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Executives:

Jennifer Gillette- Staff Social Worker at National Bone Marrow Transplant LINK

Ashlee Cramer- Childhood Educator, Cancer Caregiver

Operator:

Thank you for standing by. My name is Danielle, and I will be your conference operator today. At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the National Bone Marrow Transplant LINK.

All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. After the speaker's remark, there will be a question-and-answer session. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star followed by the number one on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, press star one again. Thank you.

I would now like to turn the call over to Jennifer Gillette. Please go ahead.

Jennifer Gillette:

Thank you so much, Danielle. Yes, my name is Jennifer Gillette, and I am the Staff Social Worker at the National Bone Marrow Transplant LINK. I'd like to welcome everyone to this call today. This month's program will focus on Finding and Cultivating Happiness Despite Loss and Cancer.

A special thanks to our generous sponsors, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Johnson & Johnson, and Incyte. We also like to thank our esteemed LINK partners for which our programming would not exist without you. So, thank you.

Today's outline will go as follows: I'm going to have a brief introduction about the National Bone Marrow Transplant LINK in case there's anyone on the call that's not overly familiar with us. And then, we will hear from our speaker, Ashlee Cramer. After she is done with her presentation, we will open the floor for questions, and then we'll do a short wrap-up at the end.

But for those who may not be familiar with the LINK, our mission is dedicated to helping individuals and their families from diagnosis through survivorship. We provide resources, support, and education. Some of the ways we do this are our monthly Lunch & Learn calls like you are on today and those are on a variety of topics. Some are disease-related, survivorship-related, GVHD or chronic graft versus host disease, and other variety of topics. We also record all of our programming, and you can go to our website and check it out at nbmtlink.org.



We have our Marrow Masters podcast and currently, we have more than 34,000 downloads and over 15 seasons. We have our annual webinars on a variety of topics. We have our popular award-winning resource books on things like Bone Marrow/Stem Cell Transplant. We have one on GVHD. So, you can check those out on our websites as well. We have our healing art programs. We have a journaling and watercolor program. We also have a craft program. We have our peer mentor support program, where you can be buddied up with people that have gone through the journey before you. We have our celebrating second birthdays program. Our Survivors Thrive Book Club. And an active Facebook, Instagram, and Web page to inform you about supports and resources, and a variety of organizations, as well as our programs.

We also are part of the GVHD alliance. Uniting us with more than seven reputable like-minded organizations to raise awareness of education, and support for those facing GVHD. But if you need any extra support, please reach out to us. We're happy to help.

Before we begin today's program, I'd like to review just a couple of housekeeping items to maximize the experience. First, when asking any questions, when that portion comes, please try to be as concise as possible knowing that others might want to ask questions, and we are limited to an hour. So, we thank you for that. Also, know that the information provided in this program is meant to stimulate conversation with your own healthcare provider and is not meant to replace your individualized medical plan.

So now, on to the meat of our program. Ashlee Cramer is an absolutely lovely human being who I am sure you will be inspired by today. She is a mom and was a dancer, turned early childhood educator, and turned into a cancer caregiver. In 2014, her husband was diagnosed with large B-cell lymphoma. She became the sole source of income, the caregiver for her husband as well as Mom and Dad to their three children. Tragically, he died in 2016, but this only brought the family closer. On July 14, 2020, heartbreak hit again, and her son Michael was diagnosed with an insanely rare and aggressive cancer. Less than 200 documented cases ever have been reported. And the average survival was eight months. Ashlee quit her job to be a full-time caregiver to Michael. Miraculously, four years later, Michael is alive. He's been through chemo, radiation, a bone marrow transplant, nearly fatal GVHD, hospital admissions for gastroparesis and liver failure, AVN, and it goes on. Through it all, Ashlee never left his side, and the relationship became an unbreakable bond. Together, the two have taken this heartbreak and found beauty and pain. It's their theme. That and "love".

The journey of Michael's cancer story is to share and to a purpose to fulfill. The mother and son started a podcast. Michael and Mom Talk Cancer, and soon after a website, a blog, and YouTube videos. They use social media to update and inspire. And now they are sharing their inspirational perspective through speaking. Michael is still in treatment for complications from his cancer, but he's alive and in remission. Michael and Ashlee speak together, doing all they can to fulfill their purpose of love and connection, not only with the cancer community, but with anyone who needs inspiration and motivation.



It is my absolute honor to introduce you to Ashlee Cramer. Thanks for being here, Ashlee.

Ashlee Cramer:

Oh my gosh, I'm so excited to be here. And after that intro, I just feel like I am pausing my cheeks are red. You're so sweet. What a beautiful intro. So, thank you.

So, I'm excited to be here because I am going to share some of happy for no reason with you all. Thank you, nbmtLINK for granting me this privilege. Thank you, Peggy and Jen. I am so honored that you invited me to speak at this Lunch & Learn. And everyone listening, I want to thank you for opening your hearts and minds to this message of happiness and joy and peace even while I know from my experience from personal experience that you are going through the most challenging of circumstances, it is the most of the most. Thank you so much for being here and I know we're on a call. We're not in person, we don't have faces or video, but I'm thanking you in advance for actually really being present with me for the next hour.

So, if you don't know me well after that intro, I think you do. I'm Ashlee, I'm a.k.a a mom who became my official title the last few years. I'm sure some of you can relate to that. Started in the hospital when the nurses and doctors didn't know my name, so I was Michael's mom. I'm sure many of the caregivers can relate to that, and that did change the more time we spent at the hospital. And then of course, I'm a mom from the podcast and the website. But I do share with Michael. We are "Michael and Mom Talk Cancer" I'm going to get that later.

But I'm going to just give you a little background. So before, as Michael's mom, I was a professional dancer and then an early childhood educator, and I was blessed. I created the Zumbini program for Zumba Fitness. If any of you know Zumba, if you've never heard of that program, it's like the Zumba early childhood music and movement program. It's music and dance for parents and their caregivers with the little ones. So, I felt this real connection with Zumba because so many of my philosophies, and this was long before cancer came into my life. My philosophy is about early childhood. They revolved around joy and happiness. And those were the ideas behind from fitness and you know, music and dance bringing joy and being in the moment, in the present, moving your body, listening, feeling the music, and like all this stress relief. So, I always thought that I was an early childhood educator, but that really I was in the business of happy and the business of getting happier. And at the time, little did I know that this was going to become necessary for my survival later on, and I think the survival of my son and my family as well.

But okay, before we go further and I think I know the answer because you're here listening, but I want you to think about it for yourself. How many of you would simply like to wake up tomorrow and feel just a little bit happier, a little more optimistic, a little more hopeful, a little more peaceful? And I think if we were together, we would all be raising our hands. I know for sure, me, all of us. Because none of us like we don't want to be miserable and depressed. Even if our circumstances are harsh, and miserable, even if we feel our circumstances leave us little or no hope, we still want to



be happy, or at least happier. And as Oprah. Yeah, Oprah Winfrey has a book with Arthur Brooks. And I love this because she doesn't say that happiness is the goal but happier-ness. And I think that's so true because happiness, I think if we've all found, it's not a destination, it is not a goal in and of itself, but it is a direction. And my goal is that we move in that direction even while life is challenging and hard, like cancer and BMT, and like cancer be in GVHD, the complications, the fears and so.

All right, so like everything in life, there is good news and bad news about happiness, and I do want to give you a bit of a perspective of starting off point my grasp this reality. So, I will give you a few statistics, so be patient, about happiness and the World Health Organization. They tell us that depression is the leading cause of disability in the US and the world. Major depressive disorder affects more than, get this, 16 million American adults. 264 million people worldwide suffer from depression, this is also from the World Health Organization. So, then looking for this in the cancer community, it goes up to 25% of people diagnosed with cancer suffer from depression. And statistically, only 5% of cancer patients actually see a mental health professional. I couldn't even get the statistics around caregivers.

So, I mean, we need good news, you guys. So, that's why I am here both science and research, it's kind of like they attract the happiness code, and we do know based on actual research, some things that it takes to be happier. I think we should be learning this in school like this is that in health, we should be learning about our mental health, and I honestly believe when you are diagnosed with cancer. And of course, caregivers too, these are tools that we should be given along with, like the Zofran and Alprazolam. I'm sure you can relate not only managing our difficult symptoms but managing our mental health. And you know, as the human population, cancers aside, why are we so unhappy? And the first thing is there is a myth to happiness, and I'm sure many of you have heard it, like the myth of all the happy win. And most people will have the typical happy when I have more success, I'll be happy when I have more money. I'll be happy when I fall in love. I'll be happy when I have kids. I'll be happy when I have lost 10 lbs, whatever it is. But then of course, there's those of us on the cancer community and I think our myths are more like, I'll be happy when chemo ends. I'll be happy when I get off steroids. I'll be happy when I get out of the hospital, and I go home. Maybe when my hair goes back, when I get in remission, one of the cleared BMT. When I reach the five-year mark, I'll be happy. Honestly, for us, after Michael's BMT, think we were like, oh my God, we're going to be happy when he hits 100 days post-transplant. I believe that was going to be true, and I'll tell you, it was not. I'll be happy when I get back to my life like it was before cancer. And if I am honest, this is probably not ever going to be the case for any of us because we do not go back. And the myth of happiness is that it comes from the outside. When something happens it should be I'll be happy and if things don't change, how can you be happy? How can you be happy when I'm going to cancer in this diagnosis? But that is the truth. That happiness doesn't come from the outside, and it never did. Even before cancer, it is an internal job. And if we wait for things to get easier or better to find our happier-ness, we will probably be waiting forever. So tall order. But I'm here because there are ways to change your thoughts and your heart to change your habits, to be happier, hopeful, and maybe even optimistic. But while living in reality, even the reality of oncology.



All right, so scientists craft the happiness code. Why are we all not happier like everything is you have to change your habits. And I know you're listening not watching, but I still want to try this little experiment if you can. Some of you might be driving, so you certainly can't do this, but if you can just take your hands like, hold them up in front of you if you can, and I want you just like cross your fingers like, put your hands together. Cross your fingers and have a look and see which thumb is on top, right? Okay. And then now I want you to kind of pick up those fingers, keep your palms together and switch and see if your right thumb was on top on top, put your left thumb on top. If your left thumb was on top, put your right thumb and see how that feels. It feels weird. It feels awkward. It feels uncomfortable, right? That's what it's like to change a habit. It feels funny. It's why we don't do it. But we can do it. We can cross our fingers. We can change how we cross which one we do. All right, now, try the same experiment with your arms. Hold your arms, if you're not driving again, hold your arms and then try to change which arm is on top. Oh my God, most people can't even figure that one out. I know I'm sitting here struggling, but that's why it's hard to change our habits. It feels weird and awkward and uncomfortable, but I'm telling you it's possible. That's why I'm here.

