

FaB Webinar – How to be a happy working mum

Hi everybody. I hope you've had a happy Monday, if you haven't, never fear, happiness is here. We're going to be talking all about happiness today, and I've got lots of happy slides for you to look at whilst you're listening, and I'm also going to get some interaction from you.

Ok, I'm going to start with a quote from one of my favourite coaches, which sums it up to me, happiness. "Whatever you can do with unhappiness, you can do better when you're happy." So we may as well be happy. However, I'd just like to start by asking all of you, what is it – shout out to me, or tell me what is it that makes you unhappy? You can either speak or use the little chat screen. Let's just get down the sort of things that make us unhappy, either as a working mum, or just generally.

Amy: Commuting.

Amanda: Commuting? Yeah. That was Amy, wasn't it?

Amy: Yeah.

Amanda: Thanks, Amy.

Amy: Stress levels, high stress levels, I guess.

Amanda: Ok. What causes high stress?

Amy: I think reacting to things that other people do or say.

Amanda: Ok. What else?

Lovely Fabber: Amanda? Sorry, I've just lost the slide for some reason, it's just gone.

Everyone: Me too.

Amanda: Oh, now, that's strange.

LF: It says, "waiting to view Amanda Alexander's screen" at the top.

Amanda: Oh. Do you know why? It's a complete user error, because I switched the screen off when Nicola said she couldn't see it. Rather than show you all my email mess. Doh! There you go. Right, you should see it any second now.

Everyone: Yay!

Amanda: Got it? Hurrah! Ok, so what causes high stress levels? Reacting to things, too many things on the go...

LF: Tiredness.

LF: Yeah, definitely tiredness.

Amanda: Tiredness.

LF: I've typed mine in. You should have a message.

Amanda: Yep. "No help and not being recognised."

LF: Yeah – lack of support.

Amanda: Yeah. Lack of recognition. And I think lack of recognition is a biggie, for working mums, because so much of what we do just doesn't get recognised.

LF: I think I make myself unhappy, as well, I let myself get wound up and end up barking at everyone and then I feel even worse before I let off steam, so I think I go down, spiral downward. Sometimes when I'm feeling a bit unhappy I end up feeling very unhappy.

LF: Yeah, because you end up kind of in this downward spiral in your head.

Amanda: Ok, so like a vicious circle?

LF: A vicious circle, yeah.

Amanda: Ok, so: commuting; no help/lack of support, kind of along the same thing; lack of recognition; self-flagellation, kind of beating yourself up; going into that downward spiral, that vicious circle – and then high stress levels, which come from reacting. I mean, is this kind of reacting versus responding? Because we know that when we're all mature we respond, we take time to consider – rather than shouting! What the hell are you doing?? Ok - too many things on the go, and tiredness. Anybody got anything that's made them unhappy today? And when I talk about happiness...

Francoise: When I compare myself to others sometimes I am unhappy.

Amanda: Oh, yeah. Comparison to others. Let me just give you a quote here – one of my favourite quotes. It's a good one. Anybody had any stress or unhappiness today?

Kim: Yeah, I had one this morning.

Amanda: Go on, Kim.

Kim: Charlie's now over her chicken pox. Still covered in spots, but they're all dried up now, and scabbing over, but she's got a lot on her face and neck – poor little lamb. Anyway, I took her off to nursery this morning, and the manager looked at her and said, "No, she can't come in because they still look a bit red and the other parents won't like it. So she needs to go home again." I came out seething.

Amanda: Oh, gosh. I can feel my shoulders rising as you talk to me about that.

Kim: She's fine! The doctor's fine. She wanted to see her friends, she's all chirpy, she was desperate

to get back to see all her friends again, and she may only be three but she's really self-conscious about her spots, so I was like, I was angry on her behalf, for her; angry because I wanted to get back to my desk today. Just I came away and that was a reaction, not an adult response.

LF: Did you feel judged?

Kim: Yeah, I did, because I left feeling like a bloody pariah. Like, I left just as all these other mums were coming in, and the mums who were in the room with me – because the nursery's all in rooms of age groups – and the mums in there while the manager was telling me that I had to leave were all shaking their heads in disbelief. So I had to go out with Charlie crying, because she couldn't go and play. But yeah, I felt awful.

LF: I would have been furious.

Kim: Yeah. I was. You kind of can't really make a big thing about it in a nursery full of people, can you?

LF: You could...

Kim: Well, I could, but it's Monday morning!

Amanda: I think, just on an aside of the subject, that's unprofessional, the way they treated you. I think one thing that we have to bear in mind with nurseries – and I've done this myself when people have reminded me – you are paying them, and you are paying them damn well. Now, fine, they've got rules and procedures, but that's worthy of a complaint, I think. That is not what you're paying for.

Kim: No, I have no problem keeping her away when she's ill, but she's not ill anymore. It's now the aftermath spot thing that you can't do anything about.

Amanda: Yes...that's...hmm. No wonder you feel stressed about that. After everything you've been through as well! This was supposed to be your first day of normality.

