

Business Reimagined #60

How to Scale Happiness with UJ Ramdas

Look at your calendar. You'll see *how and where* your values are reflected. The MORE they're reflected, the **HAPPIER** you will be.

BUSINESS REIMAGINED

Danny Iny UJ Ramdas

UJ Ramdas is the co-founder of Intelligent Change and the co-creator of the Five Minute Journal, a simple and effective tool to help you get reliably happier. He's passionate about the intersection of behavior and business, and has a strong background in behavioral science, which led him to the practical application of it in marketing.



Voiceover: This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are re-imagining the way business is done in their industries like today's guest UJ Ramdas.

UJ: A lot of the time people start a business because they want money then they get enough money and they go, "Oh shit, now I have to think about this happiness thing." They screw up their first business then they try to build another business and it's incoherent. You have the ability to build a coherent, beautiful thing from the get go if you're thinking long enough and that's what I recommend.

Voiceover: This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.

Danny: UJ Ramdas is the co-founder of Intelligent Change and the co-creator of The Five Minute Journal which if you haven't already picked one up you should. I haven't missed a day since my first journal and I just started my fourth. Where does this great invention come from? UJ has a clinical background in behavioral science but his passion is where behavior intersects with business which the rest of us call marketing. UJ didn't start out in life wanting to create a journaling phenomenon, what he wanted was to fly.

UJ: When we're kids and we want to do something, it's not that thing that we want to do, it's the feeling that we want. The feeling that I imagined pilots would have when they were flying was this unbelievable freedom to be able to move and go wherever they wanted to. To be fully engaged in the environment that they were working in and exhilarated by the work they were doing. I feel that feeling now which is wonderful.

Danny: It took a while for UJ to get to that point, in fact his childhood left him feeling kind of grounded.

UJ: I never had siblings, I had no brothers and sisters. I was a pretty lonely kid growing up, for better or for worse my cortex developed quickly. I remember asking a lot of questions and remember a lot of people not being able to answer them. In desperation and anguish I turned to a pen and a paper. Journaling has always been my solace, journaling has always been the place where I could figure out stuff.

Danny: That was the first germ of the idea that eventually led to The Five Minute Journal but even as it was beginning to sprout it felt to UJ that he himself was beginning to wither away.

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UJ: You take a lush money plant and you put it in the desert it's going to die. You take an orchid and you put it up in the mountains it's going to die. You need a certain environment for a certain plant: water, food, nutrition, culture, et cetera for that plant to blossom and really thrive. I think human beings are similar, once we realize the environment that we need to really thrive in we can ideally go there and find our thing that we want to do. I didn't know where it was and I'd never been to a foreign country before but I said I'll check out Canada and I'll pivot if I need to.

Danny: At seventeen, UJ went through the long and rigorous process of applying for a visa and he came to Canada completely alone. I asked him if he was afraid and his answer surprised me.

UJ: It's interesting I've always felt very comfortable in a foreign place navigating things on my own. Even when I move to a foreign country one of the most exciting feelings is landing, having a backpack on me and understanding the patterns that make that place work and adapting to it.

Danny: UJ didn't become a pilot but he still managed to fly and was able to tap into the feeling of freedom that he longed for as a child. He went to university, earned his degree and with his friend Alex Ikonn he co-created The Five Minute Journal. The idea behind it is easy to grasp but it's up to you to do it right.

UJ: It's an idea that is simple that has enormous potential and impact in your life. The idea, it is a toothbrush for your mind, it's something that you do everyday in the morning and right before you sleep. Very similar to a toothbrush, it allows you to cleanse your thought process and help you move through the day in a way that allows you to get the most out of it. The fundamental goal in life is to be happier and more engaged and there are things that we can do that reliably will get us there that take no money, just time and intention. All this does is it allows you to focus your mind and energy on the things that really matter.

It's a sequence of five questions, three questions you do in the morning, two questions you do at night. Together it's going to take you about five minutes, the idea is to do it as soon as you wake up in the morning and right before you go to bed. You're obviously thinking if you haven't heard of this before, "What are the five questions?" The first question is, "What am I grateful for?" There's a ton of research behind gratitude that I'm not going to get into right now. The practice of gratitude, the thinking and feeling of gratitude is a wonderful thing that can bring a ton of emotional and mental resilience. The second question is, "What would make today great?" Which is currently being changed to, "What will I do to make today great?"



That presupposes three things ... This is actually my favorite question of the day because it presupposes that today is going to be great, it presupposes that, "I am going to make today great." You take complete responsibility for the flow of the day. The third one is, "I'm responsible of my own happiness." That's the kicker because in that few minutes subconsciously rather you start to take responsibility for the day flow. The way it goes and the way you feel during the day which is a massive plus. The final question in the morning, the third question is an affirmation.

