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Guiding document

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Philosophy

Our World Today has a philosophy that your interior and exterior environments directly affect you as a person. This is in both your personal and professional life. What happens in your outside world, or society, is reflected in your thoughts, who you are and how you act.

Our World Today is an online news website that provides people with an alternative choice to the current trends of negativity and sensationalism in news and current affairs.

Rather than focus on the suffering and destruction in our world, Our World Today will capture the truly inspiring, the unheard, the stories that make us proud to be human, proud to be alive, and by doing so, reconnect individuals with the essential spirit that binds us all.

But why do we want to focus on the positive?

We realise we live in a smart society, and that people demand a well-informed and educated source of news. This of course means absorbing and understanding daily events, including disasters, wars and the happenings of the world. However, Our World Today believes news does not have to be solely about that, and that we as a society are far greater than our failures and deserve to see it. Current trends indicate that the quantity of 'positive' news (15%) is disproportionate to that of 'negative' news (85%), veering away from the original idea of news reflecting a balanced view of society to itself. (Noyes, 2005)

Like a good work life balance, so should be the news and our surrounding environment. We believe news has a part to play in the way society is influenced, and the way people think. Your thinking obviously has an effect on your life, and consequently as a whole, the actions of the world.

We want to allow individuals a chance to be inspired, a place to source not only headlines, but positive stories from around the world, promoting individuals to be inspired and help the world.

We are an independent not for profit organisation, apolitical and have no agenda other than to source and publish positive and inspiring stories of our world.

If we can inspire one individual, they can change the lives of hundreds around them, and this many, can go forth and change the world.

It is all connected, all aspects of life, and the scientific proof is now out to show how a positive environment can not only affect your chemical and physical state as an individual, making you healthier and more stable, but also that happiness and positive energy does spread to people around you.

We know from personal experience the amazing effects of this, and feel passionate about the art of story telling and news, as well as our philosophy and creating this opportunity for society and the world.

The science behind the positive

Since the creation of the printing press, people have readily absorbed the news. All over the world media organisations have been 'reflecting society onto itself', bringing the day's stories to homes across the world. However, over time news and current affairs have acquired a certain trend. This trend, possibly affected by the thirst to make big dollars, has caused sensationalised headlines and as a result turned newsroom values towards a negative, 'shock value' belief system.

But can a constant bombardment of 'negative news' really affect the way we feel, act and live our daily lives? And if so, how much impact could it potentially have?

Until recently, there has never been any 'hard' evidence that by thinking and surrounding yourself with negativity, that you will yourself, be influenced to be a less inspired and happy individual.

The (not so) Secret

There has always been a common thought that being around happy people makes you happy. The 'laws of attraction', the philosophy behind the popular book and DVD *'The Secret'* (as seen and promoted on Oprah), says that if you think of positive, you create positive and if you think negative, that is the energy you get.

With the advancement of positive psychology and the connected research, results have surfaced that give scientific evidence to the biological and chemical effects on a human, when put in a positive environment.

Researchers have explored the value of positive emotions, positive traits (or character strengths) and positive social institutions (eg families, schools, workplaces, communities).

The power of altruism

Professor of Preventative Medicine and Director for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stoney Brook University, Stephen Post, recently published a book titled *'The Hidden Gifts of Helping'*. The book explores the science of altruism (a selfless concern for the welfare of others), and how giving, helping and volunteering really does have a positive effect on our lives. Working in a UNHCR Uganda Refugee camp, Kayte Webb, said the effect on her was mind blowing, 'Coming here you realise there's just one race and that's the human race, we're all the same'.

In the recent ABC documentary series *'Making Australia Happy'*, psychologist, Dr Martin Seligman, tested this concept himself, showing how volunteering or donating money to charity actually triggers the same pleasure systems in the brain as food and sex. Furthermore, it even showed it can boost your immune system.

Over the eight week 'happiness' program doctors tested the levels of the hormones melatonin and cortisol in the saliva samples of participants. They were tested both before and after individual volunteering activities, as well as the entire eight week program. In every participant, levels responded in a way that made them able to deal with more stress and sleep more efficiently, simply by being happy. So in essence, a happier environment resulted in a positive chemical change to the hormones within the body.

The documentary and research also proved that with higher 'happiness' levels, or 'optimal human functioning' levels, participant's pain thresholds were increased, meaning they could absorb more pain without it affecting their body mentally or physically.

