

Shrink Rap Radio #653, August 8, 2019, Live Each Day with Best-Selling Author Jim McCarthy

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Jim McCarthy

(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Bridget Zoot)

Introduction: It’s Shrink Rap Radio, all the psychology you need to know and just enough to make it dangerous. It’s all in your head. And now here’s your host, Dr. Dave.

Dr. Dave: My guest today is Jim McCarthy MBA, who is a TEDx speaker and best-selling author of *Live Each Day: A Surprisingly Simple Guide to Happiness*. For more information about Jim McCarthy, please see our show notes at ShrinkRapRadio.com. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Jim McCarthy, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Jim McCarthy: Thank you, Dr. Dave. It’s great to meet you and spend some time talking with you.

Dr. Dave: Well, it’s great to have you here. We’re going to be discussing your 2019 book, *Live Each Day: A Surprisingly Simple Guide to Happiness*, which sounds wonderful. We can all use more of that. But before we get into that, let’s start with your personal story.

Jim McCarthy: Anywhere, in particular, you would like me to begin?

Dr. Dave: Well, like you did in your book, I think if you touch on your educational background, and the corporate work that you did, and then your health.

Jim McCarthy: Sure. At a high level, I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, and then I was fortunate enough to study in Vienna for a year. I had a chance to graduate from the University of Iowa, and then I studied in Germany for a year. And then I was an English Teacher in Frankfurt, for a couple years, in Germany. Then I moved to Spain and worked as a business journalist in Madrid for a couple years. And then after that, I came to the Bay Area, the San Francisco Bay Area in 1991. So it feels like a lifetime ago.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Jim McCarthy: Worked in —

Dr. Dave: That’s where I am, by the way. You probably know that. I’m about an hour north of San Francisco.

Jim McCarthy: Yeah, you’re up in Sonoma, right?

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes, that’s right. Let me just ask you — it seems like you had a very varied beginning. What does that say about you? Something about your personality in there, I think.

Jim McCarthy: I think I learned early on to be curious. My parents loved travel, especially my dad, and as kids, we didn’t do any extravagant international travel the way a lot of younger

people do today. I got a taste for travel and loving that, and then, I always loved history and political science. So when I had a chance to study and do a junior year abroad in Vienna, I jumped on that opportunity in 1984-1985. At that point, I think that's really where my whole world opened up, right? Coming from Omaha, Nebraska, to go from there to University of Iowa to Vienna.

Dr. Dave: I can imagine.

Jim McCarthy: It was really, pretty mind-blowing. And I think what I learned is that you can travel and really experience the world and enjoy life without having to have a lot of money. You need a little money, a little bit of money, and it helps to not have a ton of student loans and that kind of thing. With even a little bit of money, staying at youth hostels, and traveling really frugally, you can have a pretty fun experience and adventures. And then I got a job teaching in Frankfurt, which didn't pay a lot. But I really enjoyed doing that and living in Germany and improving my German. And then I moved on to Spain from there.

Dr. Dave: How did these international experiences change your worldview, if at all, or your view of the US in relation to the rest of the world, etc?

Jim McCarthy: Well, so it dramatically changed the way I looked at the world in many ways, and I've never recovered from that. I'm very grateful that I had the opportunity to learn how the people in Germany or in Austria, Northern Europe thought about things. But then I traveled to Spain and Italy and saw a very different approach towards life. Which I actually write about a little bit in my book about this sort of Northern European Protestant approach to work ethic. And I know these are huge generalizations. But I also, as a huge generalization, saw people in France, in Spain, in Italy, working hard but also playing hard, and really enjoying themselves a lot. Not getting too stressed out about things. Working to live rather than living to work. I've always had in the back of my mind that things can be very good from a work perspective. But if you're always working, and you're a total workaholic, and you don't know how to step back and enjoy yourself, that can have some dire consequences. Both in terms of how much you enjoy your every day, every week, or every month. But also, perhaps, the impact it can have on your health both physically and mentally.

Dr. Dave: Right. OK, so then moving along, you returned to the US at some point and began a different kind of career?

Jim McCarthy: Yeah, yeah, when I was in Spain, I was thinking, "Gosh I'm tired of being poor. Europe has been fun, but I've been here for six years. I want to earn a little bit more money. I want to get more serious about my career." I figured that I'd go back to the US, work hard, get some sort of corporate job, and then try to get into the best business school that I could. And fortunately, I was lucky enough to get into Stanford for business school, back in 1994, and graduated there in '96. And then in '97, I went to Yahoo as employee #258, which was a prime time —

Dr. Dave: That's early, I guess, right?

