

WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



Workplace happiness with Jenn Lim

Jen Fisher (Jen): Hi WorkWell listeners, I'm really excited to share that my book, "Work Better Together", is officially out. Conversations with WorkWell guests and feedback from listeners like you inspired this book. It's all about how to create a more human-centered workplace. As we return to the office for many of us, this book can help you move forward into post pandemic life with strategies and tools to strengthen your relationships and focus on your well-being. It's available now from your favorite book retailer.

Many of us probably don't think of work as a happy place but we should because when we're happier at work, we're more engaged, more productive, more innovative, and more creative. Everyone benefits from a happier workplace culture, not just the workforce, but also the organization and society as a whole. This is the WorkWell podcast series. Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, chief well-being officer for Deloitte, and I'm so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things well-being.

I'm here with Jenn Lim. She's the CEO and cofounder of Delivering Happiness, a coaching and consulting company that's helped hundreds of organizations use the science of happiness to cocreate adaptable organizations that grow people, profits, and purpose, not just to survive, but to thrive. Jenn's also the author of the newly released and bestselling book, "Beyond Happiness: How Authentic Leaders Prioritize Purpose and People for Growth and Impact". Jenn, welcome to the show.

Jenn Lim (Jenn): Thank you so much for having me. It's never too many Jenn's in the room so.

Jen: Never, but you have two Ns and I have one N. So, at least we differentiate that way, right?

Jenn: That's right. Our own individual people.

Jen: I had a good childhood friend, also named Jen and they called us Jen 1 and Jen 2. So, we always fought over who was number one and who was number two. So anyway, Jenn with two Ns, tell us about your story. I want to know who you are. Tell us about your journey. We want to get to know you.

Jenn: Well, I guess I'll just start back from graduating and being a dotcom baby liked in the day. Dotcom days were crazy; money, title, status was huge; and it really flowed really easily, especially for someone that had an Asian American studies major. Luckily, I was able to swing a job, but as we all know, the dotcom busted, and I got spit out. I lost my job, got laid off, and then all in the same year 9/11 and my dad found out that he had Stage 3 colon cancer. And that hit me pretty hard for all those different reasons that you can imagine. But it really rearranged my life and my priorities, and the realization that I was chasing this ridiculous stuff of money, title, status when things are just so much more important in life. So, at that point, I just decided to switch gears and actually focus on what's most important. And I

realized without saying it, those were my values and without saying it, I was trying to figure out what my purpose was. So, at that point, I just knew that I had to switch gears into doing things that I had more sense control. I didn't want to get laid off again. I started becoming a consultant because I used to be a consultant in a big firm. So, I was just doing my own thing when I met Tony Hsieh, through a mutual friend and that's when he just became CEO of Zappos. We just connected really well. As Zappos grew, I grew with them, doing just random projects at the beginning, strategy, marketing, etc. But as culture wasn't a word back then, a buzzword yet, as they started developing more programs on that using scientific happiness and positive psychology, that was to me pretty revelatory of, 'Whoa, I don't have to be an existentialist all my life. I can actually apply things that people have learned already in data and research on these topics that really felt near and dear to me.' Being able to do that in a company setting experimentation-wise and a Petri dish was super-exciting and interesting. I did that for several years when the book deal for "Delivering Happiness" came about in 2010. That's when Tony and I launched that book. Then, lo and behold, we didn't know there's going to be a company coming out of it, but there was a demand for that, especially in the workplace. Lot of things that you talk about in your book and that was just a huge I guess for me awakening of people saying, 'Oh well, that's all good for Zappos, but can't happen in my place, my workplace.' I was just, 'No. I want to prove you wrong. I can. It has to be able to.' So, here we are fast forward 11 years later, still running Delivering Happiness and still feeling very optimistic about, even though we have so much stuff going around us to bring us down, but there's so much optimism as to what we can do for ourselves in the workplace and in our lives.

Jen: I mean, I hate using the word pivotal, but I'm going to use it. I do feel like we're at this pivotal moment where everybody because of the pandemic and what we've been living through is taking a little bit of a restock of their lives and their values, but let's talk about the workplace. So, I mean, I think even pre-pandemic, workplaces are often associated with being unhappy or stressed. How have we gotten to this place of work is synonymous with being burned out because I feel like that's so much of what we're hearing and saying and truly what so many people are feeling?

