

HAPPINESS & its causes

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Summary

There were many inspiring speakers at the conference and I have written up some of the main highlights and insights in the following pages. Here is a summary of some of the main points:

◆ **Meditation (knowing our mind) is an important foundation**

From the Dalai Lama: To achieve happiness (wellness, peace of mind) knowledge and awareness of our mind & mental system is essential. For strong emotional and mental health we need a strong foundation in the mind. We need to develop awareness and wisdom – through meditation, through becoming familiar with the reactive patterns of our mind.

◆ **Becoming our own therapist: self-awareness & self-responsibility**

Self-reflection lies at the heart of our wellbeing. The main causes of both our happiness and suffering come from our mind—where we develop cravings, aversions, reactions, delusions and neurosis. By becoming familiar with our negative patterns (learned reactions and neurosis etc.) we can let them go. A big challenge is freeing ourselves from the prison of our mind.

◆ **The absence of illness does not mean wellness**

Our approach needs to be more on 'flourishing' and nurturing what keeps us strong, than than just on 'repairing what is wrong'. What is needed is more promotion of long-term mental health—reinforcing 'positive functioning'. "Mental illness is rising because too few of us are flourishing."

◆ **Happiness = feeling good AND functioning well**

While short-term 'highs' temporarily feel good, if we are not functioning well in the long-term (flourishing) we are more likely to become ill. We need to reinforce and practice 'positive functioning'—developing self-acceptance, relationships with others, personal growth, purpose in life, social integration and social contribution—to create a strong foundation for long-term wellbeing.

◆ **Our attitude influences the outcome**

How we positively or negatively think about and relate to a situation has a great influence on how we experience that situation. The key is not to let our emotions control us but to have control over our emotions. A predictor of happiness is 'how' we deal with our emotions. Enduring wellbeing is a process (a way of being, an attitude) as much as it is an outcome.

◆ **Developing compassion & kindness central to wellbeing**

Two things which strongly reduce our experience of wellbeing: 1) a lack of sense of community and belonging - social isolation; and 2) a lack of trust between people – alienation. Reaching out to others helps us to establish connections with others and forge community ties. Developing compassion & kindness (empathy and understanding for others) is central to happiness & wellbeing.

HAPPINESS & its causes

What a buzz to be attending such an interesting conference with a wide range of high quality speakers. The highlight was without a doubt special guest, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (more on this shortly!), who lead a group of over 50 national and overseas speakers. Attracting a crowd of around 3,200 people, the conference provided a stimulating forum for presentations and discussions around the universal theme of 'What is happiness, and how can we create and maintain it'. We learnt about the influence of Western psychology—including the emerging field of positive psychology—and the unique contribution of Buddhist psychology, and topics such as: the art of happiness, human flourishing, becoming your own therapist, balancing life and work, creating better relationships and dealing with life's challenges. The atmosphere was inviting, warm and friendly, characterised by an uplifting repertoire of intermission music (including Frou Frou's "Let Go [cos there's beauty in the breakdown]", Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" and Ben Lee's "We're All in This Together.") It was an inspiring and well-organised conference, a real credit to host organisation, the Vajrayana Institute.

Happiness – what is it?

The Dalai Lama's definition of happiness is closer to the concept of 'wellbeing', which comprises components of health, vitality, love, creativity, self-fulfilment and resilience, and is more sustainable than 'happiness' or 'pleasure'. It is this deeper enduring state of happiness and wellbeing that the conference primarily addressed (not the short-lived hedonic form of transient happiness).

It is a challenge to convey in words the richness and wisdom shared by so many of the speakers. It is one thing to read a conference paper or book and quite another to hear the words spoken by the person themselves ... As you read this article, imagine you are in a huge auditorium with all eyes on the central stage. You are about to listen to the words of many reputable people, many are heads of organisations or leaders in their field. So much was covered, it is hard to relay it all ... so what follows are only some of the highlights and insights. I hope you are able to appreciate the knowledge that was shared, each person condensing a lifetime of experience into a few moments on 'centre-stage'.