Jim McCarthy: Pretty good. Someone the other day described me as almost a cofounder. I said, no, no, no, that's not at all — no, I don't deserve that kind of credit. It was great to go there. It was really fun. I was very blessed to have that opportunity because it was just a cool place to be, working with smart, talented, hardworking people, and having a great impact on a really revolutionary new industry. So that was very fortunate, going to Yahoo, and pretty much for the 20 years after that, I worked at different internet companies.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, Yahoo. So what was your position at Yahoo? What were you there to do?

Jim McCarthy: Initially, my job was Senior Producer. It's like a project manager for Yahoo Classifieds. From that, we created Yahoo Personals, Yahoo Autos, Yahoo Real Estate, Yahoo Careers. And these are all parts of the internet that have become very big in their own right. Whether it's online dating, whether it's selling stuff online, whether it's finding a job online, real estate. These are all huge, huge industries all in their own right. And honestly, we've lost the battle to many companies that were very focused on different aspects, real estate, or careers, or whatever. We played a role in developing the usage of the internet and for people to use those products. So that was one of the things. I also worked on international rollouts for Yahoo Auctions around the world, Yahoo Shopping, e-commerce. So this is 1997 to 2001, so before social media, before YouTube. Google was just starting to really pick up some speed at that time, but it was fascinating. I consider myself very lucky to have been part of that experience.

Dr. Dave: Something about that that strikes my funny bone is that you wanted to get serious about your business life, and so you go to a place called Yahoo, which is an immature sounding name. We used to call people "Yahoos" who were out of it.

Jim McCarthy: Yes, well the company had an irreverent approach, and I've blogged about this before that, I once read a blog post called, "The Hippie Values that made Yahoo the Coolest Company in the World."

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Jim McCarthy: And it's funny because for someone today looking at that, if they even remember who Yahoo was, it's not so obvious, but at the time the company had a very funky, irreverent, almost Grateful Dead approach. And from where you are in Sonoma, Dave, you probably know, a lot of the early Deadheads were some of the first online communities of the internet. So it's not random, there's this DNA on the internet which is very anti-authoritarian, community-driven, but very innovative and kind of do your own cool thing. And that's part of what Silicon Valley has traditionally had as part of its DNA. I think that's less and less the case today, but if you look back at the internet from let's say, the very roots, let's say the 1980s and the '90s, that was quite a fascinating aspect of the web.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I got very into it in the 1980s, very excited about it. Got involved in market research just so that I could — that was a way in, to participate in what was going on. And you're speaking of the irreverence is reminding me of a company that was called, "Kentucky Fried Computers," which later became NorthStar, which no longer is around, but they were a very strong leader for a while. As happens in Silicon Valley, things can turn over very, very

quickly. So, now another significant milestone that you touch on in the book, is you had a major health challenge. Tell us about that, and what the impact of that was on your life?

Jim McCarthy: Yeah, so on February 5, 2013, my doctor called me up and told me I have cancer. And I was sitting in the car, my shiny BMW convertible, in a strip mall in Mountain View, in the heart of Silicon Valley, and I hear him talking about surgery, and radiation, and survival rates.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Jim McCarthy: It really freaked me out. I mean, I went home. I cried for a couple hours. I called my mom and dad and brothers and sister. Drank almost an entire bottle of Kendall-Jackson Chardonnay Wine, and then I started writing in my diary. And out of me started pouring forth all these questions I had because I had never really felt my mortality on a visceral level before. And we all know we're going to die on an intellectual level, but this is the first time in my gut that I really realized that this skin someday will be just as cold as the marble countertop where I'm sitting. So in writing all these questions on the day I got my cancer diagnosis, I was asking questions. I think I wrote like 37 questions. I was writing questions like, "Who's going to be at my death bed? How long am I going to live? What's my legacy? What are my regrets? Why won't it change? How are my relationships? What do I think about the work that I've done? If I live another two years or twenty years or fifty years going forward, what do I want to do? How do I want to live?" And this was a real breakthrough for me. And a couple weeks later, I saw a friend of mine named Diane who through Facebook I saw that she also had cancer. She and I used to work together at Yahoo. She was the first head of corporate communications there, was a very smart, successful woman. And we get together for lunch in Los Gatos in Silicon Valley, and I say, "Diane, I don't even feel like I'm in the same league as you. I mean, I have early-stage prostate cancer. It's quite common in men. We decided to not even treat it yet because we don't even think it's the aggressive kind." I said, "Diane, you've got lung cancer, stage 4 when you found it. You've had a lot of chemotherapy. You've lost all of your hair," and I said, "You've got a really serious situation." She looks at me, and she says, "Jim, it doesn't matter whether you have two months to live or twenty years to live. When you get a cancer diagnosis, it changes your life." But then, she went on to say, "Look when I go to my son's lacrosse games, and I see the blue in the sky and the green on the leaves, and I hear the laughter of the boys running on the field, I just have tears running down my face from the pure, simple, intense beauty of that moment. And I wish we all could live like we have cancer." Now, she obviously didn't wish cancer on you, or me, or anybody — the pain, the loss, the suffering, the heartbreak. But she wished that all of us could live so richly and deeply and intensely right here and right now.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Jim McCarthy: And Diane is no longer with us. She passed a couple years after she and I had that conversation. I am happy to report that her daughter, who's now fifteen years old, so she was quite young when Diane passed away. Her daughter recently reached out to me and said, "Hey Jim, I saw this YouTube video," sorry, "I saw this YouTube video of your Ted Talk called,