So, I'm going to share some things we can do to increase your happiness, but yeah. You might feel uncomfortable at first because we are going to have to change some of our habits and change the way we think. But we can increase our happiness. We do have the control in taking responsibility, taking some of the control, even during cancer, when we feel like we have so little control, that's one of the hardest parts that can help us find more peace and joy, and I do. I know. Oh my gosh. Jen gave me that beautiful introduction and she shared my story, but I'm going to share a little bit again because I want you to know why I'm so passionate and why I'm here and I want you to know that I am speaking as a person that can relate to all of you and what you're going through, because I've been there and I'm still there. And I'll tell you I'm really lucky because I was one of those babies that was born happy. I like came out of the womb smiling. My mom is actually named Joy and she is was then still is a beautiful shining light and she supported me and encouraged me to follow my dreams and my passion. and my what I've told you that was dancing. I graduated from high school in Midtown New York City when I was 18 years old. I became a professional dancer. At one point I went on a tour that took me to Paris and that is where I met Patrice Cramer, my teacher, husband with lots of love, got married and we moved happily ever after, the end, right? No. Not the end, of course. That's not the end of my story, and we did have a lovely life, and soon we had three amazing children, Steven, Michael, and Jennifer. We ended up leaving Paris for work. We moved to Miami, and I actually left dancing and started a new career in early childhood education. My career was theorizing. My family was beautiful. I love my husband. But there was something in my life, and I'll tell you the truth. If I felt like you were stagnant, like we were kind of stuck like something was missing. Or maybe we were just, like, waiting for something to happen. And then in December of 2014, I can't believe this has been 10 years. Something did happen, my husband Patrice, was diagnosed with cancer. It was large B-cell lymphoma, and it was considered a treatable cancer. So, in all honesty, if I said I was a happy person. So, you know I was hopeful, and I kept telling this is good. His cancer is God or the divine power, the universe, the angels, whatever you want to say,



reminding us to appreciate life, renew our joy and our happiness together like this cancer is bringing my family together and making us even closer, this is a wake-up call. This is a beautiful lesson in perspective, that is why this is happening to us and I was sure like 100% sure that Patrice was going to get healthy. He was going to laugh. We were going to laugh. We were going to love life, and we were going to cherish every day and now we were going to have a happy ever after, the end. But again, as Jen told you, it was not the end, I was wrong and in the beginning, he did well. He did like five cycles of chemo and according to schedule, he was in remission. We could breathe again, and here it was a happily ever. But then, a few months later, he relapsed. And this time, the cancer is moving faster. It was aggressive and the doctor actually talked to us about a bone marrow transplant, but his kidney started failing when he was not healthy enough to be considered realistically for a BMT. 17 Months after he was diagnosed, it was actually May 12th of 2016, he passed away. He was at home. At home, in Hospice with the kids and I, we were with him. Holding his hands. We are telling him we love him over and over again when he took his last breath. And I am going to be honest with you in that moment, I had a choice. I gave myself the grace of a choice. I could dive into sorrow and self-pity and that would be so well justified. I was a widow. I had three young kids. I just watched my husband die. Or I could choose to rise up and continue to live and spread love and joy. And I did decide to rise, and that was the summer that the program I told you about was indeed, but I hope for that was officially launched. And that was also when my mantra officially became that it's not what happens to you, but it is how you react that matters, my lessons.

Honestly, they were still not over. This has all been tested because in 2020, right in the middle of COVID, my healthy, athletic middle son, that was Michael, he just started feeling tired. I'm sure many of you can relate to this. I thought he was anemic. I'm guilty of being a vegan, so I wondered if his vegan Mama was getting enough lead an athletic 19-year-old. I joked that I started giving him almonds and dark chocolate. But then, he had night sweats and fevers. And so, you know, really I thought he had COVID. We knew so little about COVID at that time. He went for a blood test and it led to a bone marrow biopsy. And the eventual diagnosis of Hepatosplenic T-cell lymphoma. It is hard to say, hard to spell. And the doctors, they asked us not to Google it. Yeah, that's like a big one. Actually, people always say, but did you and we did not. Later, though, we found out. Why? Because Michael had a swim chance of surviving much more than eight months. And ironically, thinking about my husband, a bone marrow transplant was his only hope for survival. He went through three very intense cycles of chemo, radiation, and all the things. And he did have an analogous BMT donor from Germany to be the match. He almost passed away multiple times in the two weeks just following his transplant, and the two years after his transplant, we basically lived in the hospital. It was hard. And you can relate to the extents of your breath almost triggered by so many times. And at one point, Michael completely lost hope. And he actually wanted to take his life. He wanted to stop. He saw no other option, but he was one of those lucky, one of the 5% I mentioned before and that he did have a therapist, he did have help. He had support. He did have me. And he had tools. We had tools that he used to help him get through. Not that it was easy, but he still here. Four and a half years later now he's still here and I'm here and we do have a news on purpose, but that Jen mentioned.