Kim: Yes! I've had two weeks of all of this!

Amanda: If anyone has got any tips or advice or words of comfort for Kim, just stick something in the chat so that she can see it. She needs some virtual gin and tonic! What else makes you stressed or anxious, who's been stressed or anxious today and what was it, what was the cause of it?

Maja: I had a horrible moment, because the kids have started all day on Mondays now and I worked really hard, loved seeing them at five when I pick them up, got them home and within five minutes they were both overtired and a bit overexcited, and they just wound me up so much. Rupert was whinging – he's eighteen months old – really, really whinging, starting on the Terrible Twos tantrums already, which I'm not really used to, so I was kind of going, "Stay calm, you haven't seen them all day." And then Bridget started kicking up about clothes for tomorrow, and I just ended up snapping at her quite loudly and then I felt awful, because I was trying to put her to bed and have nice Mummy time after not seeing them all day. I thought, I can't even handle an hour with my children without one of us getting annoyed or upset at the moment, and that made me feel terrible. We did make it up before bedtime, but it's just horrible, I can't stand it when I lose it

with the kids. I feel like I have to be the grown-up.

Amanda: Yeah, it's the time when everybody's tired, aren't they? And tired grown-ups as well.

Maja: Yeah, I sort of think, though, that I shouldn't have any excuse for barking at my children, so I end up feeling really bad.

Amanda: Ok, here's one for you, Maja. Unreasonable expectations is when you have expectations of yourself, and you look at what the reality is, and you don't see the difference between those two. Has whinging got an 'e' in it after the 'g'? I can't remember. Does that look right? No, that doesn't look right.

Ok, let's have two more examples of things that stressed you out, made you anxious, made you unhappy today. I heard someone just before Jo?

Francoise: Today I was quite depressed during lunchtime, because I had work all morning, and then for lunch I had a friend who came and had lunch with me, and then I had just five minutes before starting on another coaching session, so I had a feeling that I had no pause. I was only running from one thing to another, and I was feeling very stressed.

Amanda: Ok, yeah. Can anybody else empathise with that? Stick something in your chat if you can. Go, go, go, no stop, stop, stop. Jo, so you were just behind Francoise, what were you going to say?

Jo: It's about sort of feeling taken for granted. I choose to do a lot of the stuff in the house so that I stay on top of it, but it's just like no one's got the kids ready for bed, I have to [???] nosebleed, and everything is just left. I go upstairs to have a quick shower myself, and the bathroom looked like a bomb had gone off, with the kids playing everywhere. I think, it's like, I call him Half-A-Job Dusty, because yes, he got the kids ready, but then I go round clearing up behind him, and I just feel like a maid in my own home!

Amanda: Is that what you call him? Half-A-Job Dusty?

Jo: Yeah.

LF: I know somebody like that.

Amanda: Yeah...who's that, Amy, who said, hard slog? Yes, the hard slog. It is a hard slog. Living with Half-A-Job...

Jo: You think something's finished, and you go up, and there's a whole nother job to do.

LF: I totally empathise with that. Like the washing up that isn't quite finished, and you're like, you haven't done it – how is that a job finished? I don't know how you can claim to have done the washing up when there's clearly some washing up to do.

Amanda: Ok, and this is having higher standards and expectations of partners, isn't it? And do you know what the definition of madness is? Doing the same thing again and again, and expecting different results. You could apply it to Half-A-Job Dustys as well, kind of saying the same thing again and again, expecting them to change. It just ain't gonna happen. Ok, so we've got a few things that

make us stressed or anxious. Kim, I think we're all wanting to come and throttle those idiots at your nursery. If this wasn't been recorded...

Diane: Can you hear me, because I haven't been able to say anything all call, can you hear me now?

Amanda: Oh, we can hear you now, yes.

Diane: Oh, I was talking, but no one's heard me!

Amanda: We've been ignoring you! What have you done differently just now?

Diane: I managed to – I don't know, I've been in Audio Setup for most of the call. Don't worry, very boring.

Amanda: Ok, so tell us what you were trying to tell us when we were ignoring you.

Diane: I think it was actually back on the [??] side – what makes you unhappy, people not listening to what I'm saying, ironically! I thought that you were just ignoring me, I felt unloved.

Amanda: That's the definition of irony, a woman desperately trying to say, "I hate it when people don't listen to what I'm saying!"

Diane: We're all happy, now, laughing.

Amanda: Just expand on that a little bit – what in particular, are you thinking of work or home, or both?

Diane: Everywhere. Work, I say things to people and they don't listen and they just ignore my advice and then I end up being proved right and I have to mop up the mess, and that's happened for seven years. And then at home, for example, I'll put things in a certain place so I can find them later or say something, and everyone ignores me, and then I end up having to find everything that was put away in the wrong place, and redo everything, I find that a little frustrating too. So, just generally.