"Who do you want to show up as in the day?" That's it, there are about three lines for the first two questions, two lines for the third one and once you're done then you go about your day. You've set the course for it and you move on. Right before you go to bed you have two questions, you have, "What three amazing things happened today?" Some days you'll have great days, it'll be easy to remember the amazing things that happened in one day. Some days you'll have the not so great days and during those days the first thought that comes to mind is going to be, "Nothing amazing happened today." Your challenge is to not believe that voice.

Your challenge is to dig deeper and find that thing that was wonderful that day or even good because if you're alive, if you're breathing, if you're looking at the journal at night, I guarantee you there's at least one amazing thing that happened that day. The digging that you do in that time is what's going to pull you forward in terms of resilience and resources because very similar to what body builders now, people who build muscle it's the final wraps, the ones that are the most difficult that lead to the most growth. Mentally and emotionally it's the same thing.

This allows you to do that everyday in a way that helps you build long-term mental and emotional strength. The final question is, "What could I have done to make today better?" We're changing that currently to, "What could I have done to make today even better?" That's just a way to ask yourself, "How could I improve today?" It's not a reason for you to beat yourself up, it's a way to ask yourself, "How could I have improved?" Because on a daily basis it's an incredible, important thing to learn from the day, learn the patterns that we do that help us, that hurt us. The awareness of that can be incredible, some people that I know including myself, sometimes I have the same thing on there for months.

That's fine because what that's doing is it's keeping it right there so you can be aware of this pattern that might not be serving you and that's the most important ... That's it. There's a quote at the very top, it's a different quote everyday that's meant to start your day on an inspirational note. That's it, on the app you have the option ... We're adding pictures to really brighten and

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illustrate your timeline in terms of how you can move through the day and that's the idea. It's a simple one and I believe if you apply it, it will make you happier.

Danny: Can I ask a whole bunch of questions about this?

UJ: Please.

Danny: Because part of my role is to be the advocate of the listener, ask the questions the listener is probably going to have. The first set of questions ... I'll answer myself ... The first set of questions is like, "Yeah but does this stuff really work?" To that I'll just say first of all yes. There is a ton of research supporting this. It's all cited inside the journal, if you really want to dig in there, it's all there. I really appreciate that you explained about each of the questions because I think there is a nuance to doing it right. I would think and I want to hear your opinion, is it possible for someone to ... I'm not going to say do it wrong but do it mindlessly, automatically and not reap the majority of the benefits?

UJ: Yeah. Doing it mindlessly and repetitively is a great way to not reap the benefits of it, it's just like anything else, doing exercise mindlessly and repetitively and not fully engaging with is a great way not to get results from it. The optimal way to do it in my opinion is to fully engage. What I mean by that is once I ask you right now that what are you grateful for right now?

Danny: Right now I'm grateful it's quiet in my house and not just because I'm recording a podcast with you but I appreciate having a quiet home, I appreciate the peace.

UJ: As you're appreciating that peace and quiet where do you feel that in your body?

Danny: I feel it in my heart, in my chest.

UJ: As you're feeling those sensations in your heart and your chest, what do those sensations feel like?

Danny: It feels like an openness, like an unclenching almost. I wonder if I'm just regularly very stressed.

UJ: It's all good. Here's what you did that was amazing is you started to think about what you're grateful for then you rendered an additional step and you started feeling more open. That is the

ideal way to do Five Minute Journal. You want to fully feel the emotion in your body as you're writing this down. When I wake up in the morning and I open this journal, I close my eyes and I ask myself, "What am I grateful for?" I wait for the feeling to kick in, sometimes it kicks in right away and sometimes it takes thirty seconds to kick in. That's fine because as you're feeling that feeling ... When I start to feel the feeling of the pen and the paper because a feeling is what drives a change.

The feeling is what drives the comprehensive change and the benefits that you will receive from doing it. Of course doing it is going to give you more benefits than if you don't. Fully engaging in it, feeling it, asking yourself, "What will I do to make today great?" Feeling the experience of yourself anticipating the thing that you're going to feel today to make that day great et cetera is going to be very valuable. That might have been a strong and the appropriate way to do the journal if you want to get the mass benefit out of it.

Danny: How do you support yourself to do that as a habit? Because it feels to me like ... You know I've been doing this for ... I don't know exactly how many pages are in the journal but three times the length of the journal.

UJ: It's about a year and a half. A six months journal.