And we do have a purpose and we do feel like spreading a message of love and hope and inspiration. And for me, joy and happiness, even though I think from the outside, often it seems like we don't have a lot to be happy about. Like many of you, believe me, I get it. He's still living with a with chronic GVHD, with graft versus host disease from the bone marrow transplant. I'm sure many of you know about GVHD. He does have a vascular necrosis from all the steroids he is. He lives with the body aches and pains. Still on medication but they probably will be for life. We still go to the hospital almost every week. I've not been able to go back to my career. And like many of you I know I've lost people in my life because of cancer. I'm not talking only physically, but there's people that have disappeared from my life. My future is not laid out in front of me like I thought it was, but we do help each other, and we do remind each other that it's not what happened but how you react. And we also remind each other a lot this morning I can tell you. And that we remind each other that happiness is an inside job. That it doesn't come from the outside circumstances. And also, I really want to stress this, but we can't wait to be happy because what if we don't have tomorrow? We need to find our joy and our happiness and love today and that is my motivation. We have been up and down and back again, and I do believe that love and joy have kept us going. It's then four and a half years that I spent Michael's full-time caregiver. And caregiving really has become the focus of my life. You know, I just want to tell this part really quickly and then I'm going to get into some techniques. When chemo took Michael's hair in the beginning, he had this really wonderful tight group of friends and his brother, and they all shaved their heads and used them with Michael. So, like the good mom, I took a video, and I just posted that video on Instagram and there was this sudden outpouring of love from that one video. We were really lucky with that, and I think it did help set the tone. And because of that, we started to share our story on social media. And that's really what made us start our podcast, Michael and Mom Talk Cancer, which has been really important for us in our journey of surviving this. And it's been so inspiring for me to see the impact of, you know, this 23-year-old kid and his very humbled mom. And sharing the story, I always say it's like sharing a love story because sometimes it is heartbreaking. Sometimes it is tragic, sometimes it is funny, but it's very real and it is very beautiful and that is why I'm here today. So, that's my story I know, I spent a bit of time, but I really want to know why I can relate to you. So, I want to see if we can take some of this pain and find our inner peace even while not denying the truth. Though joy while living in the real world in the world of cancer and BMT and GVHD, and sorrow and grief and beyond.

So, I want to start with what do we mean by that little phrase "happy for no reason". And I think happiness is a word that some of us might cringed a little. But really simply, it means that you have an inner state of peace. You can switch out happiness for peace or joy whatever feels right for you. But it means we have an inner state of peace and well-being that doesn't depend on our circumstances. It means you can find peace and joy even after being diagnosed with cancer or having been through that BMT complication or being a caregiver or losing someone. What does it not mean? This doesn't mean that we're walking around 24/7. I am not walking around 24/7 with a big silly grin on my face. It does not mean that you're living in a Pollyanna state of denial. You know I think we've all heard this term by now. Is not toxic positivity. It's not fake positivity. Bad things can happen. Bad things do happen. Bad things will happen, but



the idea is we can move through them more easily. You are still going to have emotions and all of them. You are going to feel grief or anger or frustration. What it means is you're going to have this inner state of happiness, it's like a backdrop of inner peace and well-being, so we're not trying to obliterate or get rid of or deny the negative feelings that everyone thinks that I'm here to do that or not because we need them and they're normal. But what we can do is recognize them and move through them. We can live with them more easily. That means it is still going to happen after even later on today. They're still happening. And the world, this is what I do like to say is the world might not change but we can change how we see the world.

So, how do we get there? That's the question, that's why we're here. So, when Marci Shimoff was writing this book, the book *Happy for No Reason*, and she was doing the research, she interviewed, she calls them her happy 100. She interviewed about 100 people that she considered to be happy or happier. And she realized, based on her interviews, that happier people had some main habits they had in common. So, she put them into these in seven areas. And I don't know about you, but it's hard to remember seven if anything, especially with chemo brain and all the sleep for caregivers, I think I can say there was something called secondhand chemo brain too. So, I'm going to use a metaphor as an easy way to remember these, and it's called "building your inner home for happiness." And the first part is the foundation. Every home needs a foundation, right? And the foundation of our home for happiness is taking responsibility for your happiness. I am not going to lie, that is hard putting it on ourselves and not blaming the outside world or someone else. Not blaming cancer, not blaming genetics or medications or whatever it is. And by the way, there's a huge difference between fault and responsibility. Fault is past tense. We can't change it. Responsibility is now. That means we can do something. For no, it is not your fault you got cancer. But we can take responsibility for how we react and I'm going to tell you this is actually empowering. You can't control what happens, you can control how you react, so that's your foundation.

Then, there's the next four habits, and they fall into the pillar of the home. There are four pillars of happiness of home. The mind, which I cannot wait to talk about, the heart, the body, and the soul. And then the sixth, the sixth area is the roof, and this has to do with living a life of purpose and passion. So, do you feel inspired by life even going through your health challenges, even when you're questioning life? Can you find meaning and purpose? And then, the seventh is the garden and that is your relationships, the people you surround yourself with, which I'm going to tell you sometimes these changes in the state of cancer.

So, today I don't have all day, right? We have a short time together, but so I'm not going to be able to get to everything in all of these wonderful habits and parts of the home. I do want to, I did want to share those seven main areas. You can get an idea of visual in your head of how it works together, and I think it is so important by looking at the foundation of your inner home for happiness, which is the hardest one, maybe. And in any home the foundation has to be strong to support the rest of the house, right? And the foundation, as I mentioned, it does have to do with taking responsibility for



your life and your happiness. And we can't be happy when we're blaming everything like cancer, other people, the doctors, our bodies, medication, insurance, whatever it is for our unhappiness. And most of the time, we don't want to take responsibility. And honestly, if that's not our fault, because I think we've been trained to think that our happiness does come from the outside, right? We've been trained to think that if something is not our fault, why should we take responsibility? We've been trying to think that a happy life in parts actually means good health. We talk about happiness and health going together, So, how can we be happy if we are not perfectly healthy? And I think that really is part of the myth of I'll be happy when that we spoke about it, that I just talked to you about a few minutes ago. And half to those ideas like will be successful or happy when we get a great job or find a partner when we're healthy and whole. Look at ads on social media, everywhere we look, it seems like if we buy something or look a certain way, eat a certain thing, go on that make cushion, and achieve something we're going to find happiness outside ourselves. And then the cancer world, many of those things now are unattainable. Maybe they're not possible now. Maybe they won't be ever and maybe now we drew a physical limitation. Maybe totally new and different circumstances. So, we end up giving away our responsibility for our own happiness. And the control and most people think that if this or that changes on the outside, I'll be happy. But conversely, especially for up here today, I think we think I can't be happy because I'm going through this. I think that's even bigger. So, to be honest, all of us, whether or not campers in our lives, anyone, our outside circumstances, they do change again and again, right? They never guarantee. Life is fluid. Our health is never guaranteed. Long life is never a guarantee.