Amanda: I wonder – this isn't directed at you, Diane, it's just listening to you and having heard this so many times before – whether one of the things that we do, when I talk about how we set ourselves up for unhappiness, for stress, whether it's about, nobody is as perfect as me, kind of syndrome. Again, that's not coming directly after your comment, it's just a general kind of - sometimes that really can get in our way. There's a quote that comes to mind, and it's a great one when you are dealing with Half-A-Job Dusty and you are feeling just...well, I can walk up and down our stairs, and find a sock on the stair, and I can deliberately leave that sock to see if it gets picked up. Three days later, the sock will still be there. I think my record's been four days, and then I eventually pick it up. Anyway, the quote - "would you rather be right or happy?" So the thing, when you're dealing with Half-A-Job Dusty, would I rather be right or would I rather be happy? The other way of kind of dealing with that is, Jo, one of your strengths is being organised, and when we look at our strengths, there's always a flip side to our strength. How does your strength manifest itself in a negative way? Often, if you are someone who is like Diane or Jo, probably most of us, very organised and probably through necessity of being a working mum, we're used to kind of

doing it all and being super-efficient, then that strength can become a negative, can manifest itself in a negative way by having really high expectations, by not letting go, by expecting perfection, and by spending half our lives, if not more, frustrated. So just think about your strength and how it can go bad...by the way, on the subject of socks, one of my clients bought me a present. I can't remember, it was one of the Inspires when I was talking about Little Miss Neat or something and I mentioned missing socks. She said "I've got the solution for you." She sent me this little, it's like a little piece of wood that somebody's decorated, it's all very pretty, and you hang it up, and then it's got pegs on it and it says "Have you seen this sock?" You put all the missing socks up there. It's great. So, onwards. So what makes us happy?

LF: Sunshine!

Amanda: Oh, yes. We have that here today. Who said that?

Diane: The times when I can sit, have a coffee and read book, just for a half hour.

Amanda: Ok.

LF: A bath and a glass of wine.

Diane: That's just time alone, isn't it? Me time.

LF: Can't imagine what I'd do. Time on my own, peace and quiet, with nothing.

Amy: A good amount of sleep. Seven hours, maybe?

Diane: I said, people actually saying thank you for what you do, so recognition and validation, I guess.

Amanda: Yeah.

LF: Hearing my children laugh rather than whine.

Amanda: I picked Freddie up from preschool today and he was just finishing off a story, and they were all sitting there, and I walked in, and he looked over at me and he gave me this smile and I was the most godlike creature in the whole world, on the receiving end of this smile. I looked at him, and I smiled and smiled, and I thought, how strange that this smiling creature I know will turn into a screaming banshee within half an hour, and sure enough, he did. Simply because he wanted to put my bicycle helmet on and I wouldn't let him. Hearing kids laugh instead of whine, what else?

Diane: Hearing your husband laugh instead of whinge.

LF: My husband's in the room!

Amanda: Yeah, I heard that.

LF: He should be exiting in a moment.

Diane: It's due to lack of sleep, of course.

Amanda: Ok, what else makes you happy?

Diane: Exercise?

LF: Driving fast.

Amanda: Driving the car?

Amy: A holiday to look forward to.

Amanda: Looking forward to things in general, yeah?

Amy: Like a holiday.

Jo: New clothes!

Amanda: New clothes. Yeah. And what was that?

Jo: That aren't covered in sick, snot, horrible stuff.

Amanda: Just bear with me a moment, I'm just going to check that...yeah, I just got this message up saying "you may be experiencing a degradation in recording quality – close down any unused Internet applications" so I just closed down a couple of windows. Ok, let's have two more. What makes you happy.

Francoise: Reading a book.

Amanda: Yeah, ok. With coffee, or what's your beverage of choice?

Francoise: Tea. A nice cup of tea.

Amanda: Ok. One more happy thing.

Nicola: Being outside, being active.

Amanda: Yeah. That was Diane, wasn't it?

Nicola: No, Nicola.

Amanda: Oh, sorry Nicola. I think that's one of your...being outside, being active, is probably one of your core values, Nicola, isn't it?

Nicola: Yeah.

Amanda: And one of the things that I'm not going to go into today, but is absolutely core: the work that we did on values in our first webinar, and we'll revisit and I'll talk more about values, actually knowing what your values are and using your values as signposts will go a long way to helping you to smooth out the roughness of life and its challenges, and to just being happy. So being outside,

what did you say? Being outside and being...active.

Diane: Can I make another suggestion? Solving problems?

Amanda: Ok. So being outside and being active and solving problems. Diane, that sounds very much like one of your values. Who was that, somebody else said something else? Ok. So, actually, let me take one thing – I've got one from Diane, one from Nicola, could everybody give me a quick thing that makes them happy that actually is a reflection of your absolutely dearest-held values?

Francoise: Being creative.

Amanda: Being creative, yeah. Ok.

Amy: Learning something new.

Amanda: Yeah.

Jo: One of my big values is exercise, but also I would say quality family time.

Amanda: Ok.

Kim: Can you hear me? Peace, actually, peace and time on my own.

Amanda: So is it about time to think?

Kim: Yeah, just be left alone. Yeah, I never have time to think, I never have time to process a thought, beginning, middle and end.

