

The All Means ALL Podcast Season 3, Episode 63

Audio Transcript

[opening]

Carolyn: Welcome to All Means ALL. I'm Carolyn O'Hearn.

Sara: And I'm Sara Pericolosi. We are two inclusive education enthusiasts striving to shift mindsets

C: Challenge the status quo

S: And open more doors for all students

C: In all settings

S: All of the time.

C: Hello, hello! Sara and I are super excited. We have a fabulous guest with us tonight. We have Kim Strobel with us from Strobel Education. Kim has been a teacher, a consultant, an administrator, and now she's a motivational speaker and a happiness coach. Kim's also the author of Teach Happy, Small Steps to Big Joy. Both Sara and I have read it and been excited about it. And we are really, we're thrilled to have you here with us tonight, Kim. So thank you so much for taking time out of your day to meet with us and connect with our listeners and talk about positivity and happiness. And what, what do our, what do we do when our educators are at that point of, do I stay or do I go welcome?

Kim: Well, thank you for that introduction. And, you know, Carolyn, I think I always laugh because when I get introduced as a happiness coach, I feel like. You know, 80 percent of the crowd hates me before I even step out on the stage because they're like, okay, is this going to be somebody like a cheerleader who's going to get up there and going to preach all this positivity and like, just focus on the good and show up and do your very best for the students because the students deserve your very best. And, and so it's kind of funny, right? Because I call it out, right? When I entered the stage, I'm like, believe it or not, I am not into toxic positivity at all. And I feel like. Like, we all know that having a positive brain is gonna, is gonna get us further in life. But that does not mean that we have to negate the heart of our lives, and I feel like We don't talk about the heart and we don't give teachers the space to talk about it. And I, I really do feel like teachers are going up and down the hallway and they're smiling and they're laughing and they're talking and hugging the students. And then many times they're in tears, driving home and highly irritable and completely stressed. And, you know, nobody knows that everybody's suffering because we all just kind of put forth our best face when we're at school and I really feel like in order to To get people to have and cultivate happiness habits. We have to acknowledge the heart of the profession. The bottom line is, the paycheck is probably never going to mirror the value that you bring to classrooms. We know that the cognitive demand, which is the amount of time needed in order to do the daily tasks that a teacher has, is never going to be enough. It's not enough time to get it all done. And so what I tell people is, you know, we can all focus on what's wrong with the system all day long. But the bottom line is the system probably isn't going to change. And what I like to do is focus on how you operate in that system. Because what I have found in my own life is when I, when I learned that I am the only

thing I can control, then I relieve a lot of suffering in my life. And I give myself a little bit of my power back. I want to clarify that because this is not some frivolous, you know, like, Get your head out of the gutter. Or I don't know, toxic positivity to me is, you know, when somebody says, look, you know, I'm super stressed. I have seven kids who were completely out of control today. And I just don't know if I can keep handling it. And then somebody says, Oh, well, at least you're not such and such, you know, she's got so and so and so and so. No, like quit, we don't have to do like that societal comparison where we say, gosh, I'm not allowed to have my hard work because somebody else's is worse than mine. And I really feel like we need to start acknowledging whatever the feeling is that a person is having and then eventually pivot.

C: I love that you brought up the toxic positivity and I think it's twofold, right? So it's us comparing ourselves to everyone else. So oh, well, at least I'm not in this classroom. I know they have it harder. They've got these students who are having some behavioral challenges right now. I only have five students and they have ten and so it's a lot harder in that room and so it's one thing. For the transcript, you have to have it translated into English. You have to have that comparison yourself. It's also the other thing to be on the receiving end. So when I come to you, or if I come to Sara, and say, you know, this day was hard. It was, this happened, this happened at home, this happened too. And then it's reflected and Sara comes back and says, well, at least it didn't happen to you. Like, at least this didn't happen.

It's that twofold of like, am I reflecting on, on these comparisons? And is it being reflected back to me? I think as an administrator, I want to hear about those hard days, right? I want to hear those hard moments. It's really hard not to be like, okay, but we also like to think about what we do have. Like, I know we don't have all the things, but think about what we do have, but also really taking that moment to acknowledge. Yeah, today was crap. Like, I'm, I'm sorry. And, and how can I help support you moving forward? Not erasing what happened today, but how do we move forward as a team, as a collective, versus saying, well, try again tomorrow. Good luck. See you later. Have a good night.

