



## **Happiness is an Option for Lawyers... Creating Success and Fulfillment in Work and Life**

By: Dr. Maynard Brusman

Dr. Brusman lives in Marin County, California and is a consulting psychologist and executive coach with a practice in the San Francisco Financial District.

*“One of my favorite musical groups once wrote a song called “Happiness is an Option”. Maynard Brusman can show even the most jaded lawyers out there that ‘happiness is an option’ for them in a way that they might never have noticed or seen before. Believe it or not, attorneys can be happy in both their personal and professional lives. It takes time and effort, but Dr. Brusman can show you how.”*

**John Faricy, Senior Partner  
Faricy, PA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**In the increasingly demanding world lawyers face; many lawyers desire to achieve professional success, a fulfilling life, and true happiness.** However, achieving both their personal and professional goals sometimes proves to be very difficult. Many lawyers report being unhappy with the choices they have made and desire a different future.

**Most lawyers live hectic and stress-filled lives.** They experience a great deal of pressure from the billable hour requirement and client/firm demands. Finding a balance between work and life without sacrificing professional success, deciding on the best practice area or work setting, and making possible career transitions can be challenging tasks, even for the most talented and effective lawyer.

**A number of lawyers choose to develop their own practice or seek alternative careers.** Lawyers frequently find marketing their practice or creating a career that is more aligned with their values and evolving interests a significant challenge.

**You have made a major investment in your legal career and developed some very valuable competencies.** You've earned the right to both career success and a happy personal life. To be happy, requires knowledge about how to achieve happiness (wisdom and hard work) and taking small action steps. There are a number of transformational strategies that can help you achieve your goals.

## **POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

**Martin E.P. Seligman introduces the foundation for a theory of Positive Psychology in his book, *Authentic Happiness* (Free Press, 2002).**

Scientifically based, it is a contrast to other theories of psychology. For example, Freud put forth that our feelings arise from unconscious conflicts experienced in early infancy and therefore our personalities are determined by such experiences. Seligman posits that we have more choice and control over how we feel and behave, and our capacity to experience positive emotions can be developed. He teaches that happiness can be cultivated by identifying and using many of the strengths and traits that one already possesses – including kindness, originality, humor, optimism, and generosity. By frequently calling upon one's signature strengths in all crucial realms of life, people not only develop natural buffers against misfortune and the experience of negative emotion, they move their lives up to a new more positive plane.

**Seligman provides the *Signature Strengths Survey* on his web site, along with a variety of brief tests on such things as happiness, gratitude, work-life satisfaction, close relationships, emotions, and motivations, at [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org), so that people can measure how much positive emotion they experience.** The lesson in his book and on the website, is that by identifying the very best in ourselves, we can improve the world around us and achieve new and sustainable levels of authentic contentment, gratification and meaning.

So what is needed to create life satisfaction?

## **LIFE SATISFACTION**

**Research indicates that the following strengths are most highly correlated with overall life satisfaction:**

1. Capacity to love and be loved (valuing close relationships)
2. Curiosity (interest, novelty seeking, openness to experience)

3. Zest for life (vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy)
4. Gratitude (awareness and thankfulness of good things)
5. Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation)

**A growing body of research is indicating that emotional competence is essential for success at home and on the job.**

## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

**The concept of emotional intelligence became popular after the immense success of Daniel Goleman's book in 1995, *Emotional Intelligence, Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.** Goleman defines it as the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.

**Most people have trouble managing situations that are emotionally charged, especially when the emotions aroused are anger and anxiety.** This difficulty is often accompanied by, or causes, poor communications skills. Individuals who are able to handle their emotions— the expression or regulation of them— are also able to internally generate the kinds of emotions that are productive and efficient.

**Goleman summarizes emotional intelligence into the following components:**

1. Emotional self-awareness
2. Managing one's own emotions
3. Using emotions to maximize intellectual processing and decision-making, including self-motivation
4. Developing empathy
5. The art of social relationships and managing emotions in others

The use of multi-rater 360-degree feedback surveys are increasingly being used in law firms to measure emotional intelligence, because such assessments ask colleagues, boss, direct reports and even family to rate the person on emotional competencies.