Diane: I'd agree with that.

Kim: I just have so little time on my own.

Amanda: Ok, this is what I'm thinking here, Kim. That's a need. The way you say it, what's in your voice, what it's come after for you with two weeks of hell, this morning with the nursery when you thought, at last! I've got my first proper working day, you've got your website live – you have been through so much, and you've said that, and your voice is cracking up. Peace is a need. So you need to get that need met.

Kim: Yes.

Amanda: So what I'd like you to do is go on the forum and look at how you're going to get that need met. I mentioned needs last month, ladies, girls. You don't mind if I call you girls, do you? Getting our needs met is – if we don't get our needs met, they drive us. They are there, nagging away at us like an itch that can't be scratched, different from values. So Kim, I'm going to take that off, but let's put a big flag here. Kim needs to get peace and time to think!

Kim: Yeah, thanks.

Amanda: But what is one thing that makes you happy that's an expression of your values once

you've got that peace, that time to think met?

Kim: Is being recognised a need or a value? I'm still doing that exercise.

Amanda: Ok. Don't worry about it, and I suspect that that's a hard thing for you to think about right now, because what your mind will be on and your whole body will be craving is that peace and that time to think, so don't worry about it.

Kim: I know it is a need, but I do actually get a lot of soul nourishment from just being on my own, and like just going out for a walk in the countryside, and just like breathing in that...it's not something to do with fresh air, necessarily, it's just that...I absorb all the peace and tranquility, and I love that feeling of it. I don't know if there is a need for it, but it's also something I've always loved.

Amanda: So the way that you're expressing it now, yes, I can hear that that's a value, and I don't want to confuse you about this, but there's a need. And what's the need, that fundamental thing?

Kim: I think it ticks both boxes for me, because yeah, there is a need for it, but even when I'm getting the thinking time I relish in that peaceful time, or listening to tranquil music, which for me is the same thing, peace for the soul. Does that make sense?

Amanda: Yeah. Ok, this is what I'm putting down. Remember, I was talking about value strings? Now, I'm interpreting that, from you, and it might not be quite right, but how does it look when you read it?

Kim: Yeah.

Amanda: Tranquility, is that spelt right? Ok, thanks Kim. Maja?

Maja: I would say having really lovely cuddles with my babies when they're in a good mood. That just makes my heart swell when we're just having a nice cuddle in front of BB's or something or I'm reading a story and they're both paying attention and sitting in my lap. That's a lovely family moment and one of my values is to have a loving family, and that just sort of makes me feel like I want to feel as a mummy, really happy. Not all the time, it would be slightly mental, obviously, if I was that happy all the time, that would be mad, like being shouty all the time.

Amanda: Ok, great. Have I got everybody? Yeah, I have.

Ok, so let's move on. Thank you. The reason I wanted to get all those down is because I want you to be able to look back on this after the webinar so that you can refer back to it, I think there's some absolute important stuff there. Ok, I'm going to share with you some of what I know about happiness, and what I know about happiness is that we can feel happy at any time, pretty much no matter what is going on. Happiness is not dependent on your circumstances, it is possible to be happy at any time. Happiness is like a muscle, so what I want you to start thinking about, after this call, is how you can exercise that muscle on a daily basis, you know – use it or lose it. Once we've got the happiness placed, the success starts following like a snowball. There's lots of so-called successful people, we hear all the time about celebrities who seem to have lots of money and all the partners that they could want at their feet committing suicide or getting hooked on drugs and so on, so happiness breeds success, not the other way around. Right, ok, what I'd like you to do

now is, we're going to do a very, very quick self-induced misery test. Using the chat facility, what I want you to do is first of all, who is guilty of number one: I tend to exaggerate the negative things in my life, either to myself or to others, yes or no? Y for yes, N for no. Maja, you're not the only one who surprised herself with how quickly and loudly you shout. Ok, number one: I tend to exaggerate the negative things in my life, either to myself or others, Y or N? I'm not getting anything from anybody...oh, here we go.

Ok, Nicola – yes; Kim – yes; Françoise – no, well done Françoise; and well done Jo – no; Amy – no; and Diane, is a “used to be yes and becoming a no.”

Number two: I have an internal tape recorder that plays things over and over again in my mind. Yes or no? Ok; Diane is becoming a no again; Jo doesn't; Amy doesn't; Kim doesn't; Nicola doesn't; Françoise, you do in this one.

Ok – positive attitude. If I'm honest, I don't really have a positive attitude. Kim does have a positive attitude...ok. So far...who's that? Jo. Amy, I love that – sorry. No, because if I didn't have one things would fall apart. Ok, so we're all pretty positive, that's great.

Who reacts rather than responds, generally tends to? Jo does, I do. Maja does, Amy does, Nicola's a firebrand! We all need to have what Diane is having. She responds now. And Kim reacts to nurseries – who wouldn't react to that? You'd have to be Mother Teresa.

