

Seattle employees challenged to pursue their own "Happyness"



Chris Gardner, the man portrayed by Will Smith in the movie "The Pursuit of Happyness" speaks to employees at Aegis Living.

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By John Sharify

SEATTLE - They'd just finished watching a private screening of The Pursuit of Happyness. It was a screening for managers at Aegis Living, a company that provides housing for seniors. The people sitting in the theater had no idea the challenge in store for them next. And who would make it.

No, not Will Smith. Better, if you ask me.

It was the person Will Smith portrays in the hit movie. Chris Gardner. He was once homeless, living on the streets of San Francisco with his son Chris Jr., while he worked as an intern at a brokerage firm.

Chris Jr. was just 5 years old. He's 26 now.

Gardner's son Chris Jr. is played by Smith's son Jaden.

Happyness is spelled with a y. You have to watch the movie to see why. Happyness. Chris Gardner never stopped pursuing it. And now he can define it.

"For me, it's easy," says the 52-year-old Gardner. "I'm healthy as a single parent; I've raised two

children that have become very special young people, and I'm in a position to do work that reflects my values. And you'll notice I didn't say anything about movies or money," he says with a laugh.

Aegis Living CEO Dwayne Clark sat in the front row inspired by Gardner's words. And his message about: "Strength," says Clark. "Strength; inner strength to overcome personal adversities on a daily basis. It's really that simple. One of the things that Aegis tries to do. If we make our people better then they care that they do will be better."

Chris Gardner went on to make millions running his own brokerage firm, but he wasn't interested in talking about that with the employees at Aegis Living. Today he challenged his Seattle audience to break the cycle that threatens to get in the way of their lives.

Gardner never knew his father. So, breaking that cycle meant being there for his son no matter what. And yes, that makes him a happy man.