“What Cancer Taught me about Happiness,”” and I’m talking about my friend Diane in that video. And so the daughter, Skylar, she reached out to me and said, “Hey, Jim, I don’t know who you are, but I guess you used to know my mom, and I would love to learn more about her.” So I’m very happy that I could — and she’s a nice young woman, very mature — and I was able to talk to her, and I said, this is how I knew your mom, and she was a wonderful lady. And she said, “Yeah, you know, that’s what my mom always told me. Enjoy the moment. Enjoy the journey. We don’t know how long we’re going to live.” It’s a beautiful lesson that this woman with lung cancer had to share with her daughter, who at the time was only like twelve or ten. And it’s a great lesson for all of us.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, it certainly is. It certainly is. One of my sons, actually, got a stage 4 lung cancer diagnosis and survived. He came through with chemotherapy, and I guess, I don’t recall if there was radiation or not. But somehow, he dodged that bullet, and as a result became a nurse and then a nurse practitioner.

Jim McCarthy: Wow, I’m happy to hear that he got through that. May I ask, David, how did that kind of experience shape his life?

Dr. Dave: Well, it shaped it, you’d do better to ask him, I suppose. He’s a very loving guy, a very open and free-thinking young man. And he then faced another challenge, sometime later, much later than that. Where he got, something I still fully don’t understand it, facial nerve pain. Due, perhaps, to a dental procedure, sent him into a real tailspin. This was after he was already a nurse. He was doing well, and he became extremely depressed. He didn’t want to see his vast network of loving friends, became really reclusive. The thing that pulled him through was he was a member of Kaiser Health System, and somebody there suggested a treatment with Ketamine, which is a new kind of thing that is being used to treat facial pain but also depression. I don’t know which category to put him in, or whether it’s both. But the Ketamine infusion of twenty-four hours, so it was like a drip, and absolutely transformative. Brought him back to his old self, and he works in the HIV area, and is having a wonderful career.

Jim McCarthy: Wow. Well, fantastic. I mean, whatever works, right?

Dr. Dave: As a matter of fact, he’s training to be a trip sitter that is for people who — he’s looking into the future when psychotherapy with various psychedelics are likely to become legitimized, there’s research in that area right now that I’m very fascinated in. And he’s gotten aboard that train trying to get ready to ride it.

Jim McCarthy: As a trip sitter, so helping someone, guide them through a psychedelic trip?

Dr. Dave: Exactly, yup.

Jim McCarthy: Wow. That sounds great.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, so that’s his happiness journey. How did you get into doing these happiness workshops? I mean, in a way, I can infer from what you’ve told us, but let’s hear your version of it.

Jim McCarthy: So after my cancer diagnosis and thinking about my legacy and the work I was doing, and I was between jobs at the time, and I thought, “Well, I always wanted to be a motivational speaker. I’ve always loved sharing stories with people, and I loved when I was a teacher, and I loved when I was a journalist. And when I was a manager, I also loved explaining and coaching people.” So I thought, maybe I could take my experience of getting my cancer diagnosis and share that with other people. That evolved into the happiness workshops that I’ve been giving to different audiences, for corporate retreats, or keynote speeches, or whatever. That’s what I’ve been doing really ever since. I’ve done that in the US and internationally, and my workshops are —

Dr. Dave: How many years has that been now?

Jim McCarthy: I’m sorry?

Dr. Dave: How many years has that been happening now?

Jim McCarthy: Pretty much since 2013, since the year of my cancer diagnosis. And the format of the workshop is it’s — a lot of keynotes are nice inspirational speech, and then people just walk away. Maybe something sticks, or maybe it doesn’t. But what I did, is I took some of the questions that I wrote the day that I got my cancer diagnosis, right? “If I were to die today, what would be my legacy? How would I feel about the relationships that I have? What would other people say about me? How do I feel about the work that I’ve done? What kind of an impact have I had, and how fulfilling has it been for me?” And also, going forward, “What do I want to change? What do I want to change in my personal life? What do I want to change in my professional life?” That’s part of the format of the workshops that I’ve done, and then I took a lot of what I learned from the many workshops that I’ve done, and I brought it into my book. Which as you mentioned, it’s called *Live Each Day: A Surprisingly Simple Guide to Happiness*. And as the title indicates, it’s more than just inspiration. It’s really a blueprint or a cookbook or a format or a roadmap for scientifically proven ways that you can boost your happiness. So not just fuzzy, nice ideas, but really backed up with a ton of scientific research.

