Changing the World, One Person at a Time

SSA Foundation Forum Speaker Jenn Lim says you can control your own happiness.

By John Dunlap

There is a Chinese proverb that says: “Make happy those who are near, and those who are far will come.” As far as Jenn Lim is concerned, truer words have never been spoken.

Lim is spreading a message that started with co-writing a book called Delivering Happiness with Zappos founder Tony Hsieh, and has continued with bus tours and speaking engagements. It is the latter that will bring her to Las Vegas on September 6 as the Foundation Forum speaker at the SSA Fall Conference & Trade Show.

Lim was already working with Hsieh at his wildly successful Zappos headquarters when the two started creating a book together. The book was originally intended to just be a publication for the business world and how to create a better working environment. But soon after the book was in print, both Lim and Hsieh were amazed by the response.

"Since it was marketed as a business book, it wasn't altogether surprising to hear the response we received from the business sector, from people wanting to understand how they can implement happiness as a business model in a similar way to Zappos,” Lim told the SSA Globe. “What was completely unanticipated was the response we got from the non-business sector—students/teachers, people working in health care and government, even mothers and fathers telling us how they want to apply the science of happiness to their lives as well. Someone wrote an email to us saying, ‘It’s not just a manual for my business, it’s a manual for my life.’"

"Now that we’ve finished a bus tour across America (to help spread our message) and we’re on our 18th translation of the book, I’ve sensed a tipping point around the world,” Lim added. “Essentially, we’ve seen a demand for tangible, sustainable happiness in the workplace, communities and everyday lives.”

On the face of it, it seems a noble ambition of the highest order. But for Lim, there is also scientific research to back up “delivering happiness” and her presentation.

“We created a company and a movement around this demand. Research shows we’re bad at predicting long-term happiness, but for the first time in our lives we know real, actionable ways to change that trend. Delivering Happiness is an extension of what Zappos has started—not just by selling shoes or delivering happiness in a package, but by delivering happiness across all facets of our lives.”

And Lim feels it can be done one person and one company at a time—benefitting the entire globe.

“For us, it comes down to this: 50-percent of a person’s happiness is based on genetics (i.e. nature); 10-percent is based on environment (i.e. nurture). That leaves 40-percent based on the one thing everyone has complete control of—action.”

“We all know actions are based on our decisions and behaviors,” Lim continued. “With the latest findings in the science of happiness coupled to what we’ve learned while applying it to workplaces and general life, Delivering Happiness is creating a global community of people inspired to take actions toward a happier life. Through this, we’re collectively creating a happier world together.”

It almost sounds as if it is a message inspired by Buddhist philosophy.

“While our message wasn’t based on it, I definitely see the parallels,” Lim says. “Actually, one of the quotes in the book is inspired by Buddhist philosophy: ‘Happiness never decreases by being shared.’"

Make Someone Happy (Including Yourself)

Lim’s presentation in Las Vegas will touch on ways to instill the Delivering Happiness message into everyone’s life.

“Research actually shows humans are super bad at predicting how we can sustain our happiness over time,” she said. “So the question is: How do we change the pattern of wanting things that don’t add to happiness (knowing they won’t last), but doing things that will add to long-term happiness instead?”

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“That’s where the concepts of Delivering Happiness come in. We boil it down to basic principles of what happiness could/should mean: (1) Be true to yourself; (2) Discover your passions; (3) Pursue your higher purpose in life (beyond yourself); and (4) Deliver happiness to yourself and those around you.”

“This is the first time in history we’re able to change the world through happiness in a measurable way,” added Lim. “To us it makes business, scientific and human sense. If you had a chance to make the world happier, would you? If the answer is yes, how are you delivering happiness every day?”

Lim would no doubt agree with writer Robert Louis Stevenson, who said: “There is no duty we so much under-rate as the duty of being happy.”

So, is she happy?

“The biggest thing I’ve learned in life is that the lessons come from the lowest times,” Lim concluded. “It was through those times that I decided to make every moment meaningful, every interaction with the people I love real. That’s when I developed my own personal values of what’s most important to me so that I’m living them, every day. Because of this—no matter what happens in my life—I am happy.”

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