

Hello everyone, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute.

Here we are at the holidays and It's a Wonderful Life. I can't imagine there's anyone in our listening audience that hasn't seen the movie with Jimmy Stewart where he plays George Bailey. It's a really moving ... I mean, I've seen it a 100 times and it still chokes me up a little bit. But for those of you that haven't seen it, just in case, it's a great movie.

George Bailey is a fine man, but he aspired to travel the world and do all kinds of things. And because of obligations, family obligations and other, he ended up staying in his hometown Bedford Falls, and he considers himself a little bit of a failure. So, towards the end of the movie, he hasn't been the success that he dreamed that he would be as a young man, and he's angry and he's filled with despair.

And there's a problem at the Building and Loan in the sense that old man Potter, the protagonist in the movie, tricked him and the Building and Loan came up \$8,000 short at the end of the day. The bank examiner was there, there's a warrant out for George Bailey's arrest. He really is at a low point in his life, he's suicidal, in fact. So, he goes, and he's getting ready to jump off the bridge and into the freezing water, and Clarence the angel shows up and shows him what Bedford Falls would have been like had George Bailey not lived. So that's the revelation, it's really quite amazing. George goes home, he's so happy. The bank examiner is still there, the warrant for his arrest is still out there, but he remembers all of the blessings that he has in life, his children, his wife, his family, et cetera.

And there at the end of the movie, the whole town shows up and they reach into their pockets. A few dollars here, a few dollars there, and out of the kindness of their hearts, they make up the money missing for the Building and Loan so that George can be good again. I'm sure Mr. Potter would eventually fess up, but who knows. His war hero brother, Harry Bailey, comes into the room and he says, "To my big brother, George Bailey, the richest man in town." Now George Bailey was not a rich man, but that's not what Harry meant, was it? George Bailey had a wonderful life.

So, the question I have for us, the viewers of this blog, is how do we get a wonderful life? And there's an answer, there's a prescription for that. So, I'm going to segue now into a TED talk, I'll recommend this TED talk to you as well. At the beginning of this TED talk is Dr. Robert Waldinger, he's a Harvard researcher. It's a TEDx talk, TEDx Beacon Street if you want to find it. About a 12-minute video, it's really quite amazing.

And Dr. Waldinger says in the beginning that when asked what they want in life, they say two things. They want to get rich and they want to be famous. Well, maybe when we were young people, those were the things that we aspired to too, I can't speak for you, but that would have sounded pretty good to a 20-year-old me. Harvard has done a remarkable study. This study goes back to 1920, I forget, a really old study. I think it might've been right before World War I as a matter of fact. They found 724 men, half were Harvard students, half were from the lower socioeconomic areas of Boston. So, they really wanted this to be a study that encompassed all kinds of people.

It was over 75 years ago when they began, and they've checked in with these people, they were all men at that time. They checked in with these men over the years, medical exams, brain scans, questionnaires, meeting with families, et cetera, et cetera. It's really an amazing long-term study. As of the time of this TEDx talk, 60 of the men were still alive and they were all in their nineties at that time, which is really amazing.

The study showed three things, these are very important. Number one, social connections are really good. Social connections are really good, and the flip side of that coin, loneliness kills. Socially connected people are healthier, happier and live longer. Lonely people experience declines in their brain functions much earlier in life.

The second conclusion, it's not the number of friends or the number of acquaintances, relationships that you have, it's the quality of the relationships that you have. So, if you're in a toxic relationship, a bitter relationship, that's probably worse for you than being single, or not being in a committed relationship. It's the quality of relationships that count, toxic

relationships and conflict are really bad. Good relationships appear to buffer us from the ravages of age. The people in the study reported that even on the days when they were in tremendous pain, the people that were in committed relationships reported they were happier than people that did not enjoy robust relationships.

And the third thing is, good relationships protect not only our bodies, but our brains. When people feel like they can count on the other people around them, the other people to whom they're related by friendship, by marriage, et cetera, their memory persists, their brain functions are better than people that don't report those things.

So, my message here before Christmas is this, build on those relationships. You'll notice in this study, none of the outcomes mentioned work, money, status. It was all about relationships, that's what gives a wonderful life. So, the message is this, build on those relationships, spend time on those relationships, rekindle old relationships. I recently began reaching out to an old high school buddy, and it's been tremendous. We laugh like crazy thinking about the old times and the foolish things that we did as young men. So cut the screen time, cut the virtual time, get back to people time and face time, and Merry Christmas.

This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you!