A True World Leader

The highlight of this conference was hearing words of wisdom from His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama. As the chairperson, Craig Hassed, graciously acknowledged, "If one wished to understand the nature of a thing, such as the nature and cause of happiness, then it makes sense to ask an 'expert'. Such a person would surely be one who is renowned for happiness in their own life and leads others to greater happiness in their lives. An expert would not just be happy when circumstances are easy, but is happy even in the most difficult of circumstances ... This is an extraordinary opportunity to hear from a true world leader in the field."

What struck me most about this very holy man was his deep sense of humility, his respect for others, his clarity of conviction yet gentleness, and, perhaps most of all, his playful sense of humour and unabashed cheekiness! Thankfully, having a true experience of contentment, wisdom and wellbeing doesn't mean always taking ourselves too seriously.

The Dalai Lama included a conference paper, excerpts of which are reprinted separately.

Here I would like to include a few of the insights he shared in person.

[The Dalai Lama speaks slowly, partly, I think, because he has inner peace, but also I think because of the language barrier (he takes an interpreter with him wherever he goes). He makes profound truths seem 'simple' - yet these clearly reflect deep thought and wisdom ... as well as, at times, real mischievousness.]

Gems of wisdom from the Dalai Lama

All humans share the same basic desire: to be happy. Yet, because of our sophisticated intellect—our mind—our pleasure and pain is also more sophisticated. We also have memory and imagination; we remember the pain of the past and imagine the future, often with anxiety, fear and worry.

Because of our mind, on a mental level we have much desire—attachment for ornaments (nice jewelry, clothes, cars, houses). We desire comfort related to our senses ... which is more about material value than internal value.

Many children today are growing up with a lack of human affection, in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Those with loving parents feel peace and security. What is important? We need to provide an education of warm-heartedness—to focus on inner value, not external value.

But what is the meaning of happiness for most at the human level? Satisfaction at the sensory level! (Which costs money!!)

Our emotions ... can be constructive and destructive. The negative ones usually come automatically, no need for training or practice here! [laughs]. These are commonly biased, reactionary, limited, destructive.

Compassion, on the other hand, is positive: respecting others' rights, seeing others as similar to ourselves. Having genuine compassion—being kind, loving, caring, showing empathy and understanding—is unbiased, shows thought and reasoning, is caring and helpful. We need a lot of training to be positive!

When people have strong hatred, 90% of this is projection. The object (other person or thing) looks 'ugly' because of our own hate. We desire a new car (or person!). First, it is beautiful ... but not long after, it is ugly! In the world, there is so much mental projection!!

Positive emotions result in peace of mind. They help us deal with difficulties in life. But a disturbed mind—full of fear, suspicion, jealousy, anger, hate—brings unrealistic unhelpful attitudes.

Also, good physical rest is important. You must have good sleep! ... so the mind can be clear.

Knowledge and awareness of our mental system is very essential. This we can achieve through the practice of meditation, which helps to reduce stress and unrest.

Our mind—consciousness, made up of our thoughts and emotions—goes very deep. It is much superior [to other animals] and serious, therefore to understand it and become aware we also need to go deeper.

A panel discussion: Growing affluence, increasing stress & elusive happiness

The Dalai Lama was then joined by an interesting array of speakers comprising of Gordon Parker (Director, Black Dog Institute), Linda Burney (MP, NSW, former Dir. Gen. NSW Dept. Aboriginal Affairs), Clive Hamilton (Director, The Australia Institute, and Magda Zubanski (Australian comedian and icon). Hosted by Geraldine Doogue from Compass, ABC TV, the panel discussed topics such as: Can we have it all and be happy? How do we explain the contradiction between material progress and our failure to achieve happiness? and Has the collapse of belief systems left us in a moral/happiness vacuum? Again, these are only a few excerpts.

Geraldine: *Can we have it all and be happy?*

Clive: We can become too desperate to be happy with too much attachment to the wrong kinds of [material] success. Enormous resources are devoted to persuading us that gratification of our desires is the path to happiness. The culture of marketing contains a deeper and rather insidious message: that money—and what it buys—is the key to the good life.

Although we are told [sold] that more money and things will make us more happy, the truth is this make us feel deprived and restless and always yearning for more! This sort of society can only reproduce itself day after day by making us feel dissatisfied with what we have! If you are desperate you can never be happy.

The paradox is, to get what you want, you first have to give up wanting [craving] it. This is most difficult.

Linda: The Aboriginal world view is not linear. It is cyclic. In the past few years I have experienced deep personal tragedy, and through this I have created three personal rules: 1) it doesn't matter how bad a situation is, ask yourself, 'what can I learn from this that will assist me in the way I live with others?' 2) live at peace within yourself ... I no longer stress or unrealistically strive to make changes that I can't, I make peace with where I am at; 3) appreciate the gift that life is every day.

Gordon: The things that now make me happy are the simple small things—a picnic with friends or family, being the father of the bride. On the broader level, there should be a drive toward uncovering our own possibilities, to find deeper fulfillment and a sense of purpose in our life. Whether we are an artist, manager or administrator, we need to connect with the creativity in what we do.

Magda: The power of a sense of humour, this has helped me get through the difficult times. [Magda offered much light relief during this session with her spontaneous comments and humour. She was a last-minute replacement for the Minister for Environment & Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull, which I think many of us saw as a bonus.]

Geraldine: *A feeling of happiness: is it a by-product of a good life or an end in itself?*

Clive: In modern society, the real purpose [of marketing] is not to make us feel happy. Advertising by its nature creates unsatisfaction, supporting a hedonistic pursuit of happiness—the result is transient and wears off. It always leaves us 'wanting more'.

Gordon: It is okay to enjoy the 'high' moments but to remember, these don't last. It is also important to sit with 'unhappiness'. To feel it and learn from it, and know that we are still okay.

Dalai Lama: We need to rise out of our own ignorance—how we keep reacting to our ego mind.

Linda: I see happiness as a tool of survival for human beings. It is not uncommon to hear laughter in the saddest places.

Clive: Emotions are the royal road to the soul.

Gordon: Many people have learnt a lot from their pain ... like tolerance, patience, kindness to others.

Linda: We all have control over ourselves. I do something every day to be kind, to change. When big things feel out of control it's important to remember that we have control over our personal reality.

Geraldine: *What is the trigger that gets people to change?*

Dalai Lama: [in his playful unassuming way] I don't know!! [much laughter] We are all different. But there is a drive to find satisfaction at a deeper level. Some pain may also result in deeper satisfaction [peace and meaning].

Gordon: We need to adjust our goals and expectations—to be satisfied with what we have, optimizing finding peace in the ordinary things. Plato once said, "What is honoured in a country will be cultivated by them." We face a danger in the west ... because our countries honour materialism.

Clive: The superficiality of modern marketing is the flip side of the loss of meaning. The issue is not the goals we have or our ambitions but how attached we are to them!

Dalai Lama: Positive ambition is a good thing—if it benefits others and the community ... not competitive ambition where 'I have to be unique and better than others'. There should be a desire to use ambition in a good way, not just for your self.

Magda [to the Dalai Lama]: If someone is gripped by fear what can they do?

Dalai Lama: If basic health is strong, germs can't enter. Emotional and mental health is the same. Therefore, we need a strong foundation in the mind. We need to develop awareness and wisdom ... through meditation, through observing the mind.

Geraldine: *In closing, what is one personal priority you will each make to create more happiness in your life?*

Clive: Happiness is also a political issue. I would like to see change at the societal level.

Magda: I want to be nicer to others [laughter].

Linda: I would like to develop more compassion.

Gordon: I believe in the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. As Nietzsche once said, "Happiness is closer when we kneel than when we soar."

The Art of Happiness

First cab off the rank on the first day was Dr Howard Cutler, psychiatrist and international best-selling author of The Art of Happiness, co-written with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

At a big-picture level, Howard believes that happiness depends more on our state of mind than our outer circumstances, even allowing for challenging physical hardships (war, poverty, shelter etc). How we positively or negatively think about and relate to a situation has a great influence on how we experience that situation.