Dr. Dave: I’m really struck by those 37 questions that you sat down and wrote, and again that says something about your personality or background or something. It sounds like there was some sort of rather unique driving force there. What are your thoughts about that?

Jim McCarthy: I’m very extroverted, as you might have noticed. My wife says I talk too much some of the time. But I love to share the ideas that I have. I don’t know if I’m a Libra, so if that means I’m like a left-brain, right-brain kind of guy. But I think I can think very creatively, but I think I can also be very analytical.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that’s what strikes me about that is something about being very methodical. Would that characterize you?

Jim McCarthy: I think that I was that way before, and living in Germany, the Germans are very structured. That is great for a lot of things, and then there’s other cultures. And again, these are huge generalizations that are wildly creative. In fact, I think I’m very structured, and my wife is a very creative person. And there can be a lot of friction there sometimes in terms of, honey you’re

over planning this, or we need to plan this more, or why don't we be more spontaneous. But if both sides realize there's a strength in that dynamism that there are these incredible synergies that can happen from the order on the one hand, and the spontaneity on the other. That can be great. And so I don't know, I was writing all sorts of questions. It wasn't just about work. It wasn't all just about relationships. These things, they complement each other in many ways. I go into different sorts of frameworks for happiness, which I would be happy to go into detail if you'd like.

Dr. Dave: One of the things you promote in the book is having a good work-life balance. And you seem to be practicing what you preach because currently, you're in Bordeaux, France, right? Is that where you are now?

Jim McCarthy: I'm in Bordeaux, France, yes. In an Airbnb.

Dr. Dave: And you are on a world trip with your wife.

Jim McCarthy: Yeah, I am. I'm continuing to work in terms of arranging workshops or speaking engagements, and promoting what I'm doing, including the book on social media. But it's true I got to the point where I decided that I can do this work internationally. I can do this work from anywhere in the world that I'm in. And San Francisco, where I have been living up until now, it's an expensive place. So anywhere you go is cheaper than staying in San Francisco, pretty much. So I can work just as many hours per a week if I want to here in Bordeaux, France, as I was in San Francisco, or elsewhere. Honestly, this is part of a bigger trend for people being these digital nomads living in Airbnb all over the world, which is perhaps the next book that I'll write, or maybe I'll start doing drafts on that as I'm on the road. But yes, in terms of work-life balance, I think that there are many things I can say about that. But one is, you might be familiar with Dan Gilbert, who is a psychology professor at Harvard. And he has a wonderful quote, which I mention in the book which as he says, "We're happy when we have family, and we're happy when we have friends, and pretty much everything else we do is simply to get more family and friends." It's such a beautiful, simple, funny quote. And when you think about it, so many of us we get wrapped up on, I studied hard to get into a good university, to get a great education, to get a great job, to make a lot of money, to buy a nice house, or a nice car, or have this status and respect. And it's very easy to lose track, why am I doing this anyways? And it usually comes back to, "I want to love somebody. I want people to love me. Maybe I want to start a family with someone. Maybe I want to raise children. Maybe I want to have a community that I call my friends." And if we remember that, and put that first and foremost in your life, then it can perhaps reprioritize how you live your life. And after I got my cancer diagnosis, I could've looked for another intense workaholic job in Silicon Valley and worked the long hours. But I do think my cancer diagnosis, in part, was a result of the very, very stressful work situation that I had. Honestly, for many years, leading up to that moment.

Dr. Dave: Was the cancer then a wakeup call that brought you to this awareness of leading a different kind of lifestyle?

Jim McCarthy: It was a wakeup call, and wakeup calls can mean different things. A wakeup call in my case was I don't want to go back to working 24/7 the way that I have in the past. It

was also, I was 49 years old at the time I got my diagnosis. I'm 55 right now, and 49 is not so old, but it's not so young either. It's like maybe I need to slow down or pick some work or career that I love, that I'm doing that's not such a burnout kind of thing. Then on top of that, there's plenty of people who can work less or retire if they wanted to, and they're scared to even do that. They just keep cranking along on the same conveyor belt rather than saying, "Let me think creatively for a second, do I have to be working in the rat race?" whether it's in New York City, or whether it's in San Francisco, or Silicon Valley, or LA, or, "Is there another lifestyle I can have? Maybe I don't have the status, maybe I don't make as much money, but wow, I'm living really well. Maybe I'm not working 70 hours a week, maybe I'm working 30 hours a week, or 40 hours a week, or 10 hours a week. But guess what, I think I can afford this. I think I can enjoy doing this." And that kind of hearkens back to my bohemian days of traveling when I was a student, and I realized you could live a great life and not need to have a ton of money. Does that make sense?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, it does, and you're a great role model. And I ask myself sometimes, even if this podcasting thing, if I'm in a rut. I've been doing it for 15 years. Do I need to jump out of that? Or maybe travel around the world and do it like you're doing? I could do it from other locations. It doesn't have to be done from my home. So that may be something I need to discuss with my wife at some point. We have family and children here that keep us —

Jim McCarthy: Yes, I would be happy to chat with you about that as well, David.

