

**Murat Ulasir (OHM Advisors):** Welcome to the show “Advancing Communities: Thinking That Enhances the World Around Us,” by brought to you by OHM Advisors. I am your host Murat Ulasir. Today, I am pleased to have Tony Slanec on our show. Tony, welcome to the show.

**Tony Slanec (OHM Advisors):** Thanks for having me.

**Murat:** Right on, Tony. You, Tony, are a partner at OHM. I also think of you as a high-quality urban designer, if you will, with a passion for community visioning and sustainable development. Would that capture your passion?

**Tony:** Yeah, that’s accurate.

**Murat:** All righty, all righty. Today, Tony and I will be talking about visioning and sustainability particularly in the context of happiness. And happiness, the way you put it, Tony, the way I heard you phrase it, is that happiness is the economic engine of the future.

**Tony:** Indeed.

**Murat:** Okay! So let’s unpack this a little bit because the sentiment of happiness being the economic engine of the future, now what does that exactly mean? What are the angles associated with that? And what I’d like to ask you to start out the conversation then is this: Is this notion of happiness a new thing or is there some kind of a global movement around this? Where is this coming from?

**Tony:** Good question. There’s a growing global consensus about how we measure progress. And the way we used to measure progress was that the gross national product was used as a measuring tool to really look at how the success of a nation from an economic condition was transpiring over time. And so once that was distilled, that information is always, basically, a very important portion of the overall health and the progress of the community, but not everything. And so the thought was, through some Gallup polling from 2005 to basically 2011, there was information about subjective well-being and surveys related to that effort about happiness and about what it means. What does it look like? How do you change it? How do you modify it? How do you grow it?

And so the condition had to be understood. If you look at the yesteryear, you look at the medical conditions of being crazy or being depressed or being angry, those are all things that have been studied over the course of time because we're looking to correct that, right? Happiness was really never studied until recently. What makes people happy? What is associated with being happy? What creates it for people? And it's subjective because it's not exactly the same for everybody. And so really you get into what creates happiness? What are the drivers of happiness?

**Murat:** Right. So before we get there, I think it may be worthwhile to stop for a second and underline something here, which I like.

**Tony:** Sure.

**Murat:** In the past, you called it yester...What did you call it? Yersterland? Yesterday?

**Tony:** Yesteryear?

**Murat:** Yesteryear, okay, yesteryear. The emphasis has been on more the problem, the apocalyptic vision of the future, the problem that we have today, how much bigger and larger it's going to get in the future. You turned the table on us. You're saying, "Wait a minute. Let's focus on the opportunity. Let's focus on happiness instead of looking at how the problem is going to get worse over time. How are we going to increase happiness over time? How are we going to do this, right, is kind of what I hear you saying.

**Tony:** It's a major shift in thinking.

**Murat:** Right, right.

**Tony:** But it's a global shift.

**Murat:** It's a global shift, okay, okay.

**Tony:** And it's being recognized by 156 countries that are part of the United Nations. And that shift is looking at happiness as it relates to public policy. And how do they develop policy that creates opportunities to become happier as a community and happier as humanity?

**Murat:** Well, let's drill on this then a bit further. What you had mentioned was that looking at happiness, there were drivers to happiness. Folks actually took this almost nebulous concept of happiness and put some rationale to it and identified some critical factors that drive happiness. So what are those critical factors then?

**Tony:** Sure. Through this subjective well-being surveys that were conducted from 2005 to 2011, they basically distilled some major themes related to happiness. And when they distilled those things, they came down to these five drivers; one driver being health; one driver being the economy, economics; one driver being the environment; one driver being education and culture.

And so there's the ability to get health care, the ability to create healthy environments related to healthy foods, being able to grow foods or get foods; recreation, being able to exercise and all the notions of health as it correlates to happiness.

Economy, pretty self-evident, related to just having purchasing power; being able to barter, trade; being able to create wealth.

Environment is the one thing that I think is probably my passion. And that relates to context and your surroundings. It's your house. It's your neighborhood. It's your city. It's your community. It's your state. It's the country where you live. It's everything you surround yourself with.

**Murat:** So let me unpack this a little bit here because that to me actually now gets into drilling down into the details of how we can incorporate happiness into tangible things that we can do now, taking a big philosophical concept or using it now down to things that people can incorporate right away. If you look at happiness as a whole, let's say happiness is this pie that is 100% full on your plate, some percentages are things that come to us that we don't have much control over, right? You said health. Well, if your genetics are predisposed to happiness, well, that's how you come to being. You can't really fudge that much, at least not in this technology. Who knows? Maybe 5 years from now, it's going to be different, or 10. I think I heard you even

say that about 50% of the happiness pie is genetics. Engineers, planners, architects obviously don't touch that.

**Tony:** Right. So this goes back to when they look at a person or one human, and they look at humanity, and they study the individual, the fact that subjective well-being, 50% of the pie you actually don't control at all because it's genetics. It's literally you're wired happy or you're wired unhappy. So we all know the guy that has the glass half-full mentality, he's got the Eeyore mentality, where he's just always unhappy about something. And we also know the reverse of that, somebody who's always pretty chipper. So that's really wired, too. You can't control it.

So there's another 10%, which accounts for 60%, 50 plus the 10, this you can't control either. This is basically your economic condition. You're typically born into wealth, and you're born into poverty. And there's usually one or two levels above unless there's some circumstantial evidence that changes everything like winning the lottery or whatever. So by virtue of that, you really can't control it. But it only accounts for a very small portion of your happiness.