Pursuing happiness: indulgent or integral to our wellbeing?

Howard raised the pressing question: is pursuing happiness self-centred and indulgent? He insightfully believes 'no' ... because it is happy (fulfilled, joyful and content) people who are open, giving and reach out to others, who help create a healthier society.

Conversely, it is unhappy people who are more self-absorbed and self-centered (more closed off, with more worries and tend not to be able to readily give to others).

Personal happiness directly links to kindness and compassion, two qualities which, in turn, reciprocally breed more happiness. Howard spoke of an experiment conducted in the US where people were asked to perform five random acts of kindness a day a week for several months. The outcome: these people experienced noticeable increased levels of personal happiness.

Being kind and compassionate to others directly contributes to our sense of wellness. This is one of the cornerstones of Buddhist psychology.

Building community & trust

Further exploring happiness at a global level, studies have been done of countries with different levels of happiness which reveal two things which strongly reduce our experience of happiness:

- ◆ a lack of sense of community/belonging: social isolation
- ◆ a lack of trust between people: alienation

Both being isolated and feeling alienated make it harder for us to feel good within ourselves. It is in reaching out to others—cultivating kindness, empathy and understanding—that helps us to establish connections with others and forge community ties.

Contrast this with destructive sexist or racist beliefs based on hate and judgement, which only serve to drive in deep wedges of division and separation ... and, unavoidably, misery, for both self and others.

Reinforcing the wisdom of the Dalai Lama, Howard claims that developing compassion is central to happiness and wellbeing. Rather than being a 'warm and fuzzy' intangible concept, acting kind and compassionate is a practical and immediate way we can cultivate happiness, both in our own lives and in others'. Reaching out creates community.

Flourishing: A need to Focus on Wellness not Illness

Hot on the heels of Dr Cutler was Dr Corey Keyes, another passionate and gracious speaker who both delighted and inspired us with his wisdom (Professor, Sociology and Public Health, Adjunct Prof. of Psychology, Emory University, Atlanta and author of numerous scientific articles).

Corey opened his speech with a pertinent question: Does the absence of mental illness mean the presence of wellness? The translation into mental health as 'flourishing'? A poignant core question. According to global research, the answer is 'No'.

A leader in the field of 'positive psychology,' Corey believes that by focusing on (curing) illness we have it backward. While it is important to research diseases, treatments and cures, he believes this alone offers false promises.

Our approach should be more than 'repairing what is wrong'. It should also be about 'identifying and nurturing what is good and keeps us strong.' What is required, he says, is more promotion of 'mental health': to recognise what it means to live a flourishing 'well-lived' life ... and then look at how to create and sustain this.

Types of happiness

Corey identified two components of happiness:

1) feeling good and 2) functioning well—and believes as a society we tend to focus on the former at the expense of the latter. While we may temporarily feel good, if we are not functioning well in the long-term, we are more at risk of becoming ill.

Anything less than 'flourishing mental health' results in decreased resilience, clarity and self-worth and increased illness, disease and disability. Conversely, an increase in flourishing mental health results in a decrease in mental illness.

Like individual pieces of an intricate puzzle each speaker added their gems of wisdom. Corey concluded his talk by stating that, "Mental illness is rising because too few of us are flourishing. Mental illness is a burden

on society, but so is the absence of mental health. Paradoxically, focusing on happiness is no laughing matter." (to which, of course, we all laughed!)

Becoming our Own Therapist

One of the most delightful speakers for me was the Venerable Robina Courtin, a straight-talking, no-nonsense, passionate nun in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition for over 27 years. She is the director of the Liberation Prison Project based in San Francisco and cares for the spiritual needs of more than 6,000 prisoners, many on death row, in 700 institutions across the US and now also in Australia.