Dr. Dave: OK, wonderful. One of the things that you say in your book is that happiness is a learned skill. And I think that most of us sit around in some ways either chasing it on the rat wheel, whatever you call it, the cage, what's that called? I'm blocking on the word.

Jim McCarthy: There's the rat race. There's the — what is that called? Not the Ferris wheel.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, at any rate, either we chase it, or we just think that it will happen by accident, somehow. That it'll just come to us somehow. So talk about how is it a skill? You say it's a skill, a learned skill.

Jim McCarthy: So when I thought about initial titles for my workshop, there was like, "Work, Life, and Death, and Silicon Valley: A survival guide," or, "The Happiness Workshop: How to Find your Happiness." As I got deeper into it, people started raising their hand in the workshop and saying, "Wait, Jim, OK, you're talking about mortality. You're talking about your legacy. You're talking about live like you have cancer. We're going through all these writing exercises, great. We're having discussions, that's cool. But what is happiness?" And then I started doing research on that, and we can go into more detail on that. But then I also realized that there's daily practices that you can do that are simple, that are scientifically proven to reduce your stress, boost your confidence, help you live in the moment. And basically those core practices there's a forgiveness practice, to let go of the past and be in the now; there's a meditation practice, to also be in the now and be at peace with what is; and not hung up on what's happened before, but also not freaked out with anxiety about something that might or might not happen in the future; the third practice is positive thinking and affirmations, to train your brain for success; the final one is gratitude practice, to appreciate all the amazing aspects of your life the way it is right now

without changing anything. So those are the four practices that I talk about in the book, and every one of these have a lot of scientific underpinnings that I share. And then I also teach people in the book how to apply every one of these practices in their lives in a very simple way every day.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's great. And of course, I've been following that literature as well. I'm very interested in the advent of positive psychology, and some of these practices that came into prominence as a result. One of the things that you do in your workshop is in the work domain, which is one of the big topics, is to help people find their calling. I was struck by one of the exercises that you do there is you have people assess that from their death bed because of your own experience, death plays a very prominent role in your happiness workshops.

Jim McCarthy: It's funny. Maybe it's because I was raised Catholic that I have this morbid awareness of mortality. Of course, I studied in Vienna, which is said to be a culture which just loves death. But it's not even that, I don't think. I think that if you really grasp your mortality, then you realize that your time is finite in this world. I think that many people, many, many people act like they're going to live forever. You and I both know people who come down with diseases, and they're dead within a year's time. I wrote about a friend of mine named Mary, wonderful woman, wonderful human being. She was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. And pretty much within a year, a year and a half, she was dead. She and her husband embodied so much love and caring and courage. It was just amazing. But it's shocking how fast that went. Let alone whether someone gets murdered in the street, or whether it's in a car accident or something that can happen very quickly, so none of us know how long we're going to live. But I think that when you face that mortality, and you really feel it, then I think that can force a person to have a little bit more courage, be a little bit more proactive to do what they've always wanted to do.

So I ask question like, "If you had five years to live, what would you do? If you had to take a job, and you were going to do it for the next 30 years, and you couldn't change jobs, what would you do?" There's a lot of writing exercises that I do to help a person think creatively about what they want to do, and what's purposeful and fulfilling. I've shared some research from a professor at Yale, which shows that people can think of their work as a job, as a career, or as a calling. And the amazing thing — a job is just for a paycheck; a career is you take it seriously, want to be successful; and a calling is really you feel like you have a unique impact on other people like you were born to do this work. And the fascinating thing from the research is that it doesn't matter what you do, if as long as how you think about your work is that way. The example I give is the people who are janitors in a school. And they don't view their work as just cleaning toilets, they view it as keeping the school clean, and hygienic for the children so that they can be healthy, they can be happy. So doing something that is not very high on social status and not paid well, is nonetheless for them a calling because they think of it in a very beautiful way of how they're touching other people's lives. And the other way around is people that are heart surgeons who just view it as a paycheck.

So this is important because I encourage anybody to find greater meaning in their work no matter what it is, whether they're an Uber driver, whether they're a schoolteacher, whether they're a software developer, whether they're a stay-at-home parent. And if they find deeper meaning in

what they're doing, and anything they could do could be beautiful. And that's one way to think about how to find greater purpose and meaning in your work, which is one of the very important pillars out of the two pillars that I have on my happiness framework.