K: Yeah, you know that one sentence you used, how can I support you? You know, like, because I, I also don't believe in being a negative Nelly and we all have those in our schools, you know, the people who just complain and complain and complain and complain. So I'm also going to go on record and say, look, we want, we don't want any part of that either. But like you said, it's like acknowledging the hard and then saying, what can we do together to solve this problem? Or what can I do to support you? That sentence right there is so powerful.

S: For me, as I was reading your book, I was reflecting on conversations that I've had with educators when I've been. On the side that's just like, man, I just need to get this, these feelings out so that I can process and move forward. And one of the things that really resonated as I was reading it is in it you talk about how we have heavy feelings and we have a tendency of pushing them down. And that so often when I'm coming to somebody with those feelings, what I'm really looking for is somebody to actively listen to me and to see me and to, to also make me feel heard, that my concerns are heard, and that I'm valued, and then so often, we talk about this a

ton, about how you have to avoid that advice monster, to like, we all want to jump in and solve something, and I think Carolyn, your response perfectly highlighted, how can I support you, and recognizing that support for people looks different too.

K: Yeah, that's really important. Support for people does look different. And so you have to know your people, don't you? I'm kind of giggling to myself because my mom really was, she's very like a loving and nurturing person, but she doesn't mean to, but she does use toxic positivity on me when I'm having those heavy feelings.

Like the other day I said, I am just so completely stressed out with work. I'm working so many hours and she's like, But you're the happiest coach and you love what you do. You even posted on Facebook that you love your job so much. And I was just like, oh my gosh, like I do love a big part of my job a lot of the time.

But like, I'm also allowed to say this really sucks sometimes. Like I'm tired of pulling the long hours this week or whatever. And she just, she just doesn't know how to emotionally support me. I don't think we're taught those skills. And honestly, I have some of those skills, but I really had to build them.

You know, my assistant, Emma, who's like a young 33 year old, she was a teacher and she's now my full, like, my assistant. She's, like, really taught me how to hear people and how to listen and how to validate their feelings.

C: Just thinking about how both can be true, right? I can love my job and I feel like that's so true for all of our teachers and all of our educators, our ancillary, our administrators. We love our jobs. And it is hard work. And we have hard days where we are second guessing everything. Like, did I choose the right path? Do I want to stay with it? Do I want to have a sick day today? Like what, but, but also on that flip side saying, no, I, I know I'm showing up for these learners. I'm showing up for my colleagues. I'm showing up for the team, but both can be true. And I feel like so often, especially with that toxic positivity, it's one or the other. Well, but you love it. But, Kim, you're the happiness coach. You love your job. Well, yes. And. This and it's hard today. So it's not hard or you love it. It's not the or it's that and piece That's a

K: Great point.

S: I I'm gonna be honest I also was the educator and I still am as I was reading your book and looking around my office and like I have quotes all over and I'm known as like the quote person, but it really resonated that what we're after is that healthy positivity and, and how can we really approach it from an authentic way. And you do, that was the part where I was like, I can be both happy and sad at the same time. And for me, I've noticed since I've started reading your book, I'm even doing it with my own children by labeling their emotions when they come, you know, Hey, it really seems like this is how you're feeling. Can you tell me more about that? And it's been really fun as a parent, because I think that naturally I didn't learn some of these skills from

my parents, and I'm having to learn them as an adult. And I'm hoping that by learning it in my 40s, I can teach it to my children when they're in their early life.

K: Oh, right. You know, Sara, I think that we were taught by well intentioned parents that feeling angry or upset Or stressed or sad was wrong. Right? They didn't mean to, but we were taught like, Hey, you know, dry up those tears and move on, you know, life isn't that bad little Kimmy. And, you know, we tend to parent somewhat in the same way. And what I've learned from my own therapist is like, you can never fight with a feeling that is valid. It's not, you didn't have a right to get angry over that, Kim. Like, even if my husband says that, like, Kim, why did you get, you didn't have a right, actually, a feeling is a feeling. So there's no right or wrong to it.