Danny: There you go I've been doing this for a year and a half, haven't missed a day and I'm more present and mindful and cognizant on some days than others. There are definitely days where it's something I do in the morning before I start my day and I know my daughter is about to wake up or she is up. I'm like, "I've got to get this done quickly." Kind of thing. I'm sure I'm not as present and mindful as I could be. It's very easy to fall into that like, "I'm grateful for a good night sleep and for my wife and daughter and for working with cool people." Those are my go-tos, what is the discipline for that not happening?

UJ: The first thing that I would recommend is that you're doing great, the fact that you're actually doing the journal is good, that is wonderful. That's what matters, the showing up no matter how you're feeling, no matter how engaged you are. That's the foundational thing that's important to keep the habit going. The second thing that I would do if I were you is to know that there is nothing to rush to. It's going to take you maybe a minute, maybe two extra to put in the word, to really feel into what you're writing or what you're thinking about or what you're planning. If you were to take a deep breath and if you were stressed, if you're like, "Hmm, my daughter is awake I got to do this quickly." Et cetera, if you were to just take a deep breath and say, "It's

okay I'm going to take the time this needs so I can be a better version of me for me and my family." That statement is going to move you forward in a way that helps you sustain yourself, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, you can do the same for your family.

Danny:

I like that, I'm curious about what you've heard from people using the journal in terms of adaptations of the process and in terms of outcomes. When I say adaptations here's what I mean, for example my wife also does the journal pretty consistently as well. Part of our morning ritual is I've done my journal, she's done hers, we share the morning part with each other. It's our morning check in while we have tea.

UJ:

That's fantastic.

Danny:

What other kind of adaptations of the process have you heard people doing?

UJ:

The most effective adaptation that I know about is the one you just talked to me about. Doing it with a spouse or a partner is an incredible way to boost your connection, your positivity and how close and connected you feel. You're doing great and I recommend keep doing that. There's several other kind of variations that you can do, for example in that, "What will I do to make today a great section?" I usually check off the ones that I've done in the day and I ask myself, "What could I have done to actually follow through on the things I didn't possibly do?" For example. That's one variation.

Another variation is some people at the very top like to log how they were feeling in the morning when they woke up. Were they feeling exuberant, were they feeling excited, were they feeling despondent, were they feeling irritated. How were they feeling in the morning? That's an interesting way to emotionally log and check into what's going on there. Some people change their entire question, I have a friend who changes his ... I think the third question to, "Who can I help today?" Thinks of somebody to help and does his best to follow through on that. There's tons of variations that you can do but the important thing is to ask the right questions for you that's going to make a difference. It's going to help you take the action you need to be the person that you want to be.

Danny:

I like that. I really like that. I'm curious what prompted you ... Because you mentioned again you're making some changes to the formulations of the questions. What prompted you to change those specific things and not other things?

UJ: The gratitude piece is pretty solid, it's very difficult to rephrase that in a more powerful way. I think we're interested in making changes that make it more effective and that our people are going to resonate with. Since we've announced the changes our people love it, it's great because it gets more focused and it gets more positive. For example how could I have made today better? Is less positive than how could I have made today even better? Slight tweaks like that compound and over time as you know can make a massive difference.

Danny: Very cool. We've talked an awful lot about the journal rather than continuing to talk through it. Let's just say everyone who's listening to this it's a very worthwhile practice, it's available on Amazon, it's available on ... If there are still bookstores in [crosstalk 00:18:16].

UJ: It's also on intelligentchange.com.

Danny: There you go that's where I order mine, I go to fiveminutejournal.com which forwards to Intelligent Change, it's like fifteen, twenty bucks, just get one. Let's talk about ... This was three years ago where have you guys gone from there?

UJ: First originally we started out as a [inaudible 00:18:40] working business and it was a [inaudible 00:18:45] working business for a while then we realized, "Wow this thing has some real steam behind it and we owe it to ourselves to see it through to wherever it needs to go and whatever it needs to be." It just turned out both of us me and Alex are really passionate about bringing tools to the world that help people make real change. We started to realize we wanted to add more things and we wanted to create more things for ourselves and other people. We launched The Productivity Planner last year which honestly came from a pinpoint that we had that we couldn't be as productive as we wanted to be. There were several days where we went to bed and ... Everybody knows that feeling they have at the end of the night when you know you've worked hard and you know you've put in a lot of time but yet you asked yourself, "What did I really do today?"

You don't have a satisfactory answer. You don't have a satisfactory feeling, it feels horrible to feel like you've put in a lot of time, a lot of work and you don't know what that was for. The thing we created was to help ourselves become more productive and do the things that really mattered to us as opposed to wasting time, reacting to things that didn't really move the needle in terms of what could really make impact in the long-term? The Productivity Planner is based on another simple idea that if you focus on the thing that matters the most and you commit to



doing that in the morning and you commit to doing that in blocks of time that you've sequenced out, you're going to have a more productive day.