The series also proved that after the eight week 'happiness' program, the participants showed less neural activity, which means their brain was functioning more efficiently, with less 'background noise' for the individual to deal with.

But can this relate to news? Can the media affect societies thinking and values?

Journalists acknowledge that the process of representing an event is influenced by the operation of their 'news values'. This suggests the values of a media organisation are represented in their stories, and thus into the minds and values of society.

How happiness spreads

Harvard Medical School in the USA also looked at whether or not 'happiness' can actually spread into social networks. Their results showed that 'people's happiness depends on the happiness of others with whom they are connected. This provides further justification for seeing happiness, like health, as a collective phenomenon.'

The research also confirmed that in a social network, happiness spreads among people up to three degrees removed from one another. That means when you feel happy, a friend of a friend of a friend has a slightly higher likelihood of feeling happy too.

So essentially, if you're feeling great today, you may end up inadvertently spreading the joy to someone you don't even know by tomorrow.

Dr Daniel Gilbert, Professor of Psychology at Harvard said 'We've known for some time that social relationships are the best predictor of human happiness, and this paper shows that the effect is much more powerful than anyone realised.'

In essence, happiness can ripple through society, affecting all who come into contact with it.

What is happiness – more than a good GDP

Research also shows that people from all around the world have similar values to what they hold most important. Things like spending time with people we love, fulfilling a job, a healthy life, education and enjoying nature are among things people value most. But as a society, our progress is measured by our GDP (gross domestic product), which essentially, measures how a country performs economically. The problem is, it does not really measure how progressive or happy a society is.

Recently, the BBC published an article after the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, said there is more to life than making money, arguing that improving people's happiness is a key challenge for politicians. Mr Cameron said improving society's sense of happiness is of the utmost importance.

'It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money, and it's time we focused not just on GDP, but on GWB - general well-being,' he said.

'Improving our society's sense of well-being is, I believe, the central political challenge of our times.' And something Our World Today believe the media have the power to influence, and even adopt a philosophy of themselves.

Negativity has a longer lasting effect than happiness

If you look at the emotional scale of a human being used by psychologists, you will see that when people are affected by an event, their emotional level drops on the scale. When you are at frustration (for example) you can't just jump up to happiness, you need to roughly go back through all the emotions to get there. It is how the biology of the body works. The news is everywhere, and often affects how we feel. This process means if you see a story and it takes you to 'anger' or 'depression', it could take you quite a lot to move yourself back up to 'joy, empowerment and freedom'. It is also much harder for your body to work its way (chemically) back up the emotional scale, than to drop down it.



Our own research, in which Our World Today surveyed more than 250 people, found the majority of people would like to see more positive news coverage.

In response to the question 'do you think news is too negative' Our World Today found 61% of participants answered 'yes', while 39% answered 'no'. The survey also saw 78% answer 'yes' to the question 'is news biased', while 15% answered 'unsure' and 7% answered 'no'. When asked 'what type of news would you like to see presented more in the news' 23% said 'positive/good' news, 22% said more 'accurate/in-depth/hard/ investigative' news, while 18.5% said 'human interest/unsung hero' stories and 13.5% said 'achievement and discovery'.

Our World Today provides an online community experience, which supports research that suggests 'creating a sense of community is a critical part of creating a positive attitude'. Studies have also shown that people with a greater sense of community feel happier through new connections and social interaction.

The evidence is there. Being in an environment that is making you think positively, feel good and promote volunteering and helping others, really can make a chemical, physical and lifestyle change for the betterment of individuals and thus our world. Our World Today's goal is to inspire, and to then allow the flow on effect of 'the science of happiness' (explained above) to filter into society, and inspire the world.

Relevant quotes

'Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.' □

~ Buddha ~

'No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit.'

'When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.'

□

~ Helen Keller ~

'In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when they are wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right.'

~ David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* ~

'If you want happiness for an hour — take a nap. □

If you want happiness for a day — go fishing. □

If you want happiness for a year — inherit a fortune. □

If you want happiness for a lifetime — help someone else.' □

~ Chinese Proverb ~

'If men would consider not so much wherein they differ, as wherein they agree, there would be far less of uncharitableness and angry feeling in the world.' □

~ Joseph Addison ~

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