



## Monthly Musing—December, 2008

### *Happiness is Contagious*

What if you had the power to make the people around you happier? One of the key tenets of Above the Line is the idea that each higher energetic state has a more and more powerful impact. In other words, if you want to have a more positive effect on the world, the best thing you can do is to raise your *own* vibration. Newly published research in the British Medical Journal, which found that happiness is contagious, seems to bear this out. (I love it when science catches up with what wise people have been saying for hundreds of years, don't you?)

The measures of happiness used by these researchers were not based on hedonistic, momentary pleasure, but rather, grounded in the research in *authentic happiness*. In order to gauge happiness, study participants were asked how often they experienced certain feelings during the previous week: "I felt hopeful about the future," "I was happy," "I enjoyed life," "I felt that I was just as good as other people" – all Above the Line states of being.

What the researchers found in this 20-year study of almost 5,000 people, was that happy people did not just tend to associate with similarly happy individuals, but rather, that clusters of happiness result from the *spread of happiness* from partners, siblings, neighbors and friends. In fact, the closer you live in proximity to a happy person, the happier you are likely to be yourself! Even a friend of a friend who is happy is likely to increase your own happiness.

We tend to think of happiness as a very individual phenomenon. Over and over again I am asked "How do I stay above the line when those around me are not?" What we are starting to learn is that we are—for good or bad—more susceptible to other's moods than we may be aware of.

To further underline this point, a different study quoted in the British Medical Journal found that "people can 'catch' emotional states they observe in others over time frames ranging from seconds to weeks. For example, students randomly assigned to a mildly depressed room-mate became increasingly depressed over a three month period."

The conclusion of the Happiness study is that people's happiness depends on the happiness of others with whom they are connected. My take-away is that this is the answer to how to stay above the line when those around you aren't: focus on your own happiness. You can't change other people, we all know that. But perhaps, through focusing on the things that *truly* make you happy and fulfilled, you can become infectious.

For upcoming ATL workshops that will help you experience a greater degree of happiness, peace and fulfillment, visit:

[www.abovethelineleadership.com](http://www.abovethelineleadership.com)

To calibrate your own level of happiness and learn more about *authentic happiness* visit:

[www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu)