**Motivational Mondays interview:**

**Meaghan Murphy – *Airing* 05.17.2021**

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:02] Our next guest is giving the world a much needed jolt of positivity!

She’s the Editor-in-Chief at Woman’s Day magazine, host of the ‘Off the Gram Podcast’, and the author of *‘Your Fully Charged Life’ …* a fantastic new guide packed with small changes we can all make to make the most of every day.

This is Motivational Mondays. I’m your host Max Irzhak, and joining us is Meaghan Murphy.

I would love to hear the story of *how* you became this glowing optimist.

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:00:29] It’s a long one, I hope you have coffee. So the thing is, the people who know me now, i am definitely somebody who seemingly farts rainbows, right? I am full of optimism and joy, and very high energy, I’m very grateful and present. But I trained to live this way. And it was a very long journey for me. My nickname as a kid was Grumpy. And I wore very proudly a gold necklace with a grumpy charm. I had some very very angsty and tumultuous teen years. I had big surging emotions that I didn't know what to do with, and that translated into a raging eating disorder — which landed me in the hospital. And my best friend and I were partners in crime on the eating disorder front, and she tragically jumped out of a car and died enroute to be hospitalized with me.

So I’m 16, I'm hospitalized and have this raging eating disorder. I have just lost my best friend — the first real loss i’ve experience in my young life. And it was tough, it was tough. I spent a year in-and-out of the hospital doing a lot of work in therapy to become what I would call then a functioning human. I was still very angsty and solemn and negative — the glass was absolutely always half full. But I began to function again in life. And at that point I wrote an essay about it — and writing has always been healing for me, a very powerful therapeutic force. And so I wrote this essay about my experience that wound up earning me a $10,000 college scholarship — I was named a Horatio Alger National Scholar. And the next thing I know I'm on an NBC Friday night tv special being congratulated by Don Johnson and Bob Costas, and some country singer named Trisha Yearwood singing. And I'm like “woah this is kind of a big deal… when you make your message, wow, pretty cool things can happen”.

And from there I got a lot of national attention and wound up at YM Magazine at the time it was Young and Modern. They called and wanted to tell my story. And i said “Well that’s super great, but i'm going to write it, and then i would love to start on Monday as your new intern, cool? Okay, be there.” And I showed up, and that’s what sort of springboarded my magazine career — i’ve been in the media for 25 years now and it started with that “hey can we tell your story?” “Yes, but I'm going to write it and I'll start on Monday”. And so that was sort of the trajectory of the career. And from there I went on to eventually be at Cosmopolitan magazine — and I really credit that job a lot because at that point in my life, in my young twenties as an editor at Cosmo, I was assigned a story called The 7 Secrets of Happiness. And I completely rolled my eyes, like definitely rolled my eyes — who wants to read this crap, this story is going to suck, but fine it’s my assignment… I'm going to write it.

And in researching that article and looking into the field of positive psychology for the first time, I had a pseudo aha moment. And i'm not Oprah, so i don't like to be like “aha, the floodgates opened and my life changed”... but i definitely had this moment of wow some people are happy — and they *choose* to live that way. What does that look like? And it dawned on me for the first time that happiness was very active. It wasn't this passive state of being… “be happy”. It was a very active state of doing. You can do happy, you can make choices, you can take action steps every single day to move the happiness needle. And even when crap things are happening around you, and in your world, you can make choices that make those things easier to manage. I got really geeked out over Martin Seligman and the field of positive psychology, and some of his research — he was the forefather of positive psychology, and that really planted the seeds of ‘Your Fully Charged Life’ for me.

**Max Irzhak** [00:04:27] What’s really interesting about that is that the common theme throughout that story is you became an optimist through tragedy. It is a choice, right? You can either choose to be unhappy and dwell on it, or you can choose happiness — and you chose the latter.

Can you explain for our listeners, just very high-level, what is positive psychology?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:04:52] So the field of psychology. Initially, the early psychology looked at what was *wrong* with people and how you could fix them. Positive psychology looks at what’s *right* with people and how to emulate that. So someone like Martin Seligman is looking at what makes people flourish. What are the key characteristics of happy people? So really it’s an optimistic approach to helping people. What’s right with people and how do we duplicate it? Versus, what’s wrong with people and how do we fix it. I love that approach. So what do these so-called — they call it “flourishing”, flourishing is the research word for happy… but what do flourishing people have in common? It's pretty cool. He calls it PERMA; the PERMA theory of wellness. The P is for positive emotion. The E is for engagement. The R is for relationships. The M is for meaning. And the A is for accomplishments. And really what that kind of boils down to is that happy people have these things in common; they have really strong relationships; we need other people. Other people are always the answer. We need other people, whether it’s your mother in law or your neighbor, or the cashier — we need other people. Meaning... we need to have a purpose. You need to have a purpose. My purpose is to leave a legacy of positive energy, and because I'm clear on that it drives me forward. Accomplishment: guess what, we all need those pats on the back; those gold stars. You got them so clearly as a kid, we still need them as adults. How do you get that pat on the back? How do we cheer each other on? How do we high-five each other to know we’re accomplishing things? And that matters. And then the positive emotion is that whole bucket of things: gratitude. Happy people are grateful. If you appreciate what you’re lucky enough to have in this world, if you’re lucky enough to love what you do, you will inch the happiness needle. So it’s a lot of these different things that make up the field of positive psychology — but in a nutshell it’s what’s *right* with happy people, and how do we steal that secret sauce. And so my book is really a toolkit that looks at these key areas of our lives, and gives little strategies, little life hacks, little fun-filtered tidbits for creating that magic in your own world.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:06] That’s really cool. Have you ever looked into what are called blue zones around the world?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:07:13] I know a little bit about, but I couldn't rattle off what those blue zones are, but yes.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:18] Yeah, so blue zones are essentially areas around the world where people on average live to be over 100 years old.

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:07:25] What are the places though?

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:29] I can’t remember.

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:04:42] It’s not Westfield New Jersey.

**Max Irzhak** [00:06:25] But it’s all over the world. It’s not just in Tibet in the mountains somewhere. It’s actually very interesting. But one of the things that is in common, you sort of nailed it, we *need* other people. Community is such a huge aspect of it.

And it doesn’t have to be a religious community. It’s just you have something in common with people in this group, and that actually makes you happier because you have other people who support you.

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:08:03] Exactly. The whole Love Charged chapter of the book is about relationships. So, yes, it’s going to be about your family and your core people and treating them like a team — but a big thing i talk about, and something that’s really really important to me is the power of weak ties. So researchers call them “weak ties”, which i think is sort of a false name because they’re so strong and they’re so powerful. And that really is about how you treat one person is how you treat all people. What does it mean when you check-in at checkout at the grocery store? If you register the cashier’s humanity, and you engage, and you use their name tag as a gift and say “Hi Ed, good morning, how are you?” And engage in a conversation, and acknowledge them; we need to acknowledge other people, we need to treat other people with kindness… and it doesn’t mean you need to go braid their hair and have a barbeque… it just means you’ve acknowledged them. It feels good to be acknowledged.

I can remember the first day out of lockdown, when we were cleared to leave the house, I walked down to my local drugstore, Baron’s, and was just like “Theresa, Mayra...how’s everybody doing??” And I call it the cheers effect in the book where you have a place where people know your name, and you know theirs, and you acknowledge each other. And again, these are not necessarily people you’re having over for Sunday dinner, these are just people who know your name and you know theirs and you acknowledge each other because you’re all in this together. How good does it feel when the barista knows your order and writes your name on the cup and you didn't say a word? We have to acknowledge each other, we’re on this planet together. And it’s a nicer, kinder, happier place when we can give each other those little courtesies. Look up when you're walking down the street and acknowledge your neighbor. Just look up. Smile with your eyes… “smeyes”. And the thing that I stand very firmly on right now is that the mask is a gift to introverts… this is giving you the most beautiful safety net to practice engaging, to practice stepping outside of yourself and engaging with another person. Use that as a safety net, practice, because it’s going to feel good for you and it’s going to feel good for them. We need to acknowledge each other's humanity.

**Max Irzhak** [00:10:19] Daily gratitude is such a frequent theme on this show because there’s an overwhelming amount of data that ties gratitude to overall happiness.

How do you practice gratitude every day?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:10:31] So this is very very interesting to me because I truly believe gratitude is the secret sauce in life and the cure for almost everything that ails us as a society. I think it can be challenging to make a gratitude adjustment, and to have an attitude of gratitude, because I think a lot of us get into our heads of like “okay, gratitude is something I do on Thanksgiving, right? Like, I tell you what I'm thankful for on Thanksgiving, check.” Or “I keep a gratitude diary”. Listen, bless you if that works for you. I love the concept of a gratitude diary — absolutely love it. I can’t do it. I’ve never kept it up for more than a day because it feels like homework. It feels like one more thing I need to do and I can't keep it up. So the way I practice gratitude is sort of a fun-filtered version. I ask myself, and I ask my family, “what made you say yay today?” And it’s a way to pause to appreciate the good in the life, the good in the day — because there’s always good. But just the simple act of saying “hey, what made you say yay today?” Okay, and maybe that is “the daffodils on Daffodil Hill are blooming… yay!” That just made me smile. Maybe it’s “whoah, the sun rises now at 5:53, which means i can go for an outdoor run before everyone is up. Yay!” I’m pausing to appreciate the good in my day; I'm practicing gratitude; it just doesn't feel so homework-y. And we’re able to keep that practice up more readily. And my kids knowing that they’re going to have to report back makes them more conscious throughout the day to collect those goods. Because that’s really what it is about… collecting good throughout the day.

**Max Irzhak** [00:12:12] There’s a lot that people aspire to do, especially as ambitious college students — but so many of us run out of steam when life wears us down.

How do you maintain your energy to make the most of every day?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:12:25] I’m constantly creating momentum. Because when you feel like you’ve run out of steam, it’s because you got stuck. And I think when you feel stuck or drained, you just have to create momentum. And I think the best way to create momentum is by being where you are. Instead of thinking two weeks out, one month out, one year out — think what can i do *today*? What can i do right here right now to inch forward, to get unstuck, to create momentum. Life is about momentum, creating movement. That action step is what creates your happiness and your success. And ‘Your Fully Charged Life’ is a toolkit for that. I'm going to give you simple simple strategies like “make your damn bed” because people who make their bed are 84% more productive in the course of the day. That small sense of accomplishment first thing in the morning can be the ultimate springboard for a really kickass day. Okay, so make your damn bed, see what happens. I talk about something in the book called dopamine dressing. Dress the way you want to feel. I was a theater major, and I always say “I wouldn't have stepped on stage playing a nurse in a fireman's costume”. How are you approaching life? How are you dressing for life? It’s not dress for the job you want; dress for the life you want. Are you going to a funeral, or are you going to a party? How can your wardrobe with that embodied cognition impact your mood? You’re going to see me in bright colors and lightning bolts, because you know what, it absolutely charges me; and that looks different for everybody… you don't have to be a walking emoji. For my husband it just means he wears fun socks, and that’s his little bit of yay — his little bit of a lighting bolt charge. He’s cool and happy from the ankle down. What does that look like for you? Maybe it’s a statement earring, but it’s something that lifts your mood. Dress up to feel up. It’s little things like that; I've got endless little strategies. And i want you to roll your eyes at some; and then i want you to adopt some, and then report back. Because something that small could be your gamechanger.

**Max Irzhak** [00:14:37] I’ve had around 20 incredible leaders on this podcast since January, and one thing is clear: *so much* of their success is the result of changing their mindset, and approaching things just a little differently than the rest of us.

What are some quick tips people can take to reroute their thinking to *become* more positive?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:14:56] Sure, so I talk a lot about cognitive reappraisal, which is just reframing what’s lame. And that is simple things like changing your “have to’s” to “get to’s”... which is another sneaky way of practicing gratitude. So instead of thinking “oh, i have to go to class today”... it’s like “no no no, you get to go to class. You get to have enough money to pay for college to get to go to a class.” “Have to work out.” “No no no, you don’t have to; you freaking get to because you’re healthy”. When I had COVID and was laying in bed and couldn’t stand up, the day I finally got to go out and finally run again, it was like “i get to do this, i get to be healthy again, i get to go for a run”. So it’s a lot of little tricks like that, and a lot of people who are reading my book want a cheat sheet. And i'm like okay, maybe i got to make a cheat sheet of some of these little cognitive reappraisal tips and tricks. I mean it’s a lot of things like changing a “why me” to a “why not me”, and understanding that if this is happening to you why not you? What’s the why and the purpose in this. I tell a story about a young woman who had a brain tumor, and she was in her twenties, and she had the sickest attitude ever. Instead of saying “why me, why did i get a brain tumor?” She changed it to a “why not me”. Okay, I'm on my parents insurance, I don't have kids and a mortgage. I am otherwise healthy and I can beat this and then I can show people strength and resilience. And she rocked her brain tumor because she changed her “why me” to a “why not me” and then powered herself with purpose.

There’s very few things in life that we actually *have* to do. This is your life. You’re creating it. You get to do these things. You’re the architect of this. So think about what you get to do versus what you have to do.

**Max Irzhak** [00:17:01] No matter what our outlook is on life, things don’t always work out.

I’d love to hear how you personally deal with failure or rejection.