## **STRESS RESILIENCE**

**In the demanding world lawyers face; becoming stress resilient is an essential component of happiness.** Resilience is the ability to persevere and adapt when overcoming obstacles. It is the key to happiness and success at work and in life. The secret to the emotional intelligence competency of resilience is *accurate* thinking. It is important to challenge limiting beliefs and negative

thinking. Managing stress allows you to excel in the workplace while maintaining a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle.

**The legal profession is currently experiencing increasing numbers of lawyers who are dissatisfied with their careers and abandoning the practice of law for less stressful career alternatives.** Contributing factors include anxiety, depression, relationship issues, and questions relating to personal values and the meaning of life.

**Unmanaged stress increases anxiety, depression, anger, substance abuse, and feelings of unhappiness- all of which decrease quality of life and workplace productivity.** In fact, a study done at John Hopkins University found that out of 104 occupational groups, lawyers were the most likely to suffer from depression- more than three times more likely than average. High levels of stress are reported by almost 3/4 of lawyers and resulting in damage to the physical health or emotional well-being of 1/3 of these attorneys.

**Increasing billable hour requirements time pressures are frequently cited as the reason for the high rates of lawyer dissatisfaction.** Attorneys complain of little time for themselves or their families. In contrast, happy people are less self-focused, less hostile, more loving, forgiving, trusting, energetic, decisive, enthusiastic, creative, sociable and helpful.

**The greatest source of stress is the tremendous internal pressure and anxiety that we create for ourselves through...**

- *worrying* about situations we can't control
- *perfectionism* - expecting too much of ourselves or others
- *competition* - turning every encounter into a win-lose situation
- *self-criticism* - focusing on faults, rather than strengths
- *insecurity* - looking to others to provide emotional security rather than ourselves
- *powerlessness* - failing to see the choices that are available
- *hurrying* - constantly pushing ourselves to perform better and faster
- *comparison* of our achievements, or lack of them, to those of others
- *pessimism* - expecting the worst from life
- the *unrealistic expectation* that life can be problem-free

## How to manage change and take control of your stress

Take action to make things better. How? Experiment with these ideas. Begin with one specific behavior change item. Then, commit over 21 consecutive days to record, measure and implement successful change.

### Stress Resiliency

#### Guidelines

##### Get Organized

Put important things first. This is the habit of self-management. It involves organizing and managing time and events around personal priorities. Develop clear values and a sense of purpose.

##### *Rehearse*

Being prepared reduces stress. When you're facing a situation that you know will be stressful to you, rehearse it, either mentally or with a friend. Anticipate what might occur and plan your response.

##### *Do It Now*

Procrastination breeds stress! Do your most difficult task at the beginning of the day when you're fresh; avoid the stress of dreading it all day.

##### *Put Perfectionism in it's Proper Place*

Perfectionism is often a poor use of time. Not everything requires perfection. High priority items require more perfection than low priority items. By demanding perfection of yourself and others, you may be wasting time in unnecessary effort.

##### *Change Attitudes*

Think of stressful situations as a *challenge* to your creative thinking, rather than looking at them as insurmountable problems. Generate solutions.

- Learn to Say "No"* Say "no" when your schedule is full: to responsibilities that aren't yours; to emotional demands that leave you feeling exhausted; to other people's problems that you don't have the power to solve.
- Take Care of your Body* You will have more energy and become stress hardy when you eat a balanced diet, get sufficient sleep and exercise regularly.
- Optimistic Self-Talk* Use positive self-reinforcement: "I can handle this one step at a time", instead of frightening or depressing yourself by coming up with reasons why you can't cope.
- Support* Actively seek support from friends, colleagues, and family. Don't be a Lone Ranger.
- Take Charge* Take responsibility for making your life what you want it to be. It is more empowering to feel a sense of control and to make decisions. Commit to what you want and take action.