Ok, and lastly, who says negative things to themselves? Jo does, thinks she's getting better; Nicola doesn't; Amy, you do when you're in a bad mood. Françoise doesn't consciously; Maja, yes you do but you're getting better too, and she talks to herself in the mirror. And Diane, again, has got this sorted. Kim, not really, but worry about others achieving or doing better than me – refer to “comparison is the killer of creativity.” And Nicola, I'm more one than five in terms of negativity. So Nicola, do you mean you tend to exaggerate things rather than saying negative things to yourself?

Nicola: Yeah. Exaggeration.

Amanda: Ok, alright. Thank you for that. Well, I think you're all pretty sorted, generally. How about the facing new challenges and creating worst possible outcome scenarios. Very quickly, yes or no? No; no; no; no; no...stopped that because the worst things have happened. Jo, you create the worst possible outcome scenarios. Yeah, I do that too. Jo, are you a Capricorn by any chance?

Jo: No...Scorpio.

Amanda: Oh, ok. All I know is I'm a Capricorn and I believe Capricorns are very practical, and one of the things about practicality is you tend to think, “Right, what's the worst that could happen? Let's face the absolute worst and start sorting that out.” Ok, next one, like a dog with a bone. Who just can't let it go? Now, if you all say “Oh, no, this isn't me,” I won't believe you, because I've heard what you do about socks and things. “Me, me, me!” says Jo!

Jo: It's been said to me very often that I'm like a dog with a bone.

Amanda: Yeah, Nicola's saying about how she's learned to adapt living in Holland. Ok, thank you. Ok, trying to find solutions in your head that you don't have any immediate influence over. Yeah...yep, yep. Yeah. Hmm...everyone's a yes to that one. Trying to find solutions in your head. Ok,

that's interesting.

Ok, taking the time to check in with yourself to see how you're feeling. Learning to, well done, Jo. Well done, Nicola. I'll talk a bit more about this later. Ok, Amy, you say you're pretty bad at this. Yep. Françoise, not anymore. Getting better at acknowledging, Maja, well done. Not so good. That's because you need some time to think, Kim!

Kim: Yes!

Amanda: Diane, what do you mean by you're trying to find time but not enough sleep as a result?

Diane: I try to find some me time, some thinking time, but I end up, it just shrinks the time and I can't sleep and I end up staying up for that me time when everyone's in bed.

Amanda: Ok, I think perhaps over the course of the program I'd like you to start thinking about how you can do that without it being at the end of the day and being at the expense of your sleep. I'll say one word to you: priorities.

Ok, seeing the funny side – I expect there's a lot of people who see the funny side on this call. Have you all seen what Jo wrote – what funny side? Very good, Jo, I like it. Laugh in the face of awfulness. Not in the middle of an argument – ok. Ok, great. Thank you.

Ok, and all this comes down to is success, happiness, whatever we call it, the whole feeling good about ourselves, it comes down to our attitude. And I think that generally, we've all got a pretty good attitude here – hang on, I've missed a...the slide's gone out of – ok, no it hasn't. Here we go, here. Right – let me just give you an emergency recovery ritual for those times when you are in the middle of an argument or when you're not stopping to check in with yourself, and just very very simple: just hit that pause button, and imagine that you are not at the centre of everything and it's not all exploding in your head, and shift the focus from you. Kim, this might be a good one for you to just try when you're reflecting on what happened this morning at the nursery. Think of a happy time and kind of think about the happy time and compare it with the stressful time or the unhappy time. And then just ask yourself, your heart, your soul, whatever it is that you want to do, it's accessing the inner you, the wise you, the inner Oprah as I'll come to in a minute. What would be a more efficient response in overwhelm? So think in terms of efficiency. Ok, inner Dobbie versus inner Oprah. The inner Dobbie is the one who is beating himself up, the one who is saying, "Oh, it's all going to hell in a hand cart, it's going to be awful!" All of those negative things that you fessed up to – that is your inner Dobbie. So we want to ban Dobbie, bad, bad Dobbie. If you think about your inner Dobbie as what's known as your inner critic, then think instead about Oprah. Who is more wise than Oprah? So go for your inner Oprah for these things when you start exaggerating the negative. Think about what your Oprah would do. Now, I switch from Dobbie to Oprah and back again a million times a day, my kids must be confused, says Maja!

Ok, so your inner Dobbie would exaggerate the negative, whereas Oprah would say "come on, what's most likely?" So when you find yourself exaggerating the negative, think about the going from one end of the scale to the next. If you think of a scale in terms of the most awful to the most wonderful, the likelihood is it's going to be somewhere in the middle of that. When you've got that inner tape recorder of doom going on and on and on – and I think most of you didn't have that – just do something to hit the stop button. Now, sometimes that can be a physical thing, like just exercise. It can be shouting at yourself, jumping up at down, spinning around or just telling yourself

to stop. One little trick that I've learned for something like that: when you've got the negative inner Dobbie talking to you, wear an elastic band on your wrist and just snap yourself. Just like Dobbie would, really, beat yourself up. But do it to release the inner Oprah. So responding rather than reacting. When you find yourself in negative self-talk, one of the two best phrases that you can choose is "this too shall pass", because everything passes, and "whatever happens, I'll handle it." It's about going from horribilising things to normalising things.

