



The science of doing good

ANH chats with HAILEY CAVILL, a social entrepreneur, who's on a mission to show that acts of altruism, or doing good, is the key to lasting happiness.

What were you doing with your life before your foray into social entrepreneurship?

I left home when I was 16 and was fortunate enough to land a job in a PR firm. I successfully climbed the corporate ladder and by the time I was 29, I'd achieved career success, but I was miserable. All the things that I was told would make me happy hadn't. Desperate to find answers, I bought a backpack and a one-way ticket overseas, where I spent 18 months travelling through Africa, India and Nepal. I stayed in tiny villages where people had nothing, but they were really happy. Before I left, I decided to volunteer at Mother Teresa's mission in Calcutta. The nuns that ran the mission were amazing and despite possessing very few material things, were happier than anyone I'd ever met – I knew then there was something in that.

On arriving home in London, broke but enlightened, I felt sick at the thought of going back into the corporate world, so I applied for a job at a charity and my career path changed forever.

What type of work are you involved in these days?

I now run a boutique social business called Cavill + Co which I founded 21 years ago when I arrived in Australia, because I could see the compelling benefits for both corporates and not-for-profits to work together to solve society's problems. I've used my marketing and PR skills, combined with my creativity

and knowledge of both sectors, to bring corporate and charities together.

What has working with not-for-profit organisations taught you?

Working with non-profits, I was able to put a name to 'that thing' that had intrigued me all those years ago at Mother Teresa's mission: the giving high, the warm fuzzy feelings we get when we do good. I've been researching it for years and recently, with the advent of neuroscience, we can now prove that doing good is actually good for you, and as humans we are wired to do it. Now I've found the answer, I feel compelled to share it.

Tell us about your research on the science of doing good...

When I heard about the neuroscience that reveals what happens in our brains when we do good for others, I wondered what else was out there, so I commissioned a PhD student to scan the globe for all credible and current research on altruism and doing good including the neuroscience.

The research showed that when a person does good – such as volunteering or donating time or cash for social good – the brain releases a potent cocktail of two chemicals: oxytocin and dopamine. Dopamine being the reward hormone that we get from money, food and drugs and oxytocin being the bonding hormone, one that makes us feel loved up and

connected to others and, on a larger scale, humanity.

How would you define happiness?

I've given up the idea that 'I will be happy' when I'm slimmer, when I'm richer, or when I've got that new car, because you end up wanting more and more. While you're striving for those things, you are missing out on real life.

I would define happiness as a transient and elusive state of being that is often recognised in hindsight. I relish moments of joy, but I'm more interested in feeling purposeful and peaceful than striving for happiness. In short, true happiness comes from doing good for others, feeling valued and purposeful.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I'd like people to know that they don't have to be wealthy to make a difference. We all have something to contribute, whether it's a skill like legal or finance, or to campaign for a charity, give time to volunteer, mentor a disadvantaged teenager or become an altruism activist in your workplace.

We all have something to give; it doesn't matter what you have, we just need to start somewhere. Start with a single random act of kindness to experience the chemical cocktail – and progress from there.

To download the full report on the science of doing good, head to cavill.com.au/the-science-of-doing-good/ ■