**Practicing the strategies listed above can help you experience “flow”.** All of us have experienced situations where our involvement in an activity was so focused, that we lost track of time. Research shows that at such times, what we are doing completely occupies all of our mind and awareness. Being fully engaged is akin to play or exceptional sports performance. This state of mind is called “being in the flow”.

**Need some quick relief? Put a copy of this brief exercise on your desk or tape it to the inside of your briefcase.** It only takes a minute to renew your energy.

## **Brief Relax/Refresher for Attorneys**

1. Find yourself a comfortable position with as few distractions as possible.
2. Gently close your eyes and focus your attention inward.
3. Imagine a radiant light releasing your stress.
4. Take a few slow easy breaths, taking air in through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.
5. Say to yourself, "Alert mind, calm body."
6. Now take a deep, soothing breath all the way down to your abdomen.
7. As you exhale, let your facial muscles, neck and shoulders relax.
8. Feel a wave of warmth and heaviness sweep down to your toes.
9. Allow the relaxation to re-energize your body and mind.
10. Slowly open your eyes, stretch, and ease back into normal activities.

## **LIFE BALANCE**

*"We have patience for everything but what is most important to us. We look at the life of our own most central imaginings and see it beckon. For the most part, we have not the courage to follow it, but we do not have the courage to leave it. We turn our face for a moment and tell ourselves we will be sure to get back to it. When we look again, ten years have passed and we wonder what in God's name happened to us.*

*We sabotage our creative possibilities because the world revealed by the imagination may not fit well with the life we have taken so much trouble to construct over the years. Faced with the pain of that distance, the distance between desire and reality, we turn just for a moment, and quickly busy ourselves. But then we must live with the consequences of turning away."*

David Whyte

**Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century law firm has become more business-minded focusing on the bottom line.** This change in focus makes it difficult for lawyers working in a firm to have time for relationships and other meaningful pursuits.

**Martin Seligman, founder of the positive psychology movement, suggests that lawyer imbalance, and therefore unhappiness, has three causes:**

1. Lawyers are pessimistic and are rewarded for their pessimism

2. Young lawyers have jobs with a lot of pressure and low decision latitude. The result may be poor health and low morale.
3. The practice of law is to some extent a zero-sum game.

**Seligman claims it is easy to remedy the problems of pessimism and low decision latitude by learning “flexible optimism” and in-house firm training and mentoring programs to address systemic issues.** Seligman believes that the win-lose adversarial legal process might be a significantly more difficult problem to solve. More focus on mediation and negotiation may provide some relief.

**Balance is about integrating the needs and wants of our personal and work lives.** A number of attorneys I have coached have expressed the desire to spend more time with their families or other priorities than constantly striving for recognition, status, and money. Balancing your personal and professional life requires making different decisions based on clear values and a life plan.

**There are many outstanding lawyers who are happy, functional, and able to integrate their professional and personal lives.** In order to convert professional success into personal happiness, you need to leverage your successes and strengths.

## **Optimism: Why It Matters So Much**

*“Success is measured by your ability to maintain enthusiasm between failures.”*  
-- Sir Winston Churchill

**Mahatma Gandhi, Norman Cousins, Helen Keller, Christopher Reeves and Thomas Edison are just a few names that come to mind in a discussion about optimism and success.**

**People who are considered successful in life measure high on assessments of optimistic attitudes.** It would be easy to presume they are optimistic because they are successful, but there is enough research to show that the optimism comes first.

**Traditional wisdom puts forth the idea that to be successful, you must have two things:**

1. Talent or aptitude
2. Motivation

More recent research shows that a third element contributes strongly to success:

3. An optimistic attitude, particularly in the face of adversity.

High scores for optimism are predictive of excellence in everything from sports to health, elections and sales.

**Dr. Martin Seligman has shown that optimists not only do better educationally and in their careers, they also enjoy superior health and longevity.** In one study of 96 men who had their first heart attack in 1980, 15 of the 16 most pessimistic men died of a second heart attack within eight years, but only five of the 16 most optimistic men died.