The dog with a bone goes with the inner Oprah – let go, let God. Now, I'm not particularly religious here, but you can replace God with anything you want. But let go, let God works for me, just a symbol of letting some sort of whatever you believe in or just trying to let go; let go and just let it be.

The Serenity Prayer – have you all come across the Serenity Prayer? Give me the courage to change the things I can, the serenity to accept the things I cannot change and the wisdom to know the difference. That helps with, what do they call it? What did you call him Jo? Half-Job Duffy? Yes, I like that Maja – the Scarlett O'Hara - "tomorrow is another day!" Especially good when you say it in the style of Scarlett O'Hara.

LF: With her dresses one as well.

Amanda: Yes, just imagine yourself floating around. And we've all been laughing today and that's so important. I've got a great quote from Anita Roddick, which is: "I want my life to be shaped by laughter, which gives you freedom against the BS of life." Another thing that I came across from a woman I met on Twitter, actually, and I've used this acronym many, many times before. I can't remember where I first learned it. FEAR, one of the acronyms in the self-development world for FEAR is False Expectations Appearing Real. And this lady had made it into a longer acronym, which was FEARLESS, which is...hang on, my mind's just gone blank. Oh...it was something like, Let's Expect...I've forgotten my acronym! Never mind, I'll put it on the forum once I remember it, but it was something like Let the Silliness Begin, but that doesn't quite work. Anyway, moving on from that failed little gem that I thought I was going to give you.

Ok. Being in the flow. One of the ways to achieve true happiness rather than just sticking-plaster happiness is being in the flow. The concept of being in the flow has come from a new branch of psychology which you might have heard of in the past few years, and some of you might have even studied, called positive psychology, also known as The Happy Science. Anyway, the happy scientists, or the positive psychologists have been focusing on what makes us happy as human beings, rather than how to fix unhappinesses. One of the guys who has been one of the pioneers of positive psychology is a guy called Dr Martin Seligman, and he's kind of regarded as the founder of positive psychology. What he says is that our pursuit of easy pleasures over gratifications might actually stop us feeling fulfilled. He says it's often puzzling that we often choose pleasure and worse, displeasure, over gratification. In the nightly choice between reading a good book and watching a sitcom on television, we often choose the latter, although surveys show again and again that the average mood while watching sitcoms on television is mild depression – and that's probably something that we all know, and that we've all done. That's Seligman – I'm just looking at your chat, Nicola, one N at the end there. And what he says is that the depression epidemic that we have in modern day Western life is over-reliance on shortcuts to happiness. He says that every wealthy nation creates more and more shortcuts to pleasure – television, drugs, shopping, loveless sex, spectator sports and chocolate (although I disagree with that), to name but a few. And such a life sets one up for depression. But what he says is that living your life based on your values means

you're living in the flow of life. There is a psychologist from the University of Chicago [Mihály Csíkszentmihályi] whose name is absolutely impossible for me to actually pronounce. I have heard it pronounced before. His name is – Maja, this is slightly Polish, possibly...do you know what? I'm just going to write it down. Let's see if anybody else knows. Yeah, I've heard of this guy, he's the originator of flow – that's right, yes. Yeah, you can see why I can't pronounce it. I'm pretty good with languages. Anyway, this guy wrote a book called Flow. Flow is what he describes as “being involved in an activity which gives us a narrowing attention, a sense of being absorbed and a feeling of transcendence.” We talked about things that make us happy before, and what you were talking about, for a lot of it, was feeling a flow. So any activity that you are absorbed in can lead to this feeling of flow, whether it's playing a game, listening to music, whether it's writing – and despite the huge differences in the actual activities, those who have experienced flow describe the psychological components of gratification in similar ways. So what they say is that you have to concentrate, you have clear goals, you can get immediate feedback, you have the deep, effortless involvement, you have a sense of control. Your sense of self vanishes and time stops. So my question to you is what activity do you love, and when you look up, you find that hours have gone by? What is it you love to focus on? Dancing, Kim says. It's your [???] isn't it, Kim?

Kim: Yeah, my jive class on Sunday night, absolutely the best thing I did signing up for that last week, and I had such a laugh for an hour, and it is, you just get totally absorbed, it's so funny, because nobody's competitive, there's none of that. It's just, you get absorbed in learning this, because I've done all the basics now so this is all the advanced stuff, so that makes me sound terribly good but I'm not that good, it's just you learn this routine and they build it up, and you just get completely absorbed in the flow of this and at the end of it it all works, and it's fantastic! It is a complete flow thing, I completely get that.

Amanda: Yeah. So flow activities, building flow activities into our life, is the way to go for happiness. Flow is actually – I was listening to Deepak Chopra today. Incidentally for those of you who have iPhones, Deepak Chopra has an iPhone application called Stress Less, isn't very good. And he said that flow is the opposite of stress, which I didn't know, so I'm loving...