When they drill down into that particular 10%, they found that as long as you can see two meals ahead, you can be just as happy as the person living in a penthouse in New York City. So it really has no relevance related to how happy you are in terms of your wealth. When you can't see two meals ahead, that's when that 10% really starts to hone in.

Lastly is this 40% that's left. So you have 50, you have the 10. Now, you have this 40%. It's your context. It's your environment. It's where you live. It's who you surround yourself with. It's the amenities associated with your environment. It's basically where you live. And there's a choice to be made there. And that court leads back to how happy you could potentially be. That environment you can't control. Public policy controls that environment. And that's where the correlation connects between happiness and the United Nations' concern with happiness being able to drive future public policy decisions to create more happiness.

**Murat:** So if I were a community leader and I am listening to this podcast, why should I pay attention to happiness? So what I hear you say, and I'm curious whether you agree with this, is this: first of all, happiness to some extent can intentionally be designed, if you will. You can intentionally design happiness in the community. So that's profound in my estimation.

And secondly then, speaking of policy, why would anybody want to entertain the possibility of doing so? And correct me if I'm wrong in saying this, but people, we want to attract talent. Why do we want to attract talent? Because talent brings entrepreneurial spirit. Entrepreneurial spirit brings new businesses. New businesses bring new opportunities. New opportunities bring wealth in the community. Where does talent go? And what you argue is that, with the Millennial Generation, with the next generation, talent is not flocking to places where there are jobs. They are trying to flock to places where there is this propensity for happiness, right? And they are going to create their jobs around them, correct?

So what you are basically saying is tying this notion back to how we started the podcast, happiness being the economic engine of the future, right? So as a community leader, if you pay attention to your policy around happiness, you will prosper. Is that correct?

**Tony:** Yeah. And that's what the United Nations of 156 countries is moving toward. So the first World Happiness Report was published in 2013. Now, 2015 results are out. And what they're doing is they're trying to better understand what creates happiness so that they can tailor public policy and decisions that they make about their communities, about their nations, about their cities and states, to tailor themselves to be able to attract what you talked about, talent, to attract jobs, to attract businesses.

And they do that through amenity packages. They do that through creating places that you can live, work, and play. They create opportunities to raise a family, to have a family with a diversity of different things to do related to things to do for kids, things to do for parents, to do for elders, and have the melting pot related to a happiness throughout your whole life, related to creating a place that does that. And so the communities that are leveraging themselves to create amenities, to create public policy that drives decisions for more happiness are going to have a competitive edge over the communities that are not doing that.

**Murat:** I am curious now, Tony. I really like how you're trying to change the way of thinking about public policy and why it is important and that this is a global movement. This is not something that only a few rich or poor folk or nations do. It is a global movement.

Drilling it down even further, going from a global level to a local level, as an urban planner, knowing that happiness can be designed, can you think of specific examples that you can share with us about how a design of sorts can incorporate elements that foster happiness?

**Tony:** Sure. I think the underlying foundational component of that is understanding land use and how we articulate land use to position it for development. And then the question is, how do we get the development we want to happen to occur? So that's really looking at the incentive packages that we give to the private sector. And then what can we do in terms of being communities to help bench up development opportunities related to cultural injection? That cultural injection is a really key component to this happiness quotient.

How do we create public space? Public space is streets. Public space is sidewalks. Public space is parks. Public space is cafe and outdoor dining. Public space is indoor recreational opportunities. Public space is meeting rooms. Public space is places where people are, where that social interaction occurs. One of the five pillars of happiness is social interaction. How do we create that in our communities to foster happiness? To promote the thing that we do best in terms of humanity is interact with one another, exchange information, communicate, establish connectivity between men and women, between parents and kids, between elders and grandchildren, between the different ways we function in professional atmospheres.

How do we foster that connectivity? Once we foster that connectivity, which is the pillar of happiness, we've changed the game related to what kind of development we want. And so that all goes back to the public policy aspect. How we drive that is that once we set the policy related to what we expect the developer to bring to the table, mixture of uses, higher densities, a vertical integrated mixture of uses, again, how we formulate that in a policy standpoint drives what we get as a product. If we don't have the policy, then the product will never materialize because the private sector is going to do what's easiest for them to do.

**Murat:** Yes, yes. So this is amazing. So as a final contextual discussion then, what I hear you almost say is that the whole visioning, public visioning, if you will, for a community doesn't necessarily confine itself to just business leaders. It doesn't confine itself to just community leaders. It involves a broader spectrum of stakeholders. I can easily see public meetings, get the input and help shape that policy which then drives urban planning decisions, correct?

**Tony:** Yeah, that is correct.

**Murat:** It's a holistic approach. So in closing then, Tony, if I were to summarize our conversation in a few words, I think what I heard you say is that happiness, the notion of happiness, doesn't

necessarily have to be as intangible of a concept as it sounds. We have the power to influence happiness. We can construct for happiness.

And once we do that, those happy places, if you will, will attract talent, especially this new talent that's springing up around us. Talent will bring jobs. Jobs end up bringing prosperity, economic value, and, hence, tying all this conversation back to how we started, that happiness is the economic engine of the future, right? Would you agree with that?

**Tony:** Right. And just to add one thing to that is happiness, while I said it's a notion, which it in this conversation, it's also a science. And it's a statistically valid science by which we can evaluate where we've been, establish where we're trying to go, and then create policy around happiness because we have the information to get to where we want to be, happy communities.

**Murat:** Perfect. Well, Tony, I really appreciate you being on the show and exploring the notion of happiness with us.

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