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# DIVIJA NANAVATI

## Merging technology and mindfulness to create happiness

Kate Hanzalik

According to diverse ancient texts across countries, spiritual traditions, and cultures, happiness is a fleeting emotion toward which our striving causes suffering. We should seek to transcend our desire for happiness, these texts say; only then can we eradicate our suffering and find peace. But Divija Nanavati, founding team member and Senior Vice President of Mind Technologies, Inc. is helping many to find peace, a positive outlook and a sense of mindfulness through an app she co-created called My-Happy-Mind.

"To me happiness is something I feel in everyday moments of life like flowers blooming in the spring, walking in nature, sunshine in the morning, the laughter of kids playing, warm soup on a cold day, the smell of lavender or eucalyptus and spending time with loved ones," says Divija, who is a wife, mother, and self-described "technology entrepreneur." "The purpose of our My-Happy-Mind app is to help people manage stress and build emotional strength. It was designed to provide short and simple effective tools to uplift our mood throughout the day. It has the combined power of music, meditation, laughter and learning, gratitude and more."

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How did Divija get to where she is today? "My best friend from high school in India now lives in Massachusetts. Her brother-in-law had started a new venture, Mind Technologies, Inc. and was working on something, when she suggested he speak to my husband. After one conversation, my husband suggested he speak with me and the rest as they say, is history! I joined forces with him and his other co-founder as we began to further develop the venture, navigating the intersection of mindfulness and technology."

Her work has given her ideas for her own wellbeing. She believes in the power of nutrition, yoga, meditation, and being engaged in the world around her while using technology as a beneficial tool for health and wellness.

"So far yoga has helped me improve my flexibility, posture, and digestion. Yoga and meditation both help me manage stress better, clear my mind, improve my focus and sleep. With nutrition what I've learned is that each body is different and just as importantly, for each person the nutritional needs and tolerances may change with time and age."

Over the years, her knowledge about health and wellness has grown. "I realized the benefits of healthy nutrition when my husband was studying for his Integrative Medicine Board Exam," she said. "Out of curiosity, I would read some of the chapters from his books and enjoyed discussing some of the topics in greater detail with him. I became more aware of what I was putting in my body by paying attention to ingredients, reading labels and started making better food choices. This awareness in our home helped to reshape our lifestyle."

She grew up as a lacto-ovo-vegetarian, avoiding meat while consuming vegetables, eggs, and dairy. Now her diet is mainly plant-based. "I cook soups, dals (a variety of lentils), vegetables with Indian spices, quinoa, leafy green salads, tofu dishes, bean dishes - mainly a plant-based diet. I do believe that what we eat can impact our mood as has been shown through multiple studies focusing on the gut-brain axis."



An online course that she took in positive psychology from Harvard Health Publishing helped her to understand "the importance of in-person engagement for our overall happiness and well-being." And years ago, she began yoga and meditation to navigate the stresses of being a stay-at-home mom. She started yoga by practicing at the YMCA; today she does not rely on a teacher and has her own routine. She started meditating for ten minutes a day with the assistance of an app; today, she has co-created her own app that assists others.

There are several features to the app, explains Divija. "Happiness Garden for expressing gratitude or sharing positive thoughts anonymously, 3-minute specially composed instrumental music for positive moods, unique wave meditation, 1-minute laughing exercise to generate happiness hormones, 3-minute podcasts offering practical guidance on daily life, a feelings tracker, unique self-awareness tool for awareness of inner strengths and reminders to help you take breaks throughout the day."

She has taken a leadership role at Mind Technologies, Inc. "When we started building the app, I was involved in the entire process of figuring out the features and front-end user experience of the app. I had fun testing each feature and button in the app as it was being developed. The initial thought was to build an MVP (minimum viable product) and then get external funding to develop it further, but we were so enthusiastic and excited about it that we ended up building the whole app. After developing the My-Happy-Mind app, we felt the need to offer physical tools to go with the app for encouraging in-person connection and engagement. ...

I came up with the idea of the 'Happily Mind-Spa' kit to go with our My-Happy-Mind app. Our goal is to have the Happily Mind-Spa kit be fun like a happiness party in a box, full of fun group activities that promote mindfulness, connection, and creativity. We researched science backed tools to bring together a uniquely curated collection of simple yet fun activities that can be used in a group setting or individually for wellness promotion. This kit also introduces and encourages people to use our app to build emotional strength. To put it simply, Happily Mind-Spa is a proactive way to care for our minds."

With the Happiness Garden "digital engagement tool," users click a white flower on the screen and share an

inspiring message. "Then see the magic happen as a colorful flower blooms with your message inside!" says Divija. "The purpose of this patent-pending tool is to encourage sharing positive thoughts, express gratitude, happy feelings, and affirmations. A simple anonymous digital tool for humanity to spread happiness and positivity in the world. Imagine this on a big screen, it could act as a 'Gratitude Wall' or an interactive message board in a stadium."

The company is extending its reach to a wide range of communities. "We are also exploring collaboration with existing wellness spaces that would be interested in offering Happily Mind-Spa activities. In fact, I recently got a chance to facilitate a Happily Mind-Spa session for caregivers of children with special needs and life-threatening medical conditions on behalf of David's Refuge, a local non-profit, during their caregiver wellness day."

According to Divija, Mind Technologies, Inc. is trying to reach small and large businesses. "We are looking to partner with cafes that would be interested in having Happily Mind-Spa tools on tables for patrons to share meaningful time and Happiness Gardens on screens to encourage positivity and engagement. We are reaching out to colleges and universities that are interested in offering Happily Mind-Spa tools and the Happiness Garden as an additional resource for their student and employee wellness programs." She hopes to expand their sales and marketing team as well.

In addition to her work, she has many hobbies that bring her joy. "I like reading non-fiction books on everything from health and wellness to personal finance. In fact, the latest book that I really enjoyed was *The Little Book of Hygge: The Danish way to live well* by Meik Wiking from The Happiness Research Institute, Copenhagen. I also enjoy listening to music while cooking, going for nature walks, making handmade cards, playing board games, and spending time with family and friends. These hobbies are important to me as they help me relax, recharge, and connect."

Divija's understanding of happiness has made a positive impact on her ingenuity, and the lives of those around her both now and in the future as Mind Technology, Inc. grows. "Happiness can be felt emotionally through an attitude of gratitude, from an appreciation of the world surrounding us, helping others and acts of kindness."

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