So again, I just list this really fast. Taking responsibility, working on becoming happier doesn't mean ignoring the outside world because I think a lot of people still have that idea that if I'm happy, I'm ignoring the hard things. Or not ignoring the outside world, I'm not saying the pain and hardship doesn't exist. We are living in reality. The good, the bad, the ugly. I know cancer is hard in every way as much emotionally and mentally as physically needing more. But it is about raising our happiness and taking control for our happier-ness, which is possible. Those people, those happy 100, the people that seem to live that life of inner peace and joy, of happiness without reason., more of the common threads they shared is that they had a belief. They believed they could be happy, or they believed they could be happier. They believed it was possible. I think that's a huge key. They believe that their happiness are like to say their inner peace was up to them. And they may have struggled, but once they realize it was up to them, they didn't wait to be happy or put it off until the right moment because even if they had difficult circumstances of cancer diagnosis, whatever, they didn't focus on being a victim. They were proactive, just like you guys today by being here. You are not being a victim by being here. You are being proactive. I also just want to acknowledge you for that.

I'm sure many of you know who Victor Frankl is. The majority of you, there's a really powerful quote from his book Man's Search for Meaning. If you don't know it, look up this book, Man's Search for Meaning. I love this book, and it literally is just as incredible today as when he wrote it. It was first published in 1947, a long time ago. Mr. Frankl, he was like...he was in an Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942.

Obviously, he had, like the worst of the circumstances, hopeless. Before the war, Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist, and somehow when he was in that concentration camp, he made it a point to study what was going on in the people around him. And he did manage to find meaning in the suffering. So, this is the quote I want to share with you.

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms- to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

And then there's someone else that you may not have heard of. She's not quite as well known, although she is known. Her name is Edith Eger. She was also a naturalist. Her family...she and her family were imprisoned in 1944. She was a teenager, she says this, “The worst prison is not the one the Nazis put me in. The worst prison is the one I built for myself mentally.”

So, after the war, Edith Eger actually survived. She came to America. She earned her PhD in psychology, and she realized how our beliefs can imprison us. That was her big revelation, I think, is that our beliefs can imprison us. And she turned on...she started helping people free themselves from their personal prisons by recognizing their power to choose. There's a lot of parallels with Viktor Frankl and Edith Eger. Both of them recognized we have a power to choose even when faced with Auschwitz, almost certain death and maybe Auschwitz is an extreme example. But it's powerful and I think it's not so dissimilar than going through cancer. Hope no one has offended that I said that. But that's why I can relate to these perspectives so near and dear to my heart. These two realized that we can choose our attitudes. Maybe we can choose going to cancer is so serious is your first habit. Is looking for the lesson and the gift, just like Edith did. Just like Victor Frankl did.

There's a quote from Einstein. “The most important question you can ask yourself is this a friendly universe?” And happy people say yes, even when the bad things happen, happy and peaceful people, they find ways to look for the gift even in the hard challenges and difficulties. I mean, if you think about it, if we think about your past is always the hardest, most challenging things they give us a lesson, give us a gift, give us that growth. And for me, and our cancer journey, I think I had to learn not to ask why because there is no why. There was no blame. We did the right thing. We checked the right boxes- healthy lifestyle, healthy habits. My husband got cancer. He did the right thing. He followed the doctors. He did the chemo; he did the treatments. He still passed away. Michael checked the boxes for athletes. He didn’t drink or smoke. He got cancer. There's no blame, bad or challenging things happen, but you can find the lessons and they get that call it the beauty and the pain. And people say all the time things happen for a reason. I know from hearing this myself, it's not really what we need to hear a lot of times, but even if you don't think they happen for a reason, you can find the lesson. You can find the gift in your tone.



So okay, I'm going to start with a really easy one. Here is an easy example that's happened the other day. There was traffic and I was late. Blame the traffic. Maybe here's a lesson learned earlier. Take responsibility. Maybe you realize if you're going to drive, you're going to have traffic, right? Here is a harder example. Traffic one was easy. For me cancer took away things on my life. Cancer took away my husband, the father of my children, stole my career from me to cry love, by the way, it stole many of my friendships, my stability. But now, if I look for the gift, now I do have this amazing perspective on life. I really and truly can appreciate the small things I can value, what we call the pockets of peace, the pockets of joy. Now we have a podcast, and I know it helps so many people. We would have never done that podcast without cancer. A volunteer at the hospital, would have never done that. We lead support groups, both Michael and I. That wouldn't have happened without cancer. I have a whole new family cancer community, and these people are incredible. I would never have met them if they had not been through this. I would not be here today if we had not been through cancer.

And I'm sure you've heard this before. But it does bear repeating so forgive me. I have tried to learn this, tried to remember this and implement this by trying to shift our thoughts what if this is happening for me not to me what would I think then? We do want to blame our circumstances, but if we can look through a different lens, those hardest moments are the best teachers. So I see this. I see the Michael inspires so many people. I know this wouldn't have happened without cancer, without struggling and pain. I see it in my thoughts. I see it in so many people that I've met. So here's that first habit. Instead of blaming, look for the lesson and the gift. When you hear yourself blaming, complaining, shaming, take a pause and take a moment and try to shift your thinking to look for the gift. It might not be apparent in that moment. You might need to step back, and the gift might seem small next to cancer. But I bet if you look, you're going to find something, right? That's the foundation. I think I talk so much. I'm so sorry. I already know I'm...I want to get through something, some other of these habits.