Jenn: I think the interesting part of this pivot that we're all going through is that we all knew the associations with workplaces being that way that it was just so hard to try and reframe those associations, especially before the pandemic, but then with the pandemic to try and make the most of a really unfortunate tragic situation for so many people in the world, especially within their work realm, I think that whole catalyst of we've been hearing future work for so long and the future of work is basically right now. We're all seeing it and its great resignation, the great awakening, whatever you want to call it, the great XYZ. I think it's just such a prime moment to not even just apply it to workplaces, but to really dig deep into our own lives and how they're so intertwined of how we spend our time basically.

Jen: So, let's talk about the word 'happy.' The word 'happy' or 'happiness' especially in the workplace because I think the word 'happy' can mean a lot of things. So, when you talk about creating happier workplace cultures and you do the work that you do with organizations, what does that actually mean and what does that look like?

Jenn: Yeah, the word happiness especially after 2020 or during 2020, after COVID hit, people wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole. They're just like, "what are you talking about, there's no way we could talk about happiness right now", and I totally resonated with that as a large reason why I named my book, "Beyond Happiness" because it's kind of like let's get rid of those perceptions of what happiness means and for us, we've always based it on the signs of and this goes all the way back to philosophical times of

Socrates and Aristotle hanging out, talking about what's the meaning of life. And Aristotle, famously known to say, happiness is the purpose of our existence, but more importantly, what he said was that happiness is dependent on ourselves. So, if I define happiness now, I still base it on those signs, but I think everyone has their own redefining of happiness. I don't know if you've noticed this too. Some people are coming to me and saying, or the frontline, they're saying I'm not even sure what happiness means anymore, but if I ground it, number one is being true to yourself, having that sense of inherent disposition of who we are as individuals. The second type of happiness is also pleasures that we all need a glass of wine, Netflix, binge those are all part of who we are and part of like how we derive a sense of happiness, but they're very fleeting and the most sustainable form of happiness that we know time and time again is purpose and we hear that word so much now. And that in itself, I think needs, defining too, but essentially, what are we doing is bigger than ourselves as companies, what are we doing that's greater than making more money and that's where a ground definition of happiness and that's the kind of conversations we start when we work with companies.

Jen: And so how does that translate? I guess you look at kind of individual happiness or purpose and then how that kind of translates into the workplace for the organizational purpose is that kind of what you're saying?

Jenn: More or less, because we pretty much try to plug in wherever the organization or the team the current state like some are really involved because they already have their purpose statement and they're big on cultural, they're big on people and somewhere on the other end of the spectrum where they're just like really not wanting to understand what that all even means on a day-to-day basis. So, I think the biggest thing that we've learned especially in the last few years is that nowadays it's not unusual. I mean you know to have companies with purpose and values and mission statements like it's a given. Now, we're seeing the more successful companies that implement all this stuff, is that when they're really actually sincere, when leaders are extra sincere about realizing they're not just checking off a box of things to do and prioritizing what culture is, and prioritizing what it means for, to actually treat your people better. It really comes down to when there's a leader that realizes is not a box to check off because they had some time or moments in their life where they reflected on their own life and what they're actually doing and why they're in this position? Then they realize that that purpose statement that they developed so committed to and tried to evolve because they want to be known for something bigger than making money until they connect it to every single person's individual purpose in a sincere and genuine way, then there's a gap, and I think that's what we've seen most effective, especially since the pandemic of those leaders that really take time to actually help, be the archaeologist or be the architect of what individuals purposes are and then helping that...to help define how you actually ladder that up and connect it in a more meaningful way to the purpose of the company.

Jen: Yeah, I think I mean, that really resonates with me and certainly something that we're seeing a lot of and a lot of conversations that I have in particular about purpose, because I think that and I know that this was true for me when I started to do the work to think about and discover my own personal purpose, it's like we tend to believe that purpose has to be, and it does need to be something that's bigger than us, but it doesn't actually have to change the world. I mean I struggled with defining personal purpose because I was like wow, I don't have skills to change the world or to do something that big and meaningful. And so, I think, like in coaching people to help them discover their personal purpose like what would you say to somebody, what does that look like.