Self-awareness the key

Drawing on the wisdom of ancient Buddhist insights, Robina stated that we are all born with the potential to be free of suffering: to live a life full of happiness ... contentment, peace and joy. How can we achieve this? In short, by 'becoming our own therapist'. The Buddhist approach is a proactive approach. As she says, no one knows us better than we know ourselves.

Introspection and self-awareness lie at the heart of our wellbeing: we cannot know ourselves without self-reflection. In Buddhism, the core tool used to 'be our own therapist' is the practice of meditation.

Robina highlighted, "Our mind is not our brain! It is much more than the physical. It is our consciousness—the entire spectrum of our cognitive as well as emotional processes, made up of our thoughts, reactions, instincts, intuition and awareness."

Meditation is a very practical and direct way, she says, that we can come to know our mind (consciousness) ... or 'unconsciousness' as the case may be! As Robina stated, the main causes of both our happiness and suffering come from our mind—where we develop cravings, aversions, reactions, delusions and neurosis. By becoming familiar with our negative patterns (learned reactions and neurosis etc.) we can then let them go.

All behaviour is learned—and practiced! But until we realize we're reinforcing our negative patterns we can't change them. Robina gave a helpful example: a concert pianist becomes good at piano by hours and years of practice. Similarly, if we automatically 'do anger' or 'anxiety' (etc. etc.), we're familiar with it because this is what we continually 'practice'. Yet, if we remain unconscious of what 'pushes our buttons,' how can we change?

Taking responsibility for our happiness

As Robina pointed out, aside from the pain we inflict on others with our negativity, everything we think, say and do first and foremost leaves an imprint in our own mind! To heal we have to stop focusing on and blaming others and take responsibility for what's in our own mind.

If we hate someone, it is not because of them but because of our own hate and pain within ourselves. A loving person doesn't hate ... happy (compassionate and kind) people aren't negative or hurtful to others. Equally, miserable people aren't kind to others.

While there are many tools and techniques for looking after ourselves, meditation is a very practical way we can 'get back in the driver's seat' and cultivate our happiness.

As Robina concluded, "Becoming our own therapist gives us great confidence in our own potential. We stop being our own worst enemy and gain deep self-respect, which we then extend to others.

Instead of blaming others, getting angry, ignoring or denying our reality or feeling guilty, we begin to observe and understand our mind. We can then change it and courageously take responsibility for it.

A panel discussion: Learning to be Happy

Moderator Natasha Mitchell (All in the Mind, Radio National) hosted this panel of speakers: Dr David Matsumoto (Prof. of Psychology, San Francisco State Uni. & Dir. Culture & Emotion Research Lab), Dr Corey Keyes (Prof. Sociology & Public Health, Emory Uni, Atlanta), Prof. Graham Burrows (Mental Health Foundation Australia), Venerable Robina Courtin and Dr Howard Cutler. Topics included: How can the mind be trained to enhance the positive and diminish the negative? What evidence exists that mind training works? Is the search for happiness self-indulgent?

David: We all experience a range of positive and negative emotions. Our negative emotions, while disturbing, have helped us to survive and served a purpose. Like all unhealthy habits, initially they are hard to change. What is important is how we deal with them later on! Our reaction to them! The key is not to let our emotions control us but to have control over our emotions.

A predictor of happiness is 'how' we deal with our emotions. Enduring lasting happiness is a process as much as it is an outcome!! It is a way of being—an attitude.

Forgiveness is a choice: an act of love. It is only in 'this moment' that we can be fully alive. We don't have to sink to the level of perpetrators—those who harm us.

When difficult things happen there are many ways to deal with it. We don't have to react negatively and keep generating the negativity. It's only a problem if you label it a problem. It is also an opportunity to learn.

Robina: Our greatest challenge is freeing ourselves from the prison of our mind. I work with prisoners on death row who physically can't change their reality: where the only thing they CAN change is their mind.

And some of them are achieving this. If we have the courage to conquer the internal we can conquer the external.