Dr. Dave: I wonder if you ever read the book, and I'm blocking on the guy's name, and it's driving me nuts, it was called, work, or working? It was a best seller some years ago. Whether you know it or not, one of the story's that is in there is about a guy who works, he's a gravedigger, but because he's a gravedigger, they gave him a little cottage in the graveyard to live in. And he had a couple of kids, and this famous journalist, who went around interviewing different people about the jobs they had and their level of happiness and satisfaction and so on about that. And this guy was one of the happiest of all. And you would think, you're a gravedigger, you're basically someone who digs holes to put dead people in, how rewarding or inspiring is that? But his view of it was, "I get to live in this park, raise my kids with beautiful green grass all around, and I have this lovely distinctive little cottage there. And I feel like I'm the luckiest man in the world. So it's how we position it, how we frame it in our mind that makes the difference. I wonder if there's any story that comes to mind, of somebody who went through that phase of your workshop, I'm taking a chance here because I don't know if you'll have such a story —

Jim McCarthy: Oh, no, David. Let's see. Let's go.

Dr. Dave: — Of somebody who awakened and found their calling as a result of going through this exercise in one of your workshops.

Jim McCarthy: There's very different examples that I can give. There are definitely people who have said that they have changed their work after going through my workshop. I know that I once gave a workshop for a small group of women who got together every month in San Francisco. And the woman who organized it, I saw her like six months later, and I said, "Hey, how's the group doing?" And she said, "It's great, about two-thirds of the women in the group," no let me see, "About one-third of the women in the group, quit their jobs after your workshop."

Dr. Dave: (laughs) I guess that's good.

Jim McCarthy: I said, really? And she said, "Yeah, but they were all lawyers, so..." That's the thing, they all hated their work. Smart, hard-working people, they hated their work, and they just thought, "Why am I even doing this? Life is too short." Now I'll give you another example related to this. So the question to who's going to be at your death bed, I did a workshop for the Harvard club of San Francisco a few years ago. And later on, one of the women got back to me, and she said, "Hey Jim, I want you to know that," actually, she mentioned this in a workshop. She said, "Hey, I'm writing about my children and my grandchildren, they're going to be at my deathbed. And then I realized I don't have any children." (laughs) She said that night she went home to her husband and had a very serious talk with him, and they decided to start a family. And now she has two kids. She said that happened directly result of me asking that question. It's a very simple question. Imagine your deathbed, who's going to be there? And she realized there that she was really not on track to have that sort of outcome thinking down the line 30 years, 50 years, 80 years, whatever. She was really not on track for that.

Dr. Dave: That's a delightful example, as is your own life, is a good example of that as well. You said that was one of the two pillars. I think it was work was one of the two pillars, what's the other pillar?

Jim McCarthy: Yeah, so thank you for asking. So when people started asking me about, "Jim, OK, you talk about happiness a lot. What does it even mean?" I didn't go to the dictionary to try to look up some definition. But I went through a lot of different research on this, and the framework that I give is basically. The way I describe it, David, is this way, I say, "Imagine a day when you're on the beach at a beautiful resort with someone you love. You wake up in the morning. You do yoga, have a great work out, fantastic breakfast. In the afternoon you go to the spa, or you hang out on the beach, or you do something you love, whether it's shopping or going to a nice museum, have a nice siesta. Wake up, and you have happy hour, great dinner, drinks, dancing, and music. Go back to your room at the resort. A beautiful night of romance with this person you love, and you fall asleep in each other's arms," and I say, "That's day one, who would be happy doing day one?" Most people raise their hand.

All right, now think about day two. Day two, you wake up early. You guzzle your coffee. You've got a long commute, but you're a nurse. A skilled nurse in a skilled nursing facility, and you help people who are at the end of their lives. Or maybe they are even at a hospice. And you don't get paid a lot of money, but you see that your tender, loving care for these people who are elderly, or who are ill, or at the end of their lives. You're bringing a smile to their faces. You're having a beautiful, positive impact on them. At the end of the day you pick up your kids at daycare, make them a quick dinner, help them get to bed, and then you go to sleep. No romance because you're a single parent. And I say, "So who would be happy with day two?" And some people are like, oh, is this a trick question? And other people say, yeah, I'd be happy doing that. And what I say is, day one is all about pleasure. And day two is all about purpose. Pleasure and purpose. Pleasure is great, and it's fun, and it's enjoyable, and it feels good, but often not very meaningful, right? And purpose is fighting for what's right, or directly helping people, or touching people's lives very directly, helping out less-fortunate people, working really hard on a great product or something. Or a service that is helping people, helping a business grow, these are very different things. And what I say is that in my happiness framework, the happiest life is one that has a blend of things. Because if you think about people as all pleasure, no purpose like sitting on the beach, drinking mojitos, that'd be great for a while.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, my mind immediately went to "Boredom." I thought, well, how long do I have to do this?