Danny:

There are a lot of productivity type planner journals out there, how's this different?

UJ:

This is different because A, there's to our awareness ... We like to create things that aren't there. We tried almost every book, app, journal product, project management software. We still use project management software because it's a great way to keep track of projects and teams and things of that nature. In terms of managing our own day-to-day movement and task list we couldn't find something that worked for us. To my awareness there was nothing that had prioritized task list available that held you accountable to keep pomodoros, keep blocked time from task to task consistently. You know how much time you're spending on it, a lot of the times as is proven by science, humans beings are terrible at estimating how long it's going to take you to do something.

If say it's something you're procrastinating there's a very good chance that you're overestimating how long that's going to take. Sometimes you think something is going to take just about an hour and it takes you three. This keeps you in check, this keeps you in check with the reality and allows you to estimate your own ability and tasks in a better way as well as do the thing that really matters. This is a really great quote and I don't remember who said it but, "The right thing to do and the hardest thing to do is usually the same thing." This allows you a structure to do the right thing early in the morning when you have the most energy, the most willpower, the most ability to tackle a thing that really matters.

Danny:

Very cool. UJ the theme of the show is Business Reimagined and the people that I invite onto the show are people who are re-imagining something about the way that business is done. It's been very clear I think throughout our conversation implicitly what that is but I want you to make it explicit. If you have to articulate in words, how do you see business? How do you see the practs of entrepreneurship, the practice of being excellent differently from the way a lot of people out there seem to in a way that has clearly been inspiring to a lot of people? What is that difference of perspective?

UJ:

Thank you for asking that question, that's a great question. I think business exists for us to make impact in the world. In my view of business is a creative vehicle for creating impact in the world and the dollars are a side benefit. No way am I saying don't focus on the dollars, I'm saying if you focus on solid business principles the dollars are going to come, no problem. The foundation of a

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business, whoever creates it, it's really important that you build it on a bedrock of values that you really care about. There's good evidence to show that beyond a certain amount of dollars your happiness doesn't scale with dollars. Your happiness scales in line almost infinitely ... In my opinion, this is not scientifically proven, this is just a crazy theory I have.

Happiness scales in line with your values, your living your life, let me give you an example, let's say you write out your top five, six, seven values on a piece of paper and time on it, you figure out what's important to you et cetera. Next to every value you have a description, next to every description you have an example. The example is really important because let's say one value is honesty, then there's a degree to which that honesty might be hurtful and that example really clears that up.

Now once you've done that you just take a look at your calendar and you see how and where your values are reflected in your calendar to the degree that your values are reflected in your calendar, the more they're reflected the happier likely you will be. To the degree they're not the less happy you will be. You have the opportunity to build a business ... At least in the early stages ... On the foundation, the bedrock of values that really matter to you and that can make all the difference in your happiness.

Danny:

I love that idea, I think it makes a lot of sense and I'm curious, is that theory reflected in The Productivity Planner? Will it allow me to track if what I'm doing is on track with my values?

UJ:

No, that's a separate product. I think that's more of an exercise, more of a quarterly exercise than a daily one or even a weekly exercise than a daily one. Because that's really somewhere where you zoom out and you go like, "What really matters to me, what's important to me and am I doing it? If I'm not what can I do to change that?" Without evaluating it you won't ever be able to change it but I think a lot of the time people start a business because they want money. Then they get enough money and they go, "Oh shit, now I have to think about this happiness thing." They screw up their first business then they try to build another business and it's incoherent. You have the ability to build a coherent, beautiful thing from the get go if you're thinking long enough and that's what I recommend.

Voiceover:

That was UJ Ramdas reminding you to honor your values and to start and end each day with gratitude. It's not enough just to scratch out on paper what you should be thankful for instead you should allow yourself time even thirty seconds to truly feel the gratitude for the things you write. When it comes to your business, your values and your graciousness should guide your

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actions. Want to know what they are? Look back at your journal and see what has mattered to you the most. To learn more about UJ go to intelligentchange.com. This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny, join us next time as we talk with Ash Maurya.

Ash:

The lean canvas is essentially a one page business model which is much more compact than a business planned and fixed in a single page. What's nice about it is that it allows the entrepreneur or the business owner to take their idea which seems very clear in their head but put it on a piece of paper and see how the parts fit together, a lot like Lego pieces. What I find is that a lot like Lego pieces the parts don't sometimes fit together and you don't see that until you try to put it down on paper.

Voiceover: Learn more about us at mirasee.com.