**You can't effectively manage your time, your career, or your life, without personal leadership guided by what matters most.**

## **MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES**

**A mission or purpose is the contribution you make to the world; it is that which gives meaning and direction to your life, as well as your reason for being.** Knowing your purpose gives you a context for making life choices. A vision is a powerful image of what you want to create in the future. It is a compelling and explicit picture of how you will actualize your purpose and talents. Values define what is most important to you. They energize, motivate and inspire. According to Chris Argyris (*Making a Life, Making a Living: Reclaiming Your Purpose and Passion in Business and in Life*), it is important to recognize the difference between “espoused values” (what you say you believe) and “values-in-action” (how you live your life). True professionals commit themselves to the pursuit of happiness and strict adherence to their highest values (David Maister, *True Professionalism*). Vision, mission and values need to be aligned. They provide an internal happiness “glee positioning system” for all of your decisions.

## **Happiness and Well-Being**

Factors that contribute to happiness and subjective well-being.

1. Strong social relationships
2. Physical health and fitness
3. Feelings of competence and control
4. Progress on Meaningful Goals
5. Marriage
6. Positive self-esteem and optimism
7. A clear sense of life purpose

## **Happiness and Money**

**The following three research findings may surprise you.**

- 1) Above the poverty level, added wealth has little relationship to happiness.
- 2) A comparison of life satisfaction across countries showed that

once the gross national product exceeded \$8000, there was no relationship between money and life satisfaction.

3) There is no relationship between money and happiness.

**How we think about money has a great influence on the choices we make and our overall life satisfaction.** Prosperity thinking and poverty thinking are two ways of thinking about one's relationship with money. Which way describes you best and is it working for you?

**Prosperity thinking and poverty thinking are the keys to career and financial success.** Prosperity thinking is a trusting attitude that things will work out. Prosperity thinking means aligning your beliefs, attitudes, expectations and goals toward realistic levels of abundance, optimism, and self-confidence. It increases financial and personal self-esteem and success. Prosperity thinking is not necessarily about being rich—it's more about being confident, optimistic and comfortable with who we are and our ability to generate and manage money.

**In contrast, poverty thinking is limited state of thinking rooted in fear and mistrust.** It closes down possibilities and opportunities and frequently leaves us feeling that things will not work out. It is characterized by pessimism, over-protectiveness, fear of loss, and a more passive relationship with money. It diminishes our financial and personal self-esteem and our confidence about earning and handling money. Poverty thinking is not necessarily about being financially deprived—there are plenty of wealthy people who are miserly or worry constantly about losing their money.

## **MARKETING AND PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT**

**The difference between successful lawyers and firms and those that are struggling may be due to business development skills.** Successful legal enterprises have developed the competencies of rainmaking, marketing and client development.

**The business side of being a lawyer can be exciting and fun. A well run successful practice and/or firm can provide a great deal of happiness and professional satisfaction.** The following are a few tips to help you focus your efforts.

1. Create a compelling purpose, vision, and goals.
2. Craft an attention-getting marketing message.
3. Develop a dynamic website.
4. Get consistent visibility for yourself and firm.
5. Do keep-in touch marketing that shows you care.
6. Determine your ideal clients
7. Overcome disempowering beliefs about practice development.

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

**Are you clear about what you want out of your legal career?** Are you fully engaged in your work and love the practice of law or are you looking for an alternative?

**There are a lot of things you can do with a legal degree.** What are your talents, skill, and interests? If you are considering leaving the law you need to have an accurate diagnosis of the problem. Is it the practice of law, your area of specialty, your job, the firm you are with, financial pressures, the number of clients, or lack of work/life balance? Career coaching may help you find the best fit between your talents, skills, interests and values. Personality assessment tests and career interest inventories can help you learn about yourself and determine work where you will be happy and fulfilled.