C: So I really love that you brought that up. Can we talk about some of the happiness research that you've looked into to kind of think about, like, where did we even, how, where did this stem from? And positive psychology you dove deep in the book. So readers and listeners, go, go find this book for sure. Read more about it. But for those who are listening to this quick little snippet, what does the research say? Is it all genetics? Is it all based on our circumstances? I know, right?

K: It's fascinating. And yeah, the happiness research is just astonishing. And when I learned about it 20 years ago, it just completely fired me up. By the way, I have to share this too real quickly. And I, I know you read about it in the story, but for anybody talking, I am a happy person a whole lot of the time. I have enthusiasm. I have a lot of joy in my life and I also still have a lot of heart in my life, but my road to getting here was really filled with intense suffering and darkness. And I know there's a chapter in the book that really tells people what I went through, but it was one of the greatest sufferings in my life. Luckily for me, it opened the gateway. To the personal development field and that's where I discovered the happiness research And so I always just want to say that because I feel like you know I have to validate myself and that I'm not somebody who just always felt happy in my life And in fact, I've had you know severe things in my life that were really difficult to get over. I just want the listeners to know that about me. And I tell the whole story on the stage, but, anyway, the happiness research says that you and I, we all have what's called a set baseline happiness level. So mine might be, I don't know. I'm just gonna make this up five out of 10 and Sara, maybe you're eight out of 10. Okay. And so that's your baseline. So good things happen to Sara and I, we go shopping for the day. Something exciting happens with one of our kids. We get married this week, whatever it is. And our happiness level goes up for a period of time. It might elevate for two hours. Two days or two months, but it elevates and it always comes back to whatever your baseline is. Now, what's been proven true, and astonishingly so, is the same is true for when we endure really hard things in our lives. Human beings can endure challenges, adversities, stress, trauma, illness, disease, and their happiness levels will drop for a period of time, but the brain has this, this thing called hedonic adaptation where it automatically sets back to baseline. So then Carolyn, Sara and I were all like, well, why do we all have different baseline happiness levels? Why is Sara's different from mine and Kim's is different from Carolyn's? And so what we know is that 50%. Of your long term happiness. is genetic. It comes from your mom or dad or a mixture of both. And

girls, when I say this to the crowd, I'm not kidding you, the heads drop. And I even hear people murmuring like, Oh my gosh, I'm so screwed. But there is a genetic tendency, just like there's a genetic tendency towards weight gain, towards Skin color. There's the genetic tendency towards whether your brain looks for negative more than it does positive and that is in correlation to your happiness levels. But don't lose hope yet. Stay with me. Where I think the happiness research got super exciting and really shook me. We can take every single external circumstance you've been in. So what kind of home did you grow up in? Were your parents married, single, divorced, widowed? Did you have money? Did you not have money? Were you bullied? Were you popular? Every single scenario, how much money you make as an adult, what kind of home you live in, what kind of car do you drive, what kind of job do you have, you can take every external circumstance and you can throw it in the pie and the research still shows you that all of those things only account for about 10 percent of our long term happiness levels. But if you're like Kim Strobel, you let some people In some situations, still way more than 10 percent for far too long, right? And I, and I want to be clear, I'm talking about long term happiness. So I'm not saying, you know what if my husband decided to divorce me tonight, I am positive that more than 10 percent of my happiness levels would be stolen for a while, as they should be. We're not saying, it's always going to be 10%. But what we are saying is that, you know, But a year later, two years later, if I'm still letting that divorce rob me of all my happiness, then at some point that's on me because it is an external circumstance. And what we're looking at is long term happiness levels. So like in general, right, about 10%. And I want to stop right there before I give you all the last statistic, because was that shocking to you girls?

C: Yes. Yeah. It feels like all of the circumstances make up way more than 10 percent in the long run. Like, okay, the genetic piece, that doesn't, that doesn't surprise me. Like, okay, that's fine. But I really thought day in and day out, like I, my happiness is built on the circumstances around me. And it just feels like if I have a crummy year, 2024 was crummy for our family. And it just feels like. We're, we're dipping and we're down and long term, it's kind of, it's still mulling, but also and that's okay, right? That's what I was, you know, starting with is like, oh, well, of course, like all of these things piling up. It's not just the one instance where we can bounce back to our baseline. It's okay. Well, then now it's gonna take a little longer because this is a little heavier and this is gonna take a little longer, but we're slowly getting back up to that baseline piece.