Real prisons are one big wake-up call ... where 'escaping our reality' is so immutable. What does happiness mean for people on death row? Ridding the mind of hate, revenge, neurosis, blame, guilt, shame, low self-worth. As difficult as it may be, learning to deal with our current reality 'as it is,' rather than fight [deny] it, brings us peace of mind.

The Buddha teaches that we all need our own wake-up call. Death row is the most extreme form of this.

Corey: We need to focus on long-term 'positive functioning'—things like developing self-acceptance, relationships with others, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life; and integrating, connecting with and giving to others—rather than on short-term superficial highs and just feeling good in the moment.

Happiness is also a societal responsibility as well as personal responsibility. We need to create a society that promotes wellbeing and happiness ... and if we don't have one, we need to create one!

We need to change our focus and the way we live, we need to create a society which we feel good living in.

Natasha: *Is it possible for everyone to train the mind to be happy?*

Culter: I believe yes. Wherever people are on the continuum, for example, people with severe schizophrenia, they may not fully recover but they can still improve. There are many different strategies, from CBT to mindfulness meditation to a range of community supports.

David: There are many influences on our happiness, both internal (genetic and learned patterns) and external (social and societal). In extremes, some people have either a deflated or inflated sense of themselves (too much self focus) while others look too much outside themselves (comparing or competing, developing attachments or seeking approval).

What is important: Not 'to be better than someone else tomorrow' ... but 'to be better than ourselves from yesterday.'

We each need to find the balance between the inner and the outer: between knowing our inner mind (its strengths and weaknesses) and living compassionate disciplined lives ... being kind and of service to others and finding lasting fulfillment in what we do.

How Happy Are You?

Economics Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, Ross Gittins, spoke eloquently on topics such as measuring wellbeing, the role of external conditions and the relationship between happiness and wealth.

Yes, money makes us happy—but only to a point! Our incomes have double or tripled but not our happiness. We are skilled at adaptation ... we soon take our new and improved material situations for granted and quickly return to our earlier states of mind. For example, unhappy people who win the lottery soon return to being unhappy.

It is our 'state of mind,' not the 'state of our bank account,' that determines our happiness.

We focus too much on wanting stuff (desire) than enjoying stuff (experiencing satisfaction). The key: ask, 'what do I enjoy doing?' Paradoxically, why don't we do the things that what we enjoy? Because we're too busy pursuing the things we desire!! Start enjoying and appreciating what you have right now.

Another key is to keep acting and doing things that in hindsight you know you would have wanted to do, and to avoid what you would have regretted. For example, going to the gym or finishing that project, or not yelling at our loved one or having that last sausage roll.

Two things that work against us: 1) we underestimate our ability to adapt—we forget that the high soon fades; and 2) our memories are rosier than reality—we readily edit the bad bits from our past and rationalize our decisions to keep doing the things that in the long-term make us unhappy.

A panel discussion: Desire, Love & Attachment

Moderator Anne Hollands (CEO, Relationships Australia) hosted this panel of speakers: Amanda Gordon (President, Australian Psychological Society), Dr Julian Short (Author: An Intelligent Life), Dr Ian Gawler (OAM, Director, The Gawler Foundation), Venerable Tenzin Chonyi (Dr Diana Taylor – Domestic Violence Committee Coalition, Psychologist & Touring Teacher). Topics included: Why are so many relationships troubled? Is attachment harmful to a good relationship? How do we develop healthy and satisfying relationships?

Amanda: Happiness takes work and thought! We have to work out what gives us genuine lasting satisfaction (do we really want to say and do things that hurt others?)

Creating happiness in our work relationships is the same as for our personal relationships: we need to show mutual respect, look for the positive, give feedback in a kind and constructive way, assume a good

motive in others, and work through the difficult tasks together. See 'through' the differences in roles and personalities and engender respect for others.

The key? It is the amount of good stuff between the difficult times that influences our happiness. Don't wait for things to go wrong and feel negative. Keep practicing and strengthening our positive functioning to help us weather the storms.

Tenzin: In relationships there is a great deal of desire, grasping and attachment rather than real love, which is giving and forgiving. Relationships easily become addictions. We need to relate without clinging and grasping. Relationships also need to reflect the true us: ask—'deep down, is this true, true for me?'

If we keep being true to ourselves we will grow in an honest way.

Ian: True lasting happiness comes from within. If we look for it outside ourselves it will always be tenuous. How can we find happiness? We have to look for it inside ourselves. When we truly love ourselves we will then be better equipped to love and give to others. One: we need a clear sense of self. Two: we need a clear sense of boundaries.

Other gems of wisdom ...

Taken from different speakers throughout the conference:

Craig Hamilton

(Ambassador, BeyondBlue, ABC Sports Broadcaster, Author: Broken Open, diagnosed with Bipolar in 2000).

I used to be a huge binge drinker, every two weeks. Looking back I see it was related to my as-yet-undiagnosed mania phases of bipolar disorder. I think as a country we have a huge alcohol/self-medication problem.

If it's out of whack it has the ability to destroy us.

I've gotten off the grog, I do meditation and yoga.

Live today! The most important day we've got is today. Meditation keeps me in the moment, that's when you stay centred.

We live in a society with constant distractions! My advice? [If it's not absolutely necessary]—turn off your mobile, turn off the internet! We need to get back to basics and make time to 'just be'. It's not easy at first, but it's important for our mental health.

We're hyper-stimulated and have the capacity to send ourselves insane—and if we're not careful we'll do this.

As a society we're getting too confused, too out there. We've got to get back to the simple life.

Garry McDonald

(Board Member: BeyondBlue, Actor, mental breakdown about 20 years ago, was diagnosed with Anxiety Disorder)

A lot of people want a simple solution. It doesn't work that way. As Socrates once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Like fitness, we've got to keep training our mind—and not let our mind run rampant! Meditation is a big part of my life.

My message? Don't do drugs! Marijuana is dangerous. Benefit from the discipline of meditation. Regular exercise ... a good walk in the morning is wonderful! Mostly, just be happy with what you've got.

Petrea King

(Founder and CEO, Quest for Life Centre, author 8 books, recovered from Leukemia 23 years ago)

Before my illness there was a split between the real me deep inside and the face I showed to others. The illness was the first time I came unstuck. It was a profound moment; I had learnt and studied about healing all my life and in the end I was just 'broken open'. It was the most profound moment: I realized I knew zip about anything! [laughter].

I learned that my healing was not about 'fighting' illness ... not about the doing or 'getting it right'. It was about learning to simply 'be'. My first book is called *Quest for Life*. It should have been called, *Sob Your Way to Your Heart!* [much empathic laughter]

Dr Craig Hassed

(Senior Lecturer, Dept of General Practice, Monash Uni, author)

Happiness equals Awareness—we need to wake up! When we're not 'paying attention' our mind snaps to our default setting ... usually either worrying or daydreaming. We need to re-collect our wandering minds.

We're not disturbed by events but by the way we perceive them. As Winston Churchill once said, "An optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity and a pessimist sees a calamity in every opportunity!"

Through meditation—mindfulness—we learn not to judge our negative thoughts ... which alone reduces relapses of stress from 78% to 38%!

It's important not to hate our negative thoughts! Because they're there anyway! Don't react ... learn to observe, through calmly paying attention.

Happiness is learning to integrate our life: our career, family life and personal growth. Self-care and personal growth don't compete with our career performance but underpin it.

In my university course I teach my students about ESSENCE:

E ducation: the importance of knowledge and reflection

S tress management: the importance of mental health through meditation and mindfulness techniques

S pirituality: the role of meaning and/or spirituality on coping, health and illness

E xercise: the importance and application of physical activity

N utrition: the role of healthy nutrition and the influences of eating patterns

C onnectedness: the role of social support for wellbeing and healthcare

E nvironment: creating a healthy physical, emotional and social environment

Wellness is not only a foundation for happiness but also for a fulfilling life and improved performance. The cultivation of strategies leading to wellness, such as mindfulness, is simple and in our hands, but it needs patient nurturing and support over time for it to truly flower. ☺