**Now, let's take a brief self-assessment quiz. Hopefully it will give you a brief snapshot of your current level of happiness.**

### **Happiness is an Option for Lawyers Self-Assessment Quiz**

**We are all trying to be happy and achieve success in our work and personal lives.** Mostly we react in a positive and productive manner. However, many attorneys are describing their lives as so busy, working so many hours, that they often feel physically and emotionally exhausted.

**Happiness and success in your work and personal life requires being clear on your purpose, mission, and values. It is really self-management.** The way you keep balance in your work and life is to set priorities and focus on what is truly most important.

**Think about the past month.** For each of the work/life pressures listed below, indicate how much each has been a source of distress for you.

**Score each item according to how much of the time each statement applies to you.**

**The Scale: 1(never), 2(rarely), 3(sometimes), 4 (often), 5(always)**

- \_\_\_ 1. I feel overwhelmed by too many tasks and responsibilities-juggling priorities.
- \_\_\_ 2. I am very busy and impatient.
- \_\_\_ 3. I get angry on a frequent basis.
- \_\_\_ 4. I work long energy-exhausting hours.
- \_\_\_ 5. I find it difficult to pace myself.
- \_\_\_ 6. I feel pressured by too many demands from clients.
- \_\_\_ 7. I am more reactive than proactive.
- \_\_\_ 8. I find it difficult to stay agile, flexible, and resilient and focus on what is important.
- \_\_\_ 9. I feel I have lost my energy and enthusiasm for practicing law.
- \_\_\_ 10. I find it difficult to appreciate what I have.
- \_\_\_ 11. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of billable hours required.
- \_\_\_ 12. I frequently feel unappreciated.
- \_\_\_ 13. I can't remember a time when I experienced "being in the flow".
- \_\_\_ 14. I am a perfectionist.
- \_\_\_ 15. I am uncomfortable with marketing and practice development.
- \_\_\_ 16. I feel that my work does not reflect my vision, mission, and values.
- \_\_\_ 17. I have forgotten what motivated me to practice law in the first place.
- \_\_\_ 18. I dislike most of my clients.
- \_\_\_ 19. I am pessimistic about the future.

\_\_\_\_ 20. I find it difficult to create a healthy work and life balance

\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL SCORE** Add up your results and to find out what your score means.

**Total Points:**

**1-30            HAPPINESS MASTER**

You are doing a great job attaining happiness. Congratulations! Executive Coaching may help you achieve even higher levels of fulfillment in life and work.

**31-50           LEARNING**

You are somewhat happy in your life and work. There is still room for improvement. You might benefit from taking a “Happiness is an Option for Lawyers” workshop. Consider executive coaching for lawyers to help you increase your level of happiness.

**51-100         RED ALERT!**

Unhappiness may be a serious problem for you. You might benefit from some happiness interventions. Don't walk...RUN to a “Happiness is an Option for Lawyers” workshop. Strongly consider executive coaching for lawyers.

**Hopefully, you feel this self-assessment quiz provided you with insight on how happy you are in your work and life.**

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## **CASE STUDIES**

### **A High Powered Attorney Achieves Success while Balancing Work and Personal Life**

#### **THE SITUATION:**

**Most attorneys lead extremely busy lives.** Finding a balance between professional success and a satisfying personal life can be a daunting challenge.

**A very successful high-performing attorney working for a Silicon Valley Law Firm was burned out.** He was working 80 hours per week and exhausted.

The pressure of meeting the billable hour requirement and professional goals was having an adverse affect on his health and home-life.

## **THE SOLUTION:**

**As part of a self insight coaching program, the attorney made a decision to renegotiate his work load with the partners in his law firm.** He took on some marketing tasks and reduced his client case load. He started an exercise program and renewed his interests in several community and family-related activities.

## **THE RESULTS:**

**In addition to work, the attorney made his health and family a priority.** He learned how to become more stress resilient. As he became more stress hardy, he was able to more fully engage in his work for the law firm. He became much happier with his career and personal life.

## **SUMMARY:**

**The legal profession can be extremely demanding.** Attorneys are at risk for a number of health and relationship related problems. Coaching interventions based on improved self management can help support learning new behaviors and revitalized commitment. Sometimes a decision is made to develop a solo practice or change careers.

