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Mt. Sinai teachers schooled in happiness

Shouldn't school be fun? Motivational speaker says yes, for teachers and kids

By Elizabeth W. Sobel

Motivational speaker James Ryan is guided by his belief that "our thoughts determine our actions." He shared his techniques for being a little happier and a less disturbed by outside forces with teachers at Thursday's Mount Sinai School District Superintendent's Conference Day in a lecture titled "Shouldn't school be fun?"

According to Ryan, knowing the eight characteristics of happy people and the five strategies for making ourselves happier can help teachers bring the fun back into the classroom and have fulfilling careers in education. This former Bethpage junior high school teacher and guidance counselor said he believed that being happy — an essential criteria for living life to the fullest — can make a difference in the way teachers handle their classrooms. By being happy, teachers can promote success in their classrooms, as well as in their private lives.

"Get back to the work you love and enjoy, and the kids will never forget," Ryan told them.

Ryan, a Northport resident, was recruited as a volunteer for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Jail DWI Alternative facility in Yaphank in 2000. There he developed a 10-week course for personal development aimed at helping male offenders reorient their lives, set positive goals and create a better self image. The positive response that Ryan received from his clients encouraged him to take his message that "our thoughts determine our actions" to the public. Since that time, he has been pounding the pavements of Long Island and delivering a variety of motivational speeches.

"Folks are as happy as they want to be," Ryan told listeners. "A little turn in consciousness can help with our perspectives on life."

According to Ryan, happy people portray eight key

characteristics. Happy people show intent to be happy and are accountable for their own happiness. They know what makes them happy and they most often "follow their bliss." Happy people are giving of their time and energy, show appreciation for what they have and know they have an option to be happy from the time they wake up in the morning. Most importantly, happy people are able to recast a mournful event or circumstance and make it more positive.

Ryan also told his audience that there are strategies people can employ to make themselves happier, such as understanding moods and the realities of others. We need to notice when we feel negative, Ryan said, and then find out how to make ourselves feel better.

'Get back to the work you love and enjoy, and the kids will never forget.'
— Jim Ryan

ones who determine its value. We need to hold onto empowering thoughts and let the disempowering ones go. We see the world through our thought systems. We should strive for a natural state of mind where compassion, wisdom and creativity lie. But we have to want to be there."

Mt. Sinai teacher Linda Pomerantz said she will take Ryan's techniques into the classroom this fall. "I learned that if I go in with a happy attitude, I will convey that [to my students]," Pomerantz said.

Teacher Marsha Connor said her eighth graders are always in a mood and the strategies Ryan presented at his lecture will help her run her classroom more effectively. Listening to Ryan made her realize that she is a person who is already "in a natural state of mind," she said. She had not previously heard Ryan speak, but had been practicing his strategies all along.

"It was a long journey for me," she added, "but some of the principles mentioned today helped me make a jump to the middle school. By following my bliss, I was able to fulfill my passion to teach English."