Jenn: Well, it's actually kind of, it is tied to what you just said because sometimes people think it's so daunting like why does everyone else have a purpose but me like what's wrong with me and the thing I think number one is to remind everyone that it shouldn't be that daunting is at the end of the day the purpose our purpose evolves as we evolve. It evolves as the world around us evolves and we adapt to it in our own ways. So I think that would be the biggest reminder of number one before going into sort of any purpose, exercise, or even if you're just revisiting your purpose, which I think is like perfect time to do that, but how I would break it down is just...I would just put draft answers to these questions of number one what lights you up, which is like basically kind of energy question and it doesn't have to be what lights you up in a positive way, it could be a negative thing too. So, answering that question first and then looking at your talents naturally, what you bring to the world but also being self-aware enough to see what people are asking you to do naturally without even you know putting it out there, hey, I'm so talented in XYZ, but people see something in you that perhaps you might not. And then the third is basically impact and again it doesn't have to be this, I'm not going to change the world impact, it's just like in your immediate sphere at work in your life what kind of impact would you like to make, and do you think you can make. And by answering those three questions, that makes it a lot less daunting as to like my purpose statement for the rest of my life because it really makes it more immediate like to the time and place that we're living in right now.

Jen: I love it. I think that's super helpful to people, so let's kind of step back to like leaders and company cultures. And so, if you are a leader or you work with a leader that is kind of on the fence about agreeing or investing in making their company culture happier, what do you tell them like what are the benefits to doing this?

Jenn: Yeah, so I cannot break it down into stats and stories and for the biggest like I actually love working with naysayers because you might too either way, you're laughing. Because when they see the light it's like they're owning it for themselves. They're like, oh, that's why and so I start with the stats first, because there's a lot of, no offense to people that care about finances, we all need to see if those in the world exist for a reason, but starting with the stats of knowing that like Fortune's Top 100 Companies to Work For, basically those companies that double down on their people, they outperform the S&P 500 consistently they've done that for the last 15 years even in bad economies. What we're seeing also now is this greater uptake of venture capitalists and private equity firms that are putting money where their mouth is, showing how the companies that they group together that actually focus on people and therefore trying to make them happy or outperforming other companies in their portfolio. So, I start there and I and I go, you know, it can rattle off all these metrics and statistics on retention and attraction and burnout, especially right now being able to help all those different factors, the Great Resignation, all those different factors if we actually treat our people as an investment and an asset versus an expense. So we kind of start there, just to get the financiers like tuned in and then I go to the stories and the stories, I think especially for the naysayers is basically having a story self-reflecting within them, basically holding a mirror and like you mentioned coaching earlier, so I'm sure you're super familiar with this. It's like basically, you know, we come in, we're just holding a mirror, we're not actually telling them anything that they don't know already. It's really from within, but it's so fascinating to me when you just ask those simple questions like why did y'all start this in the beginning in the first place of your own professional career, of your own life and ask them to start reflecting on their moments of pivotal, I'm going to use it again, pivotal moments of the life and not just the highs because we also oftentimes associate happiness with our high moments, but also their lows and this has been a big kind

of key for us when we talk about happiness because our full belief is that it's not just learning from our highs but also really digging deep and sitting with, if not befriending, our lows and it's a large part of why I wanted to go beyond happiness because sometimes we forget that, and especially what happened in the last two years. It's been happening to everyone in being able to embrace our losses, embrace our grief, and embrace our failures along the way. And by doing these exercises with leaders like it becomes an easier evolution towards that sort of aha reawakening moment of oh, wow, this is me just trying to lead my people. This is about me being honest with myself and how I show up in the world and what it is that I bring that no one else can.

Jen: So I guess I mean as a leader or really just as a human being, but in the workplace obviously we have to do the work for ourselves first, but how can we as leaders or as colleagues like what can we do maybe kind of like immediately or in the short term, like what are some tips or strategies that to help us create a happier work culture and I would say in particular, like are there differences that you're seeing or recommending kind of like in virtual and hybrid versus things that you might have recommended when people and teams were kind of colocated together. I feel like that's the big question for everything right now like how does this work in a hybrid world.

Jenn: Sure, and in terms of the first question, like, what are some practical next steps that people can do and knowing that like as we talked about earlier, having a sense or having a purpose defined and having values defined for a company are defaults, you know, those are given. I think the most practical next step especially because so many of us are in motor hybrid is doing those exercises for everyone and by getting it out there, it's especially now when I think isolation is high, loneliness is high, depression is high that having those conversations I mean it's pretty amazing what people are more willing to share and more vulnerable and sharing, and especially of course, if we as leaders take the first step in doing that. Then there's a sense of psychological safety, and there's tons of stats on how by creating that psychological safety and not saying, hey, we're going to be a happier team now, we're going to be happier companies right now, let's be real.

Jen: Toxic positivity.