S: As I was reading it, I found hope in it, like, okay, so 10, about 10%, right? That is a small percentage and, and what I can't wait for, Kim, is for you to tell our listeners about what leaves that other 40%. Because that's where for me, as I was reading that, I was like, man, I have control, like I have a lot. To say in my life in terms of happiness and I want to learn what are the practices and how can I move forward? Living just a truly happy life.

K: Yes And so regardless of your genetics and regardless of your external circumstances What we know is that human beings have the ability to increase their happiness goals by up to 40 percent and I like you was like, okay Who doesn't want to raise their happiness levels by up to 40%? And so these three things, the thoughts you're thinking, so we're going back to the brain, right? And the neuroscience of the brain, the actions you're taking or not taking. And the

behaviors or habits that you can place in your life. So when we focus on those three things, we raise your happiness levels. And why is this important in the workplace? I will tell you why. Because when I can get you to cultivate happiness habits in your life, I can get your brain to be more positive than negative, neutral, or stressed. You are going to be 31% more productive at your job. When I can get your brain into positive versus negative, neutral, or stressed, you're going to be 10 times more engaged in your job. Three times more creative in 23 percent less stressed. So this is why I don't just go to school. You guys, I did a keynote for the FBI recently on the science of happiness because they're like looking at productivity levels. They're looking at the, the, the jaded. for, for good reason, the jaded brains because of the situations they all have to deal with. And so we know there's a direct correlation when we teach you how to prioritize your happiness, you actually then begin to move the lever in every single area of your life.

S: What I love about what you just said is when, when you prioritize your happiness. And as I was reading that, I was thinking about my life, and I can reflect on times where I know that I was in flow, which we're going to talk about in a little bit, but where I know that I was prioritizing my happiness, that I was prioritizing myself. And as educators, we tend to give so much away to other people. For me, as I read this book, and I've listened to some of your keynotes, and That for me was like, yes, I need to give myself permission to put myself first and to also, and not feel guilty. My friends joke a lot with me that I don't have this mom guilt that so many of my friends have. Sometimes it's finding that peace and that joy and saying it is okay to put myself first.

K: Yeah. Well, first of all, Sara, you need to write a book on mom guilt because we need major, major help in that area. And you're right. I, okay. Do either of you have daughters by chance?

S: I do. Yes.

C: I only have sons.

K: So, this is what I always say. I feel like women are expected to work a full time job today as if they do not have children. And I feel like women are expected to raise children as if they do not have a full time job. So this is, this is part of the problem. So our, you know, we, we are, God love our partners and our husbands, but they were raised by generations of men who went out to the workforce and worked and had zero responsibility, raising the kids, household chores, managing the house, right? All of that. And so like, they're just doing what was modeled for them. But the issue is, is this 2025 and most women have to work a full time job, but we have not relinquished any of our responsibilities in some relationships that they, the men, do more, but these are conversations that you have to start having. I also want to reiterate that most of us who go into teaching are type A, perfectionistic, overly ambitious, which all has its perks, but I will also go on record and say we get in our own darn way, right, like this is going back to like Part of this is Kim Strobel. She won't leave until every single box is checked, until every eye is dotted, until her desk is nice and neat and pretty little piles, even if it means that she had to work an extra hour to get it. That is on Kim Strobel. And so, and I see both of you through the screen

just like shaking your head. Yes. And so what I really want to teach people is to get out of their own way. Right. And two, again, I'm going to go back to taking your power back because there's more there for you to grab. And the reason I asked if you have daughters is I always think, especially with daughters, you are showing your daughter How, like she's watching every move. So does she see a mom who is completely exhausted, who gives up herself constantly to everyone else to deplete her entire resources? Or is she raised with a mom who loves herself enough to know that she counts too? So like, does she see that mom actually does things for herself? Sometimes. She actually chooses herself over her kids at times. Is she raised with a mom who understands that her mother's physical health is super important? And I always say that, like, we're modeling to our daughters. We're either modeling, look, look, look, little girl. Someday, this is what your life's gonna be like. You're gonna barely be able to breathe because you're gonna give everything you're all because you were taught that you come last on the bandwagon. Or are they raised with a mom who shows, look, I love and value myself outside of motherhood, outside of being a teacher. And I'm going to model that behavior to you young one so that you know someday when you're married and you have a job that you count too.