And the next one I really want to talk to you is the pillar of the mind. Creating new neural pathways for happiness in your brains. I want to give you some thoughts about creating new neural pathways and you can do it. Even without cancer our brains, you may know this, are wired predominantly for unhappiness. It's just like basic survival from the caveman days, but we can rewire ourselves so the happiness key: number one, with our neural pathways with our mind do not believe everything you think or maybe even better, don't fall victim to what you think. So how many of you talk to yourselves in the day? You probably going, "Hmm, I don't know. Do I talk to myself? Maybe I do. I am not sure." Well, of course there we go. We all talk to ourselves all day long and these are called thoughts, and we all have them. But here's the interesting part. How many thoughts a day do you think the average person has? 60,000 on average, the average person has about 60,000 thoughts today. It's a lot of chemo brain or not. So, what percentage of those thoughts are the same ones that you had yesterday and the day before? 95%. so 95% of what we think today, we thought yesterday and the day before, that's insane. Minds are like record players, and if you're young, sorry you don't know what a record player is, Spotify playlist we keep going over the same things



over and over again. So, I want to share really quick, I want you try to this with me. Have a habitual thought. Sorry, I'm going to try and experiment. I know I can't hear you, but I hope you try this with me. I want you to say the word silk out loud three times and then we're going to spell it. So, we are going to say the word silk. Ready?

Silk, silk, silk. Silk, silk, silk. Silk, silk, silk, and spell it. S-I-L-K, S-I-L-K, S-I-L-K. Silk, silk, silk, silk, silk, silk. What a cow's drink? Milk! We want to say milk because we're hearing the word silk, but you guys all know cows drink water. But I bet a lot of you thought to yourselves I'll drink milk because our minds are going over the word. So, when that neural pathway we want to go with milk, it's so similar, we created a neural pathway for milk to come to mind.

So just for fun, roast. We're going to say the word roast three times and spell it. Roast, roast, roast. Roast, roast, roast. Roast, roast, roast. R-O-A-S-T, R-O-A-S-T, R-O-A-S-T. What do you put in a meg toaster? Toast! We want to say toast. But we actually put in bread. So, if you caught yourself, amazing, that means you can change your thoughts. You can see how our minds are habitual. We have already created that neural pathway in moments we get stuck in a lot of thoughts.

So, here's the other part. What percentage of our thoughts in a given day...remember 60,000 thoughts, 95% of the same, what percentage are negative? About 80%. And this is the average person. I imagine dealing with sickness on. Think about cancer, BMT, having your life taken away from you, someone you love taking away from you, not knowing what's going to happen to you. Of course you have negative thoughts. How could you not? But these negative thoughts they rob us of our self-esteem, of our happiness, of our peace, of our energy, right? Negative thoughts rob us that energy we need to get through a diagnosis. They rob us of our positive mindset that also helps us get through a diagnosis and chemo and treatment and radiation, scans and more. The side effects that rob us, they rob us of hope. So, you may have heard of the negativity bias. That's what I was saying before, we've inherited this from Arcadian ancestors. They had to remember the negatives or they die, right? We still have that bias. But holding on, holding in the...in the caveman days, holding on for good things, It did not serve us. It didn't promote our survival. It didn't protect us from the Saber tooth tiger. Our negativity bias gave us cortisol to escape the danger. The anxiety kept us on edge to notice the life-threatening things around us. That's why we need to cultivate the positivity bias. It's not natural. There's a syndrome called Velcro versus Teflon. Our minds are like Velcro for the negative, they stick to us. And they're like Teflon for the positive, they slide off us. But the research found that happier people, they found ways to reverse it, and they Velcro the positives and Teflon the negatives. It's not easy, but what we put our attention on goes stronger. When we're focusing on the positive and that's what grows stronger in our lives. But because we have the habit of paying attention to invoking the negative, we've developed even stronger those more positive than the negative. So we tend to feel like, you know, this is crappy, why this happened to me? Why are people okay? I'm not. But happier people even going to cancer, they return their brain to be on the lookout for the positive. When you're on the lookout, that's what you get more. You know how it is when you hear some things from your



oncologist, one bad thing, what do you remember? You remember the scary thing, the bad thing. But there are beautiful things in front of us all the time.

So, I want to get to three steps you can take. Oh my gosh, I just looked at the time. There are three steps you can take to develop neural pathways for the positive. The first one is to look for the good. Be on the lookout for the things you can be positive about. Okay. This really funny. It's going to sound silly, but one of the women who was interviewed in Happy for No Reason, she does this really cute thing. She gives away the Happiness Awards every day. She pretends that she's the Academy Award committee and every day her job is to give out at least five Academy Awards. So, she's on the lookout to see who or what she can give an award to every day. She might see two dogs, so she'll think, "Oh my God, that dog gets the Cutest Dog of the Day Award, right?" Or she has a great cup of coffee she gives us The Greatest Cup of Coffee Award, or The Best Uber Driver, whatever it is. Maybe at the hospital that nurse had the best smile, that's the award for the nicest smile. Or maybe you got a message on Instagram, Best DM Award, or a family member give you a hug, Best Hug, maybe about a cuddle. Maybe you ate something that finally actually tasted good. Best Vita Food Since Cancer. Where do you get the idea, right? So, looking for the good. I remember we had this beautiful sunset in the room where we were for almost those two years like Best Sunset Award. First habit, looking for the good, giveaway those Academy Awards.