LF: Can you repeat that?

Amanda: Flow is the opposite of stress, according to Deepak Chopra. Ok. The room of a thousand demons. Now, I spent I can't tell you how long looking for this story, and I couldn't find it. It's one of my favourite stories, so you're just going to have to bear with me, I'm going to try and retell it from my memory. It comes from an old, it's a Tibetan story, I believe. It was apparently a tradition that monks who wanted to go to a higher level of being a monk, enlightenment, had to pass through the room of a thousand demons. The thing about going through the room of a thousand demons, it was very, very dangerous, and very few people came out the other end to tell the tale. But if you did come out the other end, then you would achieve enlightenment beyond measure, and peace and joy, that you just can't possibly imagine. So anyone who was about to enter into the room of a thousand demons was given two pieces of advice. One piece of advice was: remember that whatever you see in the room of a thousand demons – oh, that's right, what you would see in this room would be the embodiment of your worst fears, so if snakes was your worst fear, you would pass through this room full of snakes slithering all over you. Mine would be cockroaches. I would be covered in cockroaches – ugh! So the room of a thousand demons would be your first fears, whatever they were. Whether they were creatures or whatever it is that we fear that we're facing in our life. But the two pieces of advice to get through the room of one thousand demons: the first is that whatever you see, remember that it's only a reflection of what you're creating in

your own mind. And the second piece of advice is: just keep your feet moving. And the reason I wanted to tell you that story, I mean it's a great story for all sorts of things, but principally, when we're unhappy, when we're stressed, it's stories that we are creating ourselves. So tell yourself better stories. I hope you like this lovely picture of domestic bliss here.

When you find yourself giving weight to a negative thought, just start thinking, "Ok, what's a better story I could tell myself here?" We talked before about what's going to be more realistic, what is a better story? Just remember that room of a thousand demons and think about a better story that you can tell yourself. By telling yourself better stories, you will feel happier.

Ok, again, I'm not deliberately giving you religious sermons today. I'm not a Buddhist, I actually wish Tamara was on the call today, because I know that she knows more about this than I do. However, I do have an interest in Buddhism and I think it's darn sensible stuff. I have a wonderful book, actually, I haven't got it on the resources at the end of here but I will do, and it's one of my favourite, favourite books called Buddhism for Mothers: A Calm Approach to Caring For Yourself And Your Children. It's lovely, and what I've learned from Buddhism for Mothers is to be a happy mum, to be a calm mum, these are things that we can learn: compassion – being compassionate to yourself, being kind to yourself; going back to that phrase "it will pass", "this too will pass", or as Scarlett says, "tomorrow is another day." Watching and labelling your emotions, which is – and I'll talk about this in a minute – about actually, rather than getting attached to how we feel, kind of look at it, acknowledge it, and then let it pass. Appreciating the preciousness of every moment, that we talked about, and having the abundance of the special moments at the forefront of our mind. And Buddha's five options for happiness are: to dwell on the positive; to consider the results of your thoughts – so what is it, you've heard that expression, what we think we become, thoughts become things – distract yourself, which again, is a great one. You find that Buddhism reflects modern day thinking in self-development and the sort of things that we teach ourselves; and just considering the alternatives. Finally, just using your willpower, give yourself a blimmin good kick when you find yourself going into that spiral of anxiety. The gratitude journal – Nicola, Maja and Kim will have done gratitude journals before. The gratitude journal is, without doubt, one of the most powerful things you can do to affect a long-lasting attitude change. Yeah, Nicola's just said, "this worked brilliantly for me last year." I know it did for Maja as well. Maja did a guest post for one of my Inspires and she talked about the effect of gratitude. Amy's just said, "I try to do three good things that happened today with David before he goes to bed, he's really responded well to it." That's a lovely idea. I'm sure, actually, it was Nicola's idea last year, when we were talking about gratitude journal – she had the idea, or she did it, to email yourself at night, so that if you get into the office first thing in the morning, one of the first emails you get in the morning is what I was grateful for yesterday. It was your idea, wasn't it, Nicola? Yeah, it was. And also to send it to your husband, if you've got a miserable husband. Actually, I might do that. My husband's under extreme stress at the moment. I should remind him. The gratitude journal is incredible. I think it's based upon what we focus on we get, that bit of the brain that looks out for good things, the more we look out for good things, the more we see good things. Just training your mind to think positively, no matter what's happening. It really puts things into perspective. When I have clients who are...sometimes I get coaching clients who are kind of...they might be on the border of wanting coaching, but they might have had some counselling or are having some counselling as well. They might have been through some heavy stuff. One thing I will do, first of all, with them is to set them a challenge of keeping a gratitude diary every evening or every morning, and actually writing things down. If they are really down and depressed, I set them the task of finding thirty things each day that they're grateful for, which sounds like a hell of a lot, but actually having that stretch, and stretching your mind to think of that many things really helps you to turn around very, very quickly.

