

## Transcript Happiness Researcher Debunks Happiness Myths | WIRED

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- Money can actually buy happiness

00:02

but only about 10% of it.

00:04

If you tell me how much money you make

00:05

I can tell you how happy you are gonna be in your life

00:08

but only by 10%

00:10

because the other 90% of happiness

00:12

is related to how you process the world around you

00:15

and your genetic makeup,

00:16

which means that 90% is up to you.

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[upbeat music]

00:24

Hi, I am Amy Blankson,

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I'm the founder and CEO of Fearless Positivity,

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I research the intersection of happiness,

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technology and wellbeing.

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And today I'm here to debunk some myths

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that we've all heard and believe about happiness.

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You either have happiness or you don't.

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It turns out that some people

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are actually born happier than other people.

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Some people are born predisposed

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to be more satisfied than other people.

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And some people have a harder time

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finding that level of satisfaction.

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Researchers found that only 10% of your happiness

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is due to your environment,

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the other 90% is due to your genes

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and your perception of the world.

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The key here is that

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it doesn't have to be the end of the story,

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despite your genes, we all have the capacity

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to increase our happiness levels

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and to practice happiness overall.

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Happiness looks the same around the world.

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Happiness takes on a different sense of meaning

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in context of the cultures around the world.

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If you're a scientist

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and you're trying to study and measure happiness,

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we actually look at something called subjective wellbeing

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which is the metric being used

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to measure happiness on a global scale,

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through the UN global happiness report.

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The UN global happiness report comes out every year

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reporting on the happiest countries in the world.

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And every year consistently

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the Scandinavian countries top the list.

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The question is,

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why do these countries

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consistently show up as happier than others?

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What makes them happier countries?

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If you're familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs,

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you know that shelter and food

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are the bedrock of being able

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to reach a level of self actualization in your life.

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So, having those taken care of

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and provided by those countries

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enables individuals to pursue other passions

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that help them to move up the triangle for happiness,

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but other countries that maybe are not as wealthy

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also top the list.

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What's interesting is that

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a number of countries who have high levels of social support

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have been indicated to be some of the happier countries.

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So if we're looking for a culture

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that is going to embrace

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and to create a global level of happiness,

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the fastest way to get there

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is by providing social support to those around you.

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There's power in positive thinking.

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Happiness is actually something that you can get better at,

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We've learned from scientists over the past two decades

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from the field of positive psychology

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that our mind has incredible power to change our scenarios

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and our life situations,

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and we can begin to train our brains

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to think this way by doing a series of exercises

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that I call the J-GAME.

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It's a cheesy mnemonic that I used to remember,

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journaling, gratitude, acts of kindness,

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meditation, and exercise,

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the J-GAME.

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When I talk about journaling,

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we're talking about taking two minutes

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to write down the most meaningful moment

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in the last 24 hours of your life.

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What were you doing?

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Who were you with?

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And why was it so meaningful?

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In doing so your brain begins to relive

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the most meaningful moment of the last 24 hours

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helping you to actually re-experience that

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because your brain can't tell the difference

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between visualization and actual experience,

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and as a result we find that

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your brain begins to relive this moment

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and feel a double sense of happiness.

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The second habit is G,

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G for gratitude.

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What we're trying to do with gratitude

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is to retrain the neural pathways in your brain

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to begin to develop a new reflex

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in how you're seeing and thinking about the world.

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We can't be both positive and negative at the same time.

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So when your brain is practicing

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scanning your environment for positive things

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your brain can't literally look

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for all the negative things at the same moment,

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you're beginning to all of a sudden

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find new ways to scan your environment for the good

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and over time this becomes a reflexive habit

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that changes your outlook on life.

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The third habit is A for acts of kindness.

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I recommend you take two minutes a day

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to thank or praise somebody in your social support network,

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you can do so by text, by phone, in person

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or even in handwritten letter.

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But what happens when you send a quick message to somebody

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saying thank you for something that you've done,

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all of a sudden you create a positive feedback loop

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that not only makes the other person feel happier

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but it also makes you feel happier,

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and so you begin to create a virtuous cycle.

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M for meditation.

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I recommend you take two minutes a day

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to simply watch your breath go in

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[inhales deeply] and out.

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When you meditate other people around you

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pick up the benefits of your meditation

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even if they don't know you're meditating.

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This comes back to something called the mirror neuron effect

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and then mirror neuron effect

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is an incredibly powerful response

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based on the fact that humans

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are wirelessly connected to one another.

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The last habit is exercise.

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Exercise is a bit of a starter drug.

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I recommend that individuals pick one of these five habits

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to try for 21 days in your life.

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This is up to you and you can get better at happiness

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if you make happiness into a work ethic.

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Success leads to happiness.

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Researchers have since found

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that the exact opposite is true.

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Happiness leads to success.

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We keep thinking,

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I'll be happy when,

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I'll be happy when I get good grades,

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or I'll be happy when I get into college,

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and then you get into college

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and suddenly you need to get a job,

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and then you need to get a promotion

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and then you need to buy a house,

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and each time happiness

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gets pushed over the cognitive horizon

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and your brain never actually

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gets to that feeling of happiness.

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The reason why is because we're after

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perhaps the wrong things.

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When we look after success

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as something that leads to greater happiness,

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we're constantly looking for external validation

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for our overall happiness,

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but if we can positively identify the correct things

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that actually drive meaning and satisfaction

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on a deeper level

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then we're actually moving towards being the person

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that we want to be.

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Those are the things that create

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long-term satisfaction and happiness.

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Money can't buy happiness.

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which means that 90% is up to you.

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So no matter how many houses you buy,

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how many planes you own,

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it won't necessarily impact your happiness,

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and in fact, it might have a decreasing effect.

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Research finds the individuals who are more wealthy

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actually reach a point

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at which their happiness begins to decline

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with increasing money.

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We find that there's the law

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of diminishing returns in economics that says that

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there is a benefit to things like money

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for a certain amount of time

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and then after a certain point there's a steep drop off.

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Social media makes us unhappy,

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many individuals feel as though social media

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is making us less happy overall

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by creating levels of social comparison,

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creating an increasing cyber bullying

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and leading to a lot of insecurities about privacy,

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but social media is not to blame,

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it's about how we use it.

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Challenges of social media

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is a level of social comparison,

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always looking to other individuals

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in your immediate environment

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who perhaps are living a better life

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or their lives seemingly are perfect,

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but when we look at our own lives

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we start to wonder

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maybe I should be doing something different

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and you feel less satisfied.

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The fastest way to make someone less happy

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is to compare them to someone else.

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We often say that comparison is the thief of joy.

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So looking at social media,

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the key is to be able to limit the amount of time

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and exposure to social media

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that actually benefits you,

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that helps you feel connected,

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and the moment at which you begin

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to find yourself comparing to somebody else

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to step away and maybe even if you need to

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take a digital detox.

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Thanks so much for tuning in today.

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My goal is to leave you feeling empowered

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and to know that you can make a difference

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in your happiness levels,

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that it is within reach

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and that you can become a best version of yourself

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by striving after your potential.

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Good luck.