate. We all know this stuff, and I think the challenge is are you doing it. It's really about sitting down and doing this stuff, because we all know how to lose weight, we all know ... It's not about knowing, it's about doing. So even though this stuff seems super simple, it works if you just do it. So I want to encourage anyone to just start with a gratitude journal, or download a free loving-kindness meditation, or just do the vision generator. Just start with one thing and notice what you notice. That momentum will start to build. Your situation might transform much more easily than you can even imagine now.

Dave: That really makes, it makes a lot of sense to me. I have one more question for you Stella, unrelated to all this other stuff except maybe the basics of happiness. I'm starting to ask other people to reconsider aging because I'm tired of hearing when I say I'm gonna live to 180, I expected people to go, "That's cool. How could I do it?" A lot of times people say, "Oh my God, I can't imagine what I would look like at that age. Don't sign me up. I'm out." I don't understand that mindset.

Stella: Yeah.

Dave: So I'm gonna ask you this. How old do you think you can get to? How old do you think you'll live? How long do you think you'll live?

Stella: I've actually never thought about that. You know, there's ... I don't know. My family's Russian, so we're always making toasts until 120 [crosstalk 00:55:20]

Dave: There you go.

Stella: So we're always saying until 120. You're saying 180 was like, "That's really cool." I thought, "Oh. Maybe we should up it." When you first said it I was like, "Whoa. I've never even gotten there." So I love it, and I think the key is to live young as long as possible. When I think about vitality, because I'm always seeing at the gym these much older women really kicking ass in the exercise class, and I'm like, "That's how I want to be." So I'm always looking at these really old women who are vivacious and that's what drives me when I think about the choices that I make every day about my wellbeing. I'm like, "Is this gonna propel me into being that kickass old lady?" I never think about the number so much, but I do want to be that kickass older woman.

Dave: All right, so you want to perform well when you're old and your family does 120. If it makes you feel better, 180 is pretty simple math. I know we can do 120 because we have people who are well documented to be 120. They didn't do anything special, and you and I have the ability to do something special. So yeah, we could probably do 120.

Stella: That's true. I love it. Great.

Dave: I'm pretty sure that we can get a 50% improvement in the next 80 years of medical research. If we can't extend our lives by 50% it's because we're not trying, so that's my incredible scientific answer.

Stella: I will happily go there with you.

Dave: All right, it's a deal. Stella, thank you for being on Bulletproof Radio. Your website is visiongenerator.com, and I'm really hoping that listeners got some really cool thoughts about how you deal with a toxic work environment and the nature of happiness. Thanks for sharing.

Stella: Thank you so much. So grateful to be here again. Thanks.

Dave: If you liked today's episode, you know what to do. You can share it with a friend, or you can pick up your copy of Game Changers, because I promise you it'll have a higher return on investment for you than even this interview. While you're at it, if you haven't had a chance to share gratitude, which will make you happier, the fastest and easiest way to do that is to go to Amazon and leave a review of Game Changers. Because guess what? I will be grateful when I see that five star review, and I'll actually read it, so I'll know what you thought. So tell me what you thought about the book. Go to Amazon, leave a review. Thank you.