So the gratitude diary's fantastic. You don't have to do thirty things, but one thing I would really love you to do as homework the next two weeks is to keep a gratitude journal, and all you have to do is find five things each day that you're really grateful for. Remember, Maja said earlier about cuddling on the sofa, and somebody talked about having a cup of coffee – it's looking out and absorbing yourself in the light, if it's a sunny day, and really noticing that light. It's all of the little things.

The pictures that I've put on here are actually from an app you can get, if any of you have an iPhone. I use this, it's really lovely, because you can put your things you're grateful for, rate your day, and you can put a little photo in that might have taken from your iPhone, so I always end up with pictures of the boys here, and it reminds me of the little things they do. You know the smile before the scream, and to focus on the smile. So, gratitude diary – if you forget everything else, don't forget the gratitude diary, it is very, very powerful.

Ok, some more tools for your happiness toolkit. As I say, I could talk for ages about this. I think I've probably gone way – what time is it? I haven't got my watch on. How do I get out of this? Hang on a second.

LF: Twenty five past nine.

Amanda: Oh, right, ok, don't worry, we're almost finished. Sorry, girls. Happy anchors – thinking about something that makes you happy, a time when you are happy, and thinking about a way that you can fix that. This comes from NLP, for those of you who've studied NLP. Those of you who haven't, it doesn't matter. If you can think of a time when you were happy, a moment when you were happy, and really absorb all the feelings, the emotions, the smells, the sounds, whatever it was that was going on – and then an anchor is a way of holding it down. So a typical one might be touching your index finger and your thumb together every time you have that thought. It might be touching your right ear and squeezing your right ear. If you practice that, you can actually reproduce that happy feeling.

The next one is satisficing. What I want to say about satisficing is this. The term was introduced by an economist in 1957, a guy called Herbert Simon, and he said it's a choice that's both satisfactory and sufficient to meet the needs of the situation without necessarily being the absolute best of all possible options. So he explains satisficing by contrasting it with maximising – so, choosing the biggest option, and optimising which is choosing the best possible option. Then a guy called Barry Schwartz wrote a book called *The Paradox of Choice*, and he pointed out in that book that we have an overabundance of options, and this overabundance of options is one of the critical factors in our modern epidemic of self-doubt, regret, anxiety and stress. This is the key point here: by choosing to satisfice, we can greatly reduce the amount of time and energy put into the mundane majority of our daily decisions, leaving us to focus that time and energy on those things that really matter to us. I put here, the little things in an average day. So perhaps satisficing, what it can do, is reduce those expectations of everything having to be the best possible, with all the socks having to be picked up, etc, and just having it as average – satisficing.

Buddhism for Mothers, cheapest in UK, from agebooks.co.uk – thanks Maja.

Raising your EQ, so raising your emotional intelligence, which is that thing about checking in with your thoughts, which a lot of us said we don't do. Thinking of a time when everything seemed to be in flow, and finally, acting as if – so, if you can't actually feel it, fake it.

So, to wind up – your happy pills. Think about what ideas you've had from today, you've had from others today or from what I've talked about today or what we've talked about together. What nurtures you, what brings you happiness? When are you in flow? And just scribble down, just take a minute, two minutes of the first things that come to mind of the things that bring you happiness, and then write yourself a prescription of three to five things that will make you happy each day, that you can do, that are simple, and that don't necessarily add more time to your day. It might do, but then again it doesn't necessarily have to do that.

Some resources up here for you – don't worry about taking all this in now, because I'll put these slides up on the members room. A quick whiz round the room, what is the one thing that you're going to take away from today if you forget everything else?

Diane: Satisficing.

Amanda: Thanks, Diane. Have an average day! Who else?

Jo: I will take away the gratitude diary.

Amanda: Ok, thanks, Jo.

Kim: I'm going to make time for some music.

Amanda: Make time for music? How are you going to do that.

Kim: Yep. Don't know yet.

Amanda: Ok.

Kim: That was my quick response.

Amanda: Ok. Who's next?

Kim: I'll take it to bed with me, actually.

Amanda: That's a good idea.

Amy: I'm going to raise my EQ.

Amanda: Ok. Let us know how you get on with that in the forum. Thanks, Amy.

Maja: I'm going to go back to doing the gratitude diary via email, I love that idea.

Amanda: Yeah, it's great, isn't it. Thanks for that, Nicola.

Nicola: What was I going to say...my firebrand, so I'm going to reflect more on how I'm feeling when I'm about to react, and think about seeing it maybe in a more humorous way. Standing back.

Amanda: Ok. I'm sorry, I'm going quiet because I'm trying to think of that great acronym of

FEARLESS. It's about silliness, about having silliness in life, so I think that's great. Reflect and use your humour. And Francoise?

Francoise: I will keep a gratitude diary.

Amanda: Ok, great. Have I got everybody? I think I have, haven't I? Yeah. Thanks very much, everybody. Great call. Great call – I sound very American. We'll be speaking in a fortnight today, in the meantime use the forums for whatever you need to. I'm here, and I think you're all there for each other as well.

Everyone: Thank you Amanda!