## **A Law Firm Retreat Creates a Vision, Mission, and Values Statement**

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

**T.S. Eliot, *Four Quarters***

## **THE SITUATION:**

**The Firm had a number of clients and was expanding into new locations.** The Partners wanted to focus on their core legal competencies and business development. In addition, they wanted help with psychological testing for employment screening of new attorneys whose values were aligned with the Firm's culture. A Retreat in a beautiful Redwoods setting provided the perfect environment for collaboratively creating a strategy.

## **THE SOLUTION:**

**As a Trusted Advisor, Dr, Brusman collaborated with the senior Partners on creating a vision, mission, and values statement that provided focus for the business strategy.** A cross-section of the Law Firm employees participated in crafting the mission and vision.

## **THE RESULTS:**

**The Partners gained clarity on the goal of creating a unique Firm identity.** Energy was mobilized to develop new business aligned with the purpose and values of The Firm. A marketing strategy was devised and implemented maximizing the different strengths of the Partners. New attorneys were hired who had the requisite legal skills, and who fit the Firm culture.

## **SUMMARY:**

**The Retreat was held at a beautiful health resort and spa.** It provided the perfect environment to craft a vision, mission and values statement. Hiking among the Redwoods reinforced the Firm's commitment to employees' health and work/life balance.

## **Top Ten Happiness Tips for ATTORNEYS**

1. Maintain a balance between your professional and personal life.
2. Express gratitude to others.
3. Create positive and collaborative interpersonal relationships.
4. Enthusiasm and happiness are highly correlated.
5. Focus on strengths and ask for multi-rater 360 -degree feedback.

6. Seek rewards other than money.
7. There is no relationship between money and happiness.
8. Develop and maintain a supportive network of close relationships.
9. Create a personal purpose/mission statement aligned with your values.
10. Care about character in your professional relationships.

*"The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win  
you're still a rat." -- Lily Tomlin*

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Working Resources

## **HAPPINESS is an OPTION for LAWYERS**

### **Self- Reflection Questions**

A coach might ask you the following questions. How would you respond?

- What makes you happiest? When were you happiest? How did you become happiest?
- What gives you peace of mind? What are your core beliefs? What best helps you feel creative?
- What brings vitality to your life? What's your proudest achievement? In what situation do you feel most alive?
- Which areas of your life are neglected or overemphasized?
- What kind of process do you use to manage stressful situations?
- Are you progressing towards meaningful goals?
- When have you felt fulfilled? What were you doing? Who was there with you?
- When was the last time you experienced satisfaction in your work? What did you do that brought you satisfaction?
- In what ways do you think you are contributing to the greater good of the people in your firm and your clients?
- How much is enough?
- What matters most?
- Is forgiveness a possibility?
- Are you maximizing your potential?
- Are you having fun ?
- Was there a time in your life when you felt most alive, creative, excited, successful, and enthusiastic?
- What do you most value about yourself?

- Deathbed exercise: if you were to imagine yourself in the future, lying in bed, living your final moments of this lifetime, and you looked back at your whole life to remember moments of happiness, which memories would come up?
- Since research shows that, after achieving ones goals (be it a personal, professional or financial one), ones level of happiness goes back to where it was before, what could you do to increase your happiness while you are pursuing these goals, based on your answers to the questions above?

## **HAPPINESS INTERVENTION ACTION STEPS**

In order to change habits and become fully engaged requires experimenting with new behaviors. Choose one or two of the following practices and consider receiving 360-degree feedback to measure improvement.

1. Count your blessings every day.
2. Take an inventory of your life and express gratitude for all the good in it.
3. Engage in five intentional acts of kindness each week.
4. Use your top strengths in new ways.
5. Focus on when you are at your best and which strengths you used.

**Happiness is clearly an option for lawyers.** It takes closing the door to whatever is not working in your life, and opening the door to a life where you can realize your fullest potential.

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