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:17:11] I let it sting, I let it hurt for a hot second. Because that’s the thing, I'm not toxically positive; I don't just look on the bright side, I look on *all the sides*. And I absolutely acknowledge when things hurt, when things suck, when things are not okay. I just don't linger too long. So if I have a big loss or something really hurts, I take that pause, I take that moment to take it in and to own it, and to acknowledge how bad it sucks. But then I rely on my toolkit. And I have a lot of different tools in my toolkit and I use different tools at different times. So there are certain things that I know work without a doubt.

In the Health Charge chapter, I talk a lot about moving your body and protecting your sleep, and how important those things are. If you are not on a sleep schedule, and you are not protecting your sleep, it’s impossible to weather hard times — it just is. We need consistent solid sleep. And so I will do things like sleep train. I go to bed at 10:17 and I wake up at 5:03 without an alarm because I have programmed my circadian rhythms. At the beginning of the pandemic, i was sleeping until 7 because i didn't have to get on the train and go to New York or any of the things. And guess what with 2 extra hours of sleep, I was dragging and was languishing and I felt like ass, frankly. So why? Because I was out of my sleep rhythm. And so when I know that, do I need to tweak my sleep? Am i not moving enough? Am I not moving my body? Am i not getting fresh air? Because all of these things are scientifically proven to help you bust out of a rut. Okay, so I got to move my body. Am I not being social enough? Do i need to pick up the phone and call my sister… Do I miss people? Do i need to make a mom playdate, right? Do I need to see other humans? Where am I struggling? And is it because I didn't make my bed? Do I need fresh flowers in my house? You know all of that great Harvard research about the power of fresh flowers to ease anxiety and boost your mood? Maybe I just need to buy myself some damn flowers, or get some scissors and go pick them at the park. Like, where is it that I'm struggling, and where can I pull those tools out. That’s the cool part. What I'm proud about with the book is it’s absolutely not a happiness handbook, or a happiness guide — it’s a happiness toolkit. And so I'm going to give you lots of different tricks and tips and strategies that are all based in positive psychology and neuroscience, but fun-filtered with real life examples. And some of them are going to stick; and you’re going to put them in your toolkit. And when you feel drained, and you feel hopeless, or you’re languishing — it’s my new favorite word, I loved that New York Times article about languishing; I love giving a name to your pain — you’re going to know which tools are going to work for you in that moment.

**Max Irzhak** [00:20:04] And finally, what is some *actionable* advice that our listeners can apply to their lives, starting today?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:20:11] Well that’s the key. I mean I am a tip machine; I’ve got 932 tricks and tips and strategies for each one of you — i just don’t know what will be your secret sauce, yet. And so my best advice is to create momentum, and do one thing to create that momentum — whether that means you make your bed, you buy yourself flowers, you dress the way you want to feel, you practice gratitude by simply asking yourself what made you say yay today, you smile at a stranger, you use a nametag as a gift and engage a cashier. Do *one* thing to create momentum.

**Max Irzhak** [00:20:48] And if people wanted to learn more about you and get their daily dose of joy, where can they follow you?

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:20:55] So I’m pretty busy on Instagram, i love Instagram — it’s just such a fun way to connect with people. And it’s @meaghanbmurphy with all the letters m-e-a-g-h-a-n-b-murphy. I have a podcast called ‘Off The Gram’ with a couple of wellness influencers and we’re part of Dr. Oz’ the OZtube network. I’ve got that magazine I was talking about ‘Woman’s Day’. It’s 18 million total audience; we’ve been #1 on the newsstand. And that is a really joyful fully charged magazine. I took over at the beginning of lockdown as Editor-in-Chief and have just made it a party on every page. And then I have the book which I am super proud of ‘Your Fully Charged Life’ which is available on Amazon, wherever books are sold.

A lot of people like the audio version, they’ll go running or walking with me which i think that the concept of that is so fun. The backstory on the Audible is I had COVID, and they almost had to have a narrator do the Audible for me. And I was like over my dead body unless it’s Drew Barrymore, that’s not okay. And so like I was 16 days out of a COVID diagnosis, like half-dying recording the book, and you can’t tell because my mental muscle was so strong — I was so determined in that moment.

**Max Irzhak** [00:22:10] I could chat with you all day, but Meaghan thank you for all that you do to make this world just a *little bit* happier, and teaching us to bring our best selves to every moment.

**Meaghan Murphy** [00:22:19] Yay! I say that a lot; my husband says we should make it a drinking game.

**Max Irzhak** [00:22:25] It’s the same way we started the show; it’s a good way to end it.

I encourage everyone to grab a copy of Meaghan’s new book *‘Your Fully Charged Life: A Radically Simple Approach to Having Endless Energy and Filling Every Day with Yay’*.

Just follow the links in the description below.

We’ll see you all back here again next week for Motivational Mondays!