Jenn: Yeah, let's be up the realists, and it's so incredible to see just starting at if you have a huge company just starting at a team level and just seeing the interactions deepen, the conversations deepen beyond just what we're bingeing on Netflix is important. What we're happy hour drinking is going to be is important, but the richness of conversation and the level of how people just more instinctively are there for each other and basically showing up as human beings, not coworkers even behind screens as we all are most these days. So, I think that would be the next like practical step in and showing us a level of commitment and knowing that, it's not going to fix everything, they're not going to fix burnout 100%, but knowing that creating these social bonds is what the world is really looking for. So, I think you'd be able to see really cool results from that in itself knowing there's a lot of uncertainty. On the other side of that, with the hybrid model or the remote model, I think we need to remind ourselves that there's been companies out there that have been doing that full remote way before Covid. So, it is kind of let's learn from them. I mean, DHS is all we've been doing is, we have been remote since 2010. WordPress they've always been remote and purpose driven. They always had sort of sense of rigor to what that means because everyone starts thinking and now that we've all lived this work life integration for so long, that something is going to break that there's going to be time that people are just going to not stop working again because or not be so productive or not being so engaged and that's just not the reality of it. If we

do it intentionally, we build the structures with that intention of having the people side of it of rewarding and recognizing based on values based on our performance, not just the skill side, but what we contribute to others, what we contribute to our purpose or what we contribute to our culture, then you get a blend of both worlds, so that's where I think hybrid or remote, no matter how long it lasts, which is going to just increase for as we know future works is now we just embed little things along the way. Like instead of starting a meeting with just diving in agenda, take 5 minutes to ask a question about one of our values, who was your favorite like person this week that did something that spotlighted this value, or like what was one meaningful thing that happened to you yesterday and just throw it in the chat or throw it in a Google Doc and it totally democratizes everything, like even the introverts have something to say right, because they say oftentimes the most interesting things to say, but I think if we can reframe it and make technology our friend, then it's actually a prime time for us to be able to even be more engaged and connected to each other.

Jen: I love that and I wholeheartedly agree with that. So, do you and you don't have to name names here, but do you have, like a favorite example or two of companies that you have worked with personally that were able to turn their company cultures around and kind of what are those stories because I think like you said at the beginning, people often tend to say, oh no, that that wouldn't happen at my company, or that couldn't happen at my company like, do you have a favorite story of like even maybe a company or client you worked with that maybe you even had doubts about and but then it was completely turned around.

Jenn: Yeah, I do. There's so many.

Jen: That's good in it. You're making an impact. I like to hear that.

Jenn: It's so hard to pick one and it's hard not to name them because they are usually proud of what they do, but I guess one that comes to mind. So, there's a construction real estate company out in the Middle East, Egypt specifically, and they came to us saying we want to, they thought it was all about customers and like what's this culture thing we want to put it in our company, and it was more of that kind of notion of checking it off the box of things to do. It's not that they weren't sincere about it, they just were really understanding what it really means. But once we started diving deeper into it, this company, took it to heart, they were like, oh wow, this is not just for our customers, this is for us and going through these exercises and making it accessible to all, so it wasn't like the senior leadership meeting that did this offsite, came back with values etc. They included everyone in the company, created their higher purpose, created their values, weren't as far and this is a huge one to create behaviors out of them so that they're specific, black and white, like you don't go down the path of Enron where their number one value is integrity that kind of thing, just to make sure everyone is on the same colloquial page and aligned knowing that we're all in this together and they saw the results. I mean, they saw their revenues go up, they saw there are levels of productivity and engagement, but they took it to the next step and what I love about them is they realized the immediate effect for themselves. And then they realized how much attached to their purpose. Being a construction real estate, their tagline was we build happiness and it's something that liked, it sounded good, but then they realized, oh, that's actually what we do. So, what they did was they redesigned their whole headquarters and did it in a way that it was all about their values and all about their higher purpose so that they had conference rooms that were named after their values, they had walkways, they created walkways specifically to collaborate more between different functions. They created things where you opened the door and if it was your

birthday or something or depending who you are with your security card, they'd play your favorite song. I mean things like that, just they realized the physical space and then betting means values were so import and then they went further than that, so they were like, yeah, this is pretty cool. They realized they had a greater purpose, so that's why they decided, we're going to actually help other companies do this too, and so we see this kind of rippling effect. So, they're now helping other companies embed purpose and values. In a systemic way for results. They're also redesigning their construction projects and their developments for housing for communities around positive psychology around the sense of connectedness and being able to have a sense of development and progress through learning and education programs. So, it really blew my mind because they reflected like wow this did so much for us, we want to do it for our teams, our customers and our community at large, and that's how they grew from just that one project.