Jim McCarthy: Right, exactly. I mean, for a while it's great, but after a while it's like, well, OK, I need to do a little bit more, I need to do something either exercise my brain more or help people out more. Or there is so much that is broken in our world, that anybody who is smart and focused on helping other people, there's no lack of work and help and volunteering work that needs to be done. Now on the other hand, I've had people in my workshops who started non-profits in Oakland, California. And this one woman she was maybe 28 years old, she said, "I started this non-profit in Oakland, I've been doing it for six years, I am so exhausted and burned out that I have to just walk away from that, and hand it off to other people because I haven't had

a vacation. I don't take care of my health. I don't get enough sleep." Ironically though, she's mainly saying, I've got lots of purpose in my life, not enough pleasure. Right? And so what I encourage people to do when they think about their happiness, and a writing exercise that I have them do is, do you have too much pleasure, too much purpose, not enough of either? And I go through a whole framework on this. If you can find something that is pleasurable and purposeful, that's ideal. Not everything is going to be that way. I think having a good meal and drinking some good wine, that is very pleasurable. I generally don't find it very purposeful, studying very hard for an exam, working really hard in order to get a degree, really sacrificing, changing diapers — that can be very purposeful but not very pleasurable. But some of the best things in life are both. So, David, if you think about playing soccer with your kids in the backyard or doing work that you find really meaningful, that is really touching people's lives in a great way. Or maybe it's family reunions. These are things that are purposeful and pleasurable. Having amazing lovemaking with someone that you really love, these are purposeful and pleasurable things. So the best things in life are purposeful and pleasurable. And if we can be aware of that, and, actually, there is a term for this which is called being in the zone, right? If you know, is it Mihaly Csikszent —

Dr. Dave: Csikszentmihalyi. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is how I've been taught to say it.

Jim McCarthy: I'm sure you've got it right. So he talks about being in the zone. And when you think about it, you're absorbed, you lose track of time, it is challenging, it is not too challenging, but it's challenging enough that you find it interesting and kind of hard, but you can do it if you're really focused and you're really trying, and it's something that it is meaningful, and interesting, and creative for you. And his advice for people to be happy in this situation is to try to get in the zone as much as you can. Now for some people, being in the zone is doing podcast interviews. Whether that is you or me or both of us. Sometimes it's writing software, writing code for software which can be very complex and ornate and challenging and beautiful, in a way. Sometimes it's playing with your kids. Sometimes it's reading, or teaching someone how to read. Sometimes it's learning a foreign language. Sometimes it's cooking. It can be doing an excel spreadsheet and doing a financial analysis. And what I encourage anyone to do, who is listening to this or who reads my book, is to really think about what puts you in the zone, and then try to do that as much as you can.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Boy, I had a powerful experience of that growing up as a teenager. I got very interested in electronics and amateur radio. And I lived, my bedroom was in what had been a laundry room, attached to the garage away from the parental house. I would just live in there or the garage, soldering and putting things together. I would forget meals. My parents would have to come in and drag me away from that stuff. I'll always think of that as being in the flow. The other is skiing, which I'm not able to do anymore. But you literally have the feeling of flow as you're flowing down the mountainside.

Jim McCarthy: Right. It's beautiful that you have been doing this podcast, and that is a reflection of your passion for amateur radio —

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you can see a relationship there.

Jim McCarthy: Beautiful, beautiful.

Dr. Dave: You talk about the power of creating good habits. Tell us some of your favorite habits.

Jim McCarthy: So in the book, I wrote about 250 pages about thinking about work, thinking about relationships, how to improve the work you're doing, the relationships you're doing. I go through the whole thing on these different practices, the forgiveness, the meditation, the affirmations, the gratitude practices. And then I thought, if a person just reads this, it's nice. If they read it, and they do the writing exercises and come up with their own action items, that is definitely better. But I wanted to make sure that people are able to implement the practices. And so I spent just a little time, maybe 10 pages, talking about how to implement good daily practices. Instead of saying, "Oh, I want to meditate, but I never do," or, "I want to do affirmations, but I never have time." I go through how you can implement practices, and basically, the idea is, the thing about implementing a new habit is not so much willpower, it's about the reminder. It's the reminder to do that thing. And so one thing is whether it's putting in your calendar as a reminder, whether it's an online calendar, or — I'm not sure who doesn't use an online calendar anymore. Putting in some kind of reminder of what is the habit that you want to do. So if you want to exercise every day, and you want to do it first thing in the morning, then maybe you put your running shoes right next to your bed, right? Or if you want to start flossing all of your teeth, and you keep forgetting it, then maybe you put your dental floss where you make your coffee in the morning. So there are all these important reminders, so it's like, "Oh, I'll remember to do this." Once you have a reminder, it's easier to do that, and then you can do some kind of a reward, maybe it's like saying, "Yay, I'm awesome." Which sends a message to your brain, which is a little reward for the thing that you did. Now I'll give you a separate example, so more than 30 years ago, I started doing stretching and a little bit of yoga every morning when I woke up. I was actually staying in a youth hostel in Berlin at the time, and I woke up, and some guy was doing all sorts of calisthenics, and I thought, that looks like a good day to start the day. So I started doing that. And then later my wife said — and then later I thought, I want to add meditation, a meditation habit to my daily habits, a meditation practice. So I thought, "Well, OK, I do some stretching and some yoga every morning, so how about once I do that, I'll do meditation for five or so minutes."