S: So, so much truth in all of that. For me, that is constantly something that I'm thinking about is what are we modeling for our children? When you mentioned the type A personality, we both are laughing over here because that is us at our heart. But recognizing as I'm reading and just diving into just a really reflective time in my life, I am thinking about when my kids look back on this time, when I look back on this time, when What is the story that I want to tell? As I was reading this book, I have to tell you, I finally got myself back on the treadmill after a year or so hiatus. That for me was like, okay, I need to find something again that brings me joy. And as I've been spending more time with myself and giving myself that permission to, Hey, you know what? I'll read that book with you in a little bit, but right now I'm going to go and go for a run first. I find that when I get back up, I'm able to connect in a different way with my children and with my family than I was before.

C: We talk a lot about what our daughters are seeing, but also what are our sons seeing who are going to be this next generation, if they choose to find a partner and be their own, uh, be a parent as well, but also just thinking, like, are they seeing that? It's okay. It's acceptable that it's the mom, it's the wife, it's, it's this partner who's coming home and working and then shouldering the housework and then also the one who's taking care of the laundry and, and taking us places and arranging the play dates. I think that's also something. Just even personally thinking about what are my boys being taught now at 5 and 8 so that when they're 15 and 18 that they have a solid foundation when they're 25 and 28 and even more solid foundation and When they find their partner that it it truly is the partnership not just oh, well I'm going to work you figure it out. Just like all the women have for a century.

K: Yeah, I have a son, he's 24, and it's like, I am trying to turn him into the man that I would want to be married to as a woman. Like, you know, when you're raising them when they're little, you are trying to do that. And I also will tell you that I've interviewed, like, so many students, and I've always asked them the good old question, like, who's your favorite teacher? But the second

question was the one that was way more powerful, which was why. And I want to tell you that over and over again, I got a version of the same two answers and the first one did not surprise me. It was, I can really tell my teacher cares about me. She really cares about us. That one didn't surprise me because we know that love trumps everything. But the other answer I got over and over again is that I can tell my teacher's happiness. She's really happy to be there. She really likes teaching. And you know, Spencer wrote me a letter when he graduated college. It was really wonderful and just, you know, said all the things that he appreciates about me. And in that letter he said, I've been raised by a mom who's happy and it's meant everything to me and he said his friends will tell him that your mom is so happy. We just love being around her because she's a really happy person. And again, I'm not going to say that there aren't times that I'm mad. I mean, my husband would be the first to tell you like all the emotions, right? Like I'm an intense person. It's like when I'm mad, I'm mad. When I'm sad, I'm sad. But I thought. How wonderful, like, I know I didn't do everything right with him, but boy, I will take that little little compliment he gave me about having a mom who's happy, you know, and that he saw that and I did prioritize my well being even while I raised him. I did.

S: In your book you talk about that if then game that we play with ourselves and that, that for me really resonated because I always say that if I'm productive enough If I get enough things done on my list, then I can go for a run, or then I'll meet up with my friends for dinner. As I was reading that, I'm like, I am totally that person, and I'm guilty of it. So, taking that time, every time I hear myself starting in my head now. Reminding myself that we don't have to earn happiness. We don't have to earn the opportunity. And it's not selfish when I put myself first, it's that I'm really, when I show up for the people that I love and care about, they get the best version of me.

K: It really is true. And I will tell anybody who's listening, because I think all your listeners are agreeing with this. But, do you have the courage to do it even though it's going to feel really uncomfortable the first time you do it, right? Like when you had to tell your kids, actually mommy's going to go run and I'm not going to read you a book right now. I'm sure you felt Well, you might not have because you said you don't struggle with it as much, but I did.

C: I felt guilty. I'll say that. Yeah,

K: This is about changing behavior, even though changing the behavior feels uncomfortable because you literally have to rewire the neuroplasticity in your brain so that one day, 20 days, 30 days later, you take the run and you don't have the guilt.