Another habit to change those neural pathways. Savor the good for at least 20 seconds. It takes at least 20 seconds for the good to actually register and to create the new neural pathway. It does not take nearly as long for the negatives to register. So, if you have a positive experience, savor it. You have that nice nurse we were talking about, don't dismiss it. Think about it. Savor that kind human connection. Hold on to it for 20 seconds. What if you get a compliment? Someone says to you you inspire them. Someone says they admire you while you're going through everything you're going through. Don't brush it off. When he says thank you and feels good about it, savor it for 20 seconds. We all feel the anxiety, the fear of what's coming. But if you do have a good test result, a good blood, whatever it is, instead of waiting for the other shoe to drop, which we're all guilty of, yes, I understand that feeling. Not wanting to celebrate the good news because of fear, instead try for a moment for 20 seconds to savor the good news and tranquil for the moment. If you savor it for at least 20 seconds or better, write it down. If you can journal it. I know journaling is not for everyone, but it's going to be like double Velcro if you do, because you'll go back and read it after second half.

And the third one is go for a 3:1 ratio. So that means for every one negative that you feel or hear or think you want to replace it with three positives. So, every day you're going to have bad things, the things the tough news, were not denying those moments. You notice something negative; you're not getting rid of it. It's there in a salad. You can try to balance it and tip the scales with three positives. You might have to search for the positive, they might be small, but just the active scanning of your brain for something positive helps your neural pathways to look for and recognize the good. You're here today with needs of us. That's a huge sign that you are looking for the good.

So those are the three neural pathways. Look for the good, those Academy Awards. Number two, take it in and savor it for at least 20 seconds or journal it. Number three, for every negative lean into three positives. Will help you develop a new neural pathway, and I want to take one more minute. I know we're social downtime, but I want to take one more minute and just talk about living with an open heart. If you can point to yourself and look where you're pointing, are you pointing to your mind? Your feet? No. Most of us. When we point to us, we're pointing to our hearts. The heart is your seat of the soul. And one of the keys to a happier person is an open heart. What does that mean? That means kindness. It means gratitude. I know we talk about gratitude. It means appreciation. It actually means forgiveness, and even though you're going through tough times. There's something called heart rate variability, heart rhythm coherence. And when you're feeling angry, frustrated, anxious or sad, or heart actually goes into heart rhythm incoherence okay. In just five minutes of anger, frustration, it can suppress your immune system. When you're feeling appreciative, loving, emotionally balanced, you strengthen the immune system. I'm not pretending like love is the cure. Definitely not the cure for cancer, okay. And I'm not saying that any of us, including my husband and my son because of the cancer. Answer because of their heart rhythm coherence, we're not loving enough for being grateful. But I'm saying that it can help get you through what you're going through with more easily and ironically with more strength. So, pay attention when you're feeling stressed or anxious. Maybe this one moment, this isn't like a moment, need to breathe. You need to pause. Maybe you need to try meditation or play calming music. In the moment

I was going to share a practice that called Ho'oponopono to get yourself back into heart rate coherence. There's something also about forgiveness and I know forgiveness is hard. But forgiveness really is a fast track to happier-ness. And I know it's hard. We've been hurt by someone or something, and it's justified that we're upset. Maybe we're mad at life because of cancer. We're mad at life for jailing us this card. We're mad at our friends, our family, for not being there, for not understanding. Sometimes you get mad at our doctors for not listening. We get mad at the government for lack of funding, insurance for making it challenging, the cancer centers for how they schedule without taking us into consideration. But I'm telling you we can't be happy unless we forgive. It doesn't hurt the person that we're not forgiving or the thing we're not mad or at the insurance that were not mad at them. And forgiveness of things like and they're wrong. So, not forgiving is like putting poison in your own body and expecting the other person to feel the pain. So, I do want to show this last practice and that I know we're going to get to some questions I'm so sorry, Jen and Peggy. I'm sorry.

But I want to share this tool, and it's called Ho'oponopono. It is a Hawaiian practice you may have heard of. There are these four phrases that you can repeat. It can be towards the person or situation need to forgive towards yourself and here are the four phrases. I am sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you. And what you do is you send these phrases to the person, the situation, yourself, whatever it is, where you're feeling the anger and forgiveness. I do it all the time. I did it yesterday. I did it this morning. I was getting upset about something with insurance and I said to myself, I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you. And when you are doing this technique, I'm telling it makes you a better driver. It makes you a more patient driver,



more patient mother, friend, human caregiver. But if you try this practice and I want to do it with you, but we don't have time. But if you literally, if you just say those words, I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love. And if you're not driving, if you do it and you put your hands over your heart, this has been proven to improve your heart rhythm coherence. Just putting the act of putting your hands on your heart is part of an inner peace practice. And it might not work to saying you three times. Might have to do it a bunch of times, say it 10 times. Something like cancer and have to say it 50 times, maybe every day for a month. Give yourself a moment and your going to feel this peace and calm and having forgiveness is healing.

And the last one I'm going to share today is appreciation and gratitude. Here's another piece of homework. Find someone you know. I know there's like #gratitude and we all get sick of hearing about, like, the gratitude journals and appreciation like so much of a trend that it gets annoying. I totally get that. But the reason it's a trend is because it kind of does work, and I want you to try something before you go to bed tonight. I want you to reach out to someone either text them, DM them, call them, message them, tell them in person, whatever it is. And tell someone you appreciate them but also tell them why. If you do this, you're not only going to notice that they feel better, but you are going to feel better. It is exponential. It spreads when you pass appreciation on, that person is going to feel better. They going to pass it on, it is exponential. So, living with an open heart, let love lead to kindness to yourself. Forgiveness, that practice of Ho'oponopono, and gratitude and appreciation. I know we really are out time. Your body is another huge pillar to your happiness, and I know when you're sick, that's really hard. But if you can think about the big three which is sleep, and I know it's challenging. Food you put into your body and exercise, like finding those endorphins like endorphin releases natural dancing, music, those are things that can help you going outside. Connection is huge and I love the name of this foundation, NBMT LINK. LINK as in connection. Connection is huge within our happiness. So, Jay Shetty, if you know who he is, he said' "You can't be everything you want. You can't be anything you want, but you can be everything you are." So maybe right now you cannot change your circumstances. You cannot be what you thought you were going to be. You cannot be who you thought you wanted to be. But I am telling you can be everything you are, who you are right now. And the world feels different when you change your happiness habits. The world does not change, but you change.