So it's easier to take an existing habit and layer an existing habit on top of that. Once the existing one is there, adding a new one is very easy. So after that, I started thinking, I wanted to do some positive thinking affirmations on top of that. And so after the stretching and yoga then I added the meditation habit, then I added the affirmations habit on top of that. And that was easy to do all of those things. And then later, my wife said, "You need to do some pushups as well." So I added pushups to the whole thing. Once you have one of these things, it's really easy to start layering them on. And I found that having a good habit like that is so important. What I say is, there's a separate section of the book called, "The Magical One Percent," and it's not about people, but it's about time. And basically, ten minutes is about one percent of your waking hours of every day. I did the math, and I was thinking if I did ten minutes of meditation, affirmations, gratitude practice, forgiveness practice, what percent of my waking hours per a day is that?

It turns out to be about ten minutes. Ten minutes is about one percent of our waking hours every day. So what I say is if you, David, spent ten minutes every day — and maybe you do this already — but if you spent ten minutes a day on meditation, affirmations, gratitude, or forgiveness practice, which you can do sitting on the sofa, or laying down on the floor, or laying in bed that one percent of the day will make the other ninety-nine percent of the day a lot better. Because of all the scientific research that I share in the book about the benefits of meditation, affirmation, gratitude, and forgiveness, so I call that the magical one percent.

Dr. Dave: That's great. What are some of your favorite affirmations, or what one or more affirmations have been most powerful in your own life?

Jim McCarthy: So every morning I wake up, and go, "Good morning, it's a nice day. It's a wonderful day. It's a lovely day. I'm happy to wake up. I'm happy to be alive. I'm happy I woke up. I'm happy to be alive. Today, I'm the best husband for my wife. Today, I'm the best husband for my wife. I forgive myself. I accept myself. I like myself. I love myself. I forgive others. I accept others. I like others. I love others. I deserve to be happy and do work that helps others. I deserve to be happy and do work that help others. I deserve to enjoy the life that I have. I'm loving and kind to myself and others," there's just so many. Part of the writing exercises or activities in the book is to help a person think through, what do you want to affirm? What do you want to say about yourself? And when I came to California and started working in sales almost 30 years ago, one of the first things the best salespeople I work for said was, "You got to do affirmations. You got to keep yourself pumped up. You got to keep yourself positive." And at that time, that was just considered to be effective. But people didn't know. It sounded so hokey and so silly and so cheesy. And I did it anyways, and I realized it started helping. You know, "I'm closing this deal today. I'm closing this deal today. I'm closing this deal today," or, "I'm a student at Stanford. I'm a student at Stanford," that was my big dream to be able to make that happen. And eventually, it did happen.

Now, in the meantime, through neuroscience, we've discovered what's called neuroplasticity, which I'm sure you're aware of. That's how the brain reshapes its structure based on what you think about it, and how you think about it, and how you frame it. Basically, so you can use affirmations to train your brain for success. This is something nobody knew anything about when I started doing affirmations, and now it's scientifically accepted and proven fact. So affirmations are very powerful, and everybody should use them to think hard about what do they want to be true about themselves. And then repeat these affirmations to themselves every day, in order to really train your brain for success. Otherwise, you have this negativity bias, which always sends us to the negative more than the positive.

Dr. Dave: Right. Right. And so that comes back to one of the first questions I asked you about, which is a skill. How is it that happiness is a learned skill? And that's really speaking to that practice. So that probably would be a good place for us to wrap this up, what do you think?

Jim McCarthy: Sounds great by me. But if I haven't said this, David, thank you so much for having me on your show. You asked wonderful questions and thank you for reading my book and featuring it. And I'm so grateful for you, for the work that you do now, this interview, and

for all the work you've done over the years. I have no doubt that you helped many people with the work that you do, so thank you.

Dr. Dave: Well, thank you very much, and I'm so happy to have discovered you and the wonderful work that you are doing in the world and the wonderful example that you're setting for me and others. So, Jim McCarthy, I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.