Jen: I love that, and it sounds like I want to like find out who this company is and go buy one of their homes. Or at least rent it and live in it for a little while.

Jenn: Yeah, totally. I mean, Egypt is a pretty beautiful place, just hanging out by the pyramids. It's not bad.

Jen: Yeah, so, so let's talk a little bit about your book. You've mentioned it a few times, but I want to dig into why beyond happiness. Can you talk about how you arrived at that, what it means, and you've talked about this a little bit already, but I wanted to dig deeper into why you went to beyond and kind of what all is that about and what will we learn from your book?

Jenn: Yeah, I mean, we talked a little bit about this before we started this podcast because we both were writing during the pandemic. Yeah, and I don't know if it was this case for you, but I I'm curious to hear, but every time something hit the headlines in the media I was just like what the hell, like there's I can't I write the book I was supposed to write like the outline that the publisher accepted and it was just not enough for me. And so, with COVID and then the recession and then social unrest and then ultimately for me and everyone had this in some form or another, but one of my lowest lows was losing my business partner and one of my best friends, Tony, at the end of 2020. And so that's what brought me to the beyond part because when I first started it was like I'm just going to capture all these stories, stats and stories about all these companies and governments and hospital systems that are doing this amazing work so people can realize they can do it too, and that was not enough anymore, especially seeing how many people were, what they were going through and going and suffering in in many ways and I don't use that term lightly, so that's where I took the book to get real about that subject matter everyone has their own perception of happiness and there's a lot of greatness and positivity to be discussed around that, but until we actually are able to embrace the lows and our shadows within ourselves, and therefore us as leaders and therefore our teams and companies, then we can only go so far. The whole cliché of you don't really know your highs until you know your lows is actually true. But to actually experience and be able to, as you said earlier, do the work within ourselves. Then we really don't get to experience that full gamut of what that really means, so that's why I wanted to bring that to light to the table of what really is happiness and what's beyond it, and how companies now and organizations and teams can actually integrate and embed that in a way that makes people feel like it's not just a happiness we're talking about anymore, it's just about being human beings to one another.

Jen: Yeah, I think you ended up with the right book. Funny how we go down that path I think in many ways our paths are similar because there's a a lot in our book about the impact that technology has had

on our ability to develop and sustain meaningful relationships in the workplace and we were writing it at a time when really the only thing keeping us connected to our colleagues and many of our loved ones was our technology and so we kind of had to step back and say, ok, wait a minute. How do we actually use technology to augment those relationships or what makes us human but not replace it? And so, I think certainly we had perhaps a similar rethinking of like, ok, what do we really want to say here and how has what we're going through changed or enhanced our perspective a little bit, I love it.

Jenn: Yeah, I mean. I love what you did too. I mean, it's beautiful how you were able to capture that and who knew like technology being our ally and all that stuff.

Jen: So and it's not going away, so we do need to figure out how to use it better to make us better humans or bring forward our humanity and I have a lot of hope. I think there's a lot of opportunity there so. Well Jen, is there any final words of wisdom? This has been great. I love the fact that there's been some practical tips and takeaways. I like to have that throughout the show, but any last pieces of wisdom you want to leave the listeners with.

Jenn: Oh, wow. I guess part of it is just the whole daunting thing. It doesn't have to be and even though these like big questions are happening around us in terms of how do we work? Where do we work? What role do we want to take? How do we prioritize basically the minutes of our day, knowing we had a lot of time to reflect on are we spending it the right way? Like those kinds of questions. If we can just reframe it in a way so that it's not so daunting and it really is just about the simple things of what means the most and prioritizing around that it helps these big lofty sort of legacy questions get simplified and that impacts our daily actions and behaviors. And most of all I think it impacts the way we connect and love one another.

Jen: I love that. We're ending on a perfect note, so thank you for that. And thank you for being on the show.

Jenn: Thank you so much Jen. Let's do this together. We've got so much of this going on.

Jen: We do absolutely. This is just the beginning, I think. I'm so grateful Jenn could be with us today to talk about how to make our workplaces happier. Thank you to our producers, Revit 360 and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on deloitte.com or you can visit various podcatchers using the keyword WorkWell all one word to hear more and if you like the show don't forget to subscribe so you get all of our future episodes. If you have a topic you'd like to hear on the WorkWell podcast series, or maybe a story you would like to share, please reach out to me on LinkedIn. My profile is under the name Jen Fisher or on Twitter at JenFish23. We're always open to your recommendations and feedback. And of course, if you like what you hear, please share post and like this podcast. Thank you and be well.