All right, I know I talked too much. I'm sorry I want to leave space for a couple of questions. I hope you forgive me. I hope you got something out of this. Peggy and Jen, are you still there?

Jennifer Gillette:

I am still here and oh my goodness, I was just soaking. This was such a good lesson, and I think it's such a gift to have this at the beginning of the year. Thank you so much, Ashlee. I'm just so moved and inspired by you. And Danielle, could you please remind everyone how they can ask a question today?



Operator: We will now begin with our question-and-answer session. At this time, I would like to remind everyone that in order to ask a question, press star and the number one on your telephone keypad.

Jennifer Gillette: And while we're waiting for people to dial in, Ashlee, I have one question. I know we have had some pre-submitted. One was on the days where the grief is the heaviest, you know you gave us all kinds of great tools to kind of make our secret sauce formula of how to get through those rough days. But on your roughest, roughest days, what is like your first go to to try to just get through those rough days?

Ashlee Cramer: Oh my gosh. And first I want to say that 100% there is grief on a lot of days, and it is never also...and I want to say this, that all of a sudden, we attain happiness and we've like reached that goal, it is always a work in progress. It is a daily practice. Sometimes it's an hourly practice. I think that for me personally, a lot of it...the reasons I wanted to share the most about the mind and the hardest for me, lot of it has to do with neural pathways. And I think sometimes I have to shift my focus and say okay that practice Ho'oponopono helps me a lot. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you. That's a really big one on a lot of those hard moments. The other one is we talk about like in my cancer caregiver group, showering in the grief, but not bathing in it. And I think it's a great analogy, because there's going to be waves and you cannot deny. If you try to push down your grief, if you try to push down what's heavy, it's going to end up exploding. And you're going to, like, sit there and you're going to up bathing in it. And if the water is going to be dirty, not good for you. But I think sometimes letting it wash over you and let it be a wave and that is okay. I experienced it. Let me see what some of my tools are and the tools in that box. Sometimes for me it is putting on music, a lot of times it's going outside. Sometimes it's looking for like, what is this teaching me right now? I have this thing Michael's heard me say it all the time. I'll say, "I choose love. I close my eyes." I'll be having a bad moment, and I'll just say, "Okay, I choose love", and I remember that I have the choice. Because I think sometimes, we feel like we are out of control and that is a very hard thing in the cancer world that we have so little control. But remember that you do have control in that foundation. Some of these techniques help.

Jennifer Gillette: Thank you so much. Danielle, do we have anyone in the queue yet?

Operator: And your first question comes from Deanea. Your line is now open. Please go ahead.

Deanea: Yes, I really don't have a question.

Ashlee Cramer: No worries. I love hearing your voice.

Deanea: Thank you.

Jennifer Gillette: I am so glad you could join us today. Thank you for being a part of it.

Operator: Your next question comes from Victoria. Your line is now open. Please go ahead.



- Victoria:** Hi, I don't have a question for Ashlee. But I just love that I'm sending her. She's amazing and everything that she says here shows in everything that she does, I adore you.
- Ashlee Cramer:** Victoria, thank you so much for being here. And you literally just made me cry, tears in my eyes in the best way. I love you.
- Victoria:** Thank you for being an Angel that walks our earth.
- Ashlee Cramer:** I love you, Victoria. Thank you.
- Victoria:** You too.
- Ashlee Cramer:** I have to say I know Victoria. I know that voice. We know each other through the cancer world. We've never met, but through the cancer world, we know each other and you just...I love you with all my heart.
- Victoria:** Yeah. And this is very helpful. Just to let people know that I deal with trying to be happy in the situation that I'm in with caregiving for my son. This was wonderful. Really wonderful. So, I appreciate it. Thank you.
- Ashlee Cramer:** Thank you for being here Victoria. It means the world to me. Everyone that's on here means the world to me that you are here. Oh, my goodness.
- Jennifer Gillette:** We agree with you 100%, Victoria, and thank you for being with us today. Danielle, do we have anyone else on the line?
- Operator:** That concludes our question-and-answer session. I will now turn the call back to Jennifer for our closing remarks.
- Jennifer Gillette:** Well, I just want to...from the bottom of my heart, thank Ashlee for these amazing tools. I really hope that everyone has at least one tool that they can take with them today and really try it. I know I was writing like crazy as Ashlee was talking and I'm going to give these a whirl myself too. But on behalf of the LINK, I just thank you so much everyone for being here. We are going to be sending out a survey so we can keep getting ideas for programming and ways we can improve with our programming. But I hope that everyone is one step closer to finding their happier ness and we hope you have a great day.
- Ashlee Cramer:** Thank you. Thank you with all of my heart and I will be happy to include a handout if that would help.
- Jennifer Gillette:** Yes, you know, if you send me any handouts, Ashlee, I will be happy to send that out to people as well, but everyone, be well. Thank you.



Ashlee Cramer: Thank you.

Operator: This concludes